



Transcript for S14, Bonus Episode: Exploring the future of internal communication whitepaper, with Joe Salmon

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.

Jen Sproul (00:01.671)

Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. As always, I am your host, Jen Sproul, joined with Dominic Walters and Cat Barnard. But this episode, we're going to do something a little bit different and we're going to talk about the topic of the future of internal communication. And to do things a little bit different this time, we are delighted to have Joe Salmon join us.

So for those of you that don't know the wonderful Joe, Joe has over two decades of internal comms experience, including in-house consultancy and agency roles. And he specialises in leadership communication, employee engagement, organisational culture, and communicating change. Joe is currently director of corporate communications at Iron Mountain. And his career highlights include senior roles at Vodafone, BT, Inmasat, Spotify, and Hill and Nolton Strategies.

So Joe is also, for those who don't know, is also an IoIC board director, an IoIC fellow, a trailblazer for the UK Black Comms Network, and a mentor to others in the profession. And it also holds the wonderful postgraduate diploma, internal communication management, so as a regular guest, panelist and speaker, and a wonderful friend of the IoIC. So to do things a little bit differently, Joe is going to interview us.



And I think this time, Jo, is where I'm going to stop talking and we're going to be the guest for a change and we're going to throw it to you as our host for this episode of the podcast.

Joe (01:34.211)

Thank you, Jen. That was a, I love that. That sounded so good. I'm gonna play that back every now and again when I need that deuce, right? Because that sounded very impressive. Really glad to be here and to join you on your podcast and to actually turn the table. you're answering the questions and I can see those nervous faces on my screen. So be ready. I have some questions for you. No, really great to be here. And I think just before we kind of get into it, I'd love to really find out a little bit more for those who haven't seen a podcast before they've been hiding under a rock, whatever it may have been, so they've missed it. I'd love Cat to just kind of give us some details around how this all started and where you've taken it to over the years.

Cat (02:12.413)

Yeah sure thanks for that Joe. Well it started as an experiment in 2021 actually by that point in 2021.

We, Working the Future, we'd been working with the IoC for a couple of years helping present future of work trend analysis to prepare members for their future of work. And it was sometime around the summer of 2021 when Jen and Dom said, how about we create a podcast? Cat, can you do that for us? And I said Yeah, I can, I think, and absolutely no prior experience at all. So just to flag that because it can be done and always, feel brave and empowered to experiment. But when we started the podcast, the intention was to curate a range of conversations with thought leaders from within internal communication and wider corporate communication and also subject matter experts from outside of that field to talk about the intersection between the future of work and communication and the role that communication plays in community, cohesion, interpersonal dynamics, successful teamwork in times of extreme and a profound change. So bearing in mind this was not long after Covid, lockdowns, etc. And as I say, it was an experiment and I don't think any of us would have been prepared for how successful the podcast has been because as we sit here today, we are are now approaching 45,000 downloads. The podcast is listened to by people with an interest in people and performance at work who are scattered right across the globe. we've got representation in our listenership from Australia, New Zealand, Asia, pack, Middle East, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, the whole gamut really. So that is the background to this podcast and the topic of the future of internal communication originated as a conversation. As all things do, right? All ideas that get born into the world start as a



conversation. They have to get surfaced and kind of pulled forth from somebody's inner being.

And so we'd carried on, we'd produced, you know, over the course of 22, 23, 24, we had produced a range of other white papers and thought leadership pieces for the IIC. And then at the start of this year, we suddenly realised that we had never produced a white paper entitled The Future of Internal Communication. And so the paper has kind of come together. It's been birthed over the course of this year.

It's probably the longest paper that it took us to write because we wanted to integrate so many disparate strands. But, but here it is, the future of internal communication, the white paper.

Joe (06:22)

Love it, absolutely love it and I think you've kind of teased the white paper there so I'm going to jump straight across the gen to say listen share some more about the white paper let's get people to know what it's all about.

