



Transcript for S17, E3 - Internal communication in an age of polycrisis with Ellen Griley

Intro: Welcome to the future of internal communication podcast. I'm Jen Sproul, CEO of the Institute of Internal Communication.

Since we launched this series in 2021, the world of work has been disrupted by event after event. A pandemic, geopolitics, AI, extreme weather events, remote and hybrid working, generational shifts, inclusion, diversity - the entire nature of how we work needs transformation.

This podcast explores opportunities for internal communication in the future of work. Internal comms is a critical function that helps organisations achieve lasting change, building trust and relationship between people, in pursuit of shared goals.

Please, join me, Dominic Walters and Cat Barnard as we dissect what this means for internal communication.

With relentless change the new norm, it's time to reimagine our profession.

Cat (01:00)

Hello and welcome to a fresh episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I am Cat Barnard, as ever joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Walters. And today I'm hoping that we're going to bring you a really interesting, potentially game-changing conversation. Our guest today, I got in touch with her after she had come across our Future of Internal Communication white paper that was published. It went on mainstream publication just in the early part of January 2026. And I remember some of the commentary being something akin to, my goodness, I thought it was just me, but it is just wonderful to see some ideas laid out that resonate with my own.

She and I have been in contact and dialogue ever since. So without further ado, I want to introduce our guest today, Ellen Griley. We're going to be talking about internal communication in the age of polycrisis. And I think we can probably all agree after what has been in many countries a literally burning hot summer with just insane levels of political and geopolitical turbulence and turmoil and uncertainty. I don't think it's



appropriate for us to hide away, to shy away from these topics. really looking forward to getting stuck in today to introduce you to Ellen Griley. Ellen is the founder of Equilibrrious Communications, a trauma-informed employee communication consultancy. Based on the West Coast of the United States, she has created the internal CALMS system and the STEDI framework, and she specialises in communicating through uncertainty and polycrisis. Prior to launching her own practice, Ellen spent more than five years leading global employee communication at Cisco, which is one of the US's most successful communications technology companies with a long history in data network infrastructure. So many of our systems that we take for granted today will have originally been deployed on Cisco infrastructure and indeed the internet wouldn't exist without it. So very adept and used to working in fast paced environments, I don't doubt. Alongside, Ellen has master's degrees in communication and leadership studies, so is well prepared and informed to speak to us today and also in trauma informed leadership and we will be having a conversation offline at the end. She's also tells us that she is a semi-retired yacht rock DJ, which is music to my ears because I plan to take some classes in DJing at some point in the next year. But without further ado and segueing off into nonsense, Ellen, welcome. I'm so, so, so happy to have you come and chat with us today.

Ellen Griley (04:28)

Thank you. It's an honour to be here truly with you all.

Cat (04:34)

Well, I think the honour is all ours. After we got chatting at the start of the year, you then subsequently published a white paper and you sent me a copy of your white paper and I read it and was just absorbed by it. So the title of the white paper that you published is called Shifting Ground. Tell us about it and tell us what led you to write it.

Ellen Griley (04:59)

Yeah, so I always when I talk about this report, I always begin by saying I'm the eldest millennial and millennials are known for thinking that they are the first people to ever experience anything in the history of the world. And so I share that as a caveat because the root of this really originates in my curiosity and in that holding myself accountable in



my own experience to say, am I experiencing this for the first time, or are there other people experiencing this? What is really the at the truth and the heart of what what's going on right now. And so rooting in that curiosity, this report really begins at Cisco. It begins in my experience leading global employee communications for 85,000 employees, starting in the pandemic, but then, rapidly arriving at the war in Ukraine.

And then a little bit after that, arriving at the Israel Hamas conflict. And then a little bit after that, arriving at things like a \$28 billion acquisition that we did. And in the meantime, we're going through this business transformation. At Cisco, they were doing a transformation to recurring revenue to become subscription for software at the time.

