



Transcript for S15, E2 – Exploring the polymorphic organisation with Perry Timms

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 Barnard (1:01)

Hello and welcome to another 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 thrilled to invite back onto the podcast a guest who last came and chatted with us in mid late 2023, Perry Timms. Perry has been working in the space of business change and performance for the over three decades and he's specifically focused on HR and organisational development. I want to highlight that because Perry is actually going to come and talk to us at our Leaders Forum Designing the Future of Internal Communication in London on February 26th and I'm really really excited about what he has been doing in the last couple of years and what he's been focusing on but just to give you a little bit more background and this will all go into the show notes if you've not come across him he's really worth following on sub stack and there will be a link to his sub stack in the show notes. Perry has ranked number one in HR's most influential thinkers 2022 that was his fifth inclusion in that list and he's now in the HR most influential hall of fame. He has been a guest professor four times. He's a two times TEDx speaker, three times author, four times engagement 101 global influencer, plus 2024's global people and culture icon. He's done a lot of work with the CIPD. He's a fellow of the RSA and in 2024 he was honoured with a lifetime achievement award for his work in self-managed democratic organisations. Hence this conversation.

I think it's fair to say that the amount of disruption facing organisations now is off the chart and I think it's also now fair to say that we are not going back to any semblance of normal and so without further ado, I want to introduce the conversation and topic of polymorphic organisations. But before we go into that, I want to welcome Perry and Perry, welcome.



Perry Timms (03:38)

Thank you. Glad to be here.

Cat Barnard (03:41)

I would love it if you could give our listeners a bit of background about the kind of work that you have been doing for the last 10 plus years and what led you to come up with the concept of the polymorphic organisation.

Perry Timms (03:55)

Thank you, Cat. Great place to start to agree because I think everything has a backstory, doesn't it? I mean, I think we tend to see things that arrive and kind of go, oh, that's interesting. And then we kind of think, yeah, but where does it start? Where's the genesis of it? So I definitely do that. So for the last 10 years, definitely been focused on the evolution of the HR and people profession for sure. Having been in it for over 20 years. So out of that 30 years working in change, 20 of it has been within the HR kind of jurisdiction, mainly on the learning and change and all design side, as you said, that was kind of where I started, but it was a parallel run for me because I was also probably 10 years into exploring organisations that were a bit alternative, a bit unorthodox and often self-managed. So they were very flat, non-hierarchical. And so I was really fascinated by those. And I kind of thought, ooh, here comes the change. This is what it's likely to shift into. And then you put on top of that organisations that focus very strongly on agile and sort of work in that really dynamic way. And then you get organisations who take a very product-based approach to the work they do so that they don't just look at it just doing policy-led, operational, bureaucratic stuff, but actually products they build that people can create value from. I was kind of thinking, hey, here we go. And it didn't happen in that sort of timeframe. Lots of things came along, and I think 2016 was a kind of big year, wasn't it? So 10 years ago, if we look at the advent of Brexit and Trump, I think that kind of rewrote it all.

And that's why it probably didn't take shape because we all shrunk and withdrew and went what's going on here? but anyway not sort of dissuade by that a few years ago I've got a real bug about the fact that the operating model for HR hadn't been kind of changed in about 25 years I'm thinking wow all this change and we're still doing this three-legged pronged thing with HR business partners shared service and Center of excellence. Nobody really knows what they mean anyway, so I had a go at creating a new operating model for HR. I was thinking I should give something back and so I came up with this concept of HR 3.0 which is kind linked to web 3.0 and so on and it started to get some traction and I wrote a book about it that was published last year but that wasn't where I wanted to stop because you can fix HR but if it's working in a system where organisations are still stuck in traditional



hierarchical lumbering bureaucratic power crazy games what's the point of having heroic HR that just bounces off it all the time. So I started to explore a bit further and literally fused everything I'd learned in the last 20 plus years into the concept I'm now exploring called a polymorphic organisation. So that's the kind of backstory of where the last 10 years have kind of been and gone and got me to. And it's only in the last six or eight months that I've really started to flex, I suppose, into this polymorphic concept. So can talk to you about that in a second if you want.

