Transcript for S12 E4 exploring the IoIC's AI ethics Charter with Joe McMann and Adele McIntosh

Jen Sproul (00:42)

Hello everybody and welcome to another episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm your host, Jen Sproul, and as always joined by my co-hosts, Dominic Walters and Cat Barnard. And today we are thrilled to be having a conversation about the recently launched IoIC AI Ethics Charter. And with that, we are delighted to welcome two of our task force members to chat through the Charter with us and what we think it presents in terms of risks and opportunities and how we can take a leading role as internal communications in the ethical adoption of AI. So with that in mind, I am delighted to welcome Joe McMann, who is Director of Internal and Executive Communication EMEA for Marriott International. So welcome, Joe.

Joe McMann (01:28)

Thank you, Jen. Pleasure to be here.

Jen Sproul (01:30)

Thank you. And also Adele McIntosh, is VP of Internal Communication and Community at ARM. So welcome Adele.

Adele McIntosh (01:36)

Thanks, Jen. Very excited to be here.

Jen Sproul (01:39)

Brilliant, well thank you. As I've just said, we recently launched the Ethics Charter, which was on the 11th of February, to look at how we think about the ethical and human adoption of AI within internal communication. And we were thrilled to invite Joe and Adele to be part of that task, which I think began back in September last year, we had our kickoff and there was many sessions, many difficult conversations and thoughts and brain hurting, I think some of our task members said when we were thinking about the Charter. So if I could just come to you first of all and ask you, Joe, really when we sent you that invite, what did attract you to Joe in the AI ethics Charter?

Joe McMann (02:16)

Yeah, thanks Jen. I mean, it was great to be invited because it was probably something that needed to happen to me to actually really try and get under the skin of AI. I think it's one of those huge items that can sit on your must get into this, must do more in this space. But sometimes because people aren't jumping up and down on you to get it done in the next three weeks, it can slide. And so it was perfect timing for me because I'd very conscious that AI, becoming a big part of organisations, how its developing in society, and it was bleeding into our territory. So it was a great stimulus for me to say, yes, let's go and do that, be with some like-minded people, and actually, let's look into this a bit more.

Jen Sproul (02:58)

Brilliant, thank you, Joe. And I think, yeah, certainly those things that feel big, but they're just not being pressured on, can be put to the side. So having that time and that brain energy to think about it was really, really enjoyable. So Adele, what about you? What attracted you to join the AI Ethics Charter Task Force?

Adele McIntosh (03:14)

Well, ARM is an AI compute platform. So our technology is like driving AI. So I'm surrounded by AI and talking about AI all day. So it's part of my world. As at the core of what we do as a business, but internally, we've been looking at how we use it internally and sort of dabbling with it a little bit. But trying to think a bit more strategically about we use it, particularly within our function, as well as how we can help the whole of our organisation with it.

But ultimately, I'm an AI optimist. I am really excited about what it can do. I think it's really going to revolutionise how we live and how we work. And I think it's going to have so much positive change. But I do think we need to be purposeful and intentional about how we use it and have guardrails around it. And we talked about this in the Charter, how we make it human centered and make sure the humans are at the centre of it. So that really attracted me to the task force to think about, what does it mean for it to be human centered, how do we keep humans always at the forefront when we're thinking about AI and how we use it? And like Joe, just give it the time and focus that I hadn't been able to give it before and be with like-minded people.

Jen Sproul (04:18)

I think that's really interesting, isn't it? It's that piece around, and that's the bit of thinking next is how does human lead where AI feels like it is and how do we play that part in the design of it? And I'm really interested. It was great to have your perspective from playing from that double edge of working in an organisation that's driving it, but also then thinking

about it internally as well. So it's been brilliant to have that. And now Cat, obviously Cat's joining us and as a host right now, but Cat was also part of the task force. Dom, you weren't, but we will, you know, that will hopefully bring in some new perspective as well. But Cat, can I throw to you to really talk about why we feel that the Charter was necessary and perhaps we can all explore why we think a Charter is necessary.

Cathryn Barnard (04:54)

And so for me, I think several points. One, I had worked in technology for a long time. And my sense was that with any new technology, I'd always worked in technology innovation. So very involved in the introduction of mobile telecommunications in the 1990s, moving into mobile telecommunications technology to enable workforce mobility in the 2010s and so on. And I've always noticed that the tech comes first and the documentation standards and kind of governance comes second. And so for me, there were several points that kind of intersected. One was that I have been tracking with interest the work of some investigative journalists in digging deep to understand the way in which some technologies have been abused as a force for evil in the last decade. So pointing particularly to the emergence of Cambridge Analytica and Facebook using the Facebook platform to target voters and get swing votes in both Brexit referendum and the 2016 first Trump election term.

