



## The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 11

### Episode 97 – *Leaving the ladder down: helping IC pros step up*

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**Katie** 00:03

Hello, and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. This is a show devoted to 'all things IC'. Yes, listeners, that's the clue. My guest today is Rachel Miller, easily one of the leading, best-known voices in our field. Rachel has 20 years' internal communication experience and advises many of the world's best-known companies, through her consulting business, All Things IC. She is a chartered PR practitioner, and fellow of the Institute of Internal Communication and Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

**Katie** 00:47

Rachel is a keynote speaker, and of course host of her own podcast, Candid Comms. Rachel is listed in Inspiring Workplaces top 101 global employee engagement influencers, and in 2020, Rachel was awarded the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' President Medal for 'distinguished service to PR'.

**Katie** 01:16

Now this is Rachel's third appearance on the show. She was in fact my very first guest back in 2019, when I interviewed her in her 'shed quarters' at the bottom of her garden. I invited Rachel back on the show to talk about her brand-new book, Internal Communication Strategy, a book to help us craft an IC strategy with her central framework, plus lots of insight and advice from Rachel's many years helping IC folk think, plan and act strategically. But as well as diving into IC Strategy, we talk about change communication, and some of the common mistakes Rachel's witnessed over the years. We discussed the growing importance of personalisation, and relevancy in our messaging and content. And we get personal. Rachael shares how her recent ADHD diagnosis has impacted her approach to her work. She talks about what inspires her to keep innovating and advancing the internal comms profession, and how through COVID, she needed to hear and heed her billboard message more than anyone.

**Katie** 02:39

Now, in my experience, Rachel always speaks from the heart as well as the head. She is hugely articulate, clear sighted, and extremely generous with her knowledge and advice. To borrow somebody else's phrase to describe Rachel, she leaves the ladder down for others. I hope you find this conversation both enlightening and uplifting, a peek into the heart and mind of a leading figure in our field. So without further ado, I bring you Rachel Miller. Rachel, welcome back to The Internal Comms Podcast, your third appearance!

**Rachel** 03:22

Thank you so much for having me back. It's an honour to be back. Thank you.

**Katie** 03:25



Thank you for coming in person. I'm going to guess that many listeners are going to feel like they know you from your work as a trainer, your blog, your social media presence, soon your book. But I still think we should start with a proper introduction. How would you describe the work that you're doing at this point in your career?

**Rachel** 03:49

So today, I am the founder of All Things IC, which I created back in 2013. And my whole world of work today is advising through consultancy, training and one to one support. So I work with in-house mainly internal communicators around the globe. So that's what I've been doing for the last 11 years.

**Rachel** 04:12

But today, a lot of my role is supporting my team so they can support and advise in-house internal communicators. So I think that's probably the biggest difference since we were last together four years ago, it's not just me anymore, concentrating on All Things IC. So my work is very much in an advisory capacity to equip my team and empower them and help them to help others to thrive. I had a conversation recently with Sarah Waddington, and I was describing the work that I'm doing today and she said what I see of you, Rachel is that you leave the ladder down for other people. Isn't that nice? You leave the ladder down for other people. And I thought that really resonated with me and I thought, I didn't have any social mobility growing up, I didn't go to university, family circumstances meant that I didn't have people to open doors for me. So at this point in my internal comms career, what I'm trying to do is help other people and leave that ladder down or open doors for other people. That's what motivates me. That's what drives me helping other people to succeed. So if I'm seen like that, and if I'm known like that, then that's really important to me. And that means I'm doing a good job.

**Katie** 05:26

I'm sure you are, I know that you are. And I love that expression. It's fantastic. What a legacy as well, I think. Let's talk about your book. Internal Communication Strategy is a deep dive into organisational communication. It's not easy writing a book, as I know. What inspired you to write it? Was there a particular gap in the market that you felt needed filling?

**Rachel** 05:52

I've always wanted to write a book. I feel like many communicators, we are writers at heart. And it's something that I had always wanted to do. And I'd contributed lots of chapters to other people's book, for about a decade. And I'm always really proud when you see your name. There's something about that real tangible, physical, you know, printed material where you know that people can use your advice and guidance and really help them in their role. So it's something that I've always enjoyed supporting other people with but the time never felt right. And if I think about my business, particularly my family, my daughter is 11 years old, my business is 11 years old. It's a real correlation between how I've been working and my twin boys are now nine. And at the very start of working on my business, the idea of having the time to write a book is always something that's gone to the bottom of the to do list. It's been an aspiration, and it's been a dream, but it's never manifested into reality.

**Rachel** 06:56

And then, at the start of 2023, I was approached by Kogan Page, which is a really nice way round, actually, to be approached by publisher. They've been investing in internal communication. They've been building their portfolio, which is wonderful to see, and they've got some excellent books in their portfolio from Emma Bridger has been writing for them Jenny Field, Priya Bates, Advita Patel, Amanda Coleman, Liam Fitzpatrick Sue Dewhurst, people that we know and trust in a really strong, beautiful community of global comms friends. And when they got in touch, they said, do you see a gap in our portfolio? What unites all of those books is in their niche topics they are the subject matter experts, and they're writing really well about a broad spectrum of internal communication or issues that impact organisations. But most of those books acknowledged, 'I'm not writing about internal communication strategy.' That's a whole separate topic in its own right, and it deserves more attention. So it was mentioned in passing in lots of those books. So that, for me was a very natural gap where I developed a framework that I've been using for a number of years, and I thought, I can comfortably step into that space. There's a natural gap there where everyone's saying, we should probably do more on this, this deserves more attention. I thought, that's the gap that I can feel. And it's been a pleasure. It's been a pleasure to write a book. I wasn't quite sure how to approach it. 80,000 word sounds like a big man's interglobe. But really excited to do it. It's been a real passion project. And you'll never find the right time to write a book you you have to create the time. But once I started, I couldn't stop. And I really I loved it. I absolutely loved it. It was fantastic.

**Katie** 08:48

What was your writing and research process?

**Rachel** 08:52

So I looked at the 80,000 words, and as I normally do with big goals, I broke it down and thought if I just have that number – which is a big number – if I have that number in mind, how can I tangibly approach it so I broke it down and had a post it note on my desk, and I broke it down into 5000 word increments. I thought, if you can do the first 5000, you can do the second. And kept on going. I kept crossing it off and sharing that little post it note which is now framed on my office wall. I was working out loud and sharing on Instagram particularly and videos of me crossing it off. And it really felt nice. It felt like a community behind me willing me on going "Go on Rachel! You're getting there! Another 5000 down!"

**Rachel** 09:37

But it wasn't a hard task to write. Once I started to write I found I couldn't stop. Never once did I have writer's block, never once did I scratch my head and think I don't know what to write. Because, you know, I've been blogging for 15 years this month. I write constantly. But what was different was the academic writing. At the start I was thinking, having not gone to university and really written academically very much other than when I did a post grad through the IoC in 2008, which I asked him to help me with, because I hadn't done referencing before. A whole new world.



**Katie** 10:13

Yes.

**Rachel** 10:14

So when I first started writing the book, I thought, oh my goodness, I need to adapt my style. And I was nervous, and I wanted to do a good job. But over time, I found I got into the flow I got into the stride. And also, we were as a family in 2023, going through diagnosis for my children, for neurodivergence, and as is very common with parents and carers, when you are going through assessment for your child or children, you suddenly realise that actually, we have a very neuro-spicy household, my children are not the only ones who are neurodivergent. Last year, through all of the conversations in the assessments, it became very clear that I have ADHD, which now I know, I'm amazed that I didn't know before. But what I found was I needed to hyper focus on writing the book. So I looked up, is there a way to really get into that hyper focus? Is there a hack or a tip or a trick to do that? And I discovered an AI powered playlist, which is sounds, music, no lyrics. So I listen to lyrics, it distracts me and I go off on tangents. So I thought, let's try this. And I trained my brain, when I put that playlist on, I'm in the zone.

**Katie** 11:28

Yes.

**Rachel** 11:29

And it worked. And it worked really, really well. And then I used brown noise afterwards to try and... the best way to describe this is if you imagine a computer when you're shutting down all the tabs at the end of the day. Does anyone actually do that? I know you're meant to. I found that I would hyper focus, write for hours and hours, and then use brown noise. And that's, it's well known apparently, for just helping calm your mind, helping close down those tabs. Because if not, I was in such a hyper focus state, I couldn't relax.

