



The Internal Comms Podcast – Season 12

Episode 107 – *Beyond words: A blueprint for more impactful, immersive IC*

[00:00:00] **Katie**

Hello and welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast with me, Katie Macaulay. If you're looking to improve communication inside your organisation, you're in the right place. Every fortnight I invite a comms practitioner, consultant, academic or author to sit in my podcast hot seat and together we explore fresh, innovative and hopefully inspiring ways to create more meaningful, impactful internal communication.

My guest today is the seasoned internal comms expert, Monique Zytnik. An international consultant and strategist, Monique has more than two decades' experience working across a range of different industry sectors, from government and software as a service, to healthcare, broadcasting, and engineering.

Monique is the author of *Internal Communication in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Now this book sets out a forward thinking approach to internal communication that suggests we should blend human creativity with technology to create more immersive, personalised, and meaningful communication experiences.

We cover a lot of ground in this conversation. First of all, listen out for Monique explaining the relevance of her early career in physiotherapy, and realising she could spot the exact moment when she knew her patients were going to get better. And just like in physiotherapy, where patient motivation is key to recovery, as comms professionals, we must tap into employee motivation and behaviour.

Here Monique explained her layered, immersive, nonlinear approach to internal comms, where messages are delivered through a variety of different channels and formats catering to different learning and media preferences. Monique talks about the 'trust triangle,' the importance of effort and authenticity, particularly in leadership communication, of pushing creative boundaries, and tapping into the collective intelligence of employees, the people who so often are closest to customers and their pain points.

It was a pleasure to interview Monique. She has a very considered, thoughtful approach to internal comms, and he's also a fantastic advocate and cheerleader for the value that we can add inside organisations. So without further ado, I bring you



Monique Zytnek. Monique, welcome to The Internal Comms Podcast. It is a pleasure to have you here.

[00:03:10] **Monique:** Thank you so much, Katie. I've really wanted to follow on from our conversation late last year with the IABC Amina podcast and have been looking forward to this one with you.

[00:03:22] **Katie:** I know that a lot of people say they fell into internal communication. They came from a background or a field sometimes quite different from comms.

You started out as a physiotherapist. So talk me through that unusual career pathway.

[00:03:41] **Monique:** I actually wanted to be an engineer originally, which is another interesting story. And I practiced physiotherapy because I couldn't stand the sight of blood and didn't want to do medicine. I very quickly realised that I could start to pick the day that my patients decided to get better.

All of this training and teaching about the science I felt there was something more and realised that it was about motivation and persuasion. I think there's a lot of interesting learnings about physiotherapy or what I took away from physiotherapy as I stepped into communications. Physiotherapy is about problem solving. It's one to one and sometimes one in a group, I did group sessions as well. It follows a pattern of SOAP, Subjective Objective Assessment Plan. Very similar to communications where you're doing the subjective, asking people questions, listening. Then the objective, what are you observing? What's the data telling you? In the internal comms world, what are the stats on your intranet or the data from your staff survey saying? Then you make an assessment. What's the problem? What are you trying to achieve? That's the strategic bit. And then what's your plan? How are you going to get there? How are you going to solve the problem? There's also this element of working in a multidisciplinary team that we had when I was a physiotherapist. We had a psychologist, occupational therapist, a doctor, you had the nursing staff, and everyone had their different roles and perspectives. And I think that's where I really learned to love. Working with different people and seeing the diamond from different angles, because then you come to a more robust conclusion and you can support each other with different skills.

Extrapolate that to the comm space, you're talking about creatives, your account manager, your digital workplace. We also had a lot of reporting, you had to measure and justify what you were doing. because the health insurance or someone

was paying for it. And keep in contact with the doctors or the hospital to make sure you got the funding needed for your patients.

That was over 20 years ago. Then I stepped into my internship in Washington, D. C. right after September 11 and plunged into the comms world, into PR and marketing. And then as many of your other guests, Katie, I discovered internal communication and fell in love with the idea that once again, you're there to create a difference. There is a business outcome. And I talk about the business side of physiotherapy as well. That was on my realisations in my book, I talk about that. We have an interesting duty of care, I believe, to our people and our organisation, which is similar to that duty of care that you would have with your patient.

And that's what I love about the profession.

[00:06:59] **Katie:** I love the idea of a duty of care. What often motivates me is the amount of time people spend at work in their lives and therefore making sure that time is at least not harrowing, but ideally meaningful and fulfilling. And people are able to at least be themselves.

You talk about picking the day and being able to notice that moment, that day when your patients are getting better. That also makes me think about the importance of the behavioural sciences in our work and understanding mind states and being able to influence mind states. Isn't that interesting, that crossover between the two?

[00:07:45] **Monique:** Absolutely. And that's what I found so frustrating with physiotherapy is it's all about the physical side and that motivational side to human nature and people wanting to do their activities. Or if you're talking about sports people, it's actually preventing them from doing their activities. It's that motivation and the human side to it, which is so important.

I found it quite frustrating that was almost ignored for the benefit of the scientific approach. I think the mixture of both is really nice and I've brought that scientific methodology to my comms as well.

[00:08:26] **Katie:** You've worked both in house and as an independent consultant. What do you prefer and why?

[00:08:36] **Monique:** I love being a part of an organisation and being able to influence long term.