So that for me is a key indicator that justice tech can be used for good. It can also be used for malevolent means. I think when we first started tracking AI emergence in the early 2020s, so you and I have been working together since 2019, Jen, but when we really started paying attention to generative AI, its release, et cetera. We were also having conversations internally within the IoIC about trust and the role of internal communication in helping to instil trust at work. And then of course, when the technology, when OpenAI launched ChatGPT late 2022, not long after that, I became aware of a Paris Charter on AI in journalism and so what had happened there was that a representation of journalists had gathered to explore and agree what standards they as professionals were committing to uphold to make sure that the general public was as far as possible protected from AI misuse. So things like misinformation, disinformation, which have been cited by the World Economic Forum as the key risks to society in the next couple of years. So that was kind of a bit of a, I know it sounds a bit magpie-ish. think, we've talked before on this podcast about borrowing with pride, but for me, I could see an easy kind of swap over from what the journalistic profession had done to what we might be able to do as a profession here as well and obviously the rest is kind of history really.

Jen Sproul (08:13)

Yeah, absolutely. And it's interesting as well when we looked at the Journal.   If you think of internal communication and how it was born as a profession, it came from Journalism by and large as a background. There's a lot of similarity there, but also as well that, what we're

doing is as largely as content creators and how we're rebranding that I think is really important. Joe, from your point of view, obviously, when you're thinking about that and reflecting on maybe what Cat's just said as well, there anything you think, that's really makes what makes a Charter necessary for us as a professional community?

Joe McMann (08:41)

Yeah, what I love about AI and there's so many themes that are tied up in how we're trying to do our jobs and make our profession the best it can be. And part of that to me is that tension you've got between speed of movement and strategy. I think there was the part of the onus, something like AI is it's, it's quite sexy, it's quite topical, it's growing exponentially. So there's this real urge to sort of jump on it and go, right, what are we doing in the AI space? Which is cool, but of course probably the right way of doing it is going, hang on a minute, what's our approach to AI if it is big growing at a rate of knots that even experts can't really kind of keep hold of it. And I am not a technology expert, I'm an internal comms expert of which technology is part of it. It felt good to me to think, why shouldn't we be building a stable foundation upon which to build our approach to AI rather than getting sucked into the temptation of jumping straight to we're using AI for this or we're using AI for that. And it was answering, I think, some of those big hairy questions or trying to with some people who have bigger brains than I do, to think, well, how do we troubleshoot some of this? Because some of these things are ethical, like societal, they're big, big questions and they don't have binary answers. And so that foundation, I guess, and also starting to create a bit of a community from a personal point of view, but from an industry point of view, that is starting to have this discussion and evolve it as the technology grows and evolves as well.

Jen Sproul (10:17)

I think it's a really great way of answering as well, Joe. And I think that community piece as well is really important. And it's about how we as a professional community collaborate with each other to approach that. I mean, from your point of view, Adele, was there anything that you thought this is picking up on those points for you that brought that Charter back to being necessary?

Adele McIntosh (10:34)

Yeah, I think I'm going to echo what Joe said. I mean, AI is here to stay. It's how do we evolve with it and adapt to it? And like Joe said, the technology is moving so fast. It's warp speed in terms of how quickly it's progressing. And I think having a Charter that puts a stake in the ground on the things you need to be thinking about as that technology is developing is really, really important for us as a community, as an industry.

And having something consistent that you can keep going back to. And we've talked about the fact that the Charter will be a living document and we'll keep updating it as the technology evolves as well. I think that's really important point to say too. So to me, it's like, this is like a starting point and it will continue to evolve probably as quickly as AI continues to evolve. But there's big meaty, like Joe said, big meaty topics in there like ethics and transparency and misinformation and accessibility and they're huge and they're not something that are just internal comms' responsibility alone. What's our place in this and how do we help bring our organisations along? Kind of be, we always talk about ourselves being the conscience of the organisation and I think we are a little bit on this.

Jen Sproul (11:42)

It's really true. And I think it also plays into going back to obviously Cat had talked about it being from that looking at what was going on in the journalism world and that sparked the idea here. But it's then moving on to where for as our role as internal communicators has evolved and that remit to create that sense of connection and humanness, but also be able to personalise and accelerate and work at pace and give understanding and meaning to our workforce as those things happened is a real big part of our evolving work. Now I know Dom, you're gonna come in with the next question, but I'm going to throw the next question to you and then you might wanna throw it back as well. And obviously you've been part of IoIC in many forms for, I shall say a number of years, Dom, shall I say that? And obviously maybe from the IoIC perspective as well, you haven't been in the ethics Charter itself, but in terms of thinking about the role of the institute and how you've seen their profession evolve. And I know you obviously specialise a lot in leadership communication and trust and line manager communication in your day work. From that kind of perspective, what do you think is really important about a Charter in this space for IoIC and therefore then the internal communication profession?