Cat Barnard (06:44)

As you say, the Genesis, I love that, the Genesis, the origin is your deep interest in people and performance and how with the right environmental conditions and people can achieve remarkable things and there doesn't need to be a hierarchy or a command and control centralised infrastructure if you empower people, if you trust people and you communicate clearly with them in a reciprocal way, you will yield exceptional results.

Perry Timms (07:24)

Yep, I'd agree with that. Because I think the third P I'd introduce into that is purpose. It's like, what's the point of it all, both in an organisational sense, in a functional sense, in a team sense, and in a situational sense. Because often we don't compute that. We don't think, what am I here for? What's it all about? And sometimes that's, what's it all about right now, right in front of me, as well as the big noble vision of whatever you want to achieve ad infinitum, right? So that's the stories that we write and tell and use for what's the point of it all.

So think there's definitely that. And I found that more organisations that have a strongly felt and applied sense of purpose didn't need lots and lots of mechanical interventions and punitive policies and seductive reward mechanisms because people are like, I'm here because I want to be. I want to be my best self. I want to do my best work in pursuit of that purpose and the various permutations of it. And of course, a lot of that manifests in then what we could call the internal comms kind of agenda, **because it's the stories that weave it all together, that make it relevant, that bring it to life, that help you deal with change and uncertainty and contradiction and so on.** So the P edition on purpose is absolutely what I found. Those self-managed organisations were powered by purpose and didn't need as much bureaucracy to get done what they needed to get done. They felt more efficient, more optimal, more human.



Cat Barnard (08:45)

And we definitely, and I'm going to refer to you Jen in a sec, but we've definitely seen that in some of the IC index research haven't we, that people are hindered when they don't have a clear message around how their specific scope of work feeds into the bigger picture. I can't remember exactly what it is, I know Jen you'll be able to...

Jennifer Sproul (09:10)

Yeah, I mean fundamentally what the IC index shows us year after year on that that sense of things it's not the process that people are necessarily looking into and how do I fix the mechanics and I don't get why I'm doing this I don't understand my role in it so they might believe we can always see strategy belief up there could be a lot higher but it's the higher one but when it comes down to what's my role don't quite understand that, don't see how I fit. But also as well when we look at things around what breaks down that relationship or where that comes from is they just don't feel that the humanity is reflected in that dialogue. So it's that piece around, well, you don't understand my context or my position, and if you explained it and contextualised that and brought it back to something of meaning and **humanity and connection, I might feel more aligned, but also more empowered and more motivated. So what we see in the IC index, I think, every year is not a mechanical problem, but a visionary problem.**

Perry Timms (10:17)

Completely agree. Almost like the alignment between what's the story of me and the story of it that I'm part of. And that sort of transcends all those strategy things and the levers that we pull and the kind of documents we produce because that's a felt thing. That's a sensation inside you that says, I belong to something that's bigger than I am. And that's the driver. And when it's not there, good grief, it can go anywhere, but it needs somewhere to go. So if you haven't got the stories to channel it, then it disperses or evaporates. I can see why that feature so highly on your index.

Jennifer Sproul (10:49)

Yeah, it'd be great to understand what it feels like with that, the impersonal nature of work. It's not personal anymore. And sometimes it's very in that sense. And I think what you were just saying, I'd love to understand more about this concept, but also this, what you were saying earlier about how you can transform the HR operating model. But if the organisation is not willing to transform, then we've got misaligned transformation, if that's even a thing I could say in a word where we just need human language.



