Transcript for S10 Bonus Episode Exploring the IC Index with Susanna Holten

Jen Sproul (00:42)

Hello, everybody, and welcome to another episode of the Future of Internal Communication Podcast. I'm Jen Sproul, and as always, joined by my co-hosts, Dominic Walters and Cat Barnard. And today is a really exciting recording because we're going to be talking about one of my major passion projects at my time at the IoIC, which is the IC Index and the 2024 edition.

We're joined today by Susanna Halton from Ipsos Karian and Box. And Susanna is a principal consultant at Ipsos Karian and Box, alongside leading a team of internal communication and behaviour change consultants. She's been driving the IKMB internal communication audit offering over the past two years, and she supports a broad range of clients in the IC research and strategic advisory space. And she leads on the work with us on the annual IC Index report. And I think, Susanna, this is our second edition. So we have been working together for - I'm trying to think when we actually started this initial journey - I think it was January 2023? So we're kind of coming along now for a good year and a half and the problem is whenever we get together for project teams, we constantly bounce and then I distract people. So Susanna's very used to me over these years.

Susanna, welcome and lovely to be here, of course, talking about the IC Index. So to kick us off and talking about this year's report, firstly, let's talk about what different approach we took this year to the research. And I think if you could tell us about why we focused on trust, I guess.

Susanna Holten (02:18)

Absolutely. So we did a few things different this year. Last year was amazing in terms of providing a baseline for what good internal comms looks like, but this year we thought, actually, let's broaden the scope and let's talk about something slightly different. Let's keep evolving. So last year we found that one of the key sort of drivers of employee advocacy and recommending your employer is a great place to work is whether you trust your leadership team, is whether you trust your CEO. And we thought, there's so much going on in the world, there's something in this. So let's deep dive into that. So we revised the question set. We kept a good few questions in there so we can benchmark and measure year on year. But we used some expert sessions with some of the people that you kindly brought together for us, Jen. So to talk about sort of, as an internal communicator, what's going on in your world, what are the things you're grappling with and how can we use those insights to sort of build out the question set. So we did that. We also increased our survey size, so our sample size.

So last year we surveyed 3000 members of the UK public and this year we've increased the sample to 4000 members of the UK public, which means that we can do more demographic cuts, get a more sort of solid view of what is going on out there and it gives us the opportunity to do loads more with the data, which we definitely will do. And we also did some senior leader interviews, which I thought gave a really nice sort of different perspective for the report. So sort of consolidating the views of a group of a small group of select senior leaders to sort of see what's their take on the world of work at the moment. And then Jen, you helped us from a practitioner survey as well. So we overlaid some of those results with the commentary in the report and we sort of it provides a really interesting contrast. So it's more comprehensive this year, definitely.

Jen Sproul (04:11)

It certainly feels that way. It feels like we've got more of those angles, isn't it, coming together from, you know, obviously we've kept with what the focus of the IC Index when we created it was to get the employee perception. But blending that in with those other perspectives also starts to help us see where we are and what we expect as a profession versus what employees are at. So it kind of gives us that place to put that together. And of course, this year when we chatted about it and you talked about what we picked up on the last year index about employee advocacy and leadership and those things that really come in and obviously we're talking in a time when I think trust is probably high in the news. So it felt like a good angle. I think for us, I guess, is the question we've had, why trust? Why do we focus on those? Because we put a lot of questions about how people feel about trust. And I think that's made it more interesting. But what, for you, really thought, that's going to make it have another sort of business angle business case to it, if you like?

Susanna Holten (05:09)

Well, it's the strategic lens, isn't it? And it's looking at such a tangible business outcome because we know trust in your employer drives all sorts of good things = retention, engagement, advocacy. So it's a clear sort of thing that we can influence as a profession and we can build on that. So we thought, let's look into it and see what the picture is. And it's not as good as I thought it would be. There's not as high levels of trust as I thought there would be. So, interesting.