Dom Walters (12:50)

That's a great question. As you very sympathetically said I have been around for a while and that means I've seen lots of technologies come in. There's a bit of a pattern which is something new happens, you get early adopters people get concerned about it. Everyone says it's going to cost our jobs. This is going back to the rise of the intranet many years ago and various things like that. Then you find some people claim to be experts, perhaps they're not and then there's lots of outlandish claims that they make and then someone has to grab it all and put together say let's make some sense of this. I'm paradigm the situation a little bit. I think that's the role of the IoIC because as the professional body for internal communication, who else is going to do this? So that's why I thought the Charter was such a fabulous idea to give people practical advice, drawn from people like Joe and Adele who are

doing the job day in day out. So I think people look for that. Now when I looked at it, as you say I wasn't involved in the creation so I looked at it as many people listening to this would have done when it came out and I thought firstly what a fantastic and useful document it is because it gives perhaps a lot of people it gives them comfort they're doing the right thing, some guidance where they're may be looking for support and it's something I think which if I were back inhouse now I would be using that to start conversations with senior people within the organisation, say look how do we use this and how do we brand it and make it relevant to us. But it struck me for three things that internal communication can do. It's great, we love three things on the podcast. Because none of us can remember more than three things and I think what struck me is there's a whole bit in there about communicating about AI and I really like the fact you were saying in the Charter help people understand it, take away some of the fear about it. Make sure they understand how its going to be used so they trust it. There's a bit in there how we use content so making sure we're not leaving ourselves open to losing intellectual property, making sure that we don't unconsciously use biased information. Making sure we check stuff, we don't use personal information about things. And there was a bit in there about the process of how we use it. So making sure we're using it for the right things in the right way. So there's more but those are the three things I took away. So that leaves me to ask a question, I'd like to target it to Adele and Joe as practioners, as doing this day in and day out from your experience, Adele I'll come to you first, what do you think is the role of internal communication can play helping organisations get the most of AI and not be domineered by it perhaps? That's a tough question Adele?

Adele McIntosh (15:30)

It is a tough question. Thank you for that one. It's a big, question. We were talking a bit about this earlier. I think there's a huge role for internal communicators to play here. I really do. And I think it's quite a strategic role that we can play to in this. I was saying earlier, we're always the ones joining the dots between different parts of the organisation. And this is no different. I found myself having to bring together our leadership, our IT teams, our AI office, our people team, our learning and development team, and bring them all together to try and tell a coherent story and think about how we're going to adopt it within the organisation. And although everyone has been doing things a little bit in silos, it's comms bringing it all together and making people think about the different angles and different audiences and how this might play out. So I do think internal comms have a really big role in terms of driving adoption and how to use it well.

I also think that we have a big role in thinking about the impact it might have, that balance between really embracing it and scaring people off and people not wanting to engage with it. So we do have a role in terms of that engagement piece as well. And I'm sure we'll come on to talk about skills and skills development and what that means for the future later on in the podcast. But I think we've got a role in building understanding of that within the organisation and like you said, taking away the fear of it within the organisation as well.

Dom Walters (16:44)

To what extent in your case because I guess you have a lot of technically minded people. You mentioned that the organisation is promoting AI. How does that affect the way you handle managing the adoption and helping people understand it?

Adele McIntosh (16:58)

Well, yeah we're predominantly engineering, so we have very, very, very bright minds in our organisation. But, people, just if you're an engineer, you still have the same sort of concerns about what it might do to your job or how to use it effectively, those are all still there.

So we've just made sure we've been very targeted in terms of our sort of messaging and FAQs and rollout for the engineering audience as opposed to like the functions rollout, which is quite different. So we're doing specific education sessions, specific training. And I would say we're quite at the early stages of doing that at the moment. So it's really evolving, but really encouraging people to experiment. And I think that's, and also getting leadership on board and making sure that they're role modelling and also using it themselves and sort of talking about the use cases and making sure people are bringing it into conversation. So I would say we're at the early stages of it.

Dom Walters (17:46)

That's very interesting cos I'm sure many of us have done when I have conversations with people about AI there are a lot of people who say I'm a bit tech-scared and it's interesting to hear that even when you're dealing with all your audiences that are tech-savvy you still need to spend time to help them think about how to use it and the manner in which to approach it and what it means for them as well.