And I think that when we're looking at the future of internal communication and where that that profession goes towards that sense of connection and conversation and humanity and clarity and how actually if we don't dial up those pieces, that's the things that are big of risk to business. But then there's a misalignment between we want to transform and the organisation doesn't want to change the way that it's doing something. And I think that that's very felt by probably many listeners. So I guess, can you tell us a little bit more about this this polymorphic organisation and what it is and why do you think it's needed right now?

Perry Timms (11:51)

Sure. Yeah. I mean, it's interesting that you kind of look back before you look forward, don't you? So the word polymorphic comes from Greek and it means many forms. So polymanymorphay forms. And so it talks about organisations then as having many forms, which we know they do, but we try and convince ourselves that they don't. We try and create standard operating procedures and formal hierarchies and lines of reporting.

And consistency and certainty and predictability when the world kind of goes well good luck with that because I'm not letting you play that game at all. Maybe in an industrial era when you were trying to tame the potential fine but now that's not what the world needs in any shape or form. So I think that's why Polymorphic was interesting for me because where it came from was me thinking about organisations are not a single entity anymore. They're not one organisation, they're two. They're the future and the legacy.

Moving between them regularly. We talk about transformation programs like they run alongside the current operation then all of a sudden they're ready and they get supplanted and on top and it becomes this new norm that Cat open this podcast with that's just not how it works anymore that kind of episodic change program of a start middle and end and a different sort of way of operating. Just doesn't compute anymore. So it feels like we are building the future while we're still operating the legacy. So we might as well admit that's why we're so busy. That's why we're potentially confusing because we've got that two energies kind of going on at the same time, the future being built at the same time as running the legacy. And we saw it even in the energy sector, right? So if you go back to the energy sector about 15 years ago, they deliberately said, let's create renewables and legacy and keep them separate until one then dominates over the other. So they actually split their own atoms.

It's sort of like that's going on everywhere now, but it's not, you can't split it out. It's intertwined so much that that's why it's, I think, very difficult for leaders and teams to understand what's going on right now. What's my priority? The thing I asked a group of HR directors about eight months ago was if I could wave a magic wand, what would your wish be? Don't say unlimited finance because I can't do that. And they just said.



I just need a clear sense of priority because there's just too much clutter and I don't know where to go and where to start. Now, if you ask me if we go back to an internal comms kind of perspective, internal comms is trying to write the stories from that future and legacy perspective to make it less confusing. But even that is an impossible ask. It almost feels like we've got a rate in real time. What's going on right now? Where are we headed? Where are we coming from? And how do we kind of just tabulate all of those three stories into one kind of almanac of things?

So **Polymorphic** is trying to address that in particular as its starting point, **many forms because of running two organisations at the same time**. And it comes from object-oriented design in technology, which is not a new piece of programming. It says an object can take on different forms depending on the data it receives. And that's what's going on in organisations at the moment. Is my market hot or dry? Do I have to go into adjacent markets? Do I contract or expand?

Do I use technology to replace or augment? We've got all of these kinds of things coming in at the moment. And what we haven't got is enough data to act upon in a way that we can change our shape according to what that is telling us. So if anything is more important than information at the moment, I don't know what is because that's what it's all about. And what does internal comms thrive on and use information? So that's the kind of context, I suppose, for a polymorphic organisations conceptual birth kind of came from.

Jennifer Sproul (15:28)

Yeah, so fascinating. And I think that probably many listeners are going, yeah, I feel that I feel like I'm trying to communicate. And it's interesting when you were talking, you referenced then what you had in the conversation with HR leaders who said, I just want priorities. So I was in some conversations, actually talking about change specifically with internal comms leaders. It's like in our organisation, it's no longer change. We can't keep talking about change. is just what is done. But is that the feeling of the recipient? And now it's more about are people just able to adapt rather than there's an expectation they have to adapt. But you know, we need to get them there quickly and fastly. we've got so many conflicting narratives. And I think that that confusion ensues in so many ways. And I think with also internal communication right now, **we're in this kind of situation where we need to digitally transform, but also be human**. What does that mean?