It's building those relationships and being able to shift mindsets or approaches or coaching senior leaders, for example, where you get the background insights, where the leader might think that they're doing a great job. If you're only to be listening to the leader, you wouldn't think there was any problems, but it's being able to, again, pick up on that with your listening, with your connections, with your network, where things are perhaps not going so well with the leader and being able to ask the right questions and help them see different perspectives. I love that about in house. With consultancy, I think you move a lot faster and you've got a lot more leeway to be daring and push the boundaries, whereas in house you're restricted by what you know is probably going to be signed off. By your in house client or in a consultancy, you're expected to be a little more out there and can offer one or two outrageous options that, if you're lucky, the client might go for because they're sick of their everyday in house comms. For me, a combination of both would be ideal.

[00:09:59] **Katie:** Yeah. Brilliant. I want to come back to you and talk about the creative process a little bit further on in this conversation, but let's get started with your new book, *Internal Communication in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Now it sets out this really, I think, very bold vision for a richer, more immersive, more creative, more experiential approach to internal comms.

What inspired you to write this book? There are now quite a few books on the markets around internal comms. Was there a particular message or gap in the market that you felt needed to be addressed?

[00:10:39] **Monique:** So Katie, my book is the first internal communications business book for leaders, to help them communicate effectively at scale.

And there are three key areas that I wanted to address in writing this book. One is that I had been working with 3D immersive technology and realised the techniques and theories we have, if you think of Berlo's Sender Receiver, that was the 1960s. If you think about Facebook, enterprise social networks, that's all emerging around 2007 onwards.

Then where we are right now is the start of the fourth industrial revolution, which has the metaverse blockchain and AI. They're the characteristics. And the way we communicate is much more experiential. We don't have a model for that, and this is what I'm offering Katie, a model that incorporates these new techniques to help us make sense of it and choose wisely when we create our strategies.

The second is also through my conversations. I again realised that our leaders, they're great at one to one or one to a team, but when you're communicating at scale, you need that strategy component, otherwise it can be very hit and miss. I'm



hoping to achieve with my book is helping leaders understand the ones that have got the budget and who get to sign off on things, why it's important to be strategic.

There's also a need to link tactics to the biggest strategy. In some ways, strategy is still a bit of a dirty word in some areas of our profession, and it's still very tactics focused. What I'm trying to do with my model is you can pick up on a tactic and step back and see how it fits into a bigger strategic model. And it can help you identify the elements that you might be missing. Maybe you've missed out on the feedback. Maybe you've completely forgotten about the measurement. Maybe it's a more complex comms plan where you need immersive communication techniques, but you also have to remember the fundamentals.

It's really, a big picture tool to help with these three things.

[00:13:05] **Katie:** Perfect. That explains, it's a book for the, as you say, for the modern age and the age when we have so many more interesting, sophisticated, immersive, richer tools at our disposal. This episode of The Internal Comms Podcast is brought to you by the Internal Communication Masterclass.

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Let's step back a little bit in order to frame this entire conversation. I love the fact that very early in your book, you set out four ways internal comms can bring value to organisations. Honestly, you think that debate has been had you think we don't have to prove our worth anymore, but I'm surprised by how often I do have to start in that place with some leaders and say, yeah, internal comms is a value adding function. Talk to me about those four ways that we add value.

[00:15:22] **Monique:** Katie, it's more important than ever that we talk about the value add that we offer. It's more important than ever that we help explain these to our leaders. With all of this change coming up, the way internal communications needs to shift to still be seen and still be a viable profession in the future is up to us.

And the reason why I talk about this at the start of my book is because, as internal communication professionals, we do a lot of navel gazing. We know what the research is. We know what the best practice is. We know why it's good. But we don't communicate that in a way that makes sense to our leaders from a business perspective.

My book, I lay out corporate communication. The second one is organisational listening, effective change and transformation and streamlining communication. Now this is, I have to confess, not the be all end all. Because I actually chunk up with the corporate communication, this is about things like reputation, both internally and external, and research. So Rita Men from the University of Florida has done some great research on this. that demonstrates that employees rate the organisation better and perceive it as being more transparent when you've got excellent internal communications in place. This flows from the internal through our employees to external reputation because your employees are really your best advocates.

This is particularly important when we look in the recruitment space. With corporate communication, we also have the employee engagement experience and alignments. piece. And research shows that there's a direct link to the bottom line. Then we've got the organisational citizenship behavior, which is minimising that destructive behavior. So the rule breaking behavior. people filling a part of the company, minimising people stealing from the company and also the damage to the reputation that they could cause. Then if I spring across to the organisational listening, which is the second one, we've got under that, we've got business insights that a lot of leaders don't think about. They don't realise that If they're able to harness the intel, and we're talking about data, we're talking about information, business intel from their frontline staff, and able to quickly, which technology now allows, get that back up to their decision making process, they can make better decisions.

Our frontline staff know what the issues are with products because they're in contact with the customers. They know the pain points for the customers. They know how things can be done better. I remember at the IABC World Conference, there was Oscar Mundos, who is the former CEO of United Airlines. The first thing he did was went on a listening tour, I think it was for 36 days, his first job as a CEO,



because he understood that those business insights from listening to your employees can help you make better decisions and do better business.

Then the third one is effective change and transformation. And that's if you have a fancy car in your garage, but you don't bring it out and actually use it, it's not really worth the money and a lot of particularly change transformation people forget that it's important to spend the time in communicating that change.

And then the last one is streamlining communication. One of the biggest issues we're facing right now is information overload. Yeah. And that's what our employees are suffering from.

And a lot of research shows that's contributing to workplace stress and mental health issues. So that's why I pulled those elements out in my book.

