



Transcript for Primer Episode 2025

Cathryn Barnard (00:43)

Hi and welcome to the very first primer episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast in 2025. I wanted to gather Dom and Jen in the room and just talk about what is in store for you as listeners, what you can expect to hear more about in 2025. But also I know we didn't do this at the back end of 2024 and I thought it would be nice just to reflect a tiny bit on the conversations that we had in 24 and I don't know about you listeners, but I always find myself reflecting a long time after the fact on conversations that have really packed a punch for me. So I realised that I hadn't gotten around to asking Dom and Jen.

I don't even know whether I'm allowed to say this, what their favourite episode was, but some of the conversations that grabbed the most. So here we are, Jen and Dom. Dom, I'm going to come to you first. Thinking about 2024, what were some of the conversations that had most impact on you?

Dom (01:54)

Well, having looked back at what we did last year, there was obviously a huge amount of stuff which I thought was very helpful. But if I had to boil it down to three, let me start with that. First of all, we talked with the journalist James Ball, and that was of the middle of last year. And I thought that was a really good conversation because he's not an internal communication specialist. But a lot of what he said, and he's done lots of investigative journalism. And he was talking about authenticity and trust.

And I think there's a lot of read across from what he's seen looking at politicians and business people communicating externally that we can take as internal communicators. And no great rocket science there. He talked about simplicity of language. I can remember him saying, people get suspicious if you use complex language. And that's something we need to bang on about, I think, with leaders as much as we can. But it's very tempting, particularly when times are tough, to retreat behind complexity. And if we do that, I think it just makes things worse. He also talked about actions and words. So he's come up with lots of organisations where things didn't happen as people said they were going to or they professed a certain commitment to something and then that didn't come through in what they did. So I think that was that as well. And I think also just reminding us about the importance of being consistent. So I thought it was really simple stuff but useful to be reminded of it and to see it in a different context and he explained it really well as well. So I really enjoyed listening to that conversation again. A couple more then I'll pass over to Jen.



Cathryn Barnard (03:23)

Couple more yes please.

Dom (02:25)

Gerry McGovern. So early part of last year, Gerry McGovern came on to talk about basically waste, worldwide waste, and lots of other things. And I'd never really thought about the ecological environmental impacts of AI. So it was a real eye-opener to me. now I bore people all the time even more by talking to them about the amount of water it takes, the simple water it takes to keep all the warehouses going, which keep all the servers going, which allow us to use AI. And so I think we've been sold the idea, or at least I'd seen it as being AI is free. It's painless. And I think Jerry really made us realise it isn't.

I've been following him on LinkedIn since and he comes up with some really useful pithy and quite scary comments and facts about how wasteful we can be in AI and in use of technology. And not just that, but also all the hardware issues about the fact we're so frequently changing hardware and phones and how wasteful that is.

Cathryn Barnard (04:25)

Have you seen that new documentary on Netflix? It's called Buy Now. Honestly, anybody that's listening to this that's got a Netflix subscription who's remotely concerned about the climate crisis needs to watch that documentary because it is jaw-droppingly frightening, is it not?

Dom (04:46)

It basically tells us how we've been all conned into buying too much stuff. And the other frightening thing about it was what happens to stuff that we think is going to be recycled. And if you have seen it, you remember the horrible shots of beach upon beach upon beach of countries where stuff has been sent and it's just left there. It's quite eye opening, yeah. So I think Gerry made us think about that sort of thing in a different way. And then there are a number of, but I think I'm going to go for my third one, David Wales, who came sort of in the autumn. Just a reminder, if you haven't or if you haven't heard it, David used to work as a firefighter and I think he became very interested in why people behaved in certain ways or didn't behave in certain ways.