How do you those two things morphed together in a way that benefits the business and dialing the right thing into the right place? And I think that that's interesting. I wonder as you think about that, that polymorphic piece and where you are right now, is there one particular thing that you're looking at going, well, do we just need to ditch the legacy and how do we pull those narratives, I guess, into something that's cohesive. Are you seeing like a path towards that or are just in this continuum of confusion?



Perry Timms (16:53)

Yeah, I think we are craving stability because there's just so much instability and so therefore sometimes we look back and go well it was more stable then so let's go back then. Not necessarily right because the conditions of then are not the conditions of now. However, you can honour what held you safe there and will continually hold you safe into the future and it's those things you've got to look for. So I think my interest in self managed organisations was that they kind of abandon and get rid of the hierarchy and all those other conventional things. And I was thinking, yay, this is the liberating force. Ignoring the fact that some of that, if you get rid of it, it creates more chaos, more uncertainty, and more challenges than you could have perceived at the start of it. So the sense I've got now is you need to know what you need to bank and hold on to and create stability or as a platform to build on. And then you can go into the areas where you can experiment and probe and then start to adapt.

What sits on top of that and that won't always be the same because you cannot sort of assume that yeah we've got these five functional things we want to keep in a hierarchy, but the other nine we can change. Well that'll work for now But you've got to give yourself a marker in the future to go is that still the case or do we need to then morph some of this stable stuff to keep it adaptive and timely and relevant. So I think that's where it gets really confusing because then people go my god. It's just constant chaos. It's like no, it's not it's responding to what's out there in a way that makes sense rather than just being dogmatic about what you hold onto and what you let go of. I think that's the really important stuff and the data and the information and the stories is the only way to help you tabulate that because you can't rely on models and theories anymore because they're often redundant yet we think they're going to work. So yeah, all of that.

Cat Barnard (18:37)

As you were talking and I don't know whether I'm going off on one, but that just struck me as feng shui for business.

Perry Timms (18:42)

Yes, is Feng Shui totally is. Yeah, align the energies. Yeah, totally is that so I talk about things like that and Qigong, you know, the Chinese ancient art of healing that sits at the heart of Tai Chi. I kind of think, there's a lot in that that actually we need to bring into the world of business. That's not some kind of weird, wacky tree hugging thing. That's just saying this stuff is more complex than models and theories we know of can help us compute. We need a little bit of adjacent thinking on alternatives and different ways to kind of just stretch our minds a bit into the right spaces. So you're right Feng Shui for organisation is kind of exactly what it is.



Dominic Walters (19:18)

Well Perry, when you were talking and describing some organisations, was reading recently about the European car industry, which is a fascinating case taken on its own, but as you'll know far better than me, it was interesting that for a while I think everyone's thought there's a linear process here. We're moving from one power pace to the next. We're going from internal combustion to EVs. And actually no, we're not because the market's not quite there and European regulations are changing, maybe even the British regulations are changing. So now actually we're going to be doing a bit of internal combustion and we're going to use cars that we design for EVs as in telecombustion cars. It's a complete mess. I was reading this thinking how on earth do you get some sort of narrative through this? And I think picking up what you're saying in that sort of situation and if you're listening from the European car industry this is free advice you're getting here I think, it's about focusing on what is stable and I think what we can focus on when it comes to what is stable is people's requirements, their relationships, who they can trust, who they can ask questions to, who they can go and throw their hands up in the air and say for goodness sake it's all going wrong. I think that's what came through very clearly and what you were just saying there. It's about giving that stability around relationships. So that then takes us to who's responsible for doing that and I suspect probably the simple answer is everybody is but I imagine that leaders have a particular role to play in that. I think I've heard this phrase this concept of leaderful is that right?

Perry Timms (20:38)

Mm-hmm. Yeah, it is. Yeah.

Dominic Walters (20:40)

It would good to know bit more about that because I guess that would shed some light into the role of leaders and how they can create that emotional relationship stability.

