

Disability-Inclusive Internal Communications - Transcript

Jennifer Sproul

Hello, everybody! And I can see lots of people signing in which is fantastic. It's been a highly popular webinar today. So hopefully, we'll have a really good conversation, lots of discussion, just letting everybody sort of sign in, and I can think we're going, so I shall kick off if you like. So let me start by saying, I'm Jennifer Sproul, and I'm the chief executive of the Institute of Internal Communication. For an audio description, I have long brown hair. I am wearing glasses, I have on a brown T-shirt, and I'm wearing a gold necklace. So, it's my pleasure to welcome you all today to our webinar, where we're going to be talking about disability, inclusive internal communication. Now, obviously, as IoIC, inclusivity is really, really close to our heart. It's one of the core principles for which we advocate, and one of the core areas in which we try to support our members and the communication profession. In making sure everything we do is inclusive from the start, at the heart of everything, so everything can be understood, informed, connected, and included in every aspect irrelevant of your disability or your issues, or things like that. Inclusivity at the heart is fundamentally what IoIC is all about.

And obviously for this webinar, we were delighted to partner with the Valuable 500 who share our aims and our ambitions. Myself and Ryan, from the Valuable 500 have chatted on many occasions about our shared ambitions, and that's why this webinar came about to really join those two organisations and putting inclusive communication at the heart of everything we do together, so I shall pass over to Ryan, who shall introduce himself, and hopefully then kick off the panel discussion.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Oh, thank you, Jen, and thanks for having us with us, and welcome to everyone. So, first things first, I'm Ryan Curtis-Johnson. I'm chief communications officer at the Valuable 500. To give an audio description, I'm a white male. I've got tortoise shell glasses on. I've got short brown hair. I'm wearing a cream top, and my background is blurred. So, for me to kind of explain, you know, communications is very much part of the role that I play within the Valuable 500. But I think to really explain how internal comms sits within our synchronised collective actions, for those that don't know, the Valuable 500 is one of the largest CEO networks, second to the UN, which we're happy to be second to. We're very much an organisation, a charity, not for profit that was started to end the CEO silence. So, it's CEOs that are committed to end disability exclusion. And really, internal comms fits within everything any organisation does in the sense of communicating messages, but awareness, but also making sure it's inclusive. And you know, to just be sharing, you know, while we're talking about this, you know, this week, we see it's a global event and an awareness day on Global Accessibility Awareness Day, where inclusivity and accessibility is so important in what we're producing and delivering. But let's share some stats here as well: with approximately 80% of all disabled people being of working age, accessible communications are essential to unlocking the full potential of your workforce.

And so hopefully, today, through the esteemed panel that we have, we're going to be able to really get an understanding of how organisations are doing this. Maybe learn some, you know, quick wins or easy tricks that you may not have thought or considered. And I just want to be making sure this is a safe space that this isn't about who's doing it best.

We're all on a journey here. And so, if we can at least come away today and think there's one thing I could change or do differently, then I think we've done a great job in what we try to achieve today. So, without further ado, let's start with the foundations and welcome our panellists that we've got here today. So first I'd like to say hello to Eleanor Chipperfield from Channel 4.

Eleanor Chipperfield

Hello! I'm delighted to be here. Thank you for having me. So, my name is Eleanor Chipperfield. I'm internal comms creative and channel manager at Channel 4. Audio description wise, I am a woman, white woman in her late forties, with a sharp blonde bob, green glasses, and I'm wearing a headset. Also got my background blurred like Ryan.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Amazing. Thank you. Lovely to have you here, and Alyson Davis from BT Group. Lovely to have you here with us too.

Alyson Davis

Hi, Ryan. Yeah. So, my name is Alyson Davis. I am a senior manager in the People and Culture team here at BT Group. For audio description, I am also white, with blonde hair and also wearing red and wearing black glasses, and I'm sat in probably the darkest room in our Snow Hill, Birmingham offices today. So, but it's very lovely to see you all.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Thank you. Okay, so let's start. Let's get into the roots of this and the foundations. Eleanor, disability inclusion obviously encompasses a wide spectrum of needs. But how's Channel 4 developed their internal communications approach that basically ensures all employees can access and engage with any of the information you may be sharing?

Eleanor Chipperfield

Okay. So, I think, to Jennifer's point as well, right at the beginning, it's about baking in from the start. We sit closely with the equity and inclusion team, and last year we launched a new strategy, equity by design, so that sort of gave everyone the principles of baking it in, thinking about all of your documents, all of your clips, everything that we produce and put out on our channels, having, like, an accessibility lens from the start. And so, I think that's just how we should sum up, really. I think Channel 4 has quite a big presence. We have created attitudinal shift with the Paralympics. So that's quite big. And it's actually quite a lot to live up to. So, the workforce often feel a little stunned. We have to provide them with roots in and, as you say, it's always a journey to sort of get everyone there.

Yes, I'm thinking I can go on even further about our events and what we do. I think something that we make sure we do for our town halls is always ensure that the clips are delivered already captioned. This is often a bit of a tight squeeze. Sometimes we're sharing like some sneak peek content of a show, it might still be offline. So, we have to sort of quickly turn that around and get it captioned. So that's accessible for everyone. So that's an example of something we do to sort of match up with what we're doing on screen as well.