[00:19:33] **Katie:** And just to double down on the point about change and transformation, we have McKinsey, three consultants from McKinsey on the show not that long ago, who said that 80 percent of Transformation programs fail to reach their stated objectives, and sometimes it's actually more than 80%.

A lot of the reason for that being poor, or missing, or inconsistent communication. So yeah, completely agree with those four, thank you.

You advocate for this multi layered, immersive approach. And I really want to get under the skin of this approach and understand what it looks like in practice. this richer, more engaging, more impactful communication experience.

Let's start with multi layer internal comms. So what does that start to look like in practice, on the ground, inside an organisation?

[00:20:30] **Monique:** So the multi layered internal communication model layers from the foundational that we were talking about with the sender receiver, using networks, taking a facilitation role with networks and communities, and then the immersive on top.

And it's held together by leadership communication and strategic alignment components. That's the model. What it means in practice is when you have a strategy, you're able to use the model to work out, how complex is what you're trying to communicate? What's the environment like? Is it something that people are going to understand easily? Is it informational? Or is it like these transformational projects where you need a lot of richness to it? And it's about layering these different

components together and being able to use this model as a tool to have conversations with senior leaders. So that when they say, Hey, I would like to have a video, let's communicate our new culture strategy with a video that you can say hang on.

That's one directional, how are we going to get feedback if it's working? How about we add in all the elements to our strategy so we get that result over time? There's a lot of misunderstanding from a leadership perspective that one piece of communication is going to make a difference. Or the opposite sometimes happens that if you bang someone over the head enough times with the same bit of information in the same way, people are actually going to understand it.

And so this model recognises the nuances and how things need to be layered, almost like a cake. Or if you prefer a toolbox full of tools that are used for different things. You've got to know what you're trying to fix first and then select the right tools in the right sequence to get the results.

[00:22:40] **Katie:** Yeah. And as you were talking about the old model of send a receiver broadcasting messages at people, which is where we get cascades from, and you and I have the same slight problem with cascades, I think. How far that's moved, because I'm thinking of Mike Klein's work on network analysis and influences inside organisations. And I guess that's a vital part of your talk here, I'm guessing.

[00:23:06] **Monique:** Absolutely. And Celine Schillinger, who wrote Dare to Unlead, and that's one of the books I wish I'd read in full before I published my book, because it's brilliant. She's doing some really interesting work at the moment where she's got a network of women in a Arabic based company, and she's networked their different not only jobs, not only backgrounds, not only qualifications, but also how they're connected to each other.

And through this tool that she's got, they can even use it for predicting who's got leadership potential and qualities based on the network. There's some really amazing stuff you can do once you start to think clearly in these areas about what you want to achieve and how you can go about mapping networks and identifying those influences and being able to use that. Say if there was an emergency and you needed to ensure something was spread quickly through an organisation, who would you first call upon? And you can nurture those people as well. Mike's done a great job. Some work in this space.

[00:24:18] **Katie:** Yeah, it's fascinating work. We're doing this with a client at the moment to identify those, they're calling them connectors, but influencers, and then

supporting them with the skills and the capability, the confidence to turbocharge their influence and connection ability. It's really quite exciting.

Immersive communication I'm picturing this as something that almost touches all our senses. Would that be a good way of describing it?

[00:24:45] **Monique:** Absolutely, Katie. It's where you put your audience in the center of the experience. It's experience based and it's about reducing the friction between the message and receiving the message.

And instead of it being about the sender, it's about the actual audience receiving in, as you said, multisensory. We forget that people prefer to receive things in different ways. Some people are more auditory, some people are more visual. Then it's about being nonlinear. So starting to think about how can you package up your messages or your communication pieces so they make sense individually but also as a whole, and it's not so gentlemanly if they're received in a different order than intended. And this is particularly important for asynchronous work.

And then the third one is the gamification and the interactivity, which we already know is important, but it's about being deliberate with it and not getting someone to play a game just for fun. It's about being intentional with your communications and how you do it. So yeah, it's got those three elements and you don't need immersive technology to use these immersive communication techniques.

[00:26:10] **Katie:** That makes perfect sense. A few things immediately spring to mind. Non linear. Isn't that interesting? We've got a communication plan. Phase one, we do this. Phase two, we do this. Phase three, and we assume that everyone is waiting there, saying, when do I get phase two? I've just had phase one. I can't wait for phase three.

That is not how people work. That's not how organisations work. That's not how teams work. I've been on holiday. I've been absent for whatever reason. I've missed something because I've been super busy. I love the fact that you're thinking about packaging things up to make sense as they arrive to you. Yes, they join up, but if you've missed something, you haven't missed anything crucial.

[00:26:49] **Monique:** I first came to, I first came to that realisation actually, I was working on a project with DHL, the Virtual Strategy House. So it was a 3D environment. It's one of the case studies in my book. And that's the moment where we had this multi story house that explained different parts of their corporate strategy, all mapped out.

There was a big warehouse, for example, to represent the DHL warehouse and there were different corners of the warehouse that were assigned to different parts of the business. I just assumed people would go through from front to back. And then when I looked at the actual data, like we could tell what people are clicking on and where people are watching.

Some people started from the back. They went all the way to the back of the room and started there. And then it became about what other assumptions are we making? And then we realised that, for example, in Australia, we drive on the left hand side of the road as we do in the UK. So people start on the left.

In Europe, people drive on the right hand side of the road. As soon as you start to think about that... I saw other designs for other 3D spaces being created, because this was during the metaverse hype during the COVID era, people putting floor stickers on the floor as to where you had to walk from. Yes.