Adele McIntosh (18:07)

Yeah, I mean, everything from like prompting, how do you prompt effectively, things like that that you don't know just because you're an engineer. So there's all sorts of things. And also the, I mean, we've had demos of it just for the functions and it's incredible what ChatGPT can do, for example, at the enterprise version. And there's almost stuff that you just wouldn't have even thought about doing if you hadn't had the education session. So yeah, it's really important.

Cathryn Barnard (18:28)

I think that has been one of the issues actually with the pace at which Generative AI came onto the market because when it first launched, I think we can probably all agree that we've all seen the images, the artificially created images of what was it, the Pope in a puffer jacket. That was one meme that did the rounds, wasn't it?

But it seemed very much as if the tech launched without an adjacent accompanying segment or array of useful use cases. So we could kind of get our heads and hands around it in terms of like the fripperies, like, do me, I don't know, a Shakespeare sonnet in the style of Snoop Dogg. That was another meme that went under the rounds in the early days. But actually, the tangible benefit that it could bring to business and industry wasn't particularly clear. And of course, the other thing that is perhaps still not entirely clear is some organisations of the size and scale of, presumably ARM and Marriott will be able to invest in their own enterprise licences for generative AI adoption, whereas SME mid-tier firms won't necessarily have that luxury. And then it's quite hard to discern what viable use cases entail because unless you've actually bought the enterprise license, you can't necessarily guarantee that you're going to ring fence and protect your intellectual property or leverage all the insights that can be mined from your intellectual property. What is challenging and maybe this is a topic for us as internal communicators to think about is context is everything, right? Context is absolutely everything. And I find we talk in generalities about artificial intelligence. And the media doesn't help us with this. We get lazy journalism, just pushing out clickbait stories about artificial intelligence. And it creates confusion and misunderstanding. And many times, those who are tasked with writing those stories in order to get clicks to their employers' news websites, they don't really understand the nuance and context either. So for us as internal communicators, just opening up and being transparent about some of those dilemmas is actually a major step forward because nobody wants to be the person that sticks their hand in the air and says, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know what you're all talking about. I don't understand. But actually giving ourselves permission as internal communicators to ask those questions, which was very much the spirit of the task force, wasn't it? There's no such thing as a silly question. Let's just ask questions of one another. And I keep coming back to context and nuance are absolutely everything in this evolution.

Dom Walters (21:35)

Within that then Joe would be good to get your take on this question. Cat talked about context and nuance. We heard from Adele about supporting adoption, helping people embrace various applications of AI. You've got a very different audience I guess. So how has internal communication helped the use of AI across the organisation?

Joe McMann (21:57)

Loads of great stuff that Cat and Adele have just said. I suppose building on that, one thing that AI is another example for me, I guess, of where does it fit into our strategic narrative? What's its part in our story? Again, like, sure, it's a thing that is it's a pretty massive thing, an almost generational explosion that is very front and centre of people's minds, certainly from a societal point of view, but then probably from a business point of view. But what was our position on it? Where does it fit within our narrative? And so often, I'm not sure anyone had necessarily decided, so we were trying to help navigate that. And I think that's our role, right? Adele was alluding to this, comms so often will get involved and here, well, okay, here's a bunch of use cases. Here's some of the direction of travel we're thinking of. Here's some of the risks we've got to be the ones who try and package it together and say, right, okay, well, here's a bit of head and heart then. Here's some of the rational, maybe a bit more prosaic part of AI and how we're gonna use it because of course it's not all generative AI. It's not all the Pope and puffer jackets is it, so much of it is backend chatbots, efficiencies, automation, which is still an important part of our narrative, but maybe aren't as sexy as some of the other parts like holograms and virtual concierge applications that we're looking at, which people can latch onto a bit more and can become perhaps more of the visual part of it. But I think, it's really important for us to try and make sure that people were clear. It wasn't just something we were going to jump onto as a fad. It was carefully considered in terms of how did that fit within our digital tech transformation policy? How does it fit within our learning and development policy? How are we building that as part of the bigger Marriott story? For an audience who is quite different to Adele's, broadly speaking, and are much more attuned to the human aspects of connecting people through human experiences. So that's an interesting lens through which we've also had to find this is how do we make sure that it is seen as enhancing that human connection rather than replacing it, which is of course starting to veer into the fears and the darker risks I suppose that a lot of people see about AI.

