Where’s internal communication headed?

EXPERT VIEWS ON IC TRENDS FOR 2016
This Institute of Internal Communication e-book on IC trends for 2016 identifies some key trends that will be affecting practitioners – both in terms of challenging them, and offering potential solutions.

Current developments seem to emphasise a particular dichotomy. On the one hand, we have the relentless advance of digital. It’s so relentless that it’s difficult for everyone – from technophobe to techno-whiz kid – to keep on top of the technical detail and what the technology can actually achieve.

And perhaps more fundamentally, evolving digital is also having an effect on the way organisations work and how the IC role fits in. So not embracing this dynamic process will be an increasing handicap for internal communicators.

On the other hand we have the continuing, core IC preoccupations, which on the face of it would be just as important with or without digital developments, such as effective two way communication within organisations and measurement.

In reality, and as we can see from a number of our contributions, those who succeed in harnessing digital to create innovative, more reliable and inclusive approaches to tackling the core issues and their more problematic aspects will be the real winners.

Key strands of the challenges ahead include:

**Digital:** recognise its full capabilities, potential in supporting and consulting even the most remote employees, and producing more meaningful measurement. But avoid being dazzled by it – it’s not a panacea and must fulfil objectives

**Shifting role of communicator:** from creator and information disseminator to curator, enabler, facilitator and coach

**Power of data:** huge potential to gather data more regularly, flexibly, providing a greater depth and breadth of insight. But communicators have to overcome frequent aversion and barriers to employing measurement systematically as a key part of activities

**Inspiring and engaging:** overcome the constraints and bureaucracy of existing cultures, and strengthen reputation and trust to inspire your people and unleash their full potential

Now take a tour of all these topics with the following thought-provoking contributions from industry experts and thought leaders

**Catherine Park**
Editor
Welcome to this, our second annual collection of fresh thinking about near-future trends in internal communication.

It’s striking how rapidly once-novel and unfamiliar uses of language become standard and accepted. Old words with new meanings can be odd at first, even awkward (agile may be an example, disruptive certainly is) but they quickly drop into the millrace of business language and join the everyday flow of words we use to describe our world, eventually losing that strange taste on our tongue as we use them. We don’t think twice now about the letter e for electronic as in e-commerce. IoIC has an e-zine and this is an e-book.

Whatever the usage, though, we all need to share a common understanding of the precise meaning of a word, a concept or a trend. We look to experts to guide us, and to professional bodies like IoIC to bring experts and practitioners together, creating moments for our professional community to introduce, share and challenge new ideas or to re-purpose old ones. This e-book is one such moment.

For a period of time spanning three governments, another e word, engagement, has reigned supreme if not unchallenged in corporate discourse and its primacy as a driver will not go away in 2016. And yet other themes are emerging. Several of them are highlighted on the following pages.

The quest for authenticity will continue. Partly this is a reaction to a relentlessly commercialised world in which we have learned to doubt, to probe and to question anything and anyone who we suspect of spinning us a line. We now trust less, often with good reason, but in a thoroughly networked world we need to trust, albeit with powerful filters – trust but verify, as a US president once said.

Our yearning for the authentic is also a human response to growing digitalisation, which brings huge benefits but can also seem to divorce us from the real. Retaining the human touch, keeping a human scale, creating a level of intimacy to balance the impersonal nature of many communication tools, these are all features to be prized.

I can therefore predict that in May 2016, IoIC will hold an annual conference with humanising communication as an overarching theme! And that we will be involved with further research next year into building trust in organisations. That’s from my privileged position with IoIC, which also enables me to know what lies inside these pages. Now it’s your turn to enjoy and reflect on what our expert contributors have to say. I wish you happy reading and a stimulating and successful 2016.

Steve Doswell
Chief Executive, Institute of Internal Communication

“Retaining the human touch, keeping a human scale, creating a level of intimacy to balance the impersonal nature of many communication tools, these are all features to be prized.”
The future of communication
Rachel Miller

What is the future of communication? Whether it’s 2016 or 3016, there are some fundamental principles that will remain constant.

#backtothefutureday was celebrated on 21 October 2015 – the date in the Back to the Future films when we were all meant to have flying cars and hoverboards, with self-tying shoes.

That’s not quite happened.