Jen Sproul (06:31)

so as Cat said, obviously it's been curated, birthed, considered, thought about over a long period of time. we're tapped into what our members, our community are feeling. We know there is a lot of change happening. We know there's a lot of complexity and there's also a lot of fear and uncertainty about how our roles as professionals fit into that future of work and how do we move our skills and our roles and create that kind of real protective space about why we are so critical to an organisation in these times, whether that's through how we enable trust, how we enable resilience, how we enable transformation. So it's kind of, guess, ringfencing that and showing our members and the community a pathway forward into that. So if you want to move with that future, think about these skills, think about these roles, think about placing yourself in this sphere, which is really moving on to a new time, in a new future. I think sometimes we talk about future of work I would say and also future of internal communication but future is actually present. Let me just say that as well. We just like to call it that but it's all happening right now. So that's kind of I think the paper is trying to present that that kind of view of this is how we protect, this is how we grow, this is how we evolve, gives you a pathway but also the paper we want it to be something throughout 2026 that we have a conversation with our community about. We're not saying this is absolutely the roles or skills you will need. Let's talk about it. Let's use this as a way for us to galvanize and own our future rather than let the future be dictated to us. So it's been available exclusively to members in the first launch. So all members will be able to exclusively download the full paper. And we'll put it out there in 2026 for a wider conversation with the rest of the community.



Joe (08:19)

Brilliant, thanks Jen. let's jump into the conversation and I think let's think group of friends at a coffee shop, right? We're having a chat, less Q &A, more friends having a chat at the coffee shop. And if we don't 100 % agree or align on stuff, let's have that conversation. That's even better. The viewers and the listeners are gonna love that, right? So Dom, you've been quiet and we're gonna bring you straight in. What excites you most about the opportunities for internal communication?

Dom (08:41)

Thanks Joe, that's a very interesting question. So I think it is, you used the right word there, it is incredibly exciting because I think the context in which we're going to be working in the future will allow internal communicators to do more of what we've always known we should be doing. And many of us do, don't get me wrong. So building on what Jen was just saying. In organisations where things are changing all the time, there's low trust, they're going to rely upon conversation to connect people, to build that trust, to help people understand what's going on, to help people make sense of stuff. That's going to be even more important than it ever has been. And we know that's where internal communication can have its most impact.

And so I think what excites me is we can do more of that. **Any organisation that wants to be successful in the world in the future needs to have a good relationship with its workforce, needs them to be connected, needs them to understand what's going on, needs to be clear on things and need them to be listened to and feel they're listened to.** And there's no one else apart from internal communication who has the skills and the range and the experience to do all of those things. So I'm very excited from that point of view. I think also or there may not always seem it, it's exciting because I think there are many more people leading organisations that recognise that. So, again, good to get your take on this, but I think **there are many more leaders who now look to internal communications to help them improve performance. There are many more people who would bring internal communication professionals into the conversation earlier.** So, what we've been asking for for a while is happening, and I think the future will accelerate that.

So that's my initial cause of excitement, I think. We can do more of what we know we're good at.

Joe (10:13.903)



And I could see Jen nodding along to a lot of what you were saying so I'm guessing you're in agreement with that Jen, anything to add?

Jen Sproul (10:21.905)

Yeah, I am and I think that... And I think as well when everything feels, and I get it, right? Some of the news, the things that are going on in terms of roles and jobs, feels really, it can feel, the media, it can all feel a bit bleak. But I think what we want to do is let's re-inject that excitement. Let's re-inject that criticality. Let's re-inject the roles we can claim for ourselves that take us out of the bounds of internal communication. It all is internal communication, but let's wider, bigger, more outcome-friendly. focus because I think organizations yes it's very easy when you see comms as a pure broadcast mechanism it is so easy to say we don't need it anymore we can put that to a machine and AI we need to reposition comms is not about broadcast it's not about those things it's about so much more and so much deeper issues that if an organisation isn't on top of they will not thrive and they will not survive we see many not that I wish to get political but you know political figures lose on their inability to communicate their inability to take people with them their inability to create transparency understanding shared meaning to have dialogue to have listening to have trust to have transformation that people understand what they're supposed to do about Organisations choose to ignore that because they see communication as a pure broadcast mechanism They will feel the pain of that in years to come in my humble opinion. So I'm excited for us to claim a stronger, bolder voice.