And so there was all of these things that were going on. And yet in the background, we had 50% new C-suite. We had several layoffs and reorganisations. And we had all of these things lining up one after the other, on top of being a global company. And so you would see all of the climate change and all of the climate disasters that we've experienced and we've known we've experienced in the last six years.

Ellen Griley (06:49)

It was arriving at that point, leading global employee communications, where you still that doesn't change the fact that you have you still have to manage performance. You have to communicate. We had new values introduced. We had a 40th anniversary introduced. We had a new intranet in the middle of all of this, right at that acquisition with 8,000 new employees and following a layoff. All of these things. And it I found a word at some point I was fortunate enough to come across the word polychrisis, which was a term coined by Adam Tooze. And understanding polychrisis as this experience of interconnected crises that don't have discrete beginnings and endings and in fact amplify the effects of one another really put a name for what I'd experienced. And then I got curious and I was like has anyone else experienced this? Am I the only one? Is this a byproduct of working at a global company? Do other communicators working at different sized companies or in different parts of the world experience this as well? So I started there.

Cat (07:55)

I think what's really interesting in what you're describing is I think it is a shared reality. I think what's so fascinating is that there is so much pressure placed upon anybody who works, particularly in the private sector, but I think it spills over into the public sector and



nonprofit to keep turning the wheel, keep turning the handle, keep going, keep going. And it seems to me, if we were able to have pressed a pause button following COVID, we may have been able to develop a language and vocabulary to express how we feel about this cumulation of events. And yet we don't.

We don't have the pause button. We don't have the language and vocabulary to articulate what it is that we're feeling. I think there is a latent sense of exhaustion right across the commercial world at the moment. I think it's undocumented. It's undescribed, unarticulated. Interestingly, the word polycrisis was listed by the Collins Dictionary as its word for the year in 2022, but if you think about 2022, we were just coming out of the worst phases of COVID. And in parallel, and I remember this because it's a girlfriend's birthday, 24th of February 2022, Russia invades Ukraine. And so this litany of events, we're just, it's one thing after another. And I think also, and I will come back to ask you a question in a minute, but I heard something the other day from one of the climate feeds that I follow. And the comment was made that despite the horrendous scale of wildfires that have swept across Europe, most notably France that we know of here in the UK. We've had our own small scale disasters. I know you guys have wildfires now every single year. And actually one of my girlfriends in Oregon told me that you are the worst affected state in Oregon and that you have more square miles of out of control fires at the moment than any other part of the United States. But it's all swept under the rug by the mainstream media who don't seem to join the dots up for us. And so to your exact point when you open this, we're all left feeling, well, is this just me? And how can I complain? Because I don't want to appear to be the person who is at their wit's end, who is at the outer limits of their capacity to cope. But we do need to be talking about it because it is insane, quite literally, what we are all collectively being expected to tolerate and endure in the name of late stage capitalism.

Ellen Griley (11:11)

Yeah, I think I hear about this a lot from the practitioners that I talk to in the United States earlier this year, it was, I feel the weight of what's going on with the government actions on immigration raids. I feel the weight of it, even though it's not in, particularly impacting my city, we're not experiencing I feel the weight of it. And I think, whether it's something like that, whether it's a climate disaster, the fires, obviously, they are just, all over the world at this point this summer. It's impossible not to feel proximity to something like that when we all are looking at our cell phones, when we all have this kind of nonstop feed of what's going on everywhere in the world all the time that that is logically going to impact



the way that we see the world around us and what we're carrying every day on top of the individual experiences that we're having.

Cat (12:14)

Which then leads to a knife edge for anyone working in internal communication because you can't really do your work without acknowledging some understanding of what your colleagues may be experiencing in their day-to-day world and then balancing that with all the communication that the organisation needs to relay in order for people to do the best work that they are capable of in their set of circumstances. And there's that juxtaposition because how can we do good work when our psychological needs aren't being met for a whole host of reasons? One reason I would argue may well be because we're not taking the time to ask the right questions and listen to the responses that we're given. There's a real thing, and Dom and I have talked about this off air, and I know Jen and I have talked about it off air. There's a leadership mindset that still prevails, whereby the leader feels that they are expected to have the answer to all of the problems. And I think the labelling, the articulation of polycrisis, I don't think that's what is expected of leaders anymore by, some people will expect that, but I don't think most people expect it. I think most people would more appreciate the space to just be able to voice, give voice to their concerns and fears. And I actually believe that when we allow and create that space, we start to restore because we start to rebuild allegiance and solidarity and togetherness and connection and all the things that we know internal communication can lead to when done well and when allocated the appropriate resources.