**Katie** 12:05

Yes.

**Rachel** 12:06

I just wanted to carry on writing. So it's been quite as journey of self discovery in setting myself up for success. How to write. How should I approach this? And then how do I get myself out of that hyperfocus.

**Katie** 12:20

Wow.

**Rachel** 12:21

And I didn't know that about myself.

**Katie** 12:23

There is a question left hanging, and I've got to go back to it. What does brown noise actually sound like?

**Rachel** 12:28

So my husband says, it sounds like when you're on an aeroplane. White noise is quite common, I used to use it with my children to help them sleep. And it's like a static noise. Brown noise isn't quite so invasive. I'm hard of hearing anyway. So he says it's very distracting. I think it's marvellous. But we have it on in our bedroom, we just put brown noise on and it's like a low frequency. He says it's quite annoying, but I find it really useful.

**Katie** 12:57

Has your ADHD diagnosis changed more generally the way that you look at your life and your work? Because I think many of us are on some kind of spectrum, aren't we? And it's often actually through our children that we discover, once we're sat in the room, listening to the assessment, certainly my other half stood up at the end and went "I've got it too." So it's interesting, I just wonder what the impact has been on you personally just in your life and work more generally.

**Rachel** 13:27

I feel like I've had to relearn how to communicate. And I've realised all of the own goals and all... Oh, my goodness, all of the missed opportunities as an internal communicator for my clients, comms friends, the way we communicate in our organisations. We're not neuro-inclusive by default. And we talk so much about we need to reach the right people at the right time, amplify their voices, encourage them to participate. But we don't set them up for success. We don't communicate in the right way.

**Rachel** 14:00

If I think about a personal example. If I'm planning a day with my children, we're going out somewhere, I will have to give them advanced warning. There's nothing spontaneous, I have to give them a heads up. We have to look at videos and photographs of this is where we going this is what it'll be like. We look at menus of places that we're going to, we book in advance, and we try and anticipate what we think the experience will be like to guide them through. We give them a visual clue and picture of this is what we think is going to happen. And even as I'm saying that, I'm thinking, well, that's how I communicate change.

**Rachel** 14:36

This is what we're going to do. This is the plan. This is the aspiration. This is what we think might happen. This is what we anticipate. This is what we expect you to experience. And then something like a pre planned menu choice not being available can cause a meltdown, it can cause a reaction, it can cause dysregulation, it can cause an issue. And if I just look at my own life and my professional life, particularly in how I plan, how I communicate, how I bring people with me. I've missed so many opportunities to do that in a really thoughtful, planned, measured way. And I feel like the lenses have changed now. I'm looking through a different lens, which is, if I think about all things I see live, which are my quarterly in person events that I'm now doing. Planning very differently. So I now share floor plans, I share the

agendas for the day, I do lots of photographs, I do lots of joining instructions that are very different, rather than, Oh, it's just here, figure it out yourself. It's very different way of communicating. Now, even if it helps one person in a room of 25, which we know, normally, I think it's one in six or seven people will be neurodivergent. So it's good to help as many people as possible. I put subtitles on the screen, the very first time I did a big celebration event for All Things IC's 10th birthday in 2023. And I put subtitles on the screen, because I'm hard of hearing. And I thought if it helps anyone else in the room, cracking, brilliant. And at the very end of the day, someone came up to me and she said, I've got ADHD, and she said, the fact that you had the subtitles meant I could stay in the room all day. I could concentrate I could be present, I could follow along and not get distracted. And I didn't do them for that purpose. But it made me think this is the own goals that I mean that there's so many things that we miss in terms of how can we help people to communicate clearly? So I feel like I'm almost starting again, and relearning and planning how to communicate in a clearer way to help other people to learn. And I've never studied that.

**Katie** 14:36

Yes.

**Katie** 16:54

Now, isn't that interesting? You talk about helping those people maybe with ADHD or some protected characteristic, but actually, there's many people that might think to themselves, I love the way she's put a map on there to show me where the loos are. Something simple like that! It's opening the lens. It's not just helping particular people, actually, we can all benefit in different ways from that. So I love that.

**Katie** 17:20

You mentioned the framework that is at the heart of this book, The Miller framework. Can you talk us through it? Just explain how that can transform your communication internally?

**Rachel** 17:35

So I created the framework, because when I write internal communication strategies, I view it as a map. And I've always written them as who, what, when, where, how, why. And I remember blogging about that. One of my very early blog posts, I think, in 2009, and then I updated it again in 2014. And there was nothing wrong with that structure. It worked, and it guided me through and it guided clients through. But there's so much to think about when you're writing an internal communication strategy, that I found I needed to do more than just all of those signposts. So I developed the framework, which is mindset, insight, logistics, leadership, evaluation, and revision – and I do mean measurement by evaluation, 'cause that's really important.

**Rachel** 18:22

So mindset is business priorities, vision and why internal communication is important. So you're setting your stall out right at the start of your strategy. Insights, what we know about the organisation and its people. Logistics, how internal communication happens, and what we're prioritising. Leadership, how we will deliver this strategy, and the role leaders and



managers play. And that's a massive one for me, Katie, that leadership bit. It's that dual focus there. Evaluation, how we measure and evaluate internal communication. And then revision: what happens next in the lifecycle of this internal comms strategy? Next steps and when it will be updated.

**Rachel** 19:07

So it gives organisations and it gives internal communicators a really logical flow, a logical series of steps to follow. And as much as it possibly can be, it's a blueprint of how to write an internal communication strategy. And the reason I say as much as it can be is because every organisation is wonderfully different, wonderfully nuanced. So what you know about the organisation and its people will vary from organisation to organisation. So the intention behind the framework is to equip internal communicators with those steps to follow. So if you've never written an internal communication strategy before, I've got you covered. People get really overwhelmed or anxious, they see it on job descriptions that you will be writing an internal communication strategy, and if you've never done it before, that can feel really overwhelming. So I created the framework to be that logical flow.

**Katie** 20:04

Let's go back to one of those elements that you said is the big one for you, which is leadership, leadership at all levels. I think we know from Gallagher's State of the Sector that the capability of line managers to communicate has always been one of the stumbling blocks, one of the obstacles that internal comms pros say they find tricky. I just wonder what you're seeing in that space. Any interesting developments? Or is it still a thorny issue for most IC teams?

**Rachel** 20:34

It's a really thorny issue. And it's the one that keeps us awake at night. It's the one that... basically if you're communicating change, we rely on our leaders. The mindset for me is you can't be a great leader without being a great communicator.

**Katie** 20:47

Yeah.

**Rachel** 20:47

And when we have leaders who aren't great communicators, it makes our life harder, frankly. And it's frustrating where you see the impact of leaders as poor communicators. If they're not clear, if they're not credible, I think it impacts the trust that people have when your leaders are seen to not be transparent or to be hiding something, it really undermines their credibility inside the organisation. We rely on our leaders to be accurate, to be open, to be transparent. And when they're not, everybody loses.

**Rachel** 21:24

So I think we're trying all sorts of things as internal communicators, we're trying different tools and techniques, we are trying to be very transparent in how we give feedback to leaders.



**Rachel** 21:34

Yes.

**Rachel** 21:35

I wrote about that in the book where I talked about hierarchy inhibits honesty, where you have a leader, and because of the hierarchy, you may not be very honest with them. They might do a town hall and you give them feedback, but are you really honest with them? Because we don't help ourselves, and we don't help them, when we're not honest to say, do you know, that wasn't great. You missed quite a few of the key messages, and this is the impact. Because you didn't talk about XYZ, or you shied away from the really thorny issues that people need to hear you talk about, you haven't helped yourself and you haven't helped them. So that really open, honest discussion from us as internal communicators is really important. And it's really easy not to do, and to hide behind that everything was fine. It was really great. Well done. We'll just do a follow up article to summarise some of the things that you said, and include the ones that you forgot.