Whether you had to go through the immersive experience clockwise or anti clockwise and that completely takes the ownership away from the person. And if we do go back to physiotherapy, this is one of the things I learnt all those years ago. is people have to want to get better themselves. They have to want to learn themselves.

You can't force feed people and you can't make anyone do anything. Sometimes you can with threats and bribes, but if they have ownership and choice in the process, it's impactful. And that's ultimately what you're trying to do is you're trying to cut through and make a difference with your communication and with the experience rather than imposing it upon somebody.

[00:29:25] **Katie:** I love that idea of choice because how often do we create something that is a once and done thing? If we use technology in the way that technology now enables us to create content, for example, you could choose your language. You could choose the 30 second version or the 20 minute version. You could choose just to watch it or just listen or just to watch the animation.

There's so many different ways now that we can create our content and give people choices. So I love that so much. Just coming back to your floor vinyls and your floor stickers, with hybrid working, and lots of things have to be communicated via screens and devices. But I have often thought to myself, what a wasted opportunity the physical space often is.

I think we need to earn people's commute, and I'm not sure we're doing that with the physical spaces that we offer people at the moment.

[00:30:17] **Monique:** I absolutely agree with you, Katie, and this has been one of my frustrations watching the hybrid office scenario unfold over the past couple of years when I was in Australia working for the Australian government a year or two ago, and we did a big hybrid return, a sort of return to work project.

It was almost like employees being told you have to come back to the office or else, but there was no, as you said, offering, like why some people were spending huge amounts of money for parking, because the public transport where wherever they were coming into the office was terrible. They had to drive. Then parking was horrendous, because you had to pay for the whole day parking.

What are you offering your employees in exchange? And then we discovered the employees. were in the office, but on a video call, all of them sitting behind their desks on a video call with someone on the other side of the country. And again, you think, what kind of experience is that? And I think there's so much opportunity for workplaces and also where communication consultants can come in, and look at the workplace experience. We haven't really, for example, experimented with smells in the office. I don't know if that's going to be a thing, but temperature, that's really important, even sound, like how can we give a better experience to people where they can concentrate more effectively, and not have this echo y office environment where everyone's talking on a video call with someone else from somewhere else?

What opportunities are we giving people to come together? With my team in Australia whenever we had enough team members, I'd take a team member out for a coffee. Or just sit down with someone and ask them how they were and have those personal conversations which are much richer in person when you can sit next to each other, look someone in the eyes and feel their pain when they talk about their stress or their personal family experience.

It helps you as a leader, support them better, but unless you're offering those experiences to people when they come in the office., Then it's wasted.

[00:32:47] **Katie:** I couldn't agree more. One of the linchpins or the drivers of your model has to be creativity, doesn't it? Because we are going to need to think in far more creative ways about how we take our strategy, our plan, and lift it up and make it something that we can touch, you can feel, you can sense, you can interact with.

Talk to me a little bit about the creative process here, because I see that as quite a challenge for some in house teams. Would you agree?

[00:33:22] **Monique:** Absolutely. And as I alluded to at the start, Katie, it's because there are limitations within an organisation as to what you know you can get away with, perhaps what the in house team is, maybe they're doing the right thing and being a real stickler for the brand guide, and sometimes As Bettina in my book says, you need to scribble a little bit over the edges and you need to. I love, yeah, I love her analogy, and sometimes it takes someone or a team from outside of the organisation to offer fresh ideas, to push the boundaries, and be that excuse, it's oh, the consultant recommended it. And then the internal comms person is saying with a smile on their face to the leader, the experienced consultant from outside the organisation proposed this and it's based on best practice. I think there's a lot both can learn from each other and lots of benefits being in house and in a consultancy.

The consultancy can draw on all of those examples that they've managed to get across the line in different organisations.

[00:34:38] **Katie:** Yeah, and hold the hand of clients that might be feeling a little bit nervous. Have you come across an example where this works without a lot of digital capability? Because a lot of the time, not all organisations have immersive technology at their fingertips. They have to do it slightly more old fashioned ways,

[00:34:59] **Monique:** I think it's a matter of whatever works. Immersive communication is about appealing to the senses. If you've got a big video conference for whatever reason, if you've got the budget, then why don't, can you send the employee something in the post? So they've got something physically there. Or I did some work with a client, a European engineering company, and they had a lot of clients who were in, I don't know what you call the suites. I'm sure there's a proper word for it in the confectionery area. And we asked the participants on this big online event to go to their local supermarket and buy specific products from their clients, so that they had them there and they could consume them together as a part of the experience. Yeah.

There are little ways and it's just about being creative and thinking, how can we bring more audio into this or how can we make it more interactive? For example, I have the 'doing it tandem style,' a case study in my book, which was a different German engineering company who was working together with a consultancy and they wanted to work more closely together and have that shared understanding. And one of the things they did was they had a strategy cooking show, and one of their senior leaders popped on a hat, everyone was behind their computer. Yeah. They did a bit of a cooking show with props and had a lot of fun, but it was based on strategy and the ingredients were different parts of the strategy that they had to put together and mix.

So there are fun ways that you can do that. There are photos and screenshots from this event where the team members, they've got their hands in I'm trying to demonstrate on a podcast, so it's not really working, Katie. But doing not quite aerobics, but activities together, which really had that sense of being a part of something, a sense of belonging.