Dom (11:58.542)

It's very tempting, think, for this one to look as an amateur historian, it's very tempting to look at circumstances and think we're never gonna get out of this mess. I was talking to people recently said the world has never been in the worst situation. That's a very tempting thing to say. I'm not sure it's true because you think about the days after the Second World War. I think things must have looked pretty dire then. During the Cold War, I'm old enough to remember the Cold War and the fact that we all thought we were going to be eliminated by some thermonuclear disaster. So there are always things which look bad. And when we've come through those things, we've come through through innovation, creativity. And that's been spurred by conversation, by people sharing ideas, by people sitting down and rationally looking at stuff. So I'm optimistic more broadly I think that if we can help conversations we can help address many of what look like intractable and really tough problems. So I think there's an historical inevitability to use a Marxian phraseology to what we're doing.



Cat (12:43)

And I would like to add to that. just want to go several steps back. I recall the very first episode that we ever recorded of this podcast and we kind of were setting the scene of, what we're talking about and why we're talking about it. And one of the things that I remember at the beginning and it is still very, very close to my heart. I am interested in how language and shared meaning has shaped our species. And so when you talk about history, Dom, I'm here for all of that because I think one of our biggest failings as a species is that we tend to not look at history, which can be hugely helpful to us. But actually, somebody asked me couple of months back, bit of a deep question, but somebody said to me, how do you remain so optimistic when all you do is look at these work trends day in, day out, and it can feel quite bleak?

And I thought about that and I thought, well, that much is true. There are days where it does feel really bleak, but the bit that I'm most interested in is to discover as paleontologists, anthropologists and archeologists have done, that our species is actually not 200,000 years old, but 300,000 years old. We know like a tiny little grain of sand in the Sahara desert's worth of modern history and the species in whatever way has survived hundreds of thousands of years, right? And so how has it survived? It has survived in community sharing language and meaning, whether that's written language, oral language, artistic language, whatever it is, we have found a way as a species to share meaning, to build community. And I find that the absolute bedrock of will sustain us throughout wherever we go next.

Joe (14L5)

Yeah, I like that. actually, I'm going to stay with you on this one, Cat. how should we, I guess, how should internal comm redefine itself for future readiness? In your opinion.

Cat (15:00)

So the thing that I'm really interested in, in terms of how any organisation or professional set of expertise evolves and adapts is, the start of question is who decides? I'm really curious about the impact of the internet on the way that we learn, develop and grow at work. The internet has only been with us for, let's say, 40 years. Little bit less than that in a valuable commercial context. And the internet, if you think about it, is like the greatest repository of online accessible information that the world possesses.

Now we know obviously that much of what exists on the internet is absolute rubbish and nonsense and conjecture and hyperbole and opinion and so on so take that to one side nonetheless there's a great amount of well-documented information and I wonder often about the extent to which reliance on that information has rendered us a little bit helpless. There's a really interesting experiment that was done 25 years ago in London where a researcher at one of the London universities put London cabbies under fMRI brain scans and



found that the area of the brain that was responsible for spatial navigation was massively bigger in cabbies than non-cabbies and so the brain is able to reprogram itself continuously, it's neuroplasticity. You look at neuroplasticity in the brain's capacity to continually learn, evolve and adapt. And what I find myself wondering about at this threshold of seismic changes, who gets to decide if we wait as professionals for our organisations to tell us what our roles and responsibilities are going to be tomorrow, we are only ever going to get the crumbs at the table. Whereas and you're a director of corporate comms, Joe, you'll see this, the work now is constantly evolving, adapting in response to the ever changing, shifting context of the organisation. So I think any professional, it doesn't matter whether you're in internal comms, HR, accounting, law, medicine, whatever.