Jennifer Sproul

Brilliant. Thank you, Eleanor, and just a quick note before I jump on to the next question, which I should have said at the start. If anybody listening has any questions for the panellists, please feel free to add them into the chat box, and we will make sure there is space for that at the end. And I think that listening to you, Eleanor, as well, this sort of baked-in approach and that attitudinal, and that journey point is really, really an important part of it. So picking on sort of that, I guess that attitudinal journey and baking that in and that accessible piece, if I could come to you, Alyson, I mean, research shows that most people with accessibility needs simply, they simply abandon inaccessible content rather than report it.

So, there's that issue of sort of self-identifying or self-declaring, I can't see this, and it's not baked in. But therefore, as communicators, we're perhaps unaware of that issue. So, I guess it would be great to hear from you is how has BT developed more sort of proactive approaches to identify and address sort of those communication barriers that sort of really enable that point of employee engagement.

Alyson Davis

Yeah, it's a great question, Jennifer, and I think you're absolutely right. Research generally tells us that most people with accessibility needs won't report the barriers. So not because they don't want to, but because they're tired of being the only ones that have to flag the issues. And that means if we wait for a complaint, then we've already lost people. So, at BT, we shifted our mindsets, and very similar to obviously what Eleanor mentioned, as communication leaders, we don't just publish and hope, we plan and bake in inclusion from the start. You know, accessibility runs through everything that we do, and it means that we have really proactive testing before anything goes out. So, screen reader checks, inclusive language reviews, clear layouts, you know, cognitive load assessments. Anything that we can do, we kind of throw at it. But we treat accessibility like tone of voice. It's just a non-negotiable. But we know that no checklist really replaces feedback from real people.

And that's why we work with our internal networks like Able To, who look after our disability population, and our neurodiversity network, bringing them in early. So, we can co-create and sanity check, and they generally tend to catch things that we won't see through abled lenses. So, I think the challenge we have is, people often won't tell you when something's not working. So instead of waiting for the feedback, we actually delve into some of our data, and low engagement from certain groups means that it's a red flag, right? And we've got to dig deeper and shift from, you know, being reactive to something to be more investigative around what we're not doing right? So, I think, as leaders in communication, it's on us to lead that shift, to, Eleanor, you mentioned earlier about designing stuff in from the very outset, and making sure that we build real engagement, not just broadcast.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Amazing. I mean, there's so many great bits that we're gonna get here. And hopefully, lots of people are adding in, we're getting some questions. So, it's definitely working in sparking those ideas. I wanted to look at, to explore how inclusive communications drive cultural change. So, and how have you seen accessible communications create, I guess, ripple effects throughout Channel 4 in the sense of that inclusive cultural change.

Eleanor Chipperfield

Yeah. So, I touched on this already. I would say, just the things that we, so demand sounds so sort of righteous, but the demand for our comms has had a ripple effect. So, for example, we now see, I think, through like prodding and from what we've done, explainer videos, and you know that really juicy sort of statistical information that we sometimes teams put out in an animation. We've now kind of helped those teams to hover the parts that are purely visual with audio description. And so helped sort of push that, make it just not seem like an add-on, I think. There's another wonderful time that we saw. I don't know if you've seen it. I recommend you look online. Our brand platform is altogether different. Okay, so for this, there's this wonderful text interpretation of what Channel 4 means, lots of crazy fonts going in and out. This doesn't have any audio on it. So, for not just people who need audio description, but also neurodiverse people who find it very much, right at the end, it culminates in a very simple expression of text on screen with a very clear audio description.

So that everyone gets to know what altogether different means internally. And we're catering for all of our staff. So I think that's something that I think works really well across departments, and we're seeing that more so that it's not just relying on the visual or audio part of it.

Another thing that we've seen as well is, we're trying to model, and I'm sure Alyson does this as well, is like sharing decks ahead with anyone who may need them, and if that's not possible, because let's face it, sometimes some decks aren't ready until the last minute. In my team, we have someone who is visually impaired. And so, someone in the team will just say, like, this is a slide with X image on, and this particular stat, although best practice would be to not rely just on the information being on the screen.

Jennifer Sproul

Amazing. Thank you, Eleanor. I think it just really highlights there's also the technical, but also the pieces in the planning and the behavioural. If we're thinking about all those areas as well, and how that goes into it. And it is that, and, as you say, it is a journey, and I just wanted to move on, Alyson, from your perspective. I mean, one of the things we know in internal communication, right? One of the biggest barriers that we can have is, you know, how do we support leaders to communicate a commitment to inclusivity? So, it's felt in the organisation as well as just said in the organisation, but also how that then translates, for example, with how we work with our managers and that piece, and how it sort of drips down through the organisation so that it's meaningful. So, I guess it would be great to know from your experience how effective internal communications help translate that leadership. How can we help those leaders show those commitments in a meaningful way, and also how it then feeds through the organisation so that it's felt in every facet, if you like.