Perry Timms (20:47)

Absolutely that. mean, you're so right to point that out. So I think when I look to my self-managed kind of exploration, that was almost like the abandonment of management in favour of collective sort of decision-making and individual accountability that's shared and more public. And so you almost have like a communal sense of how you get regulated. What I've now come to realise is that you don't just abandon managers. You think about leading, particularly leading as a different concept and you talk about it as a space. Leadership is a space. That's what is calling people in to take accountability, decisiveness, whatever it might



be. And that does not just exist by position, role, experience, dominance, ego, whatever. That is, what is it calling us to lead into and who's best to do that? Because there are times when people kind of look to each other and go, don't know what to do here. And somebody says, I think I do. I'm going to try it out.

And so then people go, well, I'll go with you then if you're brave enough to do that. So I think that still applies, right? That relational stuff of somebody has bravery, conceptualisation, creativity, pioneering spirit, whatever it is. I'm with you, but I'm not that person. **I'll be the second person to dance, not the first person to dance. And that's what leaderful is about. It's an invitation rather than an expectation based on role, title, experience and privilege.** But it still needs to happen. So that's when we can change the dynamic of it a little bit. And **Joseph Raylin is the guy who coined the phrase, leaderful, pretty much sort of said that, that it is about a space and it is about people accepting that role with a genuine intent to sort something out or create something then people kind of come and follow it.** I think if we look at social movements in the past and so on, that's not been somebody saying, well, I've got a privilege. I'm just going to exercise that. It's somebody saying, I'm cool to that.

I want to hold that space and bring people with me. I think we need more of that. Now, again, what's important there is the story, the narrative, the connections that people make to it. So if you want to be part of a leaderful enterprise, then you better get good at telling the story of why you're doing it, because otherwise nobody's going to come with you. **And that's where, again, internal comms has an enormous role to play, because you can create the sense of what that story is for somebody to go, I'll take that. I'll run with that. I'll lead with that.**

And I think that's what we're starting to see a lot more of, partly because who on earth has the capability to lead right now? Because we're facing stuff we've never faced before. Nobody's got the experience or the strife. We're making it up as we're going along. We might as well admit we're all idiots when it comes to leading, and therefore we need a bit more collective sharing to create that ethos and essence. So I think we've got to change the superstructure that currently has leaders sat in those roles being expected to lead. And I think we need to get rid of that and say to people, there's a space, we've got to solve this problem. I've got the heart for it. Who wants to join me? Bang, off we go and make things happen. That feels much more likely to work than somebody who's just got 15 years of sales experience. Who cares? That's not relevant now anyway.

Dominic Walters (23:51)

I guess when you were describing that I was thinking how do we make sure that the right and inverted commas people are dominating the story because we talked about how social movements work and of course we can talk about social movements where someone's been charismatic and taking people in perhaps the wrong direction or at least a direction most of



us wouldn't agree in. So how do we make sure that it's the right people who have that sort of dominance in organisations, the right stories if you like, that people are sharing?

Perry Timms (24:16)

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I mean, it sounds a bit too easy to say it, but the system needs to almost have its own regulation so that if people are trying to abuse power, that's noticed, called out and doesn't happen. But let's face it, it does now. So people can play the system now to abuse that power, to cover things up, to create mystery and misdirection and succeed. And it's almost like, well, that's not an individual's cleverness, that's the system not catching it, not calling it out, not creating the opportunity to spot that and course correct on that one. So if people say, surely that's worse than now, it's like, I don't think it is at all. I think you're kidding yourself if you think now is optimum leadership conditions because it's not. So we've got to bust that myth and we've got to experiment and try how we build a system that catches the right stuff, the right people, the right intent, the right outcomes and that that's more likely to be regulated by the many than the few.

Cat Barnard (25:08)

Sorry, just to jump in there, that really chimes with, Megan Wrights and John Higgins. Perry, we spoke with them last year about activism and when you were just describing that, I thinking about the Brewdog debacle.