Dom (05:39)

As I was reading the report, by the way, congratulations on producing it - within only two years, it's becoming the foundation research document for the internal communication

profession, which is a fantastic achievement. And I think one of the reasons it's so comprehensive, and when I was reading it for the first time, I was nodding a lot, and then occasionally my eyebrows, I'm sure, would shoot up because there were some surprisingly stark statistics and insights in there. But obviously you have had sight of the in-depth sight of the findings over two years. So what particularly surprised you from the research findings this year?

Susanna Holten (06:15)

There were quite a few things actually, and I think my initial thought as we were going through the survey results – I was like that's a headline, that's a headline, that's a headline - there's quite strong views of the UK public. One of the things that really stood out to me was that people who spend all of their time in the office are so close to the sentiment of that more sort of traditionally cynical audience that tend to sit in a disconnected environment. So historically, when I've done research with my clients, you see people who are in the office fully connected, they tend to be way more positive, have a more positive experience and more positive sentiment. But now actually there's a disconnect and the people who are happiest at work are actually those in hybrid roles. So that to me was a really interesting one. Also, 5% of people said that their employer had said, we want you to come back in the office so we can monitor your working hours. And I thought, who are those employers? And I guess good on them for being honest about their intentions with people sort of coming back in.

So that whole sort of trust piece and the hybrid aspect really interesting. And then the big one for me was when we did the segmentation analysis, we've got four very even groups of sentiment in the UK workforce and people are generally feeling, I think, a bit fed up and the fact that the groups are so even and the fact that we're seeing the negative effects of that long-term turbulence now, I think that they didn't surprise me, but it stood out to me, definitely.

Dom (07:47)

Just to go back for a second to the point about people who have a hybrid work life tend to be better at collaborating. That's not my words, but it really is interesting because it shone a light on the fact that I think that geography and location are not the main drivers of collaboration. And the main drivers of collaboration seem to be relationship and having the chance to have conversations, which again reinforces, I think, the role of leaders in being able to generate that atmosphere, to make people feel safe, ask the right questions, be curious, involve people in conversation. How does that strike you as something which came out of the report?

Susanna Holten (08:27)

Well, we definitely saw the need for empathy from leaders that came out so strongly and Jen, we've talked about this to great extent, haven't we? The fact that people, the leaders need to be seen to understand where people are at today, where they're coming from, the challenges they face. And again, how can we enable that in the different environments and in different sizes of organisations that we work in? Really important to sort of tailor your approach in that space.

Dom (08:56)

And I guess I will pass over in a second, but the other thing which this is highlighted is the importance of direct managers. And I know part of your trust index, if you like, looks at three levels of managers - top leaders, leadership team, and then direct managers. But it's interesting to see what 75% of people really had faith in their direct leaders. And I think if you put those two things together, it echoes something we've talked about a lot in previous podcast conversations is the importance of equipping direct managers with those conversational skills. The fact that being able to build that sort of relationship, ask the right questions is important.

Susanna Holten (09:33)

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, it's something that's been on the agenda for ever since I started working in internal comms. I feel like line managers has been at the heart of the conversation from day one. But what we really saw this year again, something that stood out to me was that only 10% of managers said, I've had training in how to communicate change effectively. Massive thing to go for, massive thing that we need, we need to fix that.

Cat Barnard (09:58)