Alyson Davis

Yeah, I love this question because this is where internal comms really proves its value. Leadership commitments are only as powerful as our ability to bring them to life for everyone. And at BT, we see internal comms as the engine that turns that intent into action and the words into the culture. So, when it comes to embedding inclusion, especially disability confidence, it's not just the one-off statement from the top. It's about consistent, accessible messaging that reaches every level of the business and makes it relevant to every single role. We've learned that people don't just need to hear that inclusion matters.

They need to understand what they can do about it, so we generally tend to not rely on one channel or one moment. We cascade inclusive messaging through every comms touchpoint, from, you know, the all-colleague emails to team briefs, manager toolkits, frontline comms. And really, importantly, is local storytelling. And you know, crucially, we like to tailor the message to keep the core values intact.

So, I mean, this is something for all corporate organisations, but no jargon, no corporate fluff, you know, just really clear, actionable messaging. We have also developed a neurodiversity toolkit which I'm more than happy to share with anyone who would like to see a copy of that, and that's available to all of our colleagues. As you know, it's everyone's responsibility to communicate accessibly. But I just wanted to share an actual story with you, if that's okay, just a really, really quick one. So, this is something I heard from the Openreach internal communications. Openreach, obviously part of BT Group. So, it's a real-life example. And it was an accessibility angle I hadn't heard of before. And the comms team in Openreach shared an article where they talked about three or four individuals, by name and job title at the start of the story, but they didn't keep the order in which the individual names were listed consistent throughout the comms. And they had direct feedback from their neurodiversity network that it was really confusing for some neurodiverse people. So, the comms team actually updated all of their guidelines to ensure that the feedback was always included in future communications. So, you know, just something as simple as keeping names and job titles consistent throughout a communication is something that I had not heard of, but obviously the feedback has rippled throughout communications right across the group.

Jennifer Sproul

Amazing, consistency is key, right? Ryan.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

It's very good. I really like that point, though, Alyson, just to add where it's not just the individual one person's responsibility. We all have a responsibility to play, and I think that's often just thinking of some of the questions that we are getting coming, and we will come to them just to flag that we can see them. But the fact that this is about everyone can take accountability and support. And so, even if your role isn't always putting or planning the events or the comms for the events, but maybe you need to consider how that can be digested. And I think, even being neurodivergent myself, what works for me doesn't always work for another person who's neurodivergent as well. So, it's, it can sometimes feel like there's lots of different ways we need to do this, but actually inclusive is making it accessible for all. For some that may be not neurodivergent, but like to digest it in that way, and that's what's key, I think, in all of this.

Is, is really, really interesting. Some great questions coming in as well. So just to move on and we will come to some questions is looking at the practical parts of this. So, and we know technically, elements like font, choice contrast, alternative text, alt text can make a significant difference in accessibility. But what simple but impactful changes have you implemented that have made the biggest difference in Channel 4's internal communications accessibility? Sorry, I think that's quite a meaty question. I do apologise, but.

Eleanor Chipperfield

No, it's fine. And I was trying to think of this sort of two things I'd like to address, but I also wanted to, I loved Alyson's story about listening to feedback from the community, because I think that's one of the considerations that's really that I was going to talk about as well. So, from a technical point of view, we listen to feedback. And it's created some really fun collaborations. I think that's something that we could probably all agree happens. So, one of those 'I love my job' moments was a visually impaired colleague approached us. Our town halls, the beginning bit, there's a bit of dead time. She's just not sure what's happening and when it's going to start. So together with our linear continuity announcers, those are the people that announce the shows coming up next, and the editors, we now have, just at the beginning of our town halls, a witty little intro like it's the next show coming up from the continuity announcer overlaid on an ident. So now everyone knows when it's going to start.

There's not this weird dead time. It's actually honed our processes as well, and everyone gets the sort of warm and fuzzies right before what could be a delightful town hall or awful bad news. So, it's a great one. That's one thing from a technical point of view, and then another. So, it is technical as well. We're very much trying to make it digestible accessibility for everyone at Channel 4. People really want to make all of their documents accessible. They want their, no one is ideologically opposed to this. But we were finding the training information we had was a little bit impenetrable for some people, so we could sort of going to go guerrilla style to break down those technical barriers. And we're developing like little sort of, I would say, training sessions where we can sort of, we're gonna invite ourselves to every department meeting and deliver a little bit of SCULPT. I don't know if you guys, you're probably quite familiar with SCULPT. It's the acronym, I think, developed by Worcester University for document accessibility. It starts with, it covers structure and other parts, tables and descriptive links, etc.

So, we're gonna come and we just right now, we're designing it to make it, I think, digestible, I think, is it, and desirable, so that they come back and they hear the rest of the different parts of the accessibility training, because presently no one is doing the hour-long training. We can see it's a little bit too much for them to digest. So those are sort of the technical things that we're working on behind the scenes and things that have worked. And yeah, we're always trying new things to bring everyone on board.

Jennifer Sproul

Amazing. And I love that. And I think that is the point of training, isn't it? A lot of where you're trying to embed that accessibility standard throughout your organisation that you're relying on everyone to operate to that standard, but understand it, but then, so time-poor, and how can we find that time and give them a framework and a structure, and all those barriers that we come across. So, I love those examples. Alyson, I'm going to move on to sort of, I guess, another tricky topic for internal communicators, shall I say? That happens perhaps in many guises of internal communication, and I think recent times and rhetoric have made some of this stuff feel even more challenging as well, is the business case for accessibility. It's how do we make that? How do we, what about internal comms? How are we making that business case? Because some of these things, they're not free. They require technical investment. They require behavioural investment and change programmes and manageable programmes.