**Katie** 22:34

We'll just do the mopping up exercise afterwards. One of the questions I like to ask senior sort of C suite comms pros is, what goes through your mind when you meet your leader for the first time your new CEO? And Sally Sussman said to me, "I think to myself, I have always got to be open and candid and honest with you. You've always got to know that I am going to tell you the truth." And we talk about this sort of speaking truth to power. But it's difficult, isn't it? It's really difficult.

**Rachel** 23:05

It's really difficult. We use the phrase being a trusted adviser a lot in this wonderful world of internal communication. Anyone can be an advisor. I think to be a trusted adviser means having that ability to say, that wasn't great. You didn't come across very well, or the sentiment is this.

**Katie** 23:24

Yes.

**Rachel** 23:25

That for me is where the trust bit comes in. And that was really important to me, when I worked in house, where my leaders knew that I would give them honest feedback, whether they asked for it or not, they were gonna get honest feedback from me. And over time you build that relationship and trust where they know they can come to you. And often I wasn't the most senior person in the internal comms team. But I made it my business to be honest, and to be constructive, not to tear them down but to build them up, in terms of, maybe we could try that a bit differently next time. It's really helpful to gather feedback from other people as well.

**Katie** 24:01





Yes.

**Rachel** 24:01

So continually listening. If you have a gut feel that things weren't great, it can be really helpful to just ask around.

**Katie** 24:09

Yes.

**Rachel** 24:10

And ask your trusted peers internally, or the actual people who were on the receiving end of this communication, to say, what did you think?

**Katie** 24:17

Yeah.

**Rachel** 24:18

Testing for recall, checking for understanding. And using that in your conversations with leaders. You are reflecting the voices of people back.

**Katie** 24:26

Yeah, absolutely.

**Rachel** 24:27

Because we talk about that so much in terms of the role of internal communication and creating a shared understanding and meaning. And actually part of that relationship building I think, for us in how we lead internal communication, is making sure we are constantly listening. So we might have that feeling, that didn't go down well, but actually, here's the evidence. And helping leaders understand that it matters to us that that they succeed, it matters to us that they're as clear as they possibly can be. So it's never to criticise. It's always to be constructive and go, what what can we do differently next time? Or how do you think it went?

**Katie** 25:03

And yes, it's interesting, isn't it? Because if they're uncomfortable, the audience is probably uncomfortable. And we live in a world now where there's so many media and format options open. You talk about neurodiversity, but oh my goodness me. I've met many leaders over the years that are technical experts, but not particularly extroverted types. They're much more introverts. So probably would prefer, say, a fireside chat, to getting up on stage behind a podium, for example. So I guess part of it also is learning what makes them tick and what they feel most comfortable with.

**Rachel** 25:44

Yes, I think so. There's quite a lot of conversation in our world around introverts and extroverts. And I think the key bit for me always is finding where your leaders are

comfortable. Because to your point, as soon as they are not comfortable, it's so obvious, and it can undermine what they're saying. They can come across as very nervous. If their communicating change, for example, yeah, they come across as nervous, because they just don't like speaking perhaps in the forum that we've put them in, then actually, it just undermines everything that's been said, and it can damage the credibility of the change. You see, "oh, they're nervous about this change." Are they? Or are they nervous in whatever they will be communicating? So I think part of our role is how do we help our leaders to be successful? This is a phrase that I've used a lot, particularly in my in house career, that internal communication is in our job title, but it's in their job descriptions.

**Katie** 26:39

Yes.

**Rachel** 26:40

Where their responsibility isn't just down to us to communicate, but we can use our skills and expertise to help them come across in the right way. So if we know that they don't like doing a particular medium, then how can we work with them? How can we really draw out their strengths and showcase them in the best way? Where it's real, it's genuine, it's authentic? Because when it's not, our people are the first to realise.

**Katie** 27:06

Yeah, yeah, they smell in authenticity from a mile away, don't they? I love that you've got revision on the end of that, because maybe it's just what I've experienced, you're brought in to help with an internal communication strategy, and you look at it and you think, I'm updating a document that's five years old. So it's great that revision is in there, because I think these need to be living fluid documents. In your experience, how often should you revise, review your strategy?

**Rachel** 27:35

When I look at an internal comms strategy, I'm looking at a business strategy first.

**Katie** 27:41

Yeah.

**Rachel** 27:41

And if you think about how often our business goals, priorities, targets, focuses change, if you do an internal comms strategy, it's not a one and done thing. As a minimum, I recommend every quarter, so every three months, you are looking at that internal comms strategy. Because we need to be pulling it through into objectives, we need to be living and breathing it. If it is a dusty tome that is dusted off every once a year, three years, every five years, then that speaks volumes to me in terms of actually from an internal comms practitioner's perspective, if you don't know the wording in it, if you're not putting it through into your objectives, if it's not something that you hold yourselves to account with... it should be a check and balance in terms of... the wording is very intentional, for me, particularly mindset and insights. So what you know about the organisation, and its people might

change? And it might change because you've had fundamental change or a merger or an acquisition. So how you're communicating, if you write it in January, and you have a merger in March, April, then actually, what you wrote at the start of the year, is not going to see you through for the whole 12 months. As the business changes, you need to revisit, what are we doing from internal communication perspective? And it might be that you look at it every three months, and there's nothing to update. Brilliant. But if you leave it, if you leave it for a year, and it's not a living, breathing, document mindset, then it's out of date almost as soon as you've written it.

**Katie 29:16**

Yeah. Do you find problems where clients will come to you and say, the business strategy isn't entirely clear or isn't updated or isn't written down? Or it's just in the heads of a few people? Yeah, what's the solution if that might be the case?

**Rachel 29:33**

That's really common. I find that sometimes internal communicators are having to scramble around to look for information internally. We think we've got a mission and there is a vision and we've got some values and they're looking on lanyards, where, where is this stuff? So top tip for me is if you're scrambling around and you're really trying to... think what do we say about ourselves? We're normally very good at doing it externally. Looking at the bottom of boiler plates on press releases looking on your external website. If you can't find clues internally, in terms of who we are, what we stand for, what are our priorities... They're normally things like annual reports, our external colleagues normally are very good at pulling together this source of information. Hopefully it exists just beyond the minds of our leaders, there should be something written down.

**Rachel 30:21**

But in lieu of that, it's not uncommon for internal communicators to set those strategies and create those pillars, which isn't the right way round, let's be honest. But in lieu of having something, then this is where I think as internal communicators, what an incredible privilege that is, you are helping to set the direction of travel, you are drawing out from your leaders. This is what we think our strategic priorities are, or the pillars are. Have I missed anything that I think needs to be added?

**Rachel 30:51**

I'm sure this will be familiar to people listening, where we're asked to communicate something and come up with a comms plan. And we'd say, show me your project plan and I will do a comms plan. It's the same with a company strategy. But on a bigger scale.

**Katie 31:04**

Yeah, yeah.

**Rachel 31:04**

So show me the thinking, and I can align my internal comms strategy to it. And if it's not there, then I believe that it's our business to know our business as internal communicators.



So we're well placed to go hunting and gathering and collating all that information together. And I often describe it as holding a mirror up.

**Katie** 31:23

Yes.

**Rachel** 31:24

So we're holding that mirror up to the organisation. This is what we're reflecting back. And this is what we are saying, as an organisation is important to us. Is it right? Am I missing anything, because this is what I'm going to be basing my internal communication strategy off, is how we bring that to life, how we help our people understand how they fit in and the role that they play in delivering. Whether we're curing patients, selling widgets, transporting people, whatever the purpose is, whatever we're here to do as an organisation. So if it's not in place, all is not lost. There are things you can do, but it is not ideal, Katie, is it?

**Katie** 31:58

No, it's not ideal. But so often, you're right, you have to pick up a few stones and look underneath to find out what those priorities are, what those goals are. I'm skipping around in the framework a little bit, but just before we move on from it, the E one, the evaluation, that used to be a bit of a bugbear, I think for many IC folk who found measurement, research, data, just gathering evidence, let's just call it that, quite tricky. I think times have changed a little bit, because a lot of the platforms that we use now at least enable us to measure the sort of output if you like. I'm just wondering what your reflection is on evaluation, measurement, research?