He talked about his practical experience of being at a fire or a rescue situation, giving people sound advice and then not following it. And he was saying, don't understand it because we used to work around a flip chart. We'd think about this. We'd come up with what made good practical, logical sense. And then people didn't follow it. And so that got him into the



whole area about the behaviour. So that was very interesting. And again, what came through for me from that was it's about consulting, not making assumptions, understanding about your audience, thinking about the circumstances they're in, being able to empathise with that, and having a conversation rather than simply going in and issuing orders. So I think that came through in all those three actually, the importance of dialogue and conversation. So that's my wrap for you.

Cathryn Barnard (06:14)

And yeah, you just recapping on David Wales, I think for me immediately, that topic is translatable into the ongoing debacle around hybrid work and where people should work from. And I think it's exactly to your point. The reason why organisations are failing to get it right is because they are not engaging in deliberative dialogue or listening exercises to understand what people want, but it's not singularly about what people want, is it? Either it's also about conveying the mission, the purpose of the organisation. What are we here to do? Why is it important that we meet up at regular intervals? So for me, there's just this massive need for ongoing conversation where both parties or all parties can learn from one another to move things forward. So grabbing the mic and thinking about 2025 and lessons learned from the conversations we had in 24 and how they translate over. But Jen, what about you? What were some of your most interesting conversations in 24?

Jen Sproul (07:34)

They were all interesting because they were all a conversation about the importance of conversations. And that was just a sort of thread that brought out through the entire year. And it always sort of continued to come back to that. And I think it is, you say, it's about understanding each other, understanding each other's perspectives, context, experiences, which is really, really important, that point of understanding our people and who we are and where we come from and how much time we need to put into that and picking up on that. One of mine was also when we spoke with Peter Mandeno. I'm sure he's not the only, but he's the first gentleman I've spoken to that actually has a PhD in understanding the business value of human connection. And I think that that's something that, you know, we talk about the value and the importance of in IOLC, we say we're here to create an informed and connected and purposeful workforce to drive organisational success. But when we get to that point, we can get very into how we inform and have the message been open and read. But actually, we need to place that ring fence value around how we design connection into our workplaces beyond just let's have a staff away day and get together. It needs to be intrinsically designed into every point and if you do that, the business value is immense. So it creates, of course, the emotional connection you would hope to. But it also supports that exchange of intellect, that exchange of information, us feeling part of something. And we all know as internal communicators that that is our job. But actually to say beyond sending out



the information, the informity piece, this is also what we're here to design and it has a business value, I think is really important. And I think it's really important to our case as a professional community that we're beyond just sending out information. We're about how you design connectivity for business value. And I think there's lots more to come in that conversation next year as well. This year, sorry, as well.

Cathryn Barnard (09:31)

Yeah, and it's great, isn't it, to finally see academic rigor being applied to areas that I think some corners of the business community might have been smirched as soft and fluffy in days gone by. I think, you know, pow, bring this academic rigor in.

Jen Sproul (09:52)

It's the art and the science combined, isn't it? Which we talk about.

Cat (09:54)

Yeah. Love it.

Dom (09:56)

Just to come back to this thing. Often we talk about conversations and you can see some senior people looking at you a bit of scants and thinking, as you say, this is a bit soft and fluffy. And I think just to pick up what Jen was saying, there's some things that the academic rigor and the conversations we had helped to frame. I mean, first of all, it's about conversation, but conversation for a purpose. There has to be a reason for the conversation. It's not just about having a chit chat, although sometimes that's valuable as well to bring people together. I think the second thing about it was the importance of structure.

So you need to understand why you're consulting with people and what's given, what they can change and what they can't. And I think the third thing which I came from that was conversation is not about consensus because often if you try and achieve consensus, everybody agree you won't get anywhere. But it's about help people make sense of stuff, understand it and see what their responsibilities are. I think those are the key things. So if anything, in this coming year, we can start to think about how we as a profession can make conversation of business enabler with structure, with being intentional, being focused. I think that would be a big win.