Jen Sproul (24:17)

And I think one of the things as well that I remember we had a sort of a big conversation or there was lots of things exchanged during the task force sessions that we had was about, we want to position this for internal communicators as an opportunity. It's a managed opportunity. So that we can be at the forefront of leadership of its implementation as opposed to a follower behind it. I think certainly some of the sort of sentiment externally, that I've picked up in other media for other industries and other sectors is it's still being sort of build as the opportunity of AI is really based around efficiency. And I wonder how far that can take something if that's the kind of the brand reputation of AI is getting in business, it will give you efficiency. And as we've talked about that then sparks a number of concerns and fear around it as well. But we wanted to be really clear, I think, in the task force that, there's a lot more to it as we've talked about and the opportunities that go with it that helps

our work in terms of how we communicate and the communications we send and we broadcast and we create and with that personalisation for our employees, but also the opportunity of internal communication to play that leading role in its adoption organisation-wide. We often talk about them both and they do conflate, but they are differences in terms of, think, those two areas. And I think that, reflecting on those conversations in terms of where we go as a profession and how our role is evolving from perhaps less content, you know, we're still doing content creation and writing and all those sorts of things. We're still making campaigns and imagery and doing all that work, but then also trying to move our way to be more strategic advisors and into sort of those leadership conversations. What do you think of all of that is the biggest opportunity for internal communicators here in terms of the ethical and human adoption of AI. And Adele, I mean, is there anything that really strikes you as kind of this is the opportunity for us and this is how we should grab it.

Adele McIntosh (26:17)

I think we talked earlier about, I think Cat, you were saying some reports that you were looking at saying that a lot of this has been driven by the technology rather than thinking about the human aspects of it. And I can definitely see that. So I really do think there's an opportunity, like I said, to be a real sort of strategic enabler of this AI transformation, but really holding the organisations to account on the ethics and keeping the human at the center of everything. So I do think there's a big opportunity for us there.

But I do think, like you said, Jen, our own roles, I think of it with that dual aspect in terms of our own roles. How is this going to change? And the Charter actually made me spending time thinking about it made me really think about my role and my team's role and what does it actually mean for us as well as communicators, as well as the whole organisation. Sometimes you neglect to think about yourself when you're in internal comms because you're thinking about everybody else. We've become sort of like curators of content, maybe rather than creators of content. What does it mean about quality control and prompting and the skills we're going to need to have and making sure that everyone's AI literate and critical thinking. I was reading the Deloitte human capital trends report from 2024. And there was a line in there. I've got it here actually. So it was a good one. They talked about much of the differentiation going forward will likely come from what humans do or evolve to do not technology. So AI can't replicate curiosity and empathy that fuel imagination and lead to creative invention.

So it's kind of how our roles will change. I think there's a massive opportunity there for us to think about that.

Jen Sproul (27:46)

Joe, have you had any thoughts around how you can see that changing our role and what we do in organisations? Because one of things that we hear a lot about is that AI will do our grunt work and we can do all this human-centred work. What does that sort of mean, I think, for you?

Joe McMann (28:00)

This is the thing that probably, buzzes me the most about AI. And I think that's where I was very much on the sort of opportunity rather than risk. I think it can be quite tempting on the risk side, like Dom was saying, you know, to fall into they're going to take our jobs or everyone's seen, like the content creation that comes out of it, that, AI can bosh out 300 words on a certain topic if you need and it can be pretty decent. But to your point and to Adele's point around becoming strategic advisors, that's kind of music to my ears in a way. If AI can be used for some of the tasks which we are increasingly under-resourced to spend our time doing from analytics, insights, curation that Adele mentioned, distilling information down, which then almost arguably is never going to be the finished article, is always going to need some layer of human connection to actually bring it to life, whether that's tone of voice, whether that's context. But if it can free up some of my capacity, some of my team's capacity to focus on some of those more human-centered elements and the strategic elements, that's fantastic. I think too many people still see us as post box that we are the output rather than adding advice at the front end. And that's still a large part of my job driving that sort of change in attitude and behaviour. So yeah, anything which helps put me more in those spaces and outside of sometimes the more automated or the more rational objective elements of the job is good. And I guess that's, that is the part of AI, isn't it? It's always trying its hardest to impersonate a human. But until we get to Skynet, and Terminator's roving the earth, scorching the skies, then they're only ever going to be able to impersonate humans. And we have that advantage over them in that we actually do have the feelings and the intuition and the emotion. That deep understanding of our stakeholders, our audiences, that for me is what I get actually quite excited about the opportunities that AI could bring if we can harness them in a huge organisation.