Perry Timms (25:26)

Yep. yeah, classic case.

Cat Barnard (25:27)

It's a really classic case in which their former chief exec lauded that the business had a great culture, that it was, doing all of the right things and so on. But the employees came out and spoke out against him to an extent that the business was actually stripped of its B Corp status, if I'm not mistaken. So I think there's a really interesting piece going on, isn't there? I'm not entirely sure how activism will manifest in 2026, whether people are so anxious about job security and income stability now that will suppress how they feel about bad leaders. But equally there is a lot of evidence to show that the system does self correct. I mean the Apple letter when Tim Cook allegedly wrote to employees in 21 or 22 to say everyone back to the office now and they all said no not happening.



Jennifer Sproul (26:39)

I pick up on that as well, I think what's interesting on that activism point when we've seen as well is that where is that accident? What emotion or feeling is so deep rooted and most collectively shared by the working population and I think that when we've looked at it at the moment that focus has been very much about mental health. What are you doing to me? How are you breaking me as a human being and how are you treating me as a human being? And going back to your point what I was thinking as you were talking as well about the genesis part so if you look at the genesis perhaps of HR but also of internal communication was all on the point of employee relations. It was all on the point of welfare. It was also for IOLC, I believe in the original days was our founding members were all parts of the social clubs. We're all looking at how they can build connection. But it was also about post-World War II Britain in our founding time, about creating a vision and a hope for the future. And I feel we are on a real sticky wicket on those two paths of our genesis that perhaps have lost their way by digital process management.

Dominic Walters (27:50)

I think what's interesting now is we've always had this debate in internal comms about do we serve the organisation or the people that work in the organisation? And it's constantly a source of tension, it has been. And I think just from what you were saying, Perry, obviously I'll pass over to you in a second, but it sounds like we're saying actually there's both. You actually serve the organisation by giving people the right stories and the environment in which they can share those stories and the way they can test things and so on. I hadn't really seen it quite in those terms before and I think this conversation helped me see that.

Perry Timms (28:20)

So I think the answer again might sound a bit too e, but I think it is a link to polymorphism because it does depend on the data it receives. So therefore, what we need to look at is if we are going to change the dynamic of what power means or decision making or whatever it is, because we recognise it's fragile now or it's broken now, whatever it is, we've got to think about an alternative and we've got to ask questions and get data to things that we haven't used before.

So there's a fantastic blog post out by John Sumser about recruitment saying often the gap in data is data itself. It's telling you there are things you don't know, but you could know and they will help you make a better decision. So I think this is a classic example where we say, look, we've over-indexed on hours of work and productivity measures and they haven't moved the needle. So therefore what we missing out on? It's almost like, how do people feel about it? yeah, how do we measure that? Well, now we've got tools that can. We can get real time sentiment on exactly how people feel.



about the motivation towards the organisation's purpose, their relationships with people. We can get all that insight and go, this is what's going wrong, let's correct that. And when we talk about how do we correct that, we don't use traditional methods to correct that. That's not a program, that's dialogue, that's invitations, that's experiments and so on. So I think we're in a position now where we're all scared about all the AI use and data intrusion and kind Panopticon type stuff. Actually we should reclaim that and go, what can we get it to tell us about things we don't know that we should know that will help us do this right in the future? Those are the kind of questions that I think when you put them to value in a business and they go, what we're missing out on that? Wow, press go. How do we make that happen? People are looking for as many straight lines to things like profit and certainty as possible. And if we can use this as an opportunity to persuade them, but we're still going to get a noble outcome ourselves, who cares? Do it. That's the kind of thing I'm thinking.

We now have an opportunity to do. So maybe the IoIC's call now is to do a bit of its own polymorphism and think, what should we be here for? And what can we do about the data and information we have and we can get that can create a different form of relevance for us? So that's the kind of invitation I want people to have with polymorphism, not more of the same plus AI, but fundamentally changing how we structure the nature and the flow of work. We have divisions at the minute that do corporate function.