But if you told me back in 1985, heck, even 2005, that I would be paying for Tube travel via my watch and using that same device to verbally control the lights in my house, and order/buy groceries, I would have found it hard to believe.

We have many incredible things that were unthinkable when the films came out. I have the ability to talk to my children via FaceTime/baby monitors from my phone wherever I am in the world, and have Live Photos in my pocket to hear their voices.

I think this is the future of communication and work:

1. Face-to-face communication cannot be beaten. It can be replicated via technology, but in person remains the most effective form.
2. Peer-to-peer will continue to grow in importance. We’re moving from hierarchical to horizontal communication. Peers are powerful and can transform organisational communication.
3. Trust is the currency of communication. With trust, great things can happen. You need to trust employees to do the right thing, rather than assume they’ll do the wrong thing.
4. Everything that is not shared is lost.
5. There’s no such thing as purely ‘internal’ communication. Everything has the potential to be shared. I wrote about this in the book Share This: The Social Media Handbook for PR Professionals (Wiley, 2012).
6. Don’t view communication as something you do to employees, but for and with them.
7. The role of professional communicators has shifted from content creators to content curators.
8. Work is a thing you do, not a place you go.
9. Integrated communication does not mean setting aside skill sets and disciplines. Equip, enable and empower your employees and customers by having a joined up approach.
10. Employee engagement isn’t something extra. It’s what you say and how you do it (via Engage for Success).

“We’re moving from hierarchical to horizontal communication. Peers are powerful and can transform organisational communication.”

ABOUT RACHEL
Rachel Miller founded All Things IC communication consultancy after a decade of working in-house for companies including Visa, Novartis and London Overground.

A highly experienced and multiple award-winning practitioner, Rachel is endlessly curious about IC and helps organisations and professionals achieve communication excellence.

As a consultant she has advised companies including Harrods, Tullow Oil, Jamie Oliver Group, London Ambulance Service, Heathrow Express and the Zoological Society of London.

Rachel is an industry speaker whose thoughts have been featured in a number of best-selling PR books. She regularly shares her knowledge through her popular blog www.allthingsic.com and on Twitter @AllthingsIC.
Time to replace apathy with advocacy in the British workplace

Scott McKenzie

In 2015 Lansons conducted its Britain at Work study, which paints a picture of a hardworking UK workforce which is also suffering from fatigue and apathy (one in four employees say they feel apathy towards their workplace). We get on well with colleagues and like our working environment. Interestingly, we feel our jobs are secure and think we’re fairly paid, while in contrast we think our CEO is overpaid – that is when we actually know who the CEO is – 23% of long-term employees do not!

We need to build more pride in the workplace. More than half (51%) of us would not recommend our employer which is a deep concern, as a similar number would also be reluctant to recommend the sector we work in.

The study also showed that many UK workers are regularly working beyond their contracted hours, sacrificing social and family arrangements. We give up nearly a whole working day every week beyond our contracted hours. This does not seem sustainable and presents a clear and present danger to the UK’s economic recovery.

"Developing campaigns which give employees a bigger voice, shaping their working environment and helping the organisation achieve its goals"

We believe communications practitioners should focus on the following four areas in order to address these issues:

1 **Rebuilding the reputation of the CEO**
   Advising and coaching CEOs to effectively address the issue of poor leadership visibility and the absence of explanations around the value senior leaders add to their workplace

2 **Creating employee advocacy**
   Developing campaigns which give employees a bigger voice, shaping their working environment and helping the organisation achieve its goals (and wider purpose)

3 **Brand and reputation recovery**
   Developing insight-led programmes which aid organisations in reputation recovery – addressing the lack of pride workers feel not just in their own workplace, but sometimes in the wider sector they work in too

4 **Building resilience in the workplace**
   Partnering with the HR team and organisational psychologists to develop training and coaching programmes which equip leaders and managers to deal with pressures of the modern workplace.

You can download the Britain at Work report [here](#) and we would encourage you to share your views by contacting us at britainatwork@lansons.com.

ABOUT SCOTT

Scott McKenzie is a partner and Board director at Lansons, as well as director of the Change and Employee Engagement practice. He has extensive experience of managing high-profile issues and complex change programmes for some of the world’s best-known organisations including Deutsche Bank, Hewlett Packard, Novartis, Statoil, Merck, Shell, Prudential and Tetra Laval Group.