It's incumbent on all of us if we consider ourselves to be professionals to take a proactive interest in our future and be the change that we want to see in the world. Because who decides otherwise? If we allow ourselves to be dictated to by the organisation, we are going to get some really mediocre version of what we would aspire for ourselves. What I've tried to do, and when we started this conversation about producing the white paper earlier in the year, I thought, well, why not me? My background was working with startup organisations in the nineties. I spent a decade helping build mobile phone networks. So my job was to bring in the teams of engineers who would design and build the mobile our phone networks and bring those to a state of commercial launch. So I've got a lot of experience of organisational planning from day dot, like from taking a theoretical constructs of what an organisation might look like and materialising that, bringing it into reality. So what I did then was use that expertise to say, right, what are these roles? What are the roles that communication and internal communication could evolve into because for me, per Jen's point, this is a radical shift away from broadcast comms to embodied communication, the way in which we use day-to-day interactive immersive communication with one another to create trust, shared meaning, alignment around group objectives and organisational success outcomes. It's how we show up for one another. Yes, it's the immersive experience of how we communicate with one another. You know what, in many regards, and to flip this on its head, generative AI is an easy option. It's been created by people that lack the social skills to show up for one another.

And I say this with love and kindness, but it has been shown in research that the biggest prevalence of autistic spectrum disorder exists in the Silicon Valley Bay area. **So the tech is being designed for us by people who don't necessarily love human connection. My view is that human connection is what will save us.**

Joe (20:26)

Great response, Cat. And I think you've mentioned AI, right? It's the hot topic. It's the thing that always pops up. So I'm going to jump into a quick fire round right now, really, because some will actually probably disagree with how you've just positioned AI, Cat. So it will be



interesting to see what we get on this. But when you hear AI, just generally, and I'll start with you, Jen. First word that comes to mind, how do you feel about AI now?

Jen Sproul (20:47)

That's the first word that comes to mind, that's a good question. Trepidatious.

Joe (20:49)

Tell me why.

Jen Sproul (20:50)

Because I think someone who does use it, right? And I can see where it can go and the things that it can do. But I'm trepidatious that we are putting in businesses and organisations are putting too much pressure on this thing that it can solve everything. And I'm trepidatious that we are using it great, but we're walking into problems that we'll have to unpack in the future because we are rushing too fast at something.

Joe (21:15)

and yourself Dom. First word.

Dom (21:17)

Yeah, I'm quite intrigued by it because it's interesting to see how it's being used by business and by organisations and how people react to it. And actually, I think the debate has changed so rapidly in last year because certainly between communicators, because I think...

The dominant debate before was, this is going to take our jobs, how are we going to manage around that? The conversation we're having much more now are, how do we get people, organisations to use it properly? How do we manage the ethics? We were talking about this the other day, at SolentUniversity. How do we manage the ethics of this? How do we make sure that people use it effectively, it doesn't damage our business? And then more broadly, we had the conversation with Zoe Colosimo from Neighbourly on one of the podcasts recently, talking about AI inequality. How do we stop that?

That's a much more interesting debate. rather than almost being fearful of this technology and seeing it as a big ogre, there's now a shift to saying how can we use it effectively, how can we get the most out of it, how can we use it equitably, and I find that quite intriguing. And I think, and I'm no expert on this, that shift is happening more quickly than I've seen it



happen for previous waves of technology. And that may be because this is such a massive wave of technology that's all-encompassing and has happened so quickly. So that's my take, and I think the debate is shifting, and I'm quite reassured by that. I'm not saying we've got the solution. but I think we're asking some of the right questions more quickly than perhaps I'd expect us to, myself included.

Joe (22:38)

Yeah. Great. And Cat, have you got one word that sums it up for you?