Yeah, there's a lot there, isn't there? One of the things that I'm thinking about on the topic of the hybrid is, you're finding that people that are office based are less trusting than people that are allowed to work remotely. That to me just reinforces what trust is a two-way street, isn't it? And actually, if you've been called back into the office, if you've been summoned to by an RTO, a return to office mandate, there is a tacit message there, isn't it? We don't trust you to work from home. And at which point the natural response to that will be, well, why should I trust you if you don't trust me? And it's just made me think, because I read an article yesterday in Raconteur magazine about the rise of hybrid hushing, which is

effectively where an organisation has mandated a full spectrum return to office. Managers are taking it into their own hands and allowing people in their teams to continue working in a, they're breaching company policy, but they're allowing their team members to continue to work in a hybrid capacity under the radar - that's not going to pan out well, is it? I mean, the fact that, managers are willing to take those risks in order to sustain the productivity and performance of their teams and go against the kind of top-down mandate. I think this is a theme that's going to keep running and running. But, Dom, as soon as you mentioned that your eyebrows had gone into your hairline, I was intrigued. So I wanted to ask you and Jen what your primary takeaways were, what surprised you most about the findings this year? Get your eyebrows out of your head.

Dom (11:58)

Unfortunately nowadays it's a long journey for my eyebrows to take. But I mean, looking at what we've just been talking about, basically the research findings I think completely undermine any case most organisations have for bringing people back in the office full time, because we've already heard that people work better and collaborate better when they have the hybrid option, which they may or may not choose to take. I know working from home doesn't work for everybody. But secondly, the fact that no one believes it. If organisations say we want you back in for collaboration, they know from their own experience it doesn't work. So I think one of the big things for me is this undermines the whole case for a mandating people back to the office unless there's a really solid business issue, business reason for it. And of course, some jobs can't be done elsewhere. I appreciate that. The other thing which struck me about the research was - I think you mentioned this already Susanna, that when you did those four different groups of people, really only a quarter of people are really fully happy with what they're getting.

The other three quarters have got some issue. Either they don't particularly believe what they're hearing or they can hear things clearly they don't like it, or they don't get on with their senior manager or they don't get on with other people. So there's some issue there to be fixed in a large number of organisations. I think that struck me. Sort of thing we know from working with organisations, but it's very helpful to have statistics to back it up. I think the final thing that really struck me is, is it less than half the UK workforce believe that organisations operate in their interest.

Now, of course we know that organisations or certainly commercial organisations have to make profit for stakeholders. We get that for the shareholders. But to see again that nearly half of people are happy to state they don't think their organisations are working in their benefit was for me a really big eyebrow moment and something which we ought to look at in more detail and organisations must take very seriously. So those are the key things for me. Jen, what about you?

Jen Sproul (13:48)

Yeah, I mean, I'll of course echo everything that's already been said because there is so much. I think the I think the other things that I would highlight that – I don't know if it surprises me, but whether it just validates what I already think and my assumptions draw on that. And I think it does rip off a couple of things that that both you and Susanna have said. But for me, it highlights how in the future of internal communication, our power is going to sit in how we become super hyper-connected across an organisation. Because if you look at the IC index, we're talking, yes, about hybrid work and collaboration and how that feels. So how are we aligning with HR and people experiences? But then we're also looking at data points like you've just said, Dom, around the 43% of employees that don't feel valued. I think generally the foot has been off the pedal as a narrative that was stronger with People, Planet and Profit.

I feel like that narrative has really been kind of really minimised in recent times. But the other piece as well is around the employees' expectation for their employer to take a stance on the big issues in society, which is at 62%. And then also then when you delve into that, when something really bad happens externally, whether that's layoffs, whether that's industrial action, when their employer makes the news for the bad headlines, how when that happens, what that then does to the trust or the engagement of that employee can't be misunderstood.

So what I come back to is that putting together those data points, and it's full of a business case, I think, for internal comms, this report, that shows that if IC isn't hyper-connected, so how are we working with external comms when bad things happen, right? and when things happen in the news or we're thinking about values and what our leaders say and how they behave and how they sit at the top of the tree. So then how we're working with our partners in HR or people functions around training of direct managers, around creating great experiences, around what we're doing to drive advocacy for retention. So then how it talks about change. And the biggest fundamental problem the index says from an employee's perspective when it comes to change is not the change itself, because we gave them those options, they all picked the communication of the change. That's where the gaps are in the delivery of that. And with that continuing, so for me, all of those, you can take a data point from trust, to experience, to reputation, to engagement and find a point of where IC if it is done to an excellent standard can be a superpower if correctly hyper-connected across the organisation.