Ellen Griley (14:31)

Yeah, one of the things that really struck me about the dialogue around the IOIC report when it first came out in January was there was a response about, describing certain aspects of the report as touchy-feely and leaning into emotions as opposed to business and things of that nature. And that's really where I drew my line in the sand. Because I think we're all deluding ourselves if we really believe that we are gonna continue to show up to work, to be productive, to get things done in a state of survival mode, which is what we're all in collectively, at the organisational level and then at the individual level. We are all in survival mode right now. And I think it's really short-sighted if you're thinking, we're just gonna, pull up our bootstraps and and trudge our way through this without acknowledging our shared humanity.



You have to acknowledge the shared humanity. And in that shared humanity, if you can start there, you can also expand and open your mind to acknowledging how the brain works, how the body and the brain work in response to information. And all of that is critical for us to know as communicators, to be aware of, and to abandon this assumption that people are arriving at work with a hundred percent emotional capacity, with a hundred percent cognitive capacity and with these like perfectly regulated nervous systems, like we've all come in from yoga and we're just ready to like sit at our desks and and exhale a big breath. No, that's not how we're arriving at work. And so I really think it's incumbent upon organisations looking ahead if you think this world is going to be any less complex, if you think this world is gonna be any slower, if you think this world is gonna be any easier in the next ten to fifteen years, I have news for you. And the only way out the only way through it is going to be that acknowledgement of our shared humanity.

Jen Sproul (16:29)

I love that. And I think, as you were talking, Ellen, as well, I think you said the things that I was making notes of is that I don't think we've yet understood the impact on our psychological load on our ability to think and process and work and move. And I think that thing is what you said at the beginning about a polycrisis, it doesn't have a beginning and an end. And I think also as well, for me, there is a little bit of, and I say this personally, and I say this with my friendships and my girlfriends and the male friends and all the people that I talk to, in the way that life in general feels and work is a part of that. You thought ages ago, once you get through this, there'll be a break. Once you get through this, there'll be a break. That just doesn't feel, we've got to we're almost grieving the fact that actually there is no end, it's a continuum. And I also think as well there's this thing as communicators as to, and I said this quite a lot when I was talking to some organisations as well where we want to send out these messages of change and adoption and transformation and the things that we're moving. And I sort of said, but the thing is as well that no one is coming into work from a place of neutrality or a place of unimpinged opinion or everyone's living in a state of fear or a state of survival or a state of my god what's that going to mean what is that going to lose so not everyone is from a psychological emotional humanity state is ready to get on board with what people now I suppose is the next thing and therefore that really impacts then the ability as communicators if we make that assumption then then we're missing a whole journey that that we need to be building on or adapting our way of communication too because yes of



course we are there to provide outcomes and drive those things for our organisations but it only comes through a collectivism, doesn't come through individualisms of how we move all that together and I just feel like there's this kind of like we're squishing in this middle and this human state and this weight in this fear and also we've got to find what is a new rhythm that is very different to a rhythm we've experienced before and it sets a new continuum for our future and does it change the focus of our work, maybe? It changes perhaps the approach to our work differently. We have to think differently about it. It's not as sequenced. It's messy.