Cat (22:41)

hmm not one word but I just thought best of times worst of times. And actually, if I was to call it right now, the thing that bothers me the most about it is the extent to which the tech is being developed by a very, very specific niche type of human. It is very male-centric and exclusionary of female representation, people of colour representation. the cultural and the other demographic representations. And that worries me because it isn't a foregone conclusion that it's going to be amazing for everybody. And we do need, as Dom exactly said, **we do need the full panorama of perspective in order to make sure that whatever it becomes, it is designed for us as ethically and safely as responsible and responsibly as possible.**

Joe (23.38)

Yeah, yeah. And I guess you were talking a little bit about the pace of change and Jen also talked about the need to kind of elevate the work that we do and to adapt and do different things for our leaders, et cetera. Dom, I'm going to jump across to you and speaking directly to the listeners, right? Can you tell me one skill that you think IC pross will need to develop a master in the coming years to really remain effective and to elevate their work? What's changed?

Dom (24:04)

I think the one that's the **biggest is going to be around coaching leaders to have conversations.** Because, I mean there are a number of them, but I think if you ask me for one, this is something which I know many communicators do very well, but it's going to be even more important for all of us to be able to do this. Because I think Leaders are going to say, I need to connect with people. I need to build trust. I need to explain complex changes in a very short space of time. I need to understand what people are feeling. And that's going to be done largely through conversation. And we know that leaders, many of them struggle



with that for all sorts of reasons. They're not equipped to ask the right questions. They're to one way communication. They used to put in their point across and then moving on to something else. They need help. And I think we are best placed to do that. the one big thing, I think, would be around coaching. **How do we coach leaders to understand their communication role and then perform it effectively?** So that's one. If I'm allowed a secondary, I think the secondary would be to be able to ask questions yourself. And again, I'm not suggesting that all you do is go around asking questions. **Being able to ask the right questions, the strategic questions, and being able to deal with the response and turn it into something useful, which achieves a certain objective,** I think that's going to be even more important than it is at the moment. I think those are going to eclipse many of the more traditional skills that we've all loved.

Joe (25:19)

Thank you. And I think, Jen and I'd like your views as well, because we often hear that writing is no longer our superpower. AI has kind of leveled the playing field. Everyone can get it to a certain level of goodness, right? And they can storytell. So what do we need to really focus on speaking to our kind of IC pros? Listening, what would your advice be to start to think more about this area of upskilling?

Jen Sproul (25:39)

Yeah, I agree, but I think that I'm going to pick one skill I think that we've always needed and worked on, perhaps a reprioritisation of it is for me is around **the sense making and the culture and intelligence that we bring to it.** Is how do we position, and we talk about this in the podcast, the science of communication, the science of language, the science of message, not what is good grammar, not as what is a good headline or stand first or what makes good clickbait. Those things are how to do and how to make a nice I'm not dwindling that importance when you're, I know that, we do that at IOIC, it is important. But if we just focused in on the display and the reader and the headline and the stand first and the grammar and is he got all the factual points? We're not building our critical knowledge, our skillset, our unique ability to critique something, go, how do people make sense of the world? How do people process information? How do we, what is culture? How is it formed? How is that intelligence? How is the psychology, the behaviour and intelligence of what we do? Because if that knowledge and that critical thinking is so high in our ability than anything that comes our way that's not creating the outcome the organisation is looking for or I think that sometimes with technology, and I know that as someone that's worked pre-internet, post-internet in publishing, where you think because you can do everything quickly, you're just spouting stuff out, rather than going, it understood, is it making sense, how does that fit with culture, how does that align in intercultural relationships, global organisations, the science and the psychology of communication is fundamental to getting it



right. guess you still need good writing perhaps sometimes but that is the bit that I think then becomes such a unique superpower that gives you the critical ability to go into an organisation and go hmm that's not working you're not processing this is why this transformation isn't getting over the line this is why the shared meaning isn't there this is why this subcultural this cultural the misalignment **it brings the science into to our work as well which I think is they're all important** but I think that that's a unique skill set that I don't see any other related discipline we're taking on.