Cat Barnard (16:27)

Can I chime in? Because I think this is the point that I believe we have discussed time and again on this podcast. And obviously the whole point of this podcast is to explore the future of internal communication. But for me, you know, analysing future of work trends day in, day out, and then overlaying that into what that could mean for this profession. I feel more strongly than ever, that if you enter internal communication because you like writing, that's no longer a good reason to enter internal comms, if I may be so bold. I think enter the profession because you love people and you love community building and connection building and the exploration because it is never a static state activity, but the exploration of team dynamics, what makes a high performing team and be willing to, and I know we've talked about this on the podcast before, be willing to step into embodied communication, be willing to role model what world-class relationship building looks like, because that's it at the end of the day.

And I'm stuck on a point that both of you have raised around, how employees perceive the stance that their employer is taking on the socio-cultural or economic or environmental issues of the day. And I think, you know, societally in the last decade, we have become so polarised, both in the UK because of the Brexit referendum result and, you know, in the United States where politics has become really, really binary and what is going on there right now is absolutely frightening for democracy itself. You know, we absolutely, at a kind of individual level, we don't know who to trust anymore. We don't know who to trust anymore. We desperately want to trust because that's in our nature - our nature is to be helpful and community oriented and trusting. That's part of our DNA. But if there's nobody out there that we can get behind, what do we do with that?

That's really discouraging and demotivating and disengaging. And so for me, there's this real piece now about, you know, what is the vision of the organisation? How full-bloodedly are the leaders, the exec team, articulating that vision and also role modelling? Do you remember, we had a conversation a couple of recordings back about, again, like if you genuinely full-bloodedly believe in the vision, it kind of exudes from the pores of your body, doesn't it? You're 100% immersed in it. So having that vision, the strategic vision, having a suite, a cadre of people that full-bloodedly are willing to eat, sleep, and work it every single day. And also knowing that come what may, you've got a cohort of people above you in the organisation who have got your back, who have got your best interests. Because equality now, inequality, I beg your pardon, is so stark societally. You know, we can forgive people most things, but if we feel like we're working for somebody that hasn't got our back and is making us worse off whilst they're becoming better off, that's a deal breaker, isn't it?

There's no surprise whatsoever that we have this kind of age of languishing or disengagement or what have you. We just want somebody that we can believe in, that we think is doing the right things.

Susanna Holten (20:37)

It's such a good point, and it's also with everything that goes on. So a piece that Ipsos do is a monthly piece of research called 'What Worries the World' and it's been going for years and years. And you can actually see long term trends in terms of what are people worried about? What do they feel is having a big impact on their lives at the moment? And at the moment, inflation is at top. You've got things like crime and violence. You've got poverty and social inequality, you've got unemployment, corruption - and those are things that again, it will influence how you feel about your employer, especially with the inflation point, the cost of living crisis. If I don't feel like the employer is acting in my best interest and trying to protect me from some of those outside world stresses, how will I trust them and why should I trust them? And what does that lack of trust and that relationship then do with how I perform at work and what I feel like I need to be putting in? So yeah, completely with you Cat.

Cat Barnard (21:37)

And the other thing that I will say just before I get off my hobby horse is the point that you have uncovered about only 10% of managers having received any communication training, I would immediately extrapolate that and think, well, okay, if you're a manager today, the chances are that you are on the career ladder, the career pathway to become a leader of tomorrow.

At what point are we equipping anybody within organisations with these absolutely vital communication skills? Because if we're not delivering comprehensive training to managers to communicate better, I would, and Dom, this is - I know you're Bailey Wick, but I would wager not a huge amount of people in the exec team and C-suites have had communication training, but actually, back to the point when we started looking at the intersection between internal comms and the future of work five years ago, we said then, didn't we? that communication skills will be your absolute leadership superpower. So any organisation that isn't investing in communication training for managers and leaders, I don't hold out much hope for their long-term sustainability, the ability of that organisation to sustain itself over time. I think it's that kind of stark really.