It's really messy. And I was wondering, listening to what you're talking about as well, is, and I do think we're in the business of emotion, brands are in the business of emotion, we're all in the business of if people buy into us and believe us and follow us, then you get the things that you're looking for. But in Cheaters, you talked a lot there about conversations you've had with practitioners, and I am pleased to hear that you have found you are not the only one that thinks like this. are many of us that are there, we're in this shared space, and I think it's not just for communication, I think it's for humanity, I think it's for leaders, and I say that as someone running a small business, it has never been as tough as I have in my living career now to show direction. But I guess from all those conversations that you've had with practitioners and thinking about what we're doing, what did you really discover through that research and what kind of brought to light perhaps what it is that we need to take on board or accept as our new normal and adapt to and thinking about that humanity and that emotion, that psychological aspect of communication.

Ellen Griley (19:44)

Yeah, it was really interesting. So in my research, it was a small sample size. So it was twenty four practitioners, about close to half of them with fifteen or more years in their in their career. And then I had eight follow-up interviews after that. So eight deep dives interviews after that. And what was interesting to me, first of all, was to participate in the research, you needed to have experienced at least two crises in the last eighteen months. Two crises or events, as we called them in the last eighteen months. A hundred percent of the participants had experienced three, and fifty percent of them had experienced five or more. So communicated through five or more. And I've got some some facts down here. So 88% had communicated through layoffs and restructuring, 71% had communicated through AI adoption, 67% hadn't communicated through economic uncertainty, especially in the United States with the tariffs. 58%



social and political tensions and then twenty nine percent had communicated through climate events and climate disaster and so there was that shared grounding of okay, no, this is this is impacting communicators beyond just, someone at a company like the size that I had been at. This is impacting communicators across the industry or across our profession, that is. And then the other thing that was interesting was what came out about the experience of that for these communicators. So there was eighty percent per eighty eight percent reported that their personal well being was impacted by communicating through these events. And seventy nine percent said that they were experiencing stress or burnout due to maintaining trust during that. And the thing that really jumped out at me, there were two things that jumped out at me about this. One was only 8%, which effectively was about one person, reported feeling supported by their organisation through this. But meanwhile, 83% were feeling stress or burnout from threading that needle between the urgency that you described, Jen, of like the pace of what is demanded of us, and balancing that with accuracy and empathy. And that really became one of the bigger points from my research was this notion that urgency is the antithesis of empathy, and that there is this in that urgent landscape there is this instinct on behalf of leaders to, hedge on their language. That that notion of, well I don't want to say I don't know and I don't want to say and we don't have all the answers. So let's just make it as high level as possible. And there were people that that responded to the research saying, I'm introducing empathy. I'm introducing acknowledging what's going on right now. I'm introducing an awareness of the fact that we are communicating among all these other things and then it's being stripped out. It's being stripped out by our leadership. And that notion that this is coming from a place of risk management for leadership, but all it's doing effectively is transferring that risk onto the broken trust of the employees. And so it's not saving you anything when you do that. So it was really it in several ways it was eye-opening. It was heartbreaking to hear that there are so many people who are not feeling supported by their organisations through this. And to me, it points for exactly what you know I seek through my work, what you advocate for with the IOIC, which is okay, how do we survive this though? The work doesn't stop. The importance of the work doesn't change. We need new ways of of organising our teams. We need new ways of thinking about this work. And for me, it was, in my own practice, it was if I wanna continue to do this this work that I love so much, I need a new playbook. I need a new way of thinking about this.



Jen Sproul (23:43)

I think that's great. I know Dom wants to pick up on the empathy point, before he does that, I want to pick up on, because I love what you've just said as well. And I also think there's something really important in the framing and the conversations that I've been having recently is kind of the state of fear that leadership is operating in that strips out this notion of empathy because, that shows weakness that means that we can become a target or attack. Right.

But actually the silence creates more risk or more risk in that because we know from the research that we do in the UK, for example, here with our IC index is that people are just don't believe you, don't follow you, are not going to do the role, it's not going to be delivered because I feel like you're hiding something from me. And we're in the business of adult to adult, human to human dialogue here, right? And that is actually where those gaps need to be really filled. And I think that one of the other things that some really interesting conversations I've been having as well is you talked about the point around risk. And I don't think that's being quite equated from a management or leadership point of view. I always worry when boards are together and you're thinking about governance and risk, trust is not a part of it.