Joe (27:49)

Yeah, I agree. And I often say, you know, we need to kind of start to solve business problems rather than just communication problems and challenges, right? We need to play in that space. So Cat, is there anything you want to add? What skills would you recommend IC pros really focus on?

Cat (29:42.494)

The two that I think, and absolutely thanks for tearing that up, the two that I think are fundamental are business acumen and advocacy. So business acumen, we need to be thinking about the business problems to your point. **We need to be able to speak the language of leadership.** We need to be able to get on the wavelength of our most senior stakeholders and see the world as they are seeing it. So that requires us to be diligent and take a more proactive interest in our industry, in our sector, in who are our competitors.

It's going way beyond internal communication to have an understanding of the risks and opportunities that our employer faces in the next two to five years and getting really on top of what are the trends that are most dynamically transforming and disrupting business.

How can I help my organisation through an elevated awareness? I'm not asking you to suddenly become, you know, a trend analyst, but I am saying the more information that you can gather that helps you understand the reality that your organisation is facing, the better. So that's one.

And then the other is at the advocacy piece. I talked a little bit before I got all prehistoric and talked about, the origins of language and the extraordinary reality that our species is as old as it is and the role that language and communication has played in that long history. **I think we need to become better at advocating for the value of communication as the glue that binds people who will be increasingly disparate and distributed and asynchronous and on demand.** What is that glue that binds them together? And it will be shared meaning, relationship, language and I'll sprinkle some love in there as well because when we love the people we work with we always go the extra mile right?



Joe (30.26)

Yeah, yeah, it's spot-on. I think, you know, continuing, yeah, jumping.

Dom (30.28)

Can I just pick in there, briefly, sorry to interrupt you, but I just want to pick up on what we've just all three said. I mean, there are going to be people listening to this who are rolling their eyes because they'll say, yeah, we've always been doing that. I know I've been around a long time and I know we've always been doing that. But I think what's different, just to reinforce what's different, is firstly, there are now going to be tools available which free us from stuff we've always said has held us back. So the production materials, collateral, et cetera. So we've always said we're really busy doing that.

We have an opportunity now to get away from that. And secondly, just to reiterate what we've all said, I think, is the environment is now where we can do that because organisations need it more and more. And we've also probably got senior managers who more likely to listen to us. So I think all this stuff has been important, it's even more important now. And if we work it well, we've got an environment that will help us do it better. The downside is, as we all know, the advent of AI may cause organisations to decide to changes that reduce our effectiveness and it's our job now I think to make our claim, make the case, the advocates for ourselves and what we can do as a profession so that doesn't happen. Sorry to interrupt you but I just wanted to...

Jen Sproul (31:34)

I agree with you, Dom, on the stakes. I just think my comment to that is because the risks and the stakes are higher than they've ever been for business. That's what it is.

Joe (31:42)

Agreed, agreed. And I think you've made a really great point there, Dom. I think it takes us a little bit further into this conversation. So we've looked at kind of individual skills, right, what people need to do to level up as an IC Pro. And I guess we're at that point in the year where we start to see all of these reports coming out and these updates around what people think the trends will be for 2026. We're about to see those come out, right? I want to take it a little step further and rather than just talk about what those trends are, we always see, you know, the similar things, reduced budget, needing to have a seat at the table, AI is coming, etc. So we know that those things are going to feature. But what I would like us to talk about, really open these around, what are your biggest concerns about some of those



trends? What are the trends that you think and themes that are going to come in 2026, even if it's throughout the later part of the year, that we should be concerned about and should be trying to get ahead of? So there are loads of things that I'll keep talking just to give you a chance to think about what you want to say, right? Because there are lots of trends that we have no influence over. So if you're in an organisation that doesn't have a great huge comms budget, it is what it is, we need to work around it. But there are things that we can do some stuff about and some of those trends will come into play. I'll open the floor to any of you to really just start to have this conversation because I think it's important.