[00:37:17] **Katie:** Yeah. We've had I think we've had virtual yoga. We've had all sorts of things at AB. So yeah, even when you're apart, you can be together doing something. You can be connected in a way and share an experience. I absolutely love that idea. I'm tempted to ask you quite a difficult question, but it's one that a lot of our clients are grappling with at the moment.

We are being asked to review, audit and streamline channels at the moment. If you could wave a magic wand and create the perfect channel suite, what core features and functionality would you have in your perfect channel suite, do you think?

[00:37:57] **Monique:** Katie, it's with all comms, you actually need to have something that suits your organisation, and I'm not talking about your organisation and your people right now. It's a mixture of what legacy channels have you got in place. Because there's obviously a history there that people prefer to use certain things in certain ways. Then it's like, where do you want to go to? What's your ideal situation?

For example, you mentioned the language translation. If your business is only operating in an English speaking or Spanish speaking company, that's not really going to be a priority for you in terms of your Channels, having that functionality. And it's also about thinking about what resources you have to support the different channels.

There are a zillion channels that you can have, but unless you've got the resources to support it, it's not a smart idea if you're a completely virtual company, so everybody's working remotely, are you going to be investing in digital signage? I don't think so. Looking at where you are and how things are currently used, what the gaps or the issues are, and also where you want to get to and then working backwards, like what are the quick wins that you can do? With your channels to tidy them up and then what investments and how much money have you got to bring in new channels? And again, I'm sorry to be talking high level, but what are your foundational, so you've got email, you've got messaging, then what's your enterprise social network situation? Is there some sort of, again, this is the second level on the model? And then the third level is what kind of tools and functionality can you, you put in place to add those additional elements to the channels? What's your matrix in the end? And can you clearly communicate it to your people? This is what you use Teams channels for. This is what you use Viva Connect for. This is where you find

your information on your intranet, which is what we're going to keep updated and that's the single source of truth. These are the channels that we have. It's about simplification.

[00:40:23] **Katie:** It's really interesting because a lot of the time I think just a simple picture on one page. When I start with an organisation, this is the channel landscape. This is what I can expect to receive when I can expect to receive it. And this is the purpose or objective of each of those channels. that doesn't exist inside so many organisations. That would be a great place to start before you change anything.

[00:40:51] **Monique:** So a couple of points there, Katie, when I was working with a global communications consultancy, we did a audit of a a company and they had Dropboxes where they were keeping PDFs for the salespeople on the products. And it's don't they use Microsoft Teams? They could have that on their phone.

And it was like, oh no, we just use Teams for video calls. So again, it's like looking at the functionality and how can you streamline it and simplify the different channels and help, going back to that point about the transformation, how can you help people understand what they're used for? This is particularly important because some research came out the other day that directly links information overload and FOMO, fear of missing out, with workplace stress, mental health issues. But what's interesting about that is, if people know where to get the information and that the information is going to come to them from the CEO message every Monday, they know where to look for, or they have, and that again, consistency, Katie. It reduces the anxiety. If you're checking multiple channels, there was an organisation I worked at who had two messaging systems. They didn't know if it was going to come to you on Teams. You didn't know if it was going to come to you on Teams. Jabba, which is a Cisco program. And you didn't know if people were going to try and reach you on a video call with which system, and then obviously the systems don't like each other. So yes, you've got to buffer in five minutes to get your headset connected with whatever video call you're trying to be on, yeah. Yeah. I think simplifying, sometimes putting some old technology to bed, saying goodbye before we add on.

[00:42:53] **Katie:** And I think you're right. My Microsoft partner, Silicon Reef, tells us all the time that only about 30 percent of the features and functionality. in any kind of platform is actually used. The vast majority of features of functionality are never touched by their clients.

So it's often not necessarily a brand new channel suite, it's just understanding the full power and potential of what you've got. And I couldn't agree more about familiarity. These constant interruptions that we are giving people by sending things out on an

ad hoc basis unexpectedly. If I know at two o'clock on a Monday or five o'clock on a Wednesday, I know what I'm due to get, I always get it. It's always in the same format. It says what it does on the tin, as it were, then that's no longer noise. That's expected. It's anticipated. I know the purpose. I think that's so important as well.

[00:43:50] **Monique:** That's where being strategic and planned with our communications can really help.

[00:43:55] **Katie:** And I'm wondering if we can squeeze a quick conversation in about trust here because you have a trust triangle, I believe. You have defined the core elements of trust, do you want to talk to us a little bit about your research into trust and where you've ended up in terms of how you define it, or how you create it?

[00:44:13] **Monique:** Sure, Katie, I would love to say that I'm the creator of that, creator of the triangle. Unfortunately, the triangle was there before me, but the elements of what you do and what other people say about you combine to form trust.

This links to that conversation about consistency being essential for leadership communication at the moment. And it's when all these three things align that people tend to trust you. We can influence what we say and what other people say about us. Jeff Bezos' famous quote, "your personal brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room."

So we can influence that in terms of being conscious about the narrative that we're sharing with people, how our stories fit together to support this overall narrative. This is where. The personal branding and leadership communication comes in, and I would strongly encourage any leaders who are listening to huddle up with your internal comms and your comms person because internal and external need to align and be really clear about: what is your narrative? What are the pillars or what are the key topics that you talk about? And how do you demonstrate that in your everyday work? If your narrative is about caring for the environment and you talk about how this is important to you and you've got your origin story, we can delve into Seth Godin because he does lots of great, he talks about that in a really great way.