So, I guess, how can, are you doing anything at BT that sort of says if we had, is it the thing that's the unicorn that we can't find to kind of say that if we implement X, Y, and Z inclusive communication practices, this is the value. I know there is swathes of data out there externally, but how are you finding that generally internally at BT in making that case for investing in accessible internal communication, because it will fundamentally benefit the business.

Alyson Davis

Yeah, I mean, it's tough, isn't it? I think the business case for external accessibility is pretty well established, as you said, but internally, probably not so. It's just as critical, and arguably, I think it's even more powerful when it comes to driving engagement and productivity. And certainly at BT, we've made the case that inclusive internal communications aren't just a nice to have, they're actually a performance enabler. I mentioned earlier that if a message isn't accessible, it's not landing, and if it's not landing, it's not leading to the actions, the changes we need to make. And we've seen that clearly in how we measure engagement. So internal data shows that comms built with accessibility in mind consistently gets higher engagement rates across diverse employee groups. That includes things like click-throughs, read time, survey responses. So, all of those metrics that show people aren't just seeing the message, they're actually getting it, I think. Beyond the clicks, we're also looking at the outcomes. So inclusive communications have a direct link to productivity and performance, and who hasn't got that at the top of their agendas this year.

So, when people understand the why and the how of what they're being asked to do without needing to decode corporate speak or navigate inaccessible formats, they can act faster and with more confidence. And that's time saved, questions avoided, and trust between people and the business actually earned. The other thing we did is we tracked correlations between inclusive campaigns and improvement in psychological safety scores, disclosure rates, and colleague advocacy, especially amongst disabled and neurodivergent colleagues. That tells us that people feel more seen, more heard, and more willing to contribute. And that's not just engagement, that's potential innovation unlocked across an organisation like BT.

So, the investment in inclusive communications, whether it's training, better tools, smarter content design, is tiny compared to the cost of disengagement across the business. So, you know, we think about how much time is lost when people don't understand the process, don't feel included, or disengaged entirely because the message wasn't built for them. And you know, we're not just talking about doing the right thing, we're talking about doing a smart thing for businesses. So, you know, we like to often make sure it's a definite for us that we don't treat accessibility like a compliance box. We treat it as a core comms strategy. And that's because we want high-performing teams, we need high-performing messages in order to make that land, and it means making sure that everyone is invited into that conversation from the start.

Jennifer Sproul

Love that, Alyson, and I think it bears true, doesn't it? In, yes, its accessibility, but also in every, if we as employees, as people, as human beings, feel seen, feel heard, but fundamentally also, we understand, we see this a lot in the research that we do. If we understand the business, the strategy on what our role is, and we feel part of the machine to create that, the business will fundamentally innovate, produce, perform, and grow.

And sometimes it's a real challenge to get that cut-through. But it's wonderful to hear that you're being, and I really like the example you gave of the campaigns. Actually, that's a brilliant thing that, because we know, for example, if psychological safety is high, advocacy goes with that hugely. So actually, taking a campaign focus. I want to just a quick one, I'm going to pass around. Thanks for looking at the Q&A, but I just want to ask one further question on that kind of analysis that you do, and maybe I don't know if you've got an answer on this as well, when you, I think you've both talked about it, and obviously building accessibility, it's important that we understand the parts of our workforce that bring whatever form of that disability may be to the workplace, and some are visible, and some are not visible.

Do you, and therefore, then, when you're reporting on those metrics, you're sort of aligning to those sort of segmentation strategies, perhaps, of the day, and I guess part of that, and I think this is a conversation, Ryan, we've talked about is the challenge in people feeling comfortable at the entry point of the organisation to self-identify any adjustments or needs that they have. Do you have any challenges or advice with that? And then does that help then, I guess, borne out into how you build your networks, and you build your segmentation, you build your understanding of the impact that you're making for that part of your workforce.

Alyson Davis

I mean, I think certainly where colleagues across BT are concerned, you know, we're constantly striving to make sure inclusion is accessible by design, you know, and everything is looked at. We have a really rich, we have 13 people networks across BT Group, and we do like to involve them in pretty much everything that we do from a communications perspective because they hold the keys to a lot of the audiences that we're trying to access. And you know, I think internal communications really needs to shift from informative to transformative in the way that we actually shape mindsets. And I think if we can help people understand better what disability confidence looks like in their world, whether they're managing a team or serving a customer or designing a new product. Then the way that that team responds is asking better questions or sharing stories or challenging assumptions. And that's the cultural shift that I think we all play a part in being responsible for.

Jennifer Sproul

Love that. Love that, Eleanor, I don't know if you had any thoughts, or that I was just my random throw, and I'll pass back to Ryan, I think he's been keeping an eye on the chat bar.

Eleanor Chipperfield

No, I think on that, I think it's we just champion our data disclosure campaign, because when we know who's in the company, we can help more. So, I think it's just pushing, pushing that out and jumping on that and helping get that disclosure campaign out further is how we help champion and support people around the company.