Jen Sproul (32:51)

I think that, as you said Jo, we know the trends are going to be AI, transformation and change and, the market, the economy isn't necessarily looking like it's going to bounce back anytime soon in that regard as well. So I think we're having a more disheartened sort of weary, dare I say workforce.

I think that all those trends, we should be prepared for is that as we try to ramp up and not trial things, I think that we need to be mindful of potential new crises.

And as we go through something without enough preparedness, without enough critical thinking, without enough consideration, whether that's AI, transformation, reputation management, economic, what we say outside and inside the view of a brand. think organisations are going to see themselves in much more crises. Cyber security, for example, I think that's going to go in a massively bad direction. We've had some really big instances this year. So I would say as an internal communicator, the one tip I would give is you look at all those trends, going back to what's in the white paper as well, **think about your scenario planning** and think about if X or Y or B or C happens, whether that's a data breach, whether that's a misreputation, a reputation, whether it's the non adoption of a piece of tech that's going to cost the organisation millions, whether it's something leaks, something comes out. I think we need to model out what those look like because nothing's worse than being bitten on the bottom shall I say with a crisis and you don't have enough resource and you're not turning that around and you're not again giving that the critical thought because how you respond to a crisis is sometimes more important than the crisis itself.

Joe (34:25)

lots of nods and smiles while you saying that. I think Dom you look as though you want to jump in and add to that.



Dom (34:32)

we're looking at some of the things to watch out for in the next 12 months and possibly beyond. mean, finance, Jen's mentioned it. Money is going to be a big issue. We're recording this just before the budget. So if you listen to this after the budget, you'll know more than we do, obviously. But it's not looking good, is it, from a financial point of view? Whatever your politics are, not looking good from a financial point of view. And that has lots of effect on budgets, on people's risk, appetite. has all sorts of effects that affect us. think the other thing is, just like I was talking about the other day, is we've seen, obviously, a bit of a push back on the advances we've made around things like DE &I. And that seems to have made it OK to criticise or to question some of the more people-related things that organisations do. And that may not be necessarily a bad thing to have the conversation at least. But what I think it is doing is meaning that things like internal comms can often get questioned as part of that re-examination of how we deal with people. Again, I know we were talking about this the other day, but the whole thing around the Home Office report talking about listening circles and the questioning of listening circles. think what someone was doing was saying, are we doing too much when it comes to involving people? Are we doing too many people related things? And look at these listening circles. And the danger is for us that we get pushed back because it seems to be popular now to question people related issues. And so I think we have to be even more careful about showing that comms is about business.

It's not there to be nice to people, it's not there to be equitable, although that's all important, well it is, but it's primarily there to help businesses perform. And I think we have to be really, really focused on making that connection. Because I think we are going to face a bit of a backlash, particularly in organisations because of financial concerns that are looking to make cuts. So it makes me really sharpen our argument, I think.

Joe (36:17)

Yeah. Cat, trends you're smiling.

Cat (36:19)

So I know, I know, I think I'm going to go a bit left field. What I think matters most now is that we each find our personal cadence. We each dig deep into ourselves to understand the rhythms and motions of when we work best. For me, the thing that is most dangerous for all organisations at the moment is the unaddressed issue of stress, anxiety and burnout. I think all the external parameters indicate that 2026 is going to exacerbate that. And I think community is the answer. I think it's really, really important that each of us



looks at and examines our own personal sustainability, looks at where we put our focus each day, what we pay attention to, make sure that we, as one of our earlier podcast conversations this year with Louise Mowbray identified, that we check our algorithmic bubbles, that we recognise also that our human brains were not designed to be always on digitally, always paying attention to all the hundreds and thousands of informational stimuli that bamboozles us every day, that we really dig deep and we get an understanding of what fills our energy cups up and what depletes our energy cups and that we actually start having conversations in community with one another so that we better understand, you know, Jen and I have worked together now closely for five years. Actually, Jen and I, we've never had a conversation about what time of day are you most productive?

Jen Sproul (38:20)

No, we haven't actually. Do we have it now?