**Rachel** 32:38

The 'E' in Miller is obviously my surname. So it was going to be evaluation, not measurement. But I deliberately put both in there in the description, because lots of people are getting the hang of measurement, not least because of the tools and technology that we have, but what's missing is the evaluation. So we've got the stats, we've got the output, but what we're missing is the evaluation or the outcome. So what's happened as a result? Or what do we need to do differently as a result? So the evaluation part of that jigsaw puzzle, if you like, is absolutely critical. And I think when we don't do that, and we just present the measurement, it's half of the story.

**Katie** 33:15

Yeah.

**Rachel** 33:16

So I'm clear in the need for evaluation. I look for that when I audit organisations. I look for that evaluation. The Institute of Internal communication, talks about the need for us to be evidence based decision makers.

**Katie** 33:30

Yeah.

**Rachel** 33:30

So when you're measuring, you're gathering the evidence. But if you're not evaluating, you're probably not making decisions. Passively bringing in all the stats. So the evaluation bit is, so what do we do differently? What do we— I use start, stop, continue a lot. And it's a really easy thing to do, frankly. But it's to look at the measurement and say, as a result of what we know, we're going to try this. We're going to start this, we're going to stop that. So that evaluation bit if there's one key thing for me that's missing from most of the measurement that I see. It's the evaluation.

**Katie** 34:02

Yeah.

**Rachel** 34:03

If you like it's the story. So what do these stats tell us?

**Katie** 34:06

Yeah.

**Rachel** 34:07

And then you go on to do that decision making?

**Katie** 34:10

Yeah, I know what you mean, because it stops at the dashboard bit. Let's have a look at our shiny dashboard. It's got lots of numbers on it. Oh, lovely. And I've updated it since last time. Lovely.

**Katie** 34:20

Moving on. No, no, as you say, so what are we going to do differently as a result? What is this actually telling us? What's the actionable insight that you've got here? Yeah, I love that. That's really helpful.

**Katie** 34:32

A quick word from our sponsor. AB is the world's most experienced internal comms agency. For 60 years, our brilliant consultants and fearless creatives have been helping organisations around the world inform, inspire and enthuse their employees building great organisations from the inside out. There is a lot of pressure on internal comms folks just now, to help you plan, prioritise and deliver astonishingly effective communications, arrange a friendly, informal chat with us today. Simply email [hello@abcomm.co.uk](mailto:hello@abcomm.co.uk). And if you do I look forward to meeting you.

**Katie** 35:31

I'm tempted to ask you the big question that's on everyone's mind at the moment. You can't open LinkedIn or any social network at the moment, any blog, anything without lots of talk about artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI. It is obviously and already is

impacting our work. I'm just massively curious, first of all, from a personal perspective, are you using AI? If so, how? And then really difficult, I know, but do you have any predictions for how it might transform our work?

**Rachel** 36:03

It is everywhere, isn't it? We've done very well to get this far not spoken about. But I did talk when AI powered playlist. So we haven't mentioned it once. I am using it. I'm fascinated by it. I'm curious to try and understand how it can enhance the work that I'm doing. I've been experimenting. My husband and I actually over the weekend we're looking at Copilot, which is now being integrated as part of Microsoft 365. If you choose to have the licences then you can integrate it. And it is absolutely fascinating. He asked a question about me in Copilot and he said, "What is the name of Rachel Miller's cat?" Oh, and it came back with this. 'Rachel Miller is the founder of All Things IC. She has a cat called Miss Wiskerton', which I don't. Miss Whiskerten is a Sphynx cat. It's hairless. And it reminds Rachel of a cat she used to have when she was younger. This was chapter and verse Katie about the cat and how I share photographs. Absolute nonsense, absolute nonsense. And then we did the same with chat GPT. And it came up with Elsa, I have a cat called Elsa. I actually have a cat called Amelie who I do share photographs on Instagram. And then yesterday we showed our children. And we're talking about AI with them and talking about checking for credibility and checking for accuracy. So I said what would you think if you read this and I read out exactly what Copilot had said about Miss Whiskerton, you can listen to try it, it will come up. And I said, How does that sound? And my daughter who's 11 said, Well, that sounds like that's truthful mummy, you look all that detail that they've put in? And I said, Well, what do you know? And she said, None of that's true. You didn't have a cat growing up and certainly wasn't a hairless cat. If so I used it as an opportunity with my children to say, there are some amazing tools out there that you can ask it questions, and they can come back with what looks like a really detailed answer. So it must be true. But you need to apply your humanity there, you need to do your verification, you need to double check your sources and references. Because if you'd have just taken that, as that's factual, not a single bit of it was factual at all.

**Katie** 38:13

Yeah.

**Rachel** 38:14

So I'm trying to help my children think about, it's not just about how you use it, but how you then apply what you know, your humanity into that. So not just going, it's come back in 0.2 seconds, or whatever it is. But really thinking about how do I feel about that? How do I prove that's accurate? Or how do I prove or disprove that? And that's what we need to do from a corporate perspective. I'm interested to see how this is going to evolve. Because if we look at currently, things like enterprise social networks that have risen up the ranks in terms of our channel suite, and our channels mix in internal comms, if you're searching internally, you're normally getting back information that has been shared internally, where you can see a named person and you can verify it.



**Katie** 39:00

Yeah

**Rachel** 39:01

When we're bringing in the capability to add another layer of search, another layer of information, it requires us to be more cautious and careful in terms of verification. I'm curious to see how that will evolve. I think in the next who knows, 3, 5, 10 years time... We're sitting here talking about enterprise social networks. We don't even call them that anymore.

**Katie** 39:23

No, it's true.

**Rachel** 39:23

I first started researching them in 2008 when I was doing the post grad, and it was a new thing. I couldn't imagine what would it be like to have people being able to have their voices heard without going through the comms team, and it was a real step change for many organisations, who were very fearful, very unsure, very uncertain, and many still were, even up until 2020. When the pandemic happened, suddenly, organisations had to create senses of belonging, had to unite their people. And my husband is an independent Microsoft 365 consultant, and he'd had many clients who for years had been saying, we're not quite ready, we're not quite ready. When COVID happened, they said, how quickly can we get this?

**Katie** 40:07

Exactly.

**Rachel** 40:08

So I feel like what we're shifting to now is that ability for people to surface answers that might be machine generated. And I'm curious to see what happens. I can't predict what that will look like, but I imagine in the same way that we're now talking about Viva Engage, and all these other amazing digital workplace platforms that have emerged, it's just part of the way that we communicate. I think the mindset for me should be that we embrace it, that we try and do so ethically and responsibly, we create flexibility within boundaries for our colleagues.

**Katie** 40:41

Yeah.

**Rachel** 40:42

So it's giving them advice and guidance. There are many white papers from the Institute of Internal Communication and CIPR, Chartered Institute of Public Relations. Lots of our professional bodies have been doing research for years. So there's lots of advice and guidance to help. But for us as internal communicators, I think it's how do we make sure that we help our employees make good choices?

**Katie** 41:03



We're seeing lots of clients, for example, put their staff handbook into a chatbot, so that instead of searching for something on the intranet, which you're never going to find, you can just ask the chatbot a question and it comes back with the answer. But as you so rightly say, then our work becomes even more important, because there's this artificial layer in all of that. Has it got it right? And these things will only play back what they're given. But they can be given all kinds of things from everywhere, can't they? So in some ways, I guess what could happen is that our role becomes more important, because you need that human, as you say, the human touch to make sure things are actually accurate and have been checked.

**Rachel** 41:45

I think so. It can certainly save us time as well. So I put the transcript for one of my podcast episodes through otter.ai. And obviously, I recorded it. So I know what I think the key points are and that I was going to include in the show notes. And I thought, let me just run this through and ask it to pull out, what are the key points? And I found that really fascinating how quick it was. I did my notes first, and then I compared it, and it missed a couple because it was going on how often I talked about something. So it wasn't the emphasis.

**Katie** 42:16

Yeah, interesting.

**Rachel** 42:17

So if you go on mentions alone, yeah, there was a couple of things I thought, that isn't the most salient point.

**Katie** 42:24

Yeah.