Dom (23:06)

And to add to that, Cat, even if they do invest in communication skills training, what that looks like, because there is still, and I know we've talked about this in the past, there is still a large group of organisations that see communication training as presentation skills training,

which of course is important but less so around being able to get conversation going. Some of the so-called softer skills, which many people think they have in abundance, but when it actually comes to applying them at work, find it really hard. It's very hard to sit in front of your team and get conversation going, particularly if the team don't want to get involved. Those are skills which aren't considered, aren't valued perhaps still by every organisation, certainly aren't trained. So I think you're absolutely right about that.

It's also the case, I was reading something recently that would be interesting to see your view on it, which is because certainly in the UK we do relatively little manufacturing and what we do is quite specialist and many of our organisations, business and the economy is based around services and services require you to build relationships, they require you to have good customer skills and in order for you to have good relationships and good customer skills you need to feel fairly comfortable with the organisation you're working with, you need to have good relations with the people that you're working with.

And the fact that this research is showing us that's not always the case, I think undermines many organisations business model. Because forgive me the language, but years ago when I worked for Lloyds Bank, there was a great saying which was, pissed off staff don't smile. And I think there's a lot in that, that when your business relies upon your people having good relationships with their clients and customers, they're not going be in a good position to do that if they're not having good relationships at work. So it's quite a stark worry, I think, what's coming out of this.

Jen Sproul (24:42)

I would agree, Dom, because I think this comes back to what I was saying as well earlier, is I think the superpower of IC is how hyper-connected we are in terms of enabling that, because I started my life in sales, right? And at the end of the day, and how did I get you get promoted? It is the likeability factor as well, plays a big role in your career progression and how you're seen and how you're valued and those relationships that you have. And I think often as well, it can create I guess that more feeling of unfairness if they see somebody going above someone when I do the same level of work. But basically that person's going up because that boss they have relationship with likes them better. But again, it comes back to that point, sorry, going slightly off point there about that IC connected superpower because that also means how are we working with marketing and customer services and skills and other functions and operations to really train and develop an organisation that is of course fundamentally understanding.

I mean, the IC index also shows worrying information that actually most employees don't have belief or understanding of the strategy and they don't understand actually even their individual role in the delivery of it. So how are we not working with those things and how are we not encouraging that environment? Because fundamentally when a customer comes

in contact with anybody, what happens inside is going to be reflected in their embodied way of dealing with them, or the information that they know, or the things that they've been imparted. Because the world works off relationships and how we feel about each other and brands and what we do. It judges people off, yes, their words, but their actions. And if we're focusing so much on words, which are important, but we're not embedding those behaviours behind it, that's going to let things down. And like I say, going back to the index, I think it says that in terms of the direct managers and the values and behaviours, the number of things they expect, particularly from their direct manager, is that their behaviours are in line with the values of the organisation. And that is going to be a factor in which they judge people off.

Cat Barnard (26:44)

Which is a really interesting point, isn't it? Sorry, just, and I will shut up then- but isn't that an interesting point? Because I don't know many organisations that undertake values alignment with their new starters. So as you probably know by now, I worked in staffing for many years before setting up Working the Future. And I don't think I've ever seen an interview take place that has sought to uncover a values alignment. I think it's just been a sort of tacit assumption, these are our values and you'll just fit in with them because you've applied for this job and we quite like you. But actually this values piece is really, really important. And I would also argue in the face of absolute ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity - values alignment is the one thing that binds people together sharing values you can overcome most things if you know that you are surrounded by a group of like-valued people but I just don't see organisations dismantling that and dissecting that with the gravitas that it deserves.