We're not talking about trust as a risk to an organisation, whereas if I lose it, what will it mean and how do I keep it and how do I think about it, which is an entirely different playbook from I'm going to treat my communication like a Gantt chart project to follow. It's much more vulnerable. It's much more open, but it's also, I think also throws in, I think really difficult. And I've been talking a lot about this ethical questions for businesses about what they say and how they say, particularly in global organisations. The ethical piece around it's not right or it's wrong, but we all feel differently or something. And how do we work through the right way to have those dialogues and those conversations with our people? Let me give an example, an ethical risk could be, let's talk about climate. Well, we don't really want to get involved in it. And the risk could be that if we do, we look like we're over here or over there. But then the risk might be that we don't look like we care. therefore then where do you, but it's not direct correspondence, so where do you sit on how you talk about something that to some degree you're never going to win on because we are our own people with our own minds as well. But also how do I open up about the fact that the risk of being decisions and trials that we're doing, we don't know.



what the implications of those decisions are yet we're working out loud with you to say that to people feels risky and then you might change that direction of travel later on. And I don't think that enough of that playbook of thinking about it through that lens beyond, if we just send out some kind of core broadcast information that means we've done our job is being seen. And the impact, I think, for that from a business's point of view is that it just erodes something in us over time as humans and as people. And I think that that framing of something opens an opportunity to position the need for more human consideration as a risk factor to if you don't.

Dom (26:55)

Ellen, I've got a couple of questions. Let me flag. One is a sort of business related one. One is a yacht rock related question as well. So I'll flag that second one. But the first one. So I'm sure like all of us on this call, many people listening, everybody listening I hope, we know that internal communication is there because it helps organisation success. That's one of the bedrocks of our organisation. That means we need to, as you know, talk about organisation success and frame things in ways that people who make decisions can understand, how it meets their goals and criteria. I've had a couple of conversations in the last few months where we get pushback about some of the things we've been talking about.

When you start talking a bit about polycrisis, some of the pushback I've had is, how much of that is real? How much of that is perception? How much of it is down to the fact that we are probably, in many ways, more attuned to that sort of stuff? So yeah, I can see cats looking at me as cats there. I'll tell you what it was. I was talking to someone a funny bit older than me. So I'm Gen X. So I'm the voice of the past in that respect.

But people pushing back saying, well, hang on, are the Polycrises, all the things you've suggested or talked about, people have experienced in the past. They've been through world wars. They've been through recessions. They've been through depressions, if you go back a bit further. They've been through the whole Cold War, et cetera. So I guess what I'm saying is I don't think we can assume that everybody sees things in the way that we do.

And I'm really interested in understanding well certainly what if any challenge you've faced when you've talked about some of these issues and how you've approached it. Because we know it works. We know we have to do the stuff we've been talking about. Connecting with people, understanding what they're going through, listening to them,



giving them space, giving them the safety that Cat was talking about. But we can only do that for a length of time when other people, particularly decision makers, accept that and buy into it. So I'd be interested to know what sort of challenges, if any. Maybe I just associate with negative people and that probably could be right. But what sort of challenges have you come across?

Ellen Griley (28:50)

So the short answer to your question is I've yet to come across a true skeptic. And maybe that's, the result of who I'm engaging with or maybe it's this is really something that is resonating with people and what I would say though is that I have those conversations in my mind.

I have those conversations in my mind all the time when I'm thinking about the topic of uncertainty. What you're starting to see whether it's The Guardian, The New York Times, a lot of articles pointing to this notion of uncertainty and the way that it's impacting decision making for people. Is it contributing to the global birth rate decline?