Cat (38:24)

No, but you know what I mean? Like, you know, beyond what point in the day is your brain banjaxed and unable to process any more information? I personally am a morning person and I don't respond well to anybody that sends me a business email after about six o'clock in the evening. I get really stressed out by it because I'm done. But I think, this whole piece around coming back to ourselves and starting from within like forget all the social media hyperbole towards perfectionism how do I function best what are the things that I personally need to fill my cup up in order that I can be the best human being that I can be when I show up for my colleagues because actually most of the time we're probably not even showing up for our employers, we're showing up for our colleagues, right? We're showing up because we want to be in the company of people that we like, respect and trust. How do I get to be, because I do have agency every single day, I get the choice of how am going to spend my energy today? What energy drains do I need to remove? What activities do I need to make sure I introduce to my day-to-day routine in order that my energy levels remain as optimal as they can be? And I think if we all were to focus on that at the micro individual level, that at a group level is what fosters organisational resilience. Resilience does not come from one person braving it on through ruggedly, doggedly, determinedly, keep going at it. **Resilience comes from community**, but we all need to be alert to our inner selves to get there.

Joe (40:20)

I really like that. I think, you know, I'm kind of starting to summarise all of the conversation in my head and listen, it comes down to very exciting times ahead, but also very challenging times ahead. The profession is changing, our skill sets need to change. There's crazy stuff



happening around the world and we don't know what else is coming our way. So I think, Jen, really switching this and really putting the focus on the IoIC. How will the IoIC support IC pros in meeting the challenges that we think we're going to face and the unexpected challenges that are going to come in 2026, right? What's the role of the IoIC and how will we help?

Jen Sproul (40:52)

I'm to try and use a Dominic Walters way of doing this which is the wall of three which he's an artist at. I think for me there's the first role which look out for more from IoIC next year about how we represent you, how we articulate the profession's criticality, importance, what it's actually there to do. So I think for IoIC number one is how we show up and articulate for you and how can we do that better stronger bolder more confidently and more clearly and more critically I think is number one. I think number two is making sure we give you the knowledge the trends the thoughts the sparking of ideas that help you feel that you can have those conversations in your organisations because we're arming you with the information. For example, we work with Cat doing a monthly IC Trends report where we look across what's going on in the world and we give you that information serving up. Right, the reports that we're doing, the way we look at the index, the way we position that, the way we share case studies and learnings across our community. I think the challenge I will throw to members is that we need to make time to read those things and understand them and process them. It's really important. I can't impress that enough on people. I know it feels like that's the last thing you've got time for but it's the thing that will help arm you for the conversations and the prioritisation that you need to give in your job. I think prioritisation is going to be key. So it's how we show up and how we arm you with the knowledge and the intelligence. I think the third thing is then of course, and with that and springs into skills, of course, that will help you learn and all that kind of stuff. But I think the third thing that's most important is then how we enable you as a community to connect and thrive and discuss and share and feel supported and feel part of, forever trying to do more to show up and help enable our community. Again, I know it's something that you feel like it's the last thing you have time to, to go to a network event or join a webinar or go on to the community page, but it's worth it. So we will do our best to provide those strands, but we want you to come and join us because that's where the magic happens.

Joe (42:55)

I think, Dom, your smile, I don't know if you want to add anything to close this off.

Dom (43:01)



I think Jen has beautifully summarised what we're about so my only thing to add to that is if you're not a member, come and join us.

Joe (43:07)

Love the promo at the very end. Great. I think we're at the end. I think we've made it to the end. think great conversation. Thank you for inviting me to be part of the conversation. Loved every minute. I think the last time we were together was at the IoIC festival. It's been too long. Let's not leave it that long again.

Dom (43:22)

We normally say, Joe, thank you very much for joining us and being an intelligent, focused, but humane questioner. Thank you very much for that.

Joe (43:30)

Thank you for having me.

Jen Sproul (43:32)

Thanks everybody for tuning in and thank you again as well to Joe for guiding us through this conversation. We'll see you on the next one.