Before joining Lansons, Scott was head of change and internal communications at Hill & Knowlton. He has also held various roles at Royal Bank of Scotland Group, including heading up internal and external communications for the Private Banking business.
Tech affords us minute by minute measures, yet many organisations still rely on a single annual engagement survey, rather than smaller ‘dip checks’ or continuous monitoring. Comms pros need to understand how messages ‘land’ and demonstrate to stakeholders the impact of communications beyond mere awareness. Leaders, even outside of HR, need to understand how engagement matters to the culture and productivity within the organisation.

We have to help stakeholders make the necessary investment of time and money to monitor, report, and act on communication metrics.

Great communications go beyond informing people (and even beyond dialogue) to support digital transformation, change management as a whole, project roll-outs, and even cultural change.

Not that everything is in the hands of the core comms team; in the networked organisation there’s a wider set of involved people, including leaders, official community managers, and unofficial influencers. Larger organisations rely on experienced community managers to roll out, embed and facilitate use of the enterprise social network. It’s vital to work with such community managers, as they can identify influencers within communities, and help organically spread key messages.

While we often have to go to the audience, rather than expecting people to come to our published material, communities are not just another channel to push messages through. A heavy hand or over use will turn people away from what should be interactive direct dialogue.

While corporate internal communicators become ever more strategically savvy (many claim to have the CEO’s ear), project communicators continue to push out ‘status updates’ via email and face-to-face conversations, and only inform affected audiences about decisions. With the rise of user experience research (UX), this is a missed opportunity – it would be better to share progress, rather than only decisions, and discuss plans and ideas, rather than only informing people of results.

Corporate communications will increasingly be lost amongst the scores of notifications; in email, in app, and within the collaborative intranet. Communicators and copywriters should work with developers within IT to craft the micro-copy to enhance the UX of apps, workflows, and the social intranet.

“Better to share progress, rather than only decisions, and discuss plans and ideas, rather than only informing people of results”

ABOUT WEDGE
Wedge has been involved with internal comms and intranets for over a decade, and is the founder of the Intranet Now conference.

He helps medium and large organisations design their intranets to be useful and useable, and has blogged about communications and intranet practices for many years. Find @Wedge on Twitter.
Measurement is the key
Paul Jones

I’ll be honest: there are things that I know I should do because they’re good for me, but I can never quite get around to. Like eating five a day, every day.

I think measurement within internal comms is much the same: many of us say that we believe it’s important, but few of us actually get around to doing anything about it. I’d love to see that change in 2016.

The latest European Communication Monitor report showed that only 59% of survey respondents were using measurement to explain the value of comms to executives, while just 43% were using data to lead comms teams or to steer agencies in the right direction.

I think that, generally, we’re pretty good at ‘doing’, but we could be better at ‘listening’. Good measurement can shine a light on what’s working well and what isn’t, and help you to focus your energies on the activities that will make the biggest difference.

If we don’t measure, we run the significant risk of giving people what we think they want, rather than what they actually need.

We heard of one organisation recently in which leaders were convinced that temporary employees weren’t interested in hearing about the big picture. So they didn’t share information effectively, believing that would be a waste of time.

But as soon as they asked employees the question, the reaction was immediate: people said that yes, they did want to hear what was happening in other parts of the business, and to learn from successes from around the country.

As ever, it all comes down to understanding your audience. One of the most exciting things about working in comms at the moment is that we just don’t know what’s around the corner, what Apple and the like are going to invent next.

There will be some fantastic technological innovations in 2016 I’m sure, but whatever the channel, we have to make sure that we’re sharing useful information in a way that suits our audience(s). And the only way we can know for sure, is by asking the people who’ll be using those channels.

“**The latest European Communication Monitor report showed that only 59% of survey respondents were using measurement to explain the value of comms to executives**”

ABOUT PAUL

Paul is a former journalist and in his 16 years with Sequel he has developed content and channels and created and delivered various internal communication projects for UK, European and global audiences. He leads Sequel’s strategy team in its work auditing channels, creating comms strategies, running training sessions and launching internal campaigns.
After many years of employee engagement surveys and culture change projects, will 2016 be the year of significant improvement?

While businesses continue to make hefty profits and the ‘people at the top’ continue to take home predictably high salaries and bonuses, I’d say it’s pretty unlikely.