Some people say the inability to picture the future is contributing to that. Some people will say that make the argument that the inability to picture the future is contributing to Gen Z spending trends, this notion of like sweet treat culture and like doom spending and things like that. So we're starting to see a lot of dialogue about this. And I keep coming back to be intellectually honest within my reasoning, to say, well, but okay, we live through the Cuban Missile Crisis when people literally did not know if there was gonna be half of the world the following week, right? We lived through so many things and collectively we lived through the pandemic. There was a point in the pandemic when we really did not know when it would end, if it ever would end. And there's two things worth flagging when we think about, Is it the first time that we've had a polycrisis where we're all glued to our phones every day and that's amplifying everything that we're experiencing? Perhaps. Is this the first time, at different points within the world, in world history, were people having the cognitive load that they're experiencing today? The amount of information, literacy conversations. Be damned, the amount of information that we are taking in every single day is extraordinary. And you can confidently state that at no point in the history of the world have people consumed as much information cognitively every single day as they do now, thanks to our smartphones, right? So all of that has to come into this conversation when we talk about is it really as bad as it seems? Well perhaps we can have that conversation. We can go back and run all sorts of studies and analyse when



there's been elements of polycrisis before. We've also had a lot of research on how to communicate through uncertainty. We have the benefit of research on how to communicate after 9-11, communicate during the financial crisis, how organisations communicated during the pandemic. And the question that I have is, are we going to pay attention to that research?

Are we going to learn from the past or are we going to pretend? Because who really at that point is pretending that this is the first time we're experiencing that? Right? If we have the benefit of this research that can guide us, it can guide leaders, can tell leaders, hey, listen, when you are experiencing uncertainty and when your people are experiencing uncertainty, hearing I don't have the answers builds trust more than silence ever will. When are we going to start to listen to that and build from that.

Dom (32:14)

And I think you've answered the question fantastically. So what I've taken from that is, I can imagine there is some pushback. Maybe it's more of British thing, perhaps, I don't know, but there is some pushback occasionally. I think even when people see that, we can say, well, hang on. Yes, there have been polycrisis in the past, but probably not quite as grave as we're facing now. But the circumstances that we are facing now, the other factors influencing people, the other parts of their lives, have never been the same and they're creating a need for a different response, I think is the first thing. The second thing you've said is, and we've learned from the past, every other walk of life we learn from the past. And just as you said, we now know what works and what doesn't work, what people need and what they don't need, how they respond. So I think that's a fantastic answer because sometimes, yes, I think we do get pushed back and I think it's either to disguise another reason why someone doesn't want to do something, maybe even a bit of laziness, I don't know. I think that's a fantastic response. So can I turn it around?

Ellen Griley (33:09)

Can I say one quick one more quick thing too is that you can't have this conversation in a vacuum and not discuss climate change. So if there is at some point a future where places that used to see snow don't have snow, that kind of changes everything, right? And so none of this is in a vacuum. And in that regard, it is worth, as much as it if I'm doing the intellectual rigour, of being honest with myself and saying, okay, this isn't the first



time that we've experienced that, I would ask you to do the intellectual rigour to say, is it worth examining in this unique set of circumstances with climate change and everything that it foretells with it?

Cat (33:52)

Can I just add one small thing? And that is a nod to the amazing research that has been done in the area of intergenerational trauma. And I do by entirely, Dom, your observation and reflection that some people are inclined to say, well, what is wrong with you all? We've been through far worse in the past.

And I would accompany that with, yes we have, and look at what is being discovered about the impact on families and societies and communities of unaddressed and unprocessed intergenerational trauma and how entirely devastating that can be for the people that have to live alongside people who haven't been able to process that trauma. And we are only at the beginning of our understanding of what fallout arises from that, I think.

Dom (34:57)

Yes, it's a cumulative approach, or cumulative effect, isn't it? So let me look at that from a slightly different angle then, it'd be great Ellen, for you to summarise why you think most thoughts or organisations must become more empathic. Why you think it's so important. And guess that is a baked in assumption there, which is that many organisations are, but I think that's probably a safe assumption. So given that, why must they do it, do you think? And then I'll come on to my yacht rock question.