Cathryn Barnard (30:17)

It seems to me, I might be wrong, but it seems to me that part of the origin story of generative AI has been to render the art of communication to kind of transform it into a science, right? To kind of, make it efficient and I think that is a great thing for routine, repetitive types of communication that would take place be that internally, externally, whoever the stakeholders are. When I look at some of the factors that are fueling disengagement, which is a massive issue, that is causing concern for organisations across the globe because it has such an impact on productivity and performance. When I think

about some of the causal factors behind disengagement, I think about things like, well, the global economy is less stable than it has been for a long time. I think about the rise in hybrid working, distributed working, remote working, the fact that so many more organisations now are multinational and therefore multicultural in their internal makeup. And I think about the under-reported global pandemic of loneliness and disconnection. And I think about all of those things and the way that they're playing out in society, but also in our day-to-day work and what impact those things have on our ability to perform well together. And to me, I just think that's the opportunity to take internal communication from perhaps something that was previously quite two-dimensional and reliant on the written word, the digital transfer of information, knowledge, et cetera, et cetera, and to shift from there into this very embodied contextual human to human communication and all the opportunity that is associated with that. That is just what an amazing time to be working in this profession if you choose to rise to that challenge or opportunity depending on which way you see it. But I just think what is better than helping people do great work together? What's better than that?

Joe McMann (33:00)

Something I talked about, increasingly over the last few years, across different organisations is, and certain different stakeholders and cultures, there is this urge still that we're fighting against is that how do you quantify, how do you quantify your value? How do you demonstrate it on the bottom line or the top line? You how can you find me a metric which, the marketing or sales will give you that. And it's very difficult to do, whether it's reputation or internal engagement. We know that that's hard to put a specific measure on. And therefore I think, in these straightened times that you're alluding to people still then, where are the efficiencies? How can we can we demonstrate that something's happening very efficiently? And information sharing or data processing is a kind of science, isn't it? That is something which can be streamlined and probably can be operated pretty well by a machine. But it completely misses the point of that human aspect, the nuance of how is it being communicated? It's not just data receiving, is it? It's the message, it's the storytelling.

And that's where I think efficiency in my mind, it doesn't mean to say that's not a dirty word because I'd love to get some better efficiencies in some of the work we do, but it's generally not that human aspect, which is where we come in and we add our value. So I think that's the same similar thing. I think where AI has got real opportunities for us, but risks as well, of course.

Cathryn Barnard (34:27)

Well, really interesting point and brings me to a question. So the kind of binary reporting around efficiency is actually a risk, isn't it? As you say, how do you quantify the way in which information or knowledge is received and understood and interpreted? And my goodness,

that's a challenge for all of us right now as we are still in the thick of culture wars and still in the thick of cancel culture and misinformation, disinformation and all of the negative things. We do have a duty of care, don't we? We do have a responsibility to make sure that these technologies are used as safely as possible and in ways that limit harm to groups or individuals that we might otherwise have overlooked, and this is the kind of mind-bending nature of being part of the task force. It required us to think until our brains hurt because where does it end? And perhaps it doesn't really end. But if I was to ask both of you, so the flip side of opportunity is obviously risk, what would you both have down as some of the risks or the considerations that we as internal communicators really need to be paying attention to as this technology rolls out. Adele, what do you think?

Adele McIntosh (35:58

I think a sort of loss of authenticity maybe and trust, I think. If you automate everything, emails, updates, you've got a chat box, you've got AI agents, we had an announcement about being part of a project with AI agents that will just go off and do stuff for you.

You ask it to book holiday, it'll book holiday for you. You ask it to find a restaurant, it'll find a restaurant for you or an alternative restaurant for you. it's phenomenal when you look at what it can do, but it could make everything feel a little bit impersonal and therefore lose engagement, I think. Interesting, in our organisation, we have like a ticket system for a lot of things, for queries on tech or people team queries and things like that. People have always wanted us to go to a ticket system and I've been really resisting it because people come into our inbox and get a really personal reply.They don't get, this is your ticket and your number. As we scale, I'm sure that will have to change, but trying to still keep that human connection for me is really important as an internal comms team. So I think that kind of sort of overall to my team is a real risk. And then, we talked about job anxiety and if people don't understand how they can evolve their skills or the potential for evolving their skills. The fear of it replacing your jobs is a real one. And I think that's a big challenge for us in our own jobs, but also for our organisations as a whole. And just general misinformation, I think, as well.

Cathryn Barnard (37:21)

And that's a really interesting point that you raise actually, and I may well be wrong on this, but obviously, part of my role is to look at the trend data and analyse it as it comes out. And I think maybe, I don't know, but maybe where we're at right now is in this kind of liminal space between what was written about artificial intelligence in the 2010s before artificial intelligence became a commercialised reality.

So if you go back to 2013, there was a infamous report, which I believe was called the Frey andOsborne, report that was published by a couple of Oxford University academics that foretold, predicted that as much as 47 % of all American jobs would be automated by 2030. That's really frightening. And if that is the kind of the launch pad for all future narratives around the release of artificial intelligence and the future of jobs, then it is absolutely no surprise that many slash most people who've been slightly awake in the last five years would feel very, very anxious right now. However, if you look at the emergent data and the most recent research coming out of, places like the big four, I think I talked earlier, I can't remember whether we were on air or off air about PWC research and Boston Consulting Group research. Actually, what that data is showing is that the most forward thinking companies are recognising that they have no plans to lay off staff because there's so much human oversight and human stewardship that is required in order to properly leverage the efficiencies. And of course, the media loves a bad news story. So, the sensationalist headlines of, the institutions that have already made bold statements about how they're adopting the AI and they're going to make all of these redundancies. I think some organisations might try that.