Susanna Holten (28:01)

No, and so often values just become words in the wall, don't they? It's not actually the lived experience, it's just wallpapered somewhere.

Cat Barnard (28:10)

And some team, some team somewhere in the business has done our values away day and decided these values sound quite cheery for our organisation. So we'll just bring them back and we'll tell everybody. I definitely - and I really will shut up now - I went out for a lunch with somebody several years ago and she works for a well-known English charity.

She had a lanyard around her neck and she said, the lanyard, we've all got these new lanyards that tell us what our values are because this remote team had decided what our values were and that was deemed the best way of telling us what our shared values were, that we would have a lanyard around our neck with the words superimposed on them so we didn't forget them. That's just madness, isn't it?

Susanna Holten (29:03)

It is. And especially if you're expecting your employer to take a stance, which most people do. We found that 63% say, I want my employer to take a stance of big things in society. If you're not clear on who you are as an organisation and what your values are, how could you then take a stance? How can you decide what are the things we stand up for as an organisation? And it's almost like the employee value proposition. What do we give you as an employee? and here are the things we'll stand up for.

Cat Barnard (29:35)

There's a lot of work to do, isn't there? A lot of work, so much opportunity to deliver really high level strategic value.

Dom (29:43)

Well, especially as what we know about values is where values do work and where they do frame behaviour and have an impact on performance. It's where they've been generated in a collaborative way to use that word with people who are going to have to live them. And that's down to having conversations. Obviously, if you don't trust your organisation, you're not going to enter in those conversations about what those values should be. And then secondly, how do you bring values to life? It's about local teams thinking about the values and what opportunity they have in their day-to-day work to bring them to life and what that looks like. And that's powered by conversation led by local managers.

So all these things are very closely linked, which I guess brings us to the next area, Susanna, which is as Cat said, the podcast is about the future of internal communication. And one of the great things about the index is it lays out the landscape into which that future is going to happen if that's right, yes - it lays out that landscape. So from your experience and looking at the findings Susanna, what do you think is the number one opportunity it presents for internal communicators?

Susanna Holten (30:46)

I think as we've just talked about, there's so much you could go for. There's so many things and it depends on where you are in your organisation today and sort of the maturity of your function and how your leadership team is working and what to sort of do with that. But I think empathy and radical transparency and really working that into your strategy, your ways of working, being sort of driver of the adult-to-adult conversation that we see so clearly in the index this year that people really do want. I think that is a very tangible thing that you can start doing today. You don't need to do much research upfront to get to it. You need to just start working with your stakeholders and have the right conversation. So number one. And then if I could dream or think about the thing that is a bit harder to action, I think it is that piece around taking a stance on the big issues.

What can you do to really embed that into your organisation? Connect that with your employer value proposition, make that connection with, as we've talked about today, the other teams in the business. How do we work with the external comms team? How do we work with the HR team? How do we join up the dots and create a more cohesive employee experience in terms of this is who we are, this is what you can expect from us as an employer. And this is how we will support you in exchange for your trust and your sort of commitment and hard work. So yeah, just those things really.

Dom (32:20)

I must come back to a fantastic phrase. You used the phrase 'radical transparency', which sort of sounds like a 1980s synth pop band title, but it's a great title. What is it? What does it mean and how does it look? It's fantastic.

Susanna Holten (32:36)

Yeah, I think it's just tell people like it is. It's the number one thing that people want when it comes to sort of improving change. Be open and honest with me as your employee around what are you doing? Why are you doing it? And be open about the fact we often talk with our clients around sort of feedback loop and making sure that people don't feel like they're sort of screaming into the void.

If someone's provided you with feedback, if you've got feedback at an organisational level and people are telling you, actually, it's not great - acknowledge that. Don't try and sort of gloss it over, but actually say, we heard you say these three things, it's not good enough. Here's what we're going to do about it.

Dom (33:20)

I think that's fantastic. Again, it's good to remind some leaders they have to do that. Not only is it a good thing to do, but if they don't do it, they're actually undermining the impact of their whole messaging. It's a really strong message.