Jennifer Sproul

Thank you.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Amazing. I think I know there've been many things that I've heard when it comes to like surveys and supporting that as well, where it's really sort of keeping it simple with the questions. Are the questions directed and simple to make someone feel like you are actually asking them rather than it just being a tick box, because I like what you were saying, Alyson. It's we know it's about doing the right thing, but it's about doing it smartly, so that you can then really support the individuals. But they need to feel like they can self-disclose, and it's going to be used appropriately. And it's what you do with the data, not just gathering the data. It's what you do with the data. I think it's so important. I'm going to go to one of the questions, I think this is a great question. So, thank you. The question is how you approach cognitive assessments, and how you manage the burden on inclusion networks to provide assistance when it comes to, I would say, accessibility on some of these things. So, I think both of you have used examples where you utilise people with either a disability themselves or lived experience. But how do you try and balance that kind of element and not just burdening those individuals with that responsibility. I don't know who wants to take that one, Eleanor, or.

Eleanor Chipperfield

Can start out. Yes, you don't want people to always have to be just pushing and advocating for themselves at every single moment. So, we have inclusion passports that we'd hope that managers refer to and that employees don't have to always sort of just keep championing for themselves. I suppose our role is to keep that visible as well that way that people can talk about their needs as well, and both ways as well for managers and for employees, so that they both know how to use that information and how it should be used. That's something that we quite passionate about. Alyson.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Yeah. But have you got anything?

Alyson Davis

I was just thinking more about the power of our people networks, and just how critical they actually are to our organisation. I mentioned two earlier, our Able To network and our neurodiversity network. But some of the things that I think I've had to really work with my communications teams with is actually not pigeonholing into these two networks and actually spreading that load across all of the networks, irrespective of what they are supporting or championing, because where we've got an example, at the moment where like many organisations, things like 3, 2, you know, the hybrid working kind of format came into force, and the way in which we communicated people coming back into the workforce. It was designed very corporate, you know, very much on trend with regard to getting people back into the office, and it kind of got stuck there. When that message was filtered into the people networks, we got a very, very different response to that which was considering all of the different elements of actually bringing people back into the workforce and some of the anxieties. Eleanor, we have something very similar passport-wise.

So, understanding these people networks and understanding what their needs and requirements are can completely change the way in which you look at your both internal and external communications about certain pieces which are very strategic in organisations.

But you know, you need to have that additional inclusive lens over everything that you do, and like I said, we said it right at the beginning, didn't we? It's baked in by design, you know, sometimes that design can come a bit unstuck, you know. So actually, using your people networks almost as your consultants, as part of the communication, I think, is super, super important.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

I think it's what drives inclusion. We often say this at the Valuable 500 when we're talking, you know, it's about not making decisions on behalf of any minority group. That's why intersectionality is so important. They need to be around the table when decisions are being made, you know. Now is not the time, you know, for us to use this session to talk about some of the things that are happening in the world, with politics and everything like that, where decisions are being made and those individuals are not around those tables to be able to import. And, as you said, Alyson, to be those consultants, to be the experts, because we can't all be experts in all areas.

That's why collaboration and connection is probably the biggest thing that any organisation can really take and utilise the internal comms function within your organisation to help cascade that both up and down within your organisations to allow those various parts in your organisation to be able to share their expertise or their knowledge that they're seeing. So, I think it, I think it's so important. Sorry, go on Jen, I don't know if you.

Jennifer Sproul

I thoroughly support what we're saying as well, and I've been to many panel interviews, and there's so many people from different backgrounds go, they've launched something, but nobody asked me first or no one used me as a, why not? And I remember when I joined IoIC as well, one of the things that I talked about was that one of our responsibilities to know our audiences and use our audiences and understand our audiences because they can help design something. And so, hearing what you're both creating and your approach to that really shows that. And I think one of our biggest challenges is, how do we encourage conversations within our workplaces to help us understand each other. And I think with the advent of technology, which is wonderful, it can help with so many of the challenges that we're talking about, but fundamentally how we connect and understand and work and collaborate with each other is, I think, such an unlocker.

But I'm going to pick another practical question, if you like, from the chat. If that's all right, I get really evangelical, but I shall stick to what the audience are asking about, which I think, Eleanor, I might throw this one to you, because I think you were talking about some of your events as well to start with. Someone's asking, they have a specific question on accessible events. How have the panel approached creating and delivering face-to-face events which take account of, oh, sorry, I'm moving too quickly, neurodivergence.

So, things like noisy busyness, light, without adversely impacting for other non-divergent individuals. So, I guess it's that, how do you have an experience of how you design the in-person events for both those in those contexts? I don't know if that's something you consider at Channel 4.

Eleanor Chipperfield

I think it's definitely something we consider. So, every event goes out with, you know, a line or a form where people can disclose if they have additional needs, and so that that would definitely be considered. And I think the option is for those in-person events, if they are going to be brash, if they are going to be crazy or disruptive, Channel 4 actually aims to be disruptive, is to give people an option to maybe join online or watch back later. I think you have to balance those needs as well of everyone being able to attend. Yeah, so it is, it is hard, because when things are crazy and brash and busy, that is tough for people with neurodiversities.