Ellen Griley (35:21)

So we can reasonably say there's there's always room to improve, right? So where your organisation falls on the spectrum, there's always, room to improve. But I think the criticality here that I hold as an internal communicator is we live in a because I said so world. And we live in a because I said so world with everything from something like the pandemic, which was one big because I said so. Like we had no we had no choice, right? We had we had to do what was required of us to get through and survive the pandemic. But we also live in a because I said so world with, you know, geopolitical events, with



climate change, with all sorts of events. And where that intersects with organisations is in that stripping of choice in that stripping of agency. If your people are in your organisations and all of a sudden they're experiencing a because I said so culture, you are instituting a return to office mandate without any reasonable why or context for your decisions, or you are, instituting a layoff that is not performance based. It's just we have to invest more. The more that we introduce these types of because I said so motions into organisations, the more you have to look at that toll on the brain and on the body when people feel like they have no choice and they have no agency and they have no options and they're stuck. And it might sound a little ridiculous to people that I consider and hold that thought. In the same universe that I hold the thought of sending an email, but I do. Because it's important when we are thinking about how we communicate with our people to be aware of the fact that so many people don't feel like they have any choice right now, and that they're holding this uncertainty. So, how from like an empathy standpoint, how can an organisation through its internal communications respond to this? You can respond by introducing predictability. You can respond to this by introducing the signposting that's going to be guiding people, telling people, we think about our internal communication strategies and we know that when we're sending out the next all hands invite, we know that we send out an email on the first Tuesday of the month that's our newsletter, but nobody else does. So how can we do a better job of just regularly communicating? Here's when you're going to hear from the organisation.

Here's what we told you last time. Here's what we're discussing today. Here's what we're gonna discuss next time. Bring people along in that way. And also give people choice and agency in how they are receiving the communications from you. At least give them that. If you don't have capacity and you don't have the time to read the long form article on the internet, here's an email digest, here's a Slack message digest of that same information so that we're meeting people where they are. I think that's a radical act of empathy in a because I said so world. And it's also part of trauma informed practice, which can help people just stay regulated from a nervous system perspective in amidst all of the stress and uncertainty of right now.

Dom (38:46)

Yeah, that makes huge sense. I mean making sure there's a regular rhythm behind things, making sure people understand what they can get. And I'd probably add, giving them a



chance to think it through, talk it through, having a conversation about it, giving their take, I think would also help there. Right, my yacht rock questions. Hard thing to say that, is that I'm going to pass back to Jen and Cat.

What is your favourite yacht rock track to de-stress after a tough day?

Ellen Griley (39:09)

Well, I'll share just a quick story in that there was one year when I was with my former partner and I woke up and I was going through a difficult time in my life. And I was listening to Yacht Rock kind of all the time. And I woke up on Christmas morning and threw in Michael McDonald's greatest hits in the CD player and was listening to What a Fool Believes on Christmas morning.

And my partner came out of the shower and looked at me just like red in the face, just like enraged. And I was like, what? What's going on? He goes, It's Christmas. Can we have a break from Yacht Rock? So my answer is I will always default to the Doobie Brothers. I will always default to what a fool believes. You can't get that doobie bounce. It just makes you want to dance and makes you it brings you joy.

So I'm a hardcore Michael McDonald fan.

Dom (40:06)

Absolutely. I'm going to be jumping on Spotify as soon as we finish talking. But for now, I'm going to pass back to Jen and Cat.

Cat (40:11)

You're lucky that Jen and I don't start crooning. We could start crooning, Jen. We could do the backup singing.