Cat Barnard (33:32)

I think what's really interesting about this is that in times past, we've all waited for the organisation to tell us what our new roles and responsibilities should be. My point would be the external landscape's moving too fast for that now. If you wait to be told what the new scope of work is for an internal communicator, you are going to be dead in the water. You need to seize the moment and work out a little bit like you said, Susanna, there's so many opportunities. So work out the next easiest thing to do and think about how you can angle that and position that as delivering strategic value. I hear a lot that, you know, the profession is underfunded and under resourced. So I fully get the pressures that you've got. But think about the small wins, the marginal gains, the one thing, the one small thing that you can do to really deliver some kind of strategic value to your most senior stakeholders and go for it because if you wait for permission, you will not get the future you want. We have to create these futures for ourselves. And hopefully by now this podcast is showcasing just how pivotal and crucial internal communication is, but not in the 20th century version of it, which was kind of internal broadcast journalism, let's say, it's so much more than that now, so much more than that. And the world is your oyster because this is the glue that will keep all organisations, no matter how distributed, no matter how challenged economically, this is the glue that will keep organisations together. So getting off my soap box, question for you, Jen.

Obviously it's what, are we three weeks into the launch of the IC index?

Jen Sproul (35:41)

Something like that all blurs into one at one stage, but I think it's about three weeks now.

Cat Barnard (35:46)

Three weeks and what feedback have you had so far? Tell me some of the best feedback you've had.

Jen Sproul (35:50)

Yeah, I mean the feedback's been great. I mean, you know, it's one of those things you put out there and it is a very large document with 60 odd pages. And I think a lot of people have been taking that time to really digest it and to understand it. We've certainly been getting a lot of feedback around how - and I was going to rip off your point as well, Cat, which I think you said so beautifully was around how the index is giving a business case for internal communication. That's certainly been the feedback.

It's been interesting to see which points of data people have mostly connected with and which ones have had a lighter touch, I would guess. I think the AI data point created some controversial conversation around, well, yes, of course, of course people aren't going to trust AI communication from the CEO communication that's generated by an AI bot. But everyone's like, but don't they realise internal communication people do it anyway? So it raises that debate of actually is CEO communication ever authentically truly them? Is it always generated by somebody? And so I think that one has generated a bit of debate and controversy, I think the response to the theme of trust has been brilliant. People have really resonated with the overall theme of trust because it does feel like something as a professional community that we can truly take and own.

And I think the thing that people have said that they feel most and there's other data points that people aren't surprised by direct managers, the fact they're not trained, the fact that we're not doing them, people aren't surprised that it shows that communication is fundamental to change delivery. Those things aren't surprising people, but they're very welcoming to have a data point to surround it. But I think the one data point that - going back to your point earlier as well about Cat - about what can people do now that people are sort of going, that's our home. That's what we could do. That's a very instant tangible piece of something we can try within our skill set to fix. And that is fundamentally the data point about how there is an understanding and belief in the strategy and people don't know what their role is.

So I think everyone's gone well none of this surprised me. And it feeds into the constant problems that we have. We've got great business cases, but actually this data point, come on team, this is our bread and butter. Let's go in and work on this. And that will be the something that hopefully can link to a business outcome that then can make the case for more investment. It's had over thousands and thousands of downloads so far and being talked about, and I'm getting lots of invites to talk on lots of things about it as well. So certainly it is picking up. But we also launched something about trust during a general election campaign. So I think we're kind of riffing into that as well.

Cat Barnard (38:25)

Yes, it's definitely fortuitous, serendipitous, whatever the word is, you know, so, so timely.

Jen Sproul (30:33)

We didn't know that when we picked the theme by the way. We didn't know that this would happen at the same time.