Jennifer Sproul

Absolutely, certainly experience that myself, as well.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

It's really hard, I think, when you're looking at accessibility as a whole, not just looking at diversity. It's an area I worked in for many years. It's about baking it into the DNA of any organisation, so it may feel like you're having to overdeliver on accessibility. But can you provide, like Eleanor is saying, a quiet room where they can still see the event, but it's in a separate area, is there areas where it's easier for the individual to be able to leave if it does get too much for them without isolating them, and sort of leaving a big arrow to say, this person is very, very different to the rest of you. What we want to do is just make it feel like it's all part of the event. And I think that's what we're always trying to do. And obviously a huge shout out to My Clear Text, who are doing the human-generated captions today to make this accessible, but it's really important to not think of it as an afterthought or wait to be asked sometimes as well. And I think you know, Barry from Channel 4 who does your events is a wonderful advocate in accessibility, and I'm sure, BT, you've done various different things that happen.

But what I think the challenges in some of these accessible events, or making it accessible, is the cost and the budget, and I think internal comms come up against this as well with the cost of sometimes to implement some of these accessibility needs, there's always a cost or a budget or a reason as to potentially why. And I think something I get quite passionate about, and I talk about quite a lot is the fact that it's the moral element to this. So, are we saying we would rather you not be there? And we'd rather you not consume this? And we'd rather you not, because what about if we change this, and we did this whole session in sign language. How would that make you feel as an individual? And I think sometimes it's often about having the conversation, the uncomfortable conversations around disability or inclusion, and really just trying to challenge the process and think what would really happen if we did things a little bit differently. It's not really going to affect you if you don't need it, but the person who does need it, it changes it from a whole perspective of the cultural shift sometimes to feel like I've been included.

You thought about me, even just, Eleanor and Alyson, some of the wonderful things you've said about the passports and the way in which you communicate, the questions you ask. It's just feeling like you cared, you included me, and it wasn't an afterthought. So, I think they're just a little sprinkle died out of it. It's a tricky one to navigate.

Alyson Davis

I think it's brilliant, isn't it? Actually, I love somebody has put in the chat, know your audience. And that's so simple, isn't it? It's so, so simple. I think a lot of, you know, internal communications, we generally think about the kind of touchpoints, right? But I think when we go into events, you know, sensory considerations have got to be your absolute priority. I went to an event recently. We're really lucky at BT, we have this amazing tower in London, and we generally host quite a lot of colleague-related events there. We've actually sold it to a hotel company, so look forward to staying there soon, if you fancy the 34th floor in Central London. But we actually did, and, Ryan, you mentioned it, having a quiet room, so that you can, you know, reduce the noise and have headphone zones and quiet rooms.

You know, you limit attendance, you create those kinds of low-stimulus environments that some of our neurodiverse colleagues really need, and actually creating your event around those things instead of the traditional things actually really helps you shift again your mindset in the way that you're creating events. So, I think definitely think, know your audience. I love that. I think it's Azalea in the chat. Know your audience. That's definitely a mantra I will be taking away. But that's brilliant.

Jennifer Sproul

Love that. Thank you, Alyson, and it's so true. I mean, you know, we've done a lot of work at lolC too, when we think about our festival, it's one of those things when you go for that site visit, have those questions set with the venue, or whether that's internally. So, you don't get caught out afterwards or have that initial meeting with your AV team. So, are you checking? Do they have technology for hearing loops or for support, or when you're doing your stage design, just make sure it has a ramp. It shouldn't be something that comes after. And I think all those things in that briefing process. And also, it's something, it's been a real behaviour of doing large-scale events in my career for 25 plus years. That's been a behaviour change I've had to adopt over time, and I feel sad with myself that that's a behaviour change I've had to make, but I think that, you know, it's as you say, it's a journey that we're all on.

One of the things that's come up quite a lot in the chat, by the way, lots of people would like your toolkit. So that's yes, please, yes, please, yes, please. I've seen that a lot. And a lot of people are talking about they'd like a little bit more information about these passports, because you both mentioned that you have these passports, and someone's talking, for example, is, how do you get people to open up even with the anonymous option? So, you have a sort of a good amount of data to make a good change, and that, but I guess if you could both speak to how the passports work, Alyson, can I come to you first, and what you do with your passports, and how that works.

Alyson Davis

Yeah, and look, passports can be quite controversial as well, because there is an element, where do you make it contractual? Is it part of your contractual terms that you have this passport, or is it something like an informal conversation you have with your manager? So, your manager knows. I think, when you work in an organisation like BT, we've got 100,000 people who work for us, and internal mobility is a really key and strong factor. So, having that conversation with your first line manager and having a real understanding about how you handle situations and maybe flexibility, and the kind of stuff that we can provide is great for

manager one. But how does that actually translate when you move around an organisation? You've got to have the same difficult conversation with maybe two or three or four different managers. So recently, obviously, I mentioned earlier, we had in January this come back to work three days a week, and people were actually asking us, I have a passport, and I want it to be recognised because I need it to be something that I can use in this sort of conversation around not having to come to the office three days a week, because I've got X, Y, and Z. And that was, it was an argument which was put forward to us really strongly by our neurodiversion community and our Able To community because they really did want it recognised as part of their contractual terms. And we are still in that conversation currently, because is it contractual, is it not? Is it just a conversation? Why do I need to keep having the same conversation? And why should we make people have that same conversation?