But I don't think that's putting them on the road to long-term success and sustainability. And actually, the more level-headed, forward-thinking, long-termist ones are certainly being transparent in their reality or their realisation that actually in order to get the best out of the technology, the human work will change, but is still very much an accompaniment, a vital bedfellow. And I think that's a really interesting thing. So I think we do perhaps need to move away from this outdated narrative that, the end of the world is nigh.

Adele McIntosh (40:07)

Yeah, now skills have always changed, right? When internet came, I'm showing my age, but I used to work in external communications and I used to make physical press packs and put them in the post and send them to journalists and I used to fax them things. Skills have changed and as long as we sort of evolve and change along with the technology and embrace it, I think then it's a positive thing.

Cathryn Barnard (40:26)

Joe, what do you think the risks are? Obviously, very different hospitality, very different industry again.

Joe McMann (40:33)

I still think the large themes persist there. I mean, I completely agree with Adele. I think, trust, authenticity is the biggest one that comes to mind. Again, I would say that is why,

where we prove our value is that we are there to actuallyconnect people to the business, to the leaders. I mean, I'm working across a region, Europe, Middle East and Africa, we've got over 100,000 employees, across over 28 different territories, nearly 40 languages. So we're already navigating a really difficult landscape to try and get one singular president to come across authentically, whether that's, via a Teams call, whether that's via video, whether that's via podcast. Trying to find the right channel, the right media and the right message to reach the right audience because we know that people are time poor and are increasingly looking for anything which might cause them to distrust or in this era of disinformation and I suppose more technology, less in-person communication, which we know is the biggest trusted form of communication. So there are obvious risks around short-cutting here I think, if you took a fairly cavalier attitude towards internal communications and AI, yes, it could probably get a lot of your day job done quicker and get stuff out there, but is it going to resonate and connect with your audiences? Arguably not. I mean, hopefully not if we're all going to keep proving our value. So I think that's the big one for me. And the other thing, I have a big thing at the moment about people's attention spans and this constant system one thinking everyone's like task, task, dopamine, dopamine. And I think that's my watch out internally in terms of how we use AI because I can see big risk around people just wanting to move quick, wanting to get stuff done. And maybe with the best intentions, AI can feed some of those bad habits you might fall into are not source checking, not scrutinising the outputs like you would have to do, whoever produces your content or your information. So I think that's a watch out for a business of any sort of scale, which is simultaneously asking its people to move increasingly faster and more agile, whilst also having huge, huge commitments to data protection, confidentiality and just literal truth and facts that we need to still keep hold of.

Cathryn Barnard (43:10)

Now is quite clearly not the time to be moving fast and breaking things. I don't think, despite what we may have been told in the past, I think now is the time to be using our brains and using, our skill set of critical thinking and analysis and empathy and trying to understand, the wider array of considerations for all of our internal stakeholders.

Dom Walters (43:37)

Well talking of internal stakeholders, it would be interesting to get your take Joe and Adele on some of the wider risks about not communicating around AI. Because I imagine there are some people listening to this who are thinking, yes that's all very well and good but in my organisation there's no appetite to communicate about it. It may be that some senior people you've probably heard some of them are saying, Adele you said earlier that a whole technology is moving at warps speed that's a really good description so there may be some senior people saying stuff this, we haven't got time or energy for this, we'll let it pass or

we'll come back to it or we'll wait for the technology settles down, let's not engage with either technology or more importantly around communicating it. Now if that's the case, some of the people listening to this is facing that sort of problem how do they address that? What can they do to build a case. What is some of the risks about not even communicating AI very well? There are about four questions there! Pick any of those to answer. Adele, I'll come to you first!