Then adding on to that, how can you share those elements through different stories that you tell in the workplace? And how can you demonstrate? In a physical sense, are you giving your employees a couple of days off to do volunteer work for the environment? Are you sparking conversations and allowing people to have robust debates on these topics in your organisation? This is where all those elements fit together, and where an experienced communication professional can support

leaders in helping them consciously through what they say and what they do and influence what other people say about them as well.

[00:46:50] **Katie:** Let's pull on that thread about origin stories because there's pet theory of mine that there's an origin story inside almost every organisation that doesn't get told as powerfully as it should.

And what it always comes down to is a series of milestones across the timeline, which is never a story.

[00:47:13] **Monique:** It's like I was born, then I went to school, then I went to high school.

[00:47:18] **Katie:** And that's not your origin story. It is your timeline and it's a totally different thing.

[00:47:22] **Monique:** And obviously origin stories can change over time. There's no problem or issue with that, but it's picking the right story that explains where it's at now. and why certain decisions are being made.

[00:47:37] **Katie:** As you say, organisations can have them, people can have them as well, as a way of explaining your background, your vision, your values, your hopes and aspiration.

It relates to individuals as much as it relates to organisations, doesn't it?

[00:47:52] **Monique:** Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. That's what's so powerful about it. And in my physiotherapy background, until I really delved and, worked out why I switched professions and what did I bring from my previous profession? What makes me different as a communication practitioner compared to someone who might have come from say a visual design background and being a typesetting expert that's a different story, a different person who brings different skills. Why am I, Monique Zytnik, so passionate about strategy, about getting results, about measurement, about taking the big picture approach? And that's what I discovered through reflecting on what changed my opinion and made me the practitioner I am today.

[00:48:54] **Katie:** Whether you're in house or a freelance consultant, it helps to differentiate you and your approach because we do not all need cookie cutter internal comms people. We need that diversity of thought.



So it does help you differentiate yourself, which I think is really important. And you're more likely to attract the colleagues, attract the clients, attract the jobs that fit for you if you share your origin story, yeah.

[00:49:18] **Monique:** And Katie, are you able to share yours?

[00:49:25] **Katie:** Listeners will probably know this because I've said it before, but I grew up wanting to be Lois Lane.

For me, it was all about words, asking awkward questions, getting to the heart of an issue, finding the story and sharing it with everyone. Being first to the story and getting the real story. I don't think that's changed. I think I've built an entire career on asking questions.

[00:49:48] **Monique:** But I think, Katie, if we look into the future and what I was able to do, the scary fact that I can go to a website and my blog asks me what I'd like to write a blog about and I just describe it and it will write it for me.

If we look at that and reflect on what the skills are that we as practitioners will need into the future. Asking the right questions is absolutely, if not top of the list, one of the top of the list, because AI is designed to please us. Unfortunately, someone's going to ask the difficult questions, don't they?

Someone's got to challenge and be able to question decisions. And there's a certain skill in being able to do that in a very diplomatic way and manage your stakeholders to get the needed results. For example, saying, Oh, that's really nice that you want to do a video, but have you thought about this? Or what's the reason, like what problem are we trying to solve here?

Yeah. These are the consultancy skills. They are absolutely where our value add is and the ones that we should be celebrating and talking about. I know that we need to be good at prompt engineering, but we need to be showing people that we are business partners. We're there to solve communication problems.

[00:51:16] **Katie:** There's a lot of talk about organisational listening, but I often think, what are we listening to? Without asking the right open question, we're not necessarily hearing the feedback we need to hear. People either won't tell you, don't trust being open and transparent, don't think you're interested. There's lots of reasons why you can have a listening ear, you can be listening out, and there's a deafening silence.

You have to encourage and foster that kind of dialogue. It isn't just about having a listening ear. I don't think that's always enough.

[00:51:53] **Monique:** Katie, if I can build on that. I think it's about using all of your senses when you listen. It's looking at the numbers and the data, but it's also observing. We've got a return to work policy and you're supposed to be in the office four days a week. Everyone says that they're in the office, but nobody seems to be in the office. There is asking the right questions, but there's also a lot organisations can pick up on with listening, whether it's from a data perspective or people being on the ground, you're just doing that observational part.

[00:52:34] **Katie:** I love observational research. The wonderful thing about observational research is no one lies, because you are simply watching what is actually happening. When the team brief happens from the shift manager, for example, or when the all hands team meeting happens, what is actually happening and just being there.

Walking round a factory site and just looking at the posters, the signage, the touch screens, how are they being used, where are they? How dusty are they? all of that. I tell you, it just brings me to one of my favorite stories from health and safety officer. 'cause I asked him how effective his posters were and he said, one, put it this way, Katie, I turned them all upside down the other day and it took a month for anyone to tell me that they were upside down. So they had literally become wallpaper. But that's the kind of observational research. You don't need to do a survey. You just need to walk in and look, and that tells you so much.

[00:53:29] **Monique:** I love that story because a lot of the time we think that there is no way to get feedback from a poster, it's just there, but obviously you can.

[00:53:41] **Katie:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:53:42] **Monique:** If someone notices there's something wrong.

[00:53:44] **Katie:** I've seen everything. I've seen QR codes on posters are obvious way that you can then link the paper with the physical. But even I've seen clever things done with these posters, where you tear off a bit of the poster that's got some number on it or some feedback mechanism. There's all sorts of ways that you can be more creative with your process.



You mentioned AI there, and I've heard you say in the past, your content is cheap and it is very cheap if you just put a prompt in and then cut and paste onto LinkedIn. And I'm worried that is happening quite a lot when I open LinkedIn these days.