It's so unbelievably frustrating. So, we do have passports, and again, I am more than happy to share the information. And, Jen, you can send this out when you send out some bits and bobs from the talk today. I'm more than happy to share kind of what that BT passport looks like and how we implement it, and how it's used, and how colleagues can interpret it, and how managers interpret it. So, it can give all of the participants today and your membership something to actually use as a bit of a toolkit. I'm more than happy to do that.

Jennifer Sproul

Sharing is wonderful. It makes such an impact. I don't know, is it something similar or different in the way that you approach the passports at Channel 4?

Eleanor Chipperfield

I'd say there were similar challenges as well, actually, not contractual at all. And I think it's a, we're much smaller, in fact, we're only just over a thousand people, so mobility isn't, people don't swap around so much, but there is still a little bit of movement, and the passports, there's a way that Giles, Ryan knows Giles probably as well, Giles is our workplace disability lead, when he implemented them when we helped with the comms, you know how there was an intention of how they're to be used, but then you can see, as you all know, people interpret, you know, the campaigns differently.

So, the passports are supposed to be shared and then have like quarterly check-ins to see if the adjustments still apply, and people put things in about how they best like to work, how they like to be managed. And again, about their, it doesn't really contain your liking of your, you say it's 2, 3, don't you, Alyson? Ours is called 60 40. So, the working pattern, that's another conversation as well. So, but they talk about the adjustments that people would need. And I think we're finding that again, we might need to do more comms out about how they're shared, because it's a little bit different, but ideally, it's meant to be the manager checks in quarterly with their employee to see if anything has changed.

Jennifer Sproul

That's brilliant. Thank you.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

I think there's a really good question if we've got time to go to it, that there's a question here around inclusive communication. So, thinking and considering emails, intranet stories, etc. How have the panel tackled providing these alternative formats when needed? For example, larger font, high contrast, audio and written formats, etc. Alyson.

Alyson Davis

Oh, I thought I was on mute. Sorry. Really quiet thinking. Oh, no, I said it earlier, right? We try to make sure that everything that we do from the outset has got an accessibility lens over the top of it. We were really lucky, actually at BT, to make sure that we align everything to the, is it the triple A standards?

So, you know, we have, we have a fantastic internal communications toolkit, which again, I'm more than happy to kind of help everyone and share it. You know, how we do it, how we do communications across BT is really important, and having that layer of our people networks supporting us to build and craft and create. And we have the most amazing inclusion team, who also support everything that we do and vice versa. But making sure that all of the right people are involved in the conversation and helping you shape and curate and craft, I think, is really important. You know, nobody is, we're not an island, right? There's a whole bunch of people to make communications right across these organisations, and I think we not only owe it to ourselves, but we owe it to the individuals and the communities that we serve to make sure we get it right for them.

Jennifer Sproul

Love that, Alyson. I think it's so true. It's a moral, ethical business, it's a responsibility. It just makes the world and everything for everybody that's in it a better place, and we all deserve to exist equally in this world. As we come to, we've got 10 minutes, but I thought we could perhaps end with a couple of quickfire sort of final questions, I guess, to get some practice and more tips, and I could already see lots of people have some of how to dash and say how helpful and how much the learnings and it. And it just shows you actually within this community, the more we can share with each other as well how we're tackling it, we will help each other in our own ripple effect. But I'll start with the first one, if you like, and perhaps I'll come to you first, Eleanor, if you like, as a sort of closing thing. What would be your quickfire practical tips if someone's at that beginning of that journey, and all the things that you've talked about that we could take away and implement today.

Eleanor Chipperfield

Well, I think it'd be speak to your usual networks. Alyson's mentioned this as well. So, our network for Purple, listen to them, run things past them, and then I'm sure we all have our little things that we really like to champion as well. So, my quickfire tip, which I champion in all my meetings, is just descriptive links. Make sure they are in place across your comms, across your intranet, in your emails, model the behaviour you want to see.

Jennifer Sproul

Brilliant. Thank you, Alyson. Can I come to you with the same question, and I'll pass back to Ryan.

Alyson Davis

Yeah, no, absolutely. Couple from me. Run everything through an accessibility checker before publishing. It's a real basic. Caption, transcribe videos, absolutely. That's a non-negotiable for us. Use employee stories from diverse backgrounds and make inclusion real, not abstract in any way, shape or form, and visuals, make sure visuals design content that works for dyslexia, colour blindness, neurodiversity, so clean layouts, high contrast, you know, no info-dense walls of text that I know we're all guilty of from time to time. But yeah, they're probably my top three.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Okay. So, another quickfire round. So, Eleanor, to you first, common pitfalls to avoid.

Eleanor Chipperfield

Oh, it is text rasterised as an image, which we've all seen flyers emailed round, and no other information in the body copy, sort of trying to find them and help add some info or ask people to send those out. So, pitfalls would be text as image with no information for a screen reader to access.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Amazing. And, Alyson, same question to you, common pitfall to avoid.