**Rachel** 42:24

But I can see why that's come back, because I talked about it for quite some time. So it's quite a few mentions. So that's what I mean by the human bit, it's great to give it a go and try it, and if you're doing focus groups, for example, you could run transcripts through, always with a massive caveat for me is be mindful of what data that you're sharing, be mindful of what you're uploading, be aware that you're not sharing commercially sensitive information, for example. In the way that you wouldn't put all that on LinkedIn and go, here's the transcript, or here's... if it was something really sensitive. So it's just applying what we already know about good practice commercially and applying that to these new shiny things. AI has been around for a long time, I think in the 50s wasn't it? There were lots of experiments that were happening. But now my mum's now talking to me about AI. So now I think it's coming into the conscience of people around, what is this thing? And will it take our jobs? No, but it might save us time.

**Katie** 43:18

I think you're right. I'm using it mainly as a productivity tool at the moment more than anything else. I don't think it's brilliantly creative, as you say, and I think it misses the things that we do as humans, the emphasis, the perspective, the judgement, good taste, all of that



it doesn't have because it's intelligent in a very narrow way. But I think what's interesting is, yeah, if I can predict the future, I would say that a lot of the tools that we take for granted now that we're going to be using in the future will just have AI baked in. I notice Grammarly is a classic one where Grammarly has got so much more intelligent. 'Would you like that in 59 different ways? I can make it shorter, more inspirational, less inspirational.' Yeah, all of these things are just going to have AI baked in, we're going to have just more features and functionality and everything we're using I'm guessing.

**Rachel** 44:03

When I was writing the book, I felt the need to write a disclaimer at the end, which was I didn't use AI to write this book. And I felt the need to do that, because I imagined it would probably take you a lot less time if you were using AI to try and summarise, here's the Miller framework, what do you suggest I write? Or there's all sorts of things that I probably could have done, but for me, morally, ethically, in writing that book, it's lived in my head and heart and notebooks for years. And I didn't want to distract myself and have another strand of thought.

**Katie** 44:39

Yeah.

**Rachel** 44:40

Which is very common for me with ADHD. I wanted to keep focused on what I know to be true. And write from the heart and write in that way.

**Katie** 44:50

Yeah.

**Rachel** 44:51

And I don't know why I felt the need to do that. But I did. It felt really important to me as I got to the end of the book to say, I haven't used AI to write this.

**Rachel** 44:58

Yeah.

**Rachel** 44:59

I wanted to have that in black and white, written there. I don't think anyone would think less of you. And I'm sure that people are using AI in different ways now to perhaps help them to write books in a different way or to bring different perspectives and very much personal each to their own. But for me that being very clear that I haven't done that, I agree that's really important.

**Katie** 45:20

I agree. I think we're going to see on artwork or music and all sorts of things, handmade by human. And that idea of handmade by human is going to be just a special characteristic, it's going to be differentiating. So, yeah, I love that. This is a naughty question. What's not in

the book? So there has to be something that you just couldn't fit in, or that you got to and thought "I could write another book all about this. But that's not really what this book is supposed to be about." Was there something that didn't quite make it, that's maybe the second book?

**Rachel** 45:54

Change.

**Katie** 45:55

Ah, right.

**Rachel** 45:56

Change communication. As I was going through, because I know the framework so well, and I've used it for a number of years, and clients have used it successfully for a number of years, I was able to share their stories for the first time, which was brilliant. People who have been under a nondisclosure agreements, and haven't been able to share their stories, I was finally able to shine a light on them. And I wanted to make sure that I did that. And when I found myself, at risk of going down a tangent when I was writing, it was always change. Always, I found myself giving examples and sharing theory, and then sharing reality and thinking, ooh I could then talk about how to apply that in a change context. And I thought, no, stay focused, stay focused. This is the book that you're writing. So change for me, I think change is a constant conversation, having conversations about change every day, every week with clients, and comms friends. And I've made so many mistakes in my very visible career, which you do have when you're an internal communicator, everything you write, everything you say, everything you advise, can be scrutinised and often is. When you're in a change situation. I know that I've got some shortcuts. And I've got some things that I know to work. Techniques that I've tried, and I've tested. And there's so much bubbling inside for me from a change perspective, where when you are in that situation, and you're working in house, and you are in that visible role, and you're advising on change, having a go-to guide that you could pick up, that has those, 'this is what works. This is what doesn't. Have you considered this? Things to try.' That's what's bubbling in head, heart and notebook. So I'm not allowed to talk about a second book, my husband wants me to have a bit of a break, because it was all consuming, it was, as much as I loved writing the book, from a family perspective, particularly, I was very much living at my desk at all hours of day and night. And I had to, obviously focus on writing the book, which I did and I loved. I might have scoped it out already.

**Katie** 48:01

Oh, Rachel, wow. No one will know, it's just me and you, and this listener here.

**Rachel** 48:10

It makes it sound like he's not supportive. He's super, super supportive. I think the change bit for me is when you're in that situation, and it is very visible, you are very exposed inside your organisation. I feel a responsibility to, for all of the hundreds and 1000s of blog posts that



I've got, the ones that are the most well read and the podcast episodes that are the most listened to are around change.

**Katie** 48:37

Wow.

**Rachel** 48:37

Because when you're in that moment, you need advice and guidance instantly. So a little bit of an exclusive there for you.

**Katie** 48:44

Nice, nice. This is probably a little bit of an unfair question. I'm going to ask it anyway. When you reflect on all of those people you have helped through change, or have told you their change story, for good or worse. Is there a common mistake do you think, that people make?

**Rachel** 49:08

There's so many. I've got a list, I've got a list of 10 mistakes. When I teach change comms, I pull out mistakes people make, and it's things like leaders who aren't taking it seriously enough.

**Katie** 49:21

Yeah.

**Rachel** 49:22

Or leaders who are focusing on being strong rather than being real.

**Katie** 49:26

Yeah.

**Rachel** 49:27

Or it's, oh, my goodness, there's so many. I was teaching a client last week and we were talking about the language of change. I've got a slide that I put up, words that we use, it was: realignment, futureproofing, reinvigoration. There's all of these different phrases. And I just showed it to them. And I was talking about all the different types of change that there are. I've mapped out 27 different types of change, from change of CEO, direction, brand, mergers and acquisitions, etc. There's 27 different categories that I've got for change. And then when I showed this slide, I said the problem is that we just use that one word to reflect all of those, or we use these sorts of phrases. What do these phrases mean to you? And we had a really good discussion, which was actually, we hide behind the language of change. We try and talk about right sizing, which I hate as a phrase, we're going to right size the organisation. What does that mean? What you're talking about is restructures. So in terms of mistakes, I think not giving proper attention to the language, how you're communicating change, and how you're being really clear and consistent in the way that you're talking about change is really important.

**Rachel** 50:36

Another really big one for me, in terms of mistake is not marking the end. Which if you're a fan of William Bridges, and Transitions Theory, you'll know about 'marking the end'. And very often I find when I'm working with clients, and I'm mapping out, tell me all the changes that are going on, and we write everything down. And even just sitting with a comms team or being on a call with a comms team, they'll suggest things, saying, Oh, this department's doing this, or we're changing that. And they'll say, oh, no, that's done. Oh, that's finished. And as a comms team, they're not aware, because they're not marking the end of change, to say, this is now done.

**Katie** 51:10

Interesting.

**Rachel** 51:11

So for our employees, you're holding all of that, everything is changing, rather than saying this is now done. And then we're moving on to the next thing. So it's very tangible, tactically.

**Katie** 51:22

Yeah. William Bridges. Now here's a new one on me. So...

**Rachel** 51:25

So, 2009, really good book around 'transitions theory'. So he talks a lot about marking the end of something. So ending, losing and letting go before you then move into a period of transition. He talks about change is something that happens instantly and transition is the process you go through as you get your head around it. And the example I always give, Katie, which is very personal, is when I discovered that I was expecting twins. So I went into that scan room, 12 weeks pregnant, I felt like there was going to be two babies.