Jen Sproul (40:17)

I'm not sure that was where my best talents will lie, but I'll give anything to go, quite frankly. And I hate to bring it back to, but also to say music is communication is rhythm



and dance and all those things. We often say to the body and how it responds and heals. I think I can think of many times, I don't know anything about Yacht Rock, but I can certainly think of many times where during something difficult in my personal life or whatever, putting something in your head that makes you feel the sense of release is really important because I'm going to make a tenuous link back to the topic here through that. I think what you've just said as well is that it doesn't feel like control is ours. And everything feels so intertwined. Everything feels so much. And I think going back to your point around how much cognitive load we got, but also as well, emotion breeds emotion, fear breeds fear, behaviour breeds behaviour, right? So there is just this constant thing. And I think that your point around research is a shame because I look at IC index that we produced this year and the data that came through, it's worse than ever. Why can't we put forward those practices that we like? Trust is down at a pivotal level, adoption is down, all those big outcomes, because fundamentally, they don't hear what it means. They don't feel that they're understood or anything's told back or it's being done to them, not with them. And all those things that really impact the way that we go. And I was going to come back as we kind of look at this stuff and the things that you're talking about in terms of, because you talked a lot about this new playbook.

And obviously I think there's one of the things as well, when we're thinking about the future of internal communication white paper, of course we talked about like the skills that we need, which I think are fundamental to us all the ways, sense making theory, understanding how humans make sense of information, how we process a psychology of communication, how we dial that up beyond just design of, I'm not declining their importance, but design of emails and internet articles. I feel like we're stepping into a place we've always known, but perhaps it puts a new precedent on the skills that we lead with as opposed to follow with. And I think one of my concerns for the future of internal communication I sit here today is what are we doing to bring in a pipeline of talent into that new space and how are we nurturing them into our new communication space? And we're not seeing enough new talent come through and then the things that are coming through or people that are changing or bringing in new perspectives and new experiences because we all learn from each other. But I guess my final question to you is you obviously we can talk about how internal communication can help deliver in a polycrisis. But I think you touched on that, but if you were gonna say what would be in that new playbook, if you were in a newer building, or you were teaching somebody new into internal communication today, or looking at something afresh today, what would be the thing in that playbook that would make you design your communication differently?



Ellen Griley (43:10)

My go-to answer for this is always going to be choice. And I know that it's something that's fundamentally a limitation of people's text acts at juncture. But if there is an opportunity to give somebody a choice, and you don't want to overwhelm, because choice can be overwhelming as well. But if you are able to say to someone, if you have capacity for all of the information, here's where we share all of the information. So here's our 60-minute town hall. Here's our 400-word intranet piece. Here's the full amount and context. And if you don't have capacity for that.

Here's a smaller version. Here that maybe that's that that newsletter. And maybe that newsletter is bi-weekly, right? And it's just a recap of in case you've missed it. And if you only have 30 seconds a day or 30 seconds here or there, here's something that comes directly into your messaging feed and your messaging agent, within your tech stack. That amount of choice to give people to say and then to say to people, our expectation for you every day is to get your job done. It's the only thing that is that we're focused on is supporting you and getting your job done. If you have capacity for more and if you want to go above and beyond, here's how to do that. Here's who to talk to, here's where to go for that, all of that. So recognize that everyone's arriving on a on a day to day basis, on a week to week basis, at differing levels of capacity.

And giving people choice in how they consume that information and reminding them that they have that choice. And reminding them that even if they miss a week or two, if they need to just, bear down and and focus on the work for a bit, that you have their back, that your manager is gonna come in and be able to reinforce anything. You're not gonna miss anything. I think that's where in the playbook that I envision that's where we have the right tools and the right technology and AI for everything that I struggle with AI. AI has also never made it more easy for smaller teams to be able to create these different touch points of content than ever before. So I think this is the right time for that as well.

Jen Sproul (45:32)

Love it. Thank you.



Cat (45:32)

Well, honestly, I could have done a part two and three here. We could, I know it launched an entirely different series on the topic of Yacht Rock, but we're not going to because we're just not. But Ellen, honestly, this has been a really illuminating conversation and I hope that people who have listened are to some degree breathing a sigh of relief that it's not just them, that actually we do have to evolve and adapt and sit with our leaders and managers and invite them to do the same because doubling down on ways of being and doing that aren't working is not doing anybody any good, right? So thank you, thank you for being an amazing guest and we will look forward to another conversation with you at some point.

Ellen Griley (46:28)

Thank you. Thank you so much.