Cat Barnard (38:38)

No, nor did we know that we'd be looking at a summer election. I think we had all thought that we'd be looking at an autumn election. And I think, you know, because I know this episode will go out next week, I think we can say we're recording this on the day of the general election. And so how we wake up tomorrow or the day after, depending on how long it takes for the polls to be counted, you know, trust is exactly to this point that the data showed, trust is on a knife-edge. And it's cascades, isn't it? It's like the Russian dolls, you know, the nested dolls, like trust happens at so many different levels and layers. And if you work in internal communication right now, if all you think about today is the people that you can touch with your communication skills to build a connective relationship fully in appreciation that relationship building is like a never-ending journey. It's a dance of synchronicity, you know, but every single interaction that we have with another person is a trust maker or a trust breaker. And I think what an opportunity that is - that really excites me.

Dom (39:59

Look, to bring this into land, I think Cat, picking up on your dance of synchronicity, Susanna, looking at the findings, we've talked about the trust issues, we talked about being an advocate and taking a stance on issues, you talked about radical transparency, we talked about the importance of direct managers. If you link that with what Cat was saying about, we shouldn't wait for permission to do things - as communicators we need to take some action and this gives us permission to do that. I can imagine, well certainly I would be, many people listening to this would think that's quite overwhelming. So from your experiences Susanna, to bring us into land, what one practical action would you suggest internal communicators do to build into their business as usual, which has to go on, but based on this research what one practical thing they could do?

Susanna Holten (40:46)

I think for me, it's always going to be about, you've got this data, you've got the external validation, but what do you know about what's going on inside your organisation? And do you have the data to back up your strategy? So, it's almost taking a step back and by all means, do you use our survey questions as inspiration. You can run them in your organisation if you'd like, but get the full picture of what does trust look like in your organisation and then use that insight to sort of pick and choose the things to go for. That would always be my recommendation, but then I'm also a bit of a measurement geek, so that is what you get from me.

Jen Sproul (41:26)

That is brilliant. Thank you so much, Susanna. And I think that I am too - I love data. Everyone always laugh, I'm far more comfortable in an Excel spreadsheet than I am in a Word document. And I've always said as well - and I think that one of the greatest opportunities in whatever is right for you as internal communicators listening is: remember you have that license to be a detective, you know. And I would have loved to have been a detective in another life, but that's a whole other podcast. But you have that license to be curious and to ask those questions. And you know what, I agree, it does all feel overwhelming. I don't know how to make that spreadsheets - If anything, if you're really struggling at the start point, just ask some key people for a cup of coffee and make some notes and get some anecdotal picture, that conversation in itself can provide you with light bulb moments, can provide you with insight. And if there's one thing that you really want as well, I would look at the thing that I think is really great for us to focus in on where it feels comfort - is what we're doing to support our leaders and support that drive, understanding what a strategy means and what everyone's role in it is. And if that's one point of practical action which feels in your comfort zone, start there because that will win you years investment like all those things that will set you up for the future.

Susanna Holten (42:43)

And it's been so brilliant to hear people say: I'm putting this report in front of my CEO. That is exactly what we want it to do. So, yeah.

Jen Sproul (42:51)

And I think one thing we'll try and do is put together some tools for you to go and actually present it to your wider team. So talk as much as you can, use it. But I hope more than

anything with the index and everything that we're talking about, remember the message, the opportunities are rich. You are really, really important in what you do. What you do has intrinsic value, yes, to business outcomes, but actually to how we all feel as a society and as human beings. And as we sit here and as the data reflects as a society that feels a bit worn out, a bit run down, a bit lackluster.

And I know that's hard to operate as an internal communicator when that's the vibe around you. But remember that what you do and what skills you bring to the party can really help turn some of that around by just - and I'm going to use the one phrase that Susanna said that I love, I think Dom loved it too - radical honesty people, radical honesty. Thank you so much Susanna and Dom and Cat, as always - and hopefully we will be tuned in with you all again for the next episode.

Susanna Holten (43:48)

Thank you.