**Rachel** 51:59

I did. I said to my husband before we went in, so one or two babies. And he said, what? I said I feel very pregnant. I don't know if I'm having a boy and I've only had a girl pregnancy before, I don't know if that's what the difference is. But I feel very pregnant. So we went in, and the change happened instantly. The image came up on the screen, it was there were two babies. So the change happened instantly. The transition was for the next six months. Oh my goodness, how are we getting to have a two year old and two newborn twins? We thought we had everything we needed, we have half of the stuff that we need. So that transition, that process of really analysing what will it be like? How will we cope, etcetera, the wonderful gift, an amazing opportunity, and you obviously adapt as you go. But that's the best example I can give of the difference. The change was straightaway, two babies not one, the transition was you've got six months, because there's a timeline here. You've got six months to get used to the idea to imagine what it will be like and then it is your reality.

**Katie** 51:59

Oh, you did?

**Katie** 53:04

Yeah, that's really made me think. Anything like that. I mean, an IT overhaul, there's a go live date, an initial public offering, an IPO, there's a date for that. As you say, though, it happens instantly, the lead up and the aftermath. Oh, my Goodness me. Yeah.

**Rachel** 53:23

That's where the work really has to happen. That's where the you listen through change. But that transition bit, so important. And then and then the end of Bridge's model is the ending, losing letting go. Then you've got the neutral zone where people are reimagining what it will be like to have a different brand, less people, more people. And then you've got the start, if you like, it's the start of the new thing.

**Rachel** 53:44

And when I closed my office last year, the All Things IC Hub, and I blogged about it, because I said, as someone who teaches change comms all the time, when we talk about marking the endings, I have to mark the ending myself. And I felt like I couldn't not do that. And very often, we don't do that we don't mark the end of something. We might close an office or close a site and not say thank you.

**Katie** 54:08

Yeah.

**Rachel** 54:09

And not just mark that and that sounds about an odd thing to say. But for your people who have worked in the office...

**Katie** 54:15

I agree.

**Rachel** 54:15

And have a sense of belonging actually closing the door and saying goodbye...

**Katie** 54:19

Yes.

**Rachel** 54:20

Is important. Before you go off into, and here's the new thing.

**Katie** 54:23

Absolutely.

**Rachel** 54:23

Cause they're still there.



**Katie** 54:24

Yeah.

**Rachel** 54:25

And I had that when I worked an automotive company at Visteon. We were closing five sites and moving to a new building. But those five sites had people who, it's a very traditional organisation, it spun off from Ford. So their grandpas had worked there, their uncles had worked there, their brothers had worked there. It was very male dominated organisation. And when I kept focusing on here's our lovely shiny new building, and we're amalgamating all of our offices into one, I realised that people weren't excited and the sentiment wasn't great about it. And it was because they still had that sense of attachment and belonging. So we did a goodbye tour if you like, which was honouring these buildings, sharing photographs, sharing memories, sharing stories. If I didn't bring them with me, no amount of 'here's the architect's drawings' and 'come and have a tour of the new building'... Emotionally they were still there. So by, this is the mistake that I made in not realising how important that was until it became very clear how important that was, so now I plan for that when I'm communicating change.

**Katie** 55:27

I like that idea of respecting the past. Because so often when you're making a change, it isn't because what had been done previously is wrong in any way. It's just circumstances, the market, everything has moved on, we're in a different place. So by respecting it and saying, 'Well, look, what we've achieved'. The other thing you're talking about makes me realise we don't do a lot of is celebration as well. So often, we move on to the next thing without pausing to celebrate where we've got to and what we've achieved. I hear that so often from clients.

**Rachel** 56:01

Absolutely. I think a lot of it for me is around affirming behaviours. When I joined the railway, and we had a lot of new things ahead of us new trains, new track, new stations, new staff, new units, everything was new. And the company was only 18 months into existence, when I joined to set up the comms function, and we had this whole timeline of things ahead. And I made us go back 18 months. And when I published that timeline, it was these are all the things that are ahead. But look how far we've come in 18 months, we are well placed to do these things that are ahead. Yeah, because we've got the right attitudes, the right behaviours, we've now got the values in place in the organisation. And that was really important for me, because just that fear factor of 'Oh, my goodness, look what's ahead'. But being able to say, you're good, look what you've done already.

**Katie** 56:48

Yeah. Yeah.

**Rachel** 56:49

And we hadn't done that, there hadn't been a story of these are all the things we've already done, the feedback I was getting was oh I didn't realise! All of those things actually, were

part of this bigger picture. And all of these things were important to get us to this stage. So it's not always about doing huge things. Yeah, expensive things. It could be having a timeline and looking back before you plan forward.

**Katie 57:11**

I like that. A lot. It resonates with me at the moment because AB's 60 this year. All the time, you're looking forward, how do we need to change? What do we need to adapt to, but then spending a moment to celebrate the last kind of six decades as well gives everyone a lift, and also proves that we can adapt, we can change, because look how we've changed already. '64 was the time before even the internet, my Goodness me, let alone AI.

**Katie 57:39**

So I've got another little question for you. Which is not a little question at all. It's a massive one. Predictions are always tricky. We've talked a little bit about AI. I always say there's never been a better time to be an internal comms, I genuinely believe that. But if I was to force you to start making predictions about the future, and you might not want to go more than five years ahead in time, 10 years might be too difficult. Do you have any predictions for us as a profession?

**Rachel 58:11**

There's two things. The first one is relevancy. And it's something that I've been writing about for a while, but not called it that. So in the book, I've created a relevancy model. We answer the question 'what's in it for me' for employees. And I feel like as we carry on in our organisations that increasing demand for relevancy is gonna get noisier and noisier where people want to curate content that makes sense for them. So they don't want to be receiving lots of emails, for example, and say, I'm not going to read this, it doesn't feel relevant. What's in it for me? It's not my region, my country, my department, the brands that I work on.

**Rachel 58:50**

I feel like at the moment, there's a real surge of expectation and frustration from employees where they're looking at content, looking at stories and saying 'none of this is for me, none of this feels relevant. These leaders are talking about things that don't feel relevant for me at all'. So lots of the work I'm doing at the moment is looking at how do we make sure we focus on relevancy in our organisations, where our leaders are listening in a really solid, structured, informed way. Where they're checking for relevancy. So when they are speaking, they understand the sentiment of the organisation, they are mindful of what is important for our people. And they're using that to then question themselves and challenge themselves in terms of, is this relevant? Is this useful?

**Rachel 59:38**

And I'm doing a lot of thinking about this at the moment. And I've got a model that I've used for years. I first started writing it out on flip charts in 2016. And it's a linear model and it's global, local, me. And that's how I've planned internal communication for years. So global might be CEO, for example. So you start with the CEO, and then you switch down into local.

So global to local. So if you're doing change, for example, and your leader will say we need to make big changes in the organisation, and then you do the switch from global to local, which will be, we need to save 20 million pounds, there will be changes, your line manager will tell you all about it. And your line manager's at that local level. And then hopefully they've got more information. And they do the shift from local to me. This is what it means for us. This is what it means for our team, our department, they're making it relevant. And we've planned internal comms like that for years, we've done intranet like that for years. Global news at the top, then local, then me. And I started flipping that, inverting it to start with me. So I've changed how I design intranets, for example, to start with me. Because if you've ever observed people on an intranet, they scroll to the bottom to get the relevant bit, the me bit. And in researching the book and looking at the reality of how organisations are communicating today, I've made it circular. So it's now called Circular Relevancy Model, because no longer do you have to go through the local layer. Yeah, what we've seen more and more inside of organisations is that direct contact between global to me, so CEO ask me anything sessions, employees going straight to leadership, they're not going through their line managers anymore. As we've created tools and technology that have made previously invisible people, ideas, leaders visible, we've flattened structures. So actually, that circular model now for me makes much more sense where we're going to keep on doing that. We're going to keep on taking out that that local layer. So are things relevant? Why am I getting this? Is it important? How is it tailored for me? that real hyper personalisation.

**Katie** 1:01:47

I banged on about this for ages. I mean, we would never not be hyperpersonal to a customer or a client. You'd never get their name wrong, you never go 'dear customer'. But how often do we say still dear colleague. It might've worked the organisers for 35 years. But the all of the data probably does exist somewhere in the organisation to make things hyperpersonal, as you say. I guess the shift and surge that you're talking about probably has a lot to do with how we're served up information outside of work. It must be, mustn't it? We have got used to things being relevant because the algorithms to a degree work to our advantage. You've just got to be really careful what you click on in my experience, otherwise, you're served all sorts of weird things because your thumb stopped scrolling at the wrong time. But yes, I guess, employees expectations have risen and become more sophisticated. So our approach has got to as well.