We don't have a space where people can come to and say I'm pissed off. I'm annoyed I don't know what to do who can help me. What can we do about it? We'll create a space for that then. But create a space for all sorts of other inventive things to you know dismantle the sort of the boundaries that hold you from doing great things and create spaces that cut across them You never know what might happen. So those I think in the invitations. We've got the opportunity to create now.

Dominic Walters (31:02)

I just want to pick up on one thing I'll pass back to Cat. Go back to the whole cast about leaderful as well. I think how that fits in, as I understand it then, is we're saying we all have to take responsibility for leading, not only ourselves, but are part of the organisation and making those connections and having those conversations. So whereas in the past we've spent a lot of time giving leaders communication skills and we still need to do that, it's looking now we say actually we should be giving people across the organisation the confidence and the skills, the tools and techniques to ask questions and the environment in which that's encouraged and that's a massive opportunity for internal communication. It has to be, it really does.



Perry Timms (31:35)

Yeah, I totally agree that creates a sense of hive mind and aliveness that is probably missing at the moment when I go to an organisation to consult. Yes I get the top team I get the HR team or whatever I like to talk to what I call the real people and just say what's it like for you? What's going on for you? Tell me about things I'll get so much power from those stories I can play back in and say, know, you think this is your culture. I've been told this is it and they're like really? What's that? Then it's like well, you're looking at the reports. I'm talking to your own people. So there's something in that. IoIC could become this amazing evangelizer for the brilliance that people have in their minds to take an organisation forward in a way that they've not done before. So you stop being broadcast and you become playback in feedback loops. That's what you become. I'd say that's a really compelling case for relevance now.

Dominic Walters (32:25)

This whole thing about being able to listen and encourage people to and to open their skills around that I think. And shifting the whole way, we go back to the point you made earlier about using knowledge, sharing knowledge actively, putting things in different contexts. Yeah, there's a lot of opportunity, there is.

Perry Timms (33:38)

Yeah, yeah, totally. Thank you.

Cat Barnard (32:39)

God, we have covered so much ground and I should imagine that there's more than a couple of listeners out there who are feeling slightly daunted by the enormity because it is, fundamentally, it's nothing short of paradigm shift and it has to be. Otherwise we are going to continue to perpetuate the brokenness of the systems that we're operating within right now. So I wanted us to have this conversation to introduce the concept and I don't doubt that we'll need to get you back Perry to come and talk more with us as the months progress but if I was going to try and conclude this episode one to three things that internal communication could do right now to move the needle on the record. What would you say?



Perry Timms (33:34)

Yeah, I think you can start to talk and tell stories not about functions or divisions or even individuals, but the spaces where things get done in your organisation. Innovation, consolidation, whatever it might be, right? So you can start to name things that don't really exist, but people go, yeah, that's not a sign of function or that's not a few individuals who've come together as a project. We created a space to do that, didn't we? Because I think you can give credence and relevance then to more of that happening. So I think **if you can name stories that create spaces, I think that will work in your favour.** So that's nothing but perhaps just a reconfiguration of how you present things. That's one thing I would talk about. I think the other realisation I've got is organisations can only morph dependent on the strength of the stories and the data that it receives. **So I think if I'm in internal comms now, I'm going where's the real hotspots? I wear loads of things are happening, but also where are the quiet things where nothing's going on by the looks of it, but could be. And I'd use those as almost like the bookends of which to explore how you can bring those things together through the stories and the data that you can get from quiet things that are ticking over quite nicely, but could do a lot more.** And the hotspots where everybody's focusing, but what's really going on there. I kind of want to do that and sort of be a bit more of a decipherer and a kind of coder for that. But I think the real thing for me is **organisations are craving coherence.** They haven't got coherent stories that tell people what's going on now, what's going on next week and what's going on the week after that. Just play that. Be the almost like the radio channel that they get their fix from on what the weather's like and what the roads are like. I think it's almost that. Give them a commentary on now that helps them go, I don't have to go searching for that. I've got it.