Are there any AI tools that you particularly enjoy using that you think, Oh, that's become quite a favorite go to AI tool?

[00:54:27] **Monique:** There are a lot of tools that organisations should be using if they've got the budget and that's the challenge of budget, and also, what organisations are allowed to use. I actually love Canva.

It sounds really silly, but I love Canva and I do appreciate the AI tools that are now embedded in basic Microsoft products. A lot of people don't even... they think, Oh, we don't have Microsoft Copilot. But there's things like the audio to text in Microsoft Word that are super useful. I remember a couple of years ago, having an interview with a senior leader and having to spend such a long time typing it out.

In fact, Katie, one of my earliest jobs in comms was in the premier's media unit in Victoria. I had one of those little digital tapes, the tiny little ones that go in a dictaphone. And I had a pedal that you'd press on that would stop the tape recorder as I typed out, and now you can just open up Microsoft Word, upload the digital file and it spits out the different speakers and a fairly good transcript and that's a matter of seconds and it would take me hours. I wasn't very good at typing, much better now.

[00:55:50] **Katie:** You're so right. PowerPoint, for example, one of my guests explained in PowerPoint, there is a rehearsal coach. You open it up, you hit this. I can't exactly remember where it is, but we'll put it in the show notes. You present and the little AI coach in the corner of your screen talks to you about how fast you're going, how slow you're going. Brilliant. It's all embedded in the basic version of PowerPoint. So I think you're absolutely right. There's a lot in our everyday tools and my guess is that's how AI is going. We're just going to see the everyday tools get a little bit smarter. I'm noticing this with Grammarly, Headliner, with Otter, getting that little bit cleverer.

It's offering me another bit of choice or creativity. So yeah, I think that's definitely the way we're going.

[00:56:33] **Monique:** I don't think people need to freak out about AI. It's just about working out what you're trying to achieve and checking to see if what you've already got allows for that. If it doesn't, quite often that tool or functionality will become available. That's the current argument for things like Gemini or Microsoft Copilot, it

might not be perfect now, but if you get on board and start playing with it and understand how it works, then when it gets better and it will do that very quickly, then you'll be up to speed. I don't see it as any huge challenge and no need to do loads of research on the internet. It's about identifying what would make your life easier and then working within the boundaries provided by your organisation.

[00:57:22] **Katie:** And I think also your budget yeah, absolutely. But also testing and piloting and trialing things. There's quite a few clients that are testing and piloting chatbots, intranets have been for years places where people just can't find things archives of dusty information and the actual thing that you want to find is buried somewhere and someone once sent you a link on an email but you can't find it anymore.

Whereas the chatbot just enables you to ask a question and it comes immediately back with a result and you don't need to know where that result was originally, you're just given the answer. And chatbots most of them that my clients are talking about to me at the moment are in their infancy. They're still plugging away, giving them the right information, testing them out, helping them learn, connecting them to another data point, another database. I think we've got to get used to playing with these things, haven't we, as well? Lose the fear.

[00:58:20] **Monique:** But now's the time to be moving from play to productive. That's my message to all of the communication professionals listening today. Yes, playing's great, But you need to start to shift that to something that you use on a daily basis. As things develop, there'll be more parts of your processes, more things that you do where you can bring in different AI elements and things that you'll discover in your Microsoft or your Google products that you didn't know were there yesterday that are certainly there today.

So it's about consciously and deliberately using these products in a productive way.

[00:59:01] **Katie:** Just a side question on that. Synthetic media. I didn't go to Shel Holtz's presentation at IABC World Conference. I really wanted to, but I was speaking at the same time . I was so frustrated. Where do you stand on this?

So we can have the CEO stand up and give his or her presentation in Mandarin, in Spanish. They don't speak those languages, it doesn't matter, it's still... does it matter? It's that person's voice, synthetically created to speak in those languages. Where do you stand on all this? I'm curious, because it does raise that question of authenticity, doesn't it?

[00:59:41] **Monique:** It does, absolutely. And it comes back to all of our comms Katie. What's the purpose of it? For example, Rewe, which is a German supermarket chain, are using AI avatars, which are like a big hologram in a box. It's not actual hologram technology, but it looks like a hologram of a head of digital workplaces.

And it's based on a real person, looks like a real person. It's his voice, he can answer questions you have about the company or about your leave entitlements. Wow. And it'll answer there's a lot of experimentation going on. The initial claim is that employees are comfortable because it's available 24 7. Employees feel that they can ask questions that they might not ask their manager. Yes. It is early days and I already know as well that people are sending out personalised videos from their CEOs. Hey Katie, thank you so much for the great work that you've done today. We're doing great stuff and we're going to be hitting our end of financial year targets.

I just need you to stay the course for the next two months until we really get ourselves over the line with our business goals. That's already been done. One of the really interesting conversations I had at the World Conference was with Kevin Hanlahan from Halo and Frank Wolfe from Staff Base. We had a big chat about employees being able to choose how they receive their communication. So you mentioned a couple of things about languages and being able to choose language earlier. But actually deciding, okay, I just, I want to have a audio summary of that CEO's message, or do you want a written version? What's your communication channel and medium preference as Katie? So I think that's really interesting.

For example, a friend of mine's chief of staff at a very big organisation, she said that her CEO wasn't a native German speaker and went to the effort of learning, of having a speech written that she helped him with and he learned it. And he presented in German to all of his executives and the kudos for the effort was worth it. The respect he got for doing that was worth it. So I think we need to remember those things with the personalisation side of things. You still get brownie points for effort.