**Rachel** 1:02:47

And then the second one for me, I finished my book in this way, I finished in the boardroom, because it felt like a good place to end the book, which was, I think we're going to see the rise of the Chief Communication Officer a lot more. We've done really well to actually not talk about having a seat in the boardroom, Katie. All of our conversation, well done us! But I think this is a real age old argument for me and I think it's one that, again, it's relevancy. It's demonstrating for you as a professional, why is your job relevant? What is it that you bring to the party? What is it that you do that is special and unique? I mentioned earlier about it being our business to know our business. In an ideal world, if you are sitting around that board table virtually or in a room as a Chief Communication Officer, where there is strategic oversight at a C suite level for communication, where there's a real understanding



of this matters. And we need to invest in it in the right way. So there was a quite a few rallying cries in my book. Very passionate at the time I was writing it, but I think I am always very passionate, but I was over to show it perhaps, in particularly around the Chief Communications Officer, it's not something that we've talked about very much in the world of internal communication, but it's something that I think deserves careful thought and attention. So if we're really serious about being in the room where there are discussions that are happening and decisions are being made then what does that role look like?

**Rachel** 1:02:47

So I think because if not, if you flip it and think this just feels irrelevant, so why would I listen? So why would I choose to pay attention? If we're not equipping our people with information they need to do their jobs, we're not serving up content that feels like it's personal, then people will tune out, particularly with hybrid working, our techniques have had to change. So what I'm looking for is what's going to pull us through? And if you can apply that lens of relevancy throughout and you're challenging yourself: Why is this relevant? Why is it being shared? Is it important? What are we prioritising? There's lots of questions in there for me. I wrote about it on LinkedIn a few months ago, where I pulled out the questions to ask to be sure that relevancy is in place in your organisation.

**Katie** 1:05:05

Do you see that as somebody who has all the comms functions reporting into them, a bit like the old or certainly when I was inhouse, the Corporate Communications Director, so they'd have investor relations, media relations... Is that how you see it?

**Rachel** 1:05:23

Yeah, I don't see why not. I think that the concern for me always is when you've got external media relations, Investor Relations represented at board level, but not internal. So that's the gap. So however that manifests itself, whether that's a combined role, where you are the chief of all communication, or it is particularly looking at internal communication, it depends on the culture of the organisation, and how then how they're set up. As long as there is representation that's what matters to me. I've long believed that it shouldn't matter if you're not at the table, if you've done your job, every single person around that board table should understand that internal comms is in the job description, and be bringing forward the voice of employees. So if for whatever reason, your culture doesn't enable you to be part of that discussion around that table, the relationships that we have should mean that everyone is fully equipped and fully aware. But an ideal scenario for me would be you're there, you're at the table, you're there, where the decisions are happening, you're helping leaders to understand that this is why this role is important. It's invested in the same way, as our external colleagues as our Investor Relations, public affairs team.

**Katie** 1:06:34

This is one of my favourite questions to ask those guests who have met so many different comms professionals over the years, through mentoring, coaching, training, etc. When you reflect on the most successful, and you can define success how you want to, because I think that's quite important, do those comms folks share any common traits or characteristics?

**Rachel** 1:07:00

They're brave.

**Katie** 1:07:01

Ah, nice answer.

**Rachel** 1:07:04

You have to be brave. I think if you've done your homework, and if particularly if, you know, mindset, insight, logistics, leadership, evaluation, revision, you know your strategy. The thinking about strategies that the thinking behind the organisation, you know, all those things, and you can see the gaps, and you can see the things that need to happen in your organisation. It takes courage. If you're holding that mirror up, and you're sharing what's reflected back, you have to be really brave. So I'm really privileged when I have these conversations with clients, or comms friends, where they know what they need to do and then they come to me and say, I just don't quite know how to do it. And they need courage. So the conversations we have are normally me saying test it out on me. I'm not close, I'm not as close to this as you are, test it on me, use me as your testbed, and then they will share, I think we need to do XYZ. And I always say, and what else? And just encourage them to go that bit further. Because if you've been brave enough and bold enough to make recommendations, you are the professional experts inside your organisation when it comes to communication, it's okay, that you have a view and that you have a voice and that you use it. But often, you have to give yourself that permission. I think I wrote two or three times in the book, if you're waiting for permission, this is it. Because it feels like when you are in that very visible, very vulnerable role, very often inside your organisation it requires you to actually make that difficult choice, make that bold statement, this is not good enough. We are not treating our people in the right way. That's a big thing to say. So bravery. That's the key core ingredient for me. But it's okay if you ask for help to get you feeling braver. But that, I think is what stands people out and sets them in good stead. And again, it goes back to being a trusted adviser. If you're listening and you're gathering and you're filtering all the things that you're hearing, and you know that you need to say something, but something stops you and you're not being courageous enough or bold enough, then everybody loses out, not least you because you've got all that evidence where it's okay. It's okay to be bold and be brave.

**Katie** 1:09:20

It's so curious to me that our friends in external communication, particularly marketing, advertising, can be bold and brave at the drop of a hat and then go oh dear, it didn't work, or we overstepped the mark, we even offended people. But will get straight back up and try the next campaign. And you said something earlier about our visibility, about everything being so visible. And it's not to say that our friends in external comms don't have that visibility, but there is a difference. I'm not quite sure if I can put my finger on it. But there seems to be a greater sense of visibility. internally.

**Rachel** 1:10:01

I think it's because everyone thinks they can do our jobs and they tell us that. In a way that there's some mystique around external and how the press work and how advertising and marketing works, that would be my take on it that because of that, I think that is the voice in our ear in terms of everyone thinks they can do it. So when you step into that conversation, and you're being bold and brave, you're saying, I hear you, you've all got your views, and that's marvellous, but I am the professional communicator here. This is my professional recommendation. And I'm really clear when I'm working with people one to one and mentoring them, particularly, if we're running through scenarios, and they're going to be talking to leaders, I always get them to step up their language. It's not if this is okay. Does it make sense? No, you're going in strong, you're going in with based on my expertise, this is what I recommend. Yeah, this is the right thing for us to do, not if that's okay, does it make sense? Obviously needs to be personable with people. But actually, you are the experts, step into that space, own it.

**Katie** 1:11:00

That's such good advice as well. You mentioned the possible second book, is there anything else, Rachel, professionally, you can speak personally as well, if you'd like, that is still on the to do list? Because you've achieved so much.

**Rachel** 1:11:15

I feel like I'm just getting started Katie, honestly, there's so much that I want to do. Thank you for saying that. That's very kind of you. If I look back at what I've done, I feel like I've been setting the foundations. I feel like I've only in the last two years built my team. And love Team Teal, they're doing an absolutely brilliant job, so Caroline, and Dan and Louise. And what that means is I'm able to support more people. So we're now able to do, we're doing an audit at the moment, and we're doing focus groups in all four nations of the UK. When there was just me, that was a lot harder to be able to do. So there's lots of things where I've set the foundations in place.

**Rachel** 1:11:53

But what's next for me, I think is how do I take the knowledge and take the mistakes that I've made and make it really accessible for people? So there's something that's been in my head for a very long time. In fact, when my business was three weeks old, I was approached by one of the largest PR agencies in the world, and offered to buy my business. And I didn't have... I had one client. And I had four years' worth of blogging. But they seeded an idea with me about publishing white papers. And that's something that I've never done. I've carried on blogging, I've been blogging for a long time, but builds on the book, I think, but having regular advice and guidance that we can publish is something that I've not done. There's something that's been there since week three of All Things IC 11 years ago. So that's something that I want to explore more, and it's something that I've talked about with my team, in terms of how do we have regular advice and guidance for people that you can access? So that's something that's bubbling away. And I think the other thing for me is really building on the in person work. So much has changed in the last few years. When we last met, I just opened the All Things IC Hub. And I've now closed the Hub four years later. And I think the in person work I'm doing with All Things IC Live is the quarterly conversations for 25

people at a time. I want to see how I can expand that reach more people. So there's always notebooks full of ideas Katie you know this!