Let’s consider company culture as a force, a bit like the wind. It’s made up by the way people think and act, and influences the way people think and act. We can feel it.

What can we do to really affect something so strong?

Do we abandon our established companies operating with years of bureaucracy to join start-ups building a great culture from scratch? Do we reset our expectations to accept that until our CEO genuinely prioritises culture over short-term profit and growth, it’s unlikely we’ll see significant improvement?

Throughout 2016 we’ll see more companies develop their culture by applying the ‘Hack Day’ concept. A Hack Day (or Hackathon) is an experimental approach that’s been delivering hope in the technology world for years. People come together for a short fixed period, collaborating in small teams to redesign something that already exists or create something completely new. It’s a safe environment to explore and demonstrate what could be possible. Building deeper relationships, richer learning, and unique solutions.

Rather than developing technology, imagine applying this concept to other parts of an organisation, such as the performance management process, the internal communications approach, how ‘resources’ are allocated to projects, how decisions are made, workplace design, team away days, and so on.

So where do we, as internal communication practitioners, start?

1. As we consider our ‘engagement strategy’, let’s think about whether a non-technical Hack Day might be a refreshing activity to introduce
2. Attend a Company Culture Hack Day ourselves to experience it and learn from others
3. Build an internal company culture network to help people who care about our company culture find each other and share ideas for hacks. Here are a few example hacks as inspiration.

“Throughout 2016 we’ll see more companies develop their culture by applying the ‘Hack Day’ concept”
The digital renaissance communicator
Elizabeth Marsh

We live in a remarkable time in which digital technologies are transforming how we live and work. In our recent book, my co-author Paul Miller coined the term ‘Digital Renaissance of Work’ to describe the sweeping changes and disruption we’re experiencing across all walks of life. To me, this period is remarkable not because ‘digital’ offers a panacea, but because a human-centred vision of the digital workplace has the potential to transform our organisations from the inside out.

So what does it mean to be a digital renaissance communicator? It means playing a strategic role beyond just communication, potentially challenging the status quo, as well as helping to humanise work by making messages more authentic and personal. All the core skills of communication continue to be critical but an extended set is also needed, including elements of user-centred design, cultural and behavioural analysis, facilitation and curation, and a fast-evolving understanding of new digital workplace technologies.

The digital workplace offers new opportunities for communicators with these skills. Perhaps one of the most exciting is the ability to extend communication to non-office-based employees. Mobile initiatives at the front line are levelling the playing field and enabling previously disenfranchised workers to easily consume communication and information, and to have a voice in the organisation. Being a digital renaissance communicator means developing an understanding of the needs of these groups and becoming deeply involved at the front line.

Another important area is metrics and measurement. What we know from Digital Workplace Group benchmarking, is that measurement is still generally a weak area for intranet and internal communicators. Organisations are grappling with getting accurate and trusted data that make sense to them, as well as gaining actionable insight from usage data. Seeing measurement as an enabler for doing what you do even better, rather than as an afterthought or necessary evil, is definitely an important trait of the digital renaissance communicator.

In this remarkable time, being a digital renaissance communicator perhaps most fundamentally means stepping up and forging a path as a digital leader inside your organisation.

“"It means playing a strategic role beyond just communication, potentially challenging the status quo, as well as helping to humanise work by making messages more authentic and personal.”

ABOUT ELIZABETH

In her role as director of research at the Digital Workplace Group, Elizabeth is responsible for the management and development of the research programme. Now in its tenth year, and with a library of 60+ reports, DWG’s in-depth, case study-based research is a trusted source that helps members drive their intranet and digital workplace agenda. Elizabeth recently co-authored ‘The Digital Renaissance of Work: Delivering Digital Workplaces Fit for the Future’ with DWG’s CEO, Paul Miller which provides a roadmap for digital workplace practitioners.
As memories of the recession grow more distant, we have been seeing more investment by clients in both internal and external communication, and digital has been at the heart of this.

The rapid pace of digital change means both IC generalists and technology specialists are feeling the pressure to keep up to date with developments. Fast-moving technology is also making it more challenging for organisations to choose the right channels, and we are definitely seeing more companies coming to us for advice on the technical and creative digital solution that will best deliver their IC vision or concept.