Adele McIntosh (44:36)

I think we've already talked about it. think the risk of not adopting it is massive and huge. And I think you're going to fall behind if you don't. And I think you want to be a leader, not a laggard in this area. I think you should be experimenting as much as possible. And sometimes that's quite difficult in organisations. And I think Cat I hadn't thought about it. I'm so wrapped up in our world of AI, both in what our business is doing and what we're doing as an organisation. Some organisations can't afford to like you say, buy the enterprise version of ChatGPT. But I think you still need to be experimenting. And I was encouraging my team to experiment even when we didn't have the tools with stuff that was non-confidential. You need to be out there experimenting with stuff. I think the organisations that embrace it and get all employees to embrace it are going to be the ones that thrive in the future. I really do. But embracing it in the right way, as we've talked about. Making sure we've got the checks in on ethics and as Joe was talking about, all the checks and balances in place with it. But I do think that is probably the biggest risk to business actually. I think there are obviously things like reputational risk that could come from misuse of it. We have a lot of IP in our organisation. If some of our IP got leaked out, that wouldn't be a good outcome for us reputationally or with our customers. There's lots of things to think about, I do think the biggest thing is not adopting it is the biggest, actually the biggest risk.

Dom Walters (45:55)

And it sounds like it's not really an option to any credible company to not adopt it and then of course they have to make sure it's managed well to prevent the stuff you're talking about. Joe, what's your take on this? Against difference in organisations I guess.

Joe McMann (46:07)

There's similar I think, certainly in the big theme, you just can't ignore it, can you? I guess it comes back to, for me it has to be part of your strategic narrative and it's going to differ, part of our strategic narrative I suspect will be wildly different from Adele's because Adele probably has lots of use cases, a much higher level of understanding.

I'm guessing some backend use cases, that we just won't get into. But that said, it's such a huge societal topic. You'd be mad not to be discussing it. I don't think you'd leave like your competitor position or your DE &I position just unthought of or left to hang without anyone actually coming together to say what is our position and what's our strategy on this because that's where I think you with so many stakeholders but particularly obviously for us, our internal stakeholders, you've got a generation, Gen Z who are coming through, they are almost all of them are early adopters. So if you can't talk the same language, if you can't be demonstrating at least how you're going to, you're planning to get to a place which motivates them, which interests them, that's an internal reputation risk for me. That's where your employees are starting to think, hmm, is this feeding a narrative that actually my company is a bit traditional and a bit old and actually maybe I need to start looking somewhere that has more progressive views and adoption of AI. And this is where the humans come in, your culture, your strategy, your organisation, everyone's going to have slightly different takes on it. And that's where I think, as always, I find it so helpful to be talking to the task force and we'll increasingly keep talking to the task force because these are not all the questions you're getting to ask are all open questions, they're not closed questions. You can't say here's the absolute answer to it. It's gonna change week on week, month on month. And all you can do as usual in internal comm is try and take all the inputs, take all the information and use it to form the best strategy and solution that works for your organisation and your stakeholders.

Dom Walters (48:19)

Thank you Joe. We've spoken a lot about the importance of human centered conversation and I think this podcast amongst other things has proved the value of that. So as we come in to land Joe and Adele, I'm going to ask you, what's one thing you'd like people to take away. I know we've talked about a lot but for you what's one thing you'd like people to think about as a result of this conversation please.

Adele McIntosh (48:39)

Don't be scared of it. Experiment. Keep learning. I actually asked ChatGPT, I was like, what should internal communications be thinking about? And they said, it's actually said to me, AI is only as powerful as the people who use it. So I think that's one thing to take away from our AI friend.

Dom Walters (49:01)

Thank you very much. Joe, what's your thoughts?

Joe McMann (49:03)

Yeah, similar. I guess it would be, stay positive, this is an opportunity and it actually strengthens our hand, I think, as humans who are trying to prove the importance of connecting organisations to people, leaders to people. That is a human connection, it's not a technological connection. And so the technology can help free us up to play that role and improve that value, whilst also taking away some of the duller, more administrative, and also making some fantastic AI memes and videos of execs in strange futuristic places and costumes, which we certainly used it for, then all the better.

Jen Sproul (49:47)

Brilliant. Thank you so much, Joe and Adele. And I think it's been a really positive conversation. I think it needs to be a positive conversation. It's an awareness critical thing, but a positive one. It is happening. Let's not be scared of it. Let's learn together. I think that's really important as a community as well. And I just want to close by saying to all of our listeners as well, the Charter is available on the IoIC website. Please do take the time to download it and have a good read and then please as well contribute. As we said at the outset, this is a living document. And as Joe and Adele so eloquently said as well, sometimes those questions don't always have the answer, but we need to keep asking ourselves those questions, but also sharing our own use cases and our own learnings throughout this journey. And we'll make sure those are regularly reviewed. The Charter is there, has eight great principles. We are gonna be working on more supportive resources to help you think through those questions but please take this opportunity to contribute, to let us hear what you're doing, because actually I think that's the opportunity to also bring us together as a community. And one of the principles is always to prioritise dialogue, so let's keep doing that. So thank you all again so much for your time, and we hope you enjoy it, and we look forward to hearing from anybody on their views of the future of AI and that the future of internal communication. Thank you.