[01:02:22] **Katie:** Human beats machine again. Handmade by human. That's my prediction that we're going to see on things, this is all me. And as you say, you'll get brownie points for it being really you and really making that effort. I like that a lot.

[01:02:38] **Monique:** This is already happening in the music industry where you can have a digital recording studio with digital instruments, and you can select a function that puts imperfections into your recording to make it sound more natural. Wow. And I'm wondering if that's the way that we're going to be going with our comms is like the deliberate typo.

[01:03:01] **Katie:** Yeah. Wow. What an interesting thought. The Harvard Business Review case study about the, I think it was Volkswagen, but they introduced a model of car, which was very efficient and rarely broke down, but they had this amazing customer service model in the background and no one was using it. So they put some minor fault on the car so people would experience the wonderful aftercare service.

We'll have to find out whether that's really true. It might be apocryphal tale, but anyway. Before we go to those quick fire questions, I'm going to ask you one of my favourite questions to ask authors, which is, what's not in the book? Is there a topic that you would have liked to have included, but for whatever reason you didn't? Or might be the subject of another book one day?

[01:03:52] **Monique:** So the challenge I have is that my book is designed to be a business book. I had a page and word limit to operate within. I've had a lot of very helpful people after my book is published saying, Oh, you should have included this, or this could have been included. Mainly specialists in that area. I had to deliberately not include things to emphasise other things. But I would love to include more about narratives, particularly Frank Wolf's book came out a month before mine, so I didn't get to read it unfortunately, and I would have loved to include some of that sort of narrative, the bigger picture narrative and how the stories fit in. And also a little bit more about a non hierarchical leadership, I think would have been interesting for a book for leaders to better understand that. And that's Celine Schillinger book that I would have loved to have interviewed her and put that in as well.

[01:04:59] **Katie:** I want to remind listeners that our show notes are comprehensive and links to everything that Monique's mentioned will be in the show notes.

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.

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Let's turn to those quickfire questions, Monique, if that's okay with you. What's the most important skill or trait that comms professionals will need to succeed over the next decade?

[01:07:01] **Monique:** Consulting skills. And that's the questions, Katie, that you were talking about. It's being able to ask difficult questions. It's being able to problem solve. It's being able to challenge in the right way.

[01:07:17] **Katie:** How would you complete this statement? World class internal communication is...

[01:07:24] **Monique:** Effective.

[01:07:26] **Katie:** I. e. know why you're doing it in the first place. Have a goal and measure against it.

[01:07:31] **Monique:** Absolutely. I just, I see, I see so many campaigns, not so many, but I do see campaigns or things being done where the comms person is the party person, and there is no clear business objective with whatever event they're being asked to run or it's very top down and they're completely missing the empowerment of the employees and giving them that ownership. My speciality is picking up campaigns that have failed or that are flopping along the ground and pulling that together and making them work.

[01:08:16] **Katie:** Yeah. Yeah. What piece of bad advice or unhelpful thinking has consistently dogged the communication profession?

[01:08:28] **Monique:** I think we navel gaze too much and we don't think about how our profession is being perceived. I was speaking to a digital communication expert the other day and their perception of internal comms was that we wrote the newsletters.

[01:08:45] **Katie:** Still that perception. Yeah.

[01:08:47] **Monique:** We talk amongst ourselves, but we don't seem to have deliberate campaigns to explain what we do to other areas of the business. One of the first things I do with a new comms leader is encourage them to go on a listening



tour and present what comms can do for the different stakeholders within the organisation. Set out the service offer.

[01:09:11] **Katie:** And finally, the tradition on this show, we give you a billboard for millions to see. What message would you like to put on your billboard, Monique?

[01:09:23] **Monique:** People come first, technology merely enables.

[01:09:27] **Katie:** Nice. Neatly sums up this whole conversation, I think. Thank you very much, Monique.

[01:09:34] **Monique:** Thank you so much, Katie. I've really enjoyed our conversation, and there are so many questions I have for you as well.

[01:09:40] **Katie:** It could always be a part two.

[01:09:42] **Monique:** And thank you as well for all that you do for the comms community.

[01:09:46] **Katie:** Oh, it's a pleasure. It's a pleasure. I get to meet lovely people like you Monique, so why wouldn't I?

And that is a wrap for this episode of The Internal Comms Podcast. As always, listeners, you can find all the links mentioned in today's show, including a full transcript, on our website. Just head over to abcomm.co.uk/podcasts. If you did enjoy this episode and found it valuable, I have a small favor to ask. It would be great if you could take a moment to like rate or even review the show on your favorite podcast platform. This just gives the algorithms a little nudge and makes it easier for your fellow comms professionals around the world to discover our show. We have got some fantastic episodes lined up in this season, not least an interview with the one and only Seth Godin, so you might want to hit that subscribe button today. A huge thank you to Monique for sharing her insights today. And a big shout out to the dream team behind the scenes at AB. My producer John, sound engineer Stuart, content manager Madi, designer Rob, and the rest of the incredible crew at AB who keep this show on the road.

And lastly, but definitely not least, my heartfelt thanks to you for choosing the Internal Comms Podcast. Please do keep reaching out to me on LinkedIn. Tell me what you like, what you want more of, less of. I genuinely want this show to be as helpful as possible to you. Lovely listeners, until we meet again, stay safe and well, and remember, it's what's inside that counts.