**Katie** 1:12:15

There's a question, I think from everything you've said, that I really do need to ask, which is: what is it that drives you at the end of the day? Because you could easily sit back on your laurels now, say, I've made it, I've got where I need to be. But it's clear to me you are still highly ambitious, you're thinking what's next? What is it that drives you, do you think?

**Katie** 1:13:49

I love that. Thank you so much, Rachel.

**Rachel** 1:13:49

Setting other people up for success. If you can go through a blog post or listen to a podcast episode, and it gives you that nugget or that key that unlocks something for you as an in house internal communicator where you can go and thrive and be everything you need to be. If I had any opportunity to play a small part in that, I think that's what I needed when I was in house. I didn't know who to turn to and I was in such a visible role always, you know, I spent 10 years in house and you asked for it quite a bit. So visible and feeling quite vulnerable. So being able to equip – it makes me feel quite emotional – being able to equip people with something that just unlocks that capability in themselves. It's not about me, it's not presenting my ideas ever. And I think that's what drives me, helping other people to succeed. And when they come back, and very often I don't know that I've helped them. And that's the most beautiful thing Katie, because I can't tell you how lovely that is when people do get in contact and say, Well, you won't know this but you helped me get this job or you won't know this but I had this really difficult situation and something you said, or something you wrote made the difference for me. And it makes me think I want to do more of that I want to help more people through that way. So setting other people up for success helping them to succeed, I will never get bored of that, because how I do that, I've talked about neurodivergence, I get bored really quickly. And I know that, that is why working as consultant works better for me than working in house. So how I'm serving them how I'm helping them to succeed. I can experiment with books, podcast, in person, whatever it might be. And I will never get bored of that. If I've had any role to play in helping other people feel confident, and feel equipped to be their brilliant visible selves inside their organisations. That's why I'm just getting started. Because I know now with the book, particularly. I'm excited to see what people do with it because these are my thoughts, but that, how do you pull them through into your actions? I can't wait to see what people do. I really want people to tell me as well what they do and what makes them be bolder in or, or braver with.

**Katie** 1:16:16

This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by my very own Friday Update. Would you like a short email from me, never more than five bullet points long, giving you my take on the week's news from across the world of communications? This might be the latest reports, books, podcasts, conferences, campaigns that have caught my eye during the week. I always limit myself to just five nuggets of news, so you can read it in



record time, but still feel a little bit more informed, hopefully a little uplifted as you end your week. Now, this is subscriber only content, which was initially intended just for AB colleagues and clients. I don't post this content anywhere else. So you do need to sign up. But that is super easy. Simply go to [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](https://abcomm.co.uk/Friday), we just need your email address. And it's equally easy to unsubscribe at any time. So give it a go that sign up page again, [abcomm.co.uk/Friday](https://abcomm.co.uk/Friday). And if you do choose to be a subscriber, I very much look forward to being in touch.

**Katie** 1:17:51

Let's head over to those quick fire questions. What's one piece of bad advice or unhelpful thinking? Do you think that has consistently dogged the internal comms profession?

**Rachel** 1:18:05

I think that we are less than others. And therefore we are less deserving of resource, budget, recognition. And sometimes that comes from companies themselves. And often it can come from internal communicators where we feel like there is a perception that we are less important or valued than our external colleagues. So I think that real strain of negativity permeates and it has for years. So I think that's spectacularly unhelpful. And it's not true. So I think that that's an important consideration for us to have, how are we showing up? Are we talking like that? Are we not valuing our skills and our professionalism and our expertise in the right way? And if we are, how do we change that narrative?

**Katie** 1:18:52

And the language we use, I'm not saying 'does this make sense?' But 'in my opinion, I've seen this work before, trust me.' You obviously clearly get a lot done in an average working day so as I was very tempted to ask you this question, what's your go to productivity hack for getting stuff done?

**Rachel** 1:19:12

Very traditional, lots of to do lists. So I've always got a list on the go, I have to write things down. And using now the AI writing playlist. So if I need to hyper focus and shut out all other noise, because I've trained my brain in writing, particularly in writing the book, I turn that playlist on, I'm in it. And it's really working, but I have to couple it with the brown noise afterwards or I am still in it.

**Katie** 1:19:40

Are you using particular apps for this just in case anyone wants to know more?

**Rachel** 1:19:44

There's all sorts. This was the concern. When I started looking into it, and I was writing the book, I lost about 20 minutes, 30 minutes going, Oh, my goodness, there's lots of playlists on YouTube, and there's lots of virtual radio stations that are geared for this. It's amazing. But what I found, I had to stop myself from going down that rabbit hole and think, no, you just need to focus. Because you're looking at this for a reason. I used Apple. There's curated playlists on there, and I pulled in songs, and I have to play it, sharing all my secrets with you

today, Katie, I have to play it in that order. I can't start in the middle or put it on shuffle. As soon as I hear that first track, I can feel my brain go well, okay, we're now writing. And I just get completely stuck in. I think it's the habit. At the end of the year in December 2023, you've got your how many minutes you've listened, and I can't remember how many it was, but it was so many hours, I'd listened to that playlist. And I found that really interesting, because if I look at the correlation of what I wrote, and how long I listened, it's pretty much equal, where, like how long I wrote for, so it really helped.

**Katie** 1:20:53

It's classic FM for me, but a bit... It's a bit like what you said before about, I can't have lyrics because I love lyrics. And I'm off if I hear a lyric, I'm just, oh that's lovely, I wonder what he's writing about. I have to look it up. What's the story behind that? So yeah, it has to be completely it has to be Mozart or something like that. It's okay, if it's the measure of Figaro, because I will not understand it. So it's fine. You were the very first guest on this years ago, where are we at now, John? 90? 97!

**Katie** 1:21:23

Congratulations, wow!

**Katie** 1:21:25

Should have been the 100th! I gave you to the billboard question. And you said your message was 'you've got this', which is a little bit of the theme, I think of this conversation as well. Do you want to update your billboard message?

**Rachel** 1:21:41

No. I love the fact that you sent it to me, it is on the wall in my office. But December 2018, when we met and we recorded it, it was lovely to be your very first guest, thank you for inviting me back. I had no idea when I said that quite how much I would need to rely on my own self belief and self confidence in the years that were to come. I think if I look at my particularly from what from a work perspective, going through COVID so many times, it was really dark. So many times when not least I had a very expensive, beautiful, but very expensive office space that, we met there when we recorded four years ago. For 21 months, I was the only person who could go there. And I kept telling myself that you've got this, you can do this, you can get through this. And I had to keep that internal narrative going because I had to trust and believe in myself. And when I asked for help, and I asked three solicitors to give me advice and guidance on the lease that I was locked into. And all the advice I was given was fold your company, the leases with All Things IC Limited, fold your company. And I've worked too hard to fold my company morally, ethically, that would have been the wrong thing to do. And what message would that I sent to my children? I couldn't do that. And it's very personal each to their own. You make choices that feel right for you. But for me, that internal narrative constantly during that time, particularly was, you've got this, you can do this, you got this. So when I said it, I didn't quite realise how much that is a mantra for me would keep showing up particularly in COVID time, so I'm going to stick with her, Katie,



**Katie** 1:23:27

I love the fact that you've turned that message... because we think of the billboard messages for other people. But it was for you during that time. I love that. Rachel, thank you so much for appearing again on this show. It's been a wonderful conversation. Thank you.

**Rachel** 1:23:42

Thank you for inviting me and pleasure to be back.

**Katie** 1:23:46

So that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. You'll find the show notes and links to everything we discussed on our website. That's [abcomm.co.uk/podcasts](http://abcomm.co.uk/podcasts). Also, in the show notes, there is a special link to Rachel's publisher's website, where if you use the code RACHELMILLER, you save yourself 20% off the purchase price of Rachel's new book. If you did enjoy this episode, I have a small favour to ask. Please could you rate like or even subscribe to the show? Perhaps you feel moved enough to leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. That way you're just helping the wider IC community find our show. My thanks to Rachel, our producer John, sound engineer Stu, and Content Manager Madi. And last but far from least my heartfelt thanks to you for tuning in. This show would be nothing without you. So until we meet again, lovely listeners Stay safe and well and remember it's what inside that counts.