It is clear that more of our clients are introducing collaboration apps such as Microsoft’s Lync, 37 Signals’ Basecamp and Slack. These are particularly useful for communications within a team – collaborating on a project; keeping lines of communication open and working; and achieving a positive end result.

It can be a complex and costly business to incorporate new tools and functionality into existing infrastructure. The easier the integration process, the more cost-effective the implementation, and the more straightforward it will be to gain senior management approval.

I believe this is one of the reasons why products such as Lync are currently gaining popularity; because it works within Microsoft, and it can be easy to integrate into an organisation’s workflow. Apps such as Slack are gaining popularity because they enable organisations to integrate with other third party applications like Twitter, so that everything can feed into one central hub.

Two other key priorities for clients are ensuring effective two-way communication and the gathering of data to ensure robust decision-making; clients are increasingly seeking to tackle these through innovative digital solutions. We recently developed an app that made it possible for a global business to replicate the information-gathering potential of a particular event in a number of different territories. The event was repeated in nine countries, and the app enabled employee feedback to be gathered digitally, stored centrally and undergo an accurate and in-depth analysis. Something simply not possible a few years ago.

I would expect the ascendancy of collaboration apps to be a theme in 2016, along with continuing innovation in involving all employees – however remote – and in analysing their feedback to make best use of their knowledge and maximise engagement.

― The easier the integration process, the more cost-effective the implementation, and the more straightforward it will be to gain senior management approval.‖

ABOUT GRAHAM

Graham Stewart is senior digital designer at 20/20 Productions Europe Ltd. He won the IoIC ICon award for digital innovator in 2015.
Since the dawning of civilisation, leaders on a quest have changed the world. Quests are the force propelling humankind forward. From the building of the great pyramids; to circumnavigating the globe for the first time; to going to the moon; quests have inspired bold leaders to venture into the unknown, challenge the impossible and return, hopefully successful, with new knowledge, riches and rewards.

Imagine if you, your team, your organisation or your community embraced a culture of questing. Now imagine if we could create a questing culture everywhere. What if through the power of having a clear destination, inspired by the possibility of achieving the impossible and delivering meaningful benefits, we could empower people everywhere to have the courage and conviction to do their small bit or big bit to change the world? What if through the power of quest we created a culture where people believed they could make a difference? We would craft more wholesome and inspiring jobs, truly ethical businesses, value-enhancing business models, healthier economies and more opportunities to contribute well-being in the world.

What’s holding us back? The technology and capital know-how is all already there. There is too much paranoia about the next quarter and the share price and not enough about delivering future longer-term benefits. We do too much “me too” and don’t attempt enough “moonshots”, a term coined by Larry Page, CEO of Alphabet, Google’s parent company. But this is changing. Today, because of unparalleled access to technology, and the democratisation of information and social media, anyone can become a quester and do their big bit or small bit to change the world.

The power of quest can be found in how each quest binds teams, and informs and inspires people to work together to make bold positive differences. As a result, quests require focused communication supported by compelling storytelling. When this happens quests attract the best talent; they empower people and unleash passion and energy. Quests give people a sense of purpose, which encourages creativity, experimentation and innovation. Quests deliver strategy at speed, by being agile and adaptable because when you know your target destination it’s easy to reroute. Quests deliver sustainable competitive advantage.


ABOUT DEAN

Author and strategist Dean van Leeuwen’s new book Quest: Competitive Advantage and the Art of Leadership in the 21st Century shows you how quests are becoming an important and successful part of internal communications and twenty-first-century leadership thinking.
The Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC) is the UK professional institute dedicated to supporting IC practitioners throughout their career.

We are a not-for-profit, membership organisation and all our activities are based around five key pillars:

**Advocacy** – we work continuously to promote a wider and deeper understanding of internal communication and the added value it brings to organisations of all kinds and sizes

**Career development** – through our training and qualification programmes we are equipping practitioners to be the best they can be

**Community** – we are a forum and network, bringing people together from internal communication and other related fields to exchange ideas, experiences and techniques

**Thought leadership** – we are building a body of high-quality knowledge to explain and demonstrate the impact of internal communication

**Organisational development** – we are investing in the development of the Institute so we have the capability to provide the best support for IC professionals now and into the future. The Institute provides seminars and workshops, stages a national conference, runs the largest competition for internal communicators in Europe, provides short training courses and accredited qualifications, and supports a large knowledge bank.

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