I can stabilise now and just work on what I'm working on and then I'll tune in next week and find out what things are going on. Because I think that tempo is how it's going to be. So those are the three things I'd say, I hope they feel practical enough.

Cat Barnard (35:35)

They do for me, I'll just check in with Dom and Jen, but for me, what I think is so wonderful about those things is that they're deeply human. They're not anything that any sophisticated Silicon Valley algorithm is gonna be able to automate anytime soon. And the one thing that is absolutely clear is that anything that can be automated is going to get automated and therefore we need to be looking for kind the diamonds in the dirt and the ways in which we as human beings can distinctly add value and make an impact. I think this has been an invaluable episode. Jen, Dom, **I don't know whether you have anything to add.**



Jennifer Sproul (36.23)

Yeah, totally agree. You know when you're having that episode where your brain is just kind of slowly ticking and thinking about it and what does that all mean with all the other conversations that you have as well? And I think there's something, I agree with all of that, I think that's a beautiful way to think about something so practical, right? Where storytellers find newer stories or new ways of presenting a story, right? That is perhaps feels a bit more valuable or spaciousness or insightful than performative in terms of we're ticking a goal of our values are not that I'm not trying to describe, so that isn't important, but it's that blend of it.

But I think it's also the piece around that you've just said as well about the radio channel is that look, the formation of internal communication and we say it in our purpose as well as people just need to feel informed, need to clearly informed. And whether that's good, bad or ugly or indifferent people, they just want informity and honesty. Doesn't need to feel like something that's created. And yes, you could automate something, but actually digging in and investigating what is new weekly, what is real weekly, and critically discerning that for your audience. AI can't be in every meeting and discerning that. You need to bring that sense of that journalistic perhaps skill as well that comes to that. And I think there's something super powerful in that when everything feels where everything feels sort of far away from us, perhaps, or just don't feel connected to it. And so I think that those are really powerful places where we can become those facilitators, those digesters, that is those enablers of something that roots into our genesis of storytelling and purpose, perhaps. Dom, I'm gonna throw it to you now before I stop waffling, my brain is still turning.

Dominic Walters (33:09)

I think it's about our manifesto as communicators and I think we've outlined our manifesto is we've got a real strong purpose to play and it's a purpose and this connection, the conversation, alignment. We'll be talking the other day about this new phrase about orchestrating, but I there's something we should be doing around that as well. Getting people together to understand what's going on. However, that doesn't mean we're abandoning our traditional skills because you've still got to get information across in the right way. You've still got to position stuff. You're still going to ask the right sort of questions. Maybe it takes away some of our, as a professional on channels from the past, that may not be a bad thing, but it's much more about how do we connect with people. So think you've laid out a manifesto for us. There is, through all this chaos, there is a path forward for communicators to do something worthwhile, I think. Give us our purpose that you talked about earlier.



Perry Timms (39:00)

Lovely, lovely. Yeah, there is. I think from both of you, I've just written down from sludge to soul, because I think we're AI sludge all over the place. You can put the soul back into what this is all about. And wow, how cool is that? So yeah, thank you for that.

Cat Barnard (39:15)

Perry, thank you so, so much. For those of you listeners who are UK based, it's not too late, grab a ticket to come and hear Perry close the Designing the Future of Internal Communication Leaders Forum in a couple of weeks time. And Perry, in the meantime, please say that you will come back at some point and chat further with us. Amazing.

Perry Timms (39:39)

Yeah, love to. Yeah, you try and stop me. So thanks very much everybody. I really enjoyed that.

Cat Barnard (39:44)

Thank you so much.

Jennifer Sproul (39:44)

Thanks Perry

Cat Barnard (39:44)

Thank you so much.