Alyson Davis

I probably have two really quick ones. So, assuming that no complaints means no problems. I think sometimes we're guilty of thinking silence equals success, and people with access needs often are the least likely people to speak up, so make sure you get loads of feedback and watching, keeping a close eye on your behavioural data. I think it's really important. I think we mentioned visual accessibility as well, but for me, because we work in a large organisation, it's not equipping our comms teams with the right tools to do their job. So, assuming comms professionals just know how to be accessible and inclusive, I think is a mistake. And I think the way we can avoid it is by providing really good training, accessibility checklists, ongoing support, having a brilliant inclusivity team to support that. Accessibility is a skill; it's not just goodwill.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

Totally amazing, great tips from both, and also utilising any of the programs you have. So, I know someone in the chat talked about, you've got, obviously the accessibility checks you can do on some of the Microsoft software packages as well. And I know obviously on Apple as well, those are the same products on all of them. We're not going to give one shout out to any place. All software packages, I'm sure, have accessibility options as well, but some great bits and pieces there. I mean, it's so fruitful to hear, I think, a common denominator here, which I think is quite a lovely thing, Jen, and I don't know if you agree on this, is that there's an element sometimes of ignorance, and if it doesn't affect us, we don't know, and we shouldn't really not finger point or point fingers or blame culture. It's about an opportunity to learn, grow, and start the journey. If it isn't something we've done. If it's something you keep doing, then I agree there is sometimes a bit of an option where we can say, come on, this is not good enough, but I do think there's an option sometimes for us to take stock as

humans to say, they've not affected us, we don't know, and that's just ignorance sometimes. And we have to just remember that, like Alyson, you're saying, and, Eleanor, you've mentioned training, allowing people to go and get the training that's needed and allowing people to have that space to further develop. And so, it's everyone's responsibility, not just those that need it.

Jennifer Sproul

Absolutely, couldn't agree more. And I think it's okay, you know, I can say I'm getting, you know, been around a while, and the things that I'm aware of now in society that I wasn't aware of 20 years ago when I started my career, it's okay, you know, I'm not perfect, I'm a human that didn't know or made mistakes or made an assumption, many assumptions in my life that I didn't row, test or didn't check. And that's okay, but as I learn, and I always say, life's about just progress, it's not about finishing it or being perfect, as long as you're making progress. And I think one of the things that I've learned greatly in my recent use is just to listen a lot, so you can seek to understand, and then you can find the solution and try and, and jobs like you have the amazing Valuable 500 that probably your organisations are members of and have an awful lot of resources and support that can help you. So do reach out to those as well. We will, of course, share this video, but also IoC, we want to support you in providing you that training and that support. So, we will, thank you to our panellists, share this and whatever, but we also now offer periodically free accessibility training for all members of the IoC, and I can see our trainer has been answering some questions on the sidebar as well, Diana. So, we'll get some more of that scheduled in, because I think it's really important, as well as an institute, that we support you with those free things to think about those fundamental standards that we should build in that Eleanor and Alyson have described so eloquently into our communication.

So, we will make sure, when we follow up with this, to send you the recording, the wonderful things that Alyson has already agreed to share as well. We've always got case studies, journeys. I've just read an article as well about that we're producing about how we think about visible differences and how that's been made to feel, and storytelling is so powerful. We'll let you know about the next round of accessibility training and resources and things like that. But so, we'll make sure we can keep supporting you best as we can. I didn't, Ryan, if there's anything you wanted to leave as a sentiment.

Ryan Curtis-Johnson

No, just that it's great to have such fruitful conversations like this. I guess, for us, connection at the Valuable 500, internal comms is embedded in every organisation. I've always been a great advocate for internal comms that it needs to be more prioritised within organisations, and it's lovely to see that, and mirrored with external comms as well. They need to sit very closely together and be talking. We're really excited at Valuable 500 as we go to host our Sync 25 event, the first accountability summit which we hosted in Tokyo on the 3rd and 4th of December. The day is important because it's International Day of Persons with Disability, and we want to bring our Valuable 500 partners and companies together to be accountable again, not finger pointing, not telling off, but to say, this is what we're doing, and as a group, and throughout our kind of synchronised collective actions, we can drive change and end disability exclusion. So yeah, it's just to continue engaging, continue doing, listening to the great tips that everyone's doing.

But thank you, Jen, for having us, and to our speakers as well, and for sharing such great insight. It's so nice to hear saying, we can't really shout this from the rooftop sometimes and bang this further when there's so much noise happening in the world that often leaves people feeling quite excluded.

Jennifer Sproul

Brilliant, just to share that, and thank you all for taking the time to listen and thank you all for engaging so much in the chat and sharing as well with your experiences with each other, because, you know, we're a community that's trying to do good things, and so that pays to it. But, Alyson, a massive thank you for giving up your time and sharing all of those tips today, you've been invaluable, and I have learned things that I didn't even know today, and I'm going to take those away with me. So, thank you so much, Eleanor, thank you so much, Alyson, wonderful as always, Ryan, to be working with you and the Valuable 500, and we will follow up and we'll hopefully tune in and keep this conversation going, and keep supporting each other on this journey. Thank you, everybody.

Eleanor Chipperfield

Thanks, thanks for having me.