Jen Sproul (11:02)

Yeah, I absolutely agree. Do you want another one then based off that? I think, I think, okay, okay. We would never be getting off lightly in this podcast group, would we? I think the next one, which kind of builds on it as well, but it was the conversation we had with Deborah Sobel about sustainability. Now we've talked a lot about sustainability. It's one of the key trends that we will continue to monitor this year and obviously how the landscapes evolve from CSR to ESG to sustainability into ethics and all that that encompasses. But for me, what Debra really well articulated was actually there is going to be more demand on organisations from a legislative point of view next year. And actually, as a professional community, we don't need to be scientists to understand data, but we need to understand what's going on in that space.

Jen Sproul (11:50)

And I think it opens up for me a massive opportunity for our profession to be a resource, to be a guide, to be a support, because fundamentally, if organisations are going to meet the requirements they have, but also just do good alongside the rise of activism, where you're going to be called more into question, what you say and what you do is going to be called more into question.

Whether that's about climate action, just about being an ethical organisation, a responsible organisation. We need to help organisations socialise that internally and see that embedded in and see that put through. And we're seeing the rise of sustainability roles in organisations. What Deborah was talking about, they are crying out for communication support. This is where the technical and the communication skillsets could be a great combined force. And so really, for me, I think it's about, well, this is what we're good at. So this is an opportunity for us to come in and support this evolving area. And also as well, another part for our business case to show that we're really important for reputation and advocacy. And what everyone's saying in a world where I think we've seen it in the research that we've done this year, where activism and saying you're ethical and being ethical are going to be called very much into question. And that needs to be socialised in every facet of an organisation.

Cathryn Barnard (13:11)

And that reminds me, at some point last year, I had a conversation with an HR director of a multinational tech firm and she pointed out to me that there are some brilliant people coming into the working world with master level degree qualifications in sustainability and sustainability related topics. What they lack is the communication skill, the ability to socialise the hard data and make it relatable for your common or garden colleague who has probably by now a great deal of concern for the environmental planetary crisis, but doesn't get enthused by percentage data points because they're not emotive, are they? They're not, you know, it's just dry data. So there is this big opportunity and if I had one wish for 2025, it



would be that more of our listeners and members feel confident to step up and help because it's urgent work, needs doing. And to your point, Jen, I think, well, to be discussed, I think we will be having some conversations about the rise of workplace activism in this year's schedule. So I'll tell you a little bit more about that in a bit.

Jen Sproul (14:43)

I give you my third and final because we do love a three on this podcast, don't we? We do everything in three, so I'm going to not let us down this time. I think my third would also be about when we spoke with Naeema Pasha about ethical AI. So again, this ethical piece is coming in. And she reminded us of the Luddite movement that was in the last revolution and actually how they were sort of not seen as valid, but actually what they were doing was very valid. To remember that phase and how we take that forward. But for me, beyond that, I think that it plays into what I just said a minute ago about this sort of ethical piece, is that AI is happening, right? It is an opportunity. We need to take it, but we need to do it. It will not work from the things that we are protecting in charge of, the things that we can help contribute as a professional community. We talked trust. We know trust was fundamental in our work last year. We need to be really, really considerate of the unintended consequences of AI. It needs to have human layer. It needs to not undo the work that this professional community has done to create trust and values and mission and vision and inclusivity and accessibility. We have to embrace it and we should embrace it, but we need to do that through an ethical mindset, through an ethical lens and not feel like we need to run at something because everybody else is doing it. It's that sort of, we've got to keep up with the peer pressure, but we need to take a breath and think through our decisions, think through our consequences. And then as a professional community demonstrate, as organisations seek to adopt AI, whether that's through in our own practice, but also through processes and how work is done in the organisation, that is a huge change in itself and a huge transformation in itself that needs guardrails, that needs advice, that needs support. Again, for me, it's another big opportunity for our profession to provide that sort of conscience, I think, and the ethical lens as we approach it.

Cathryn Barnard (16:40)

And I would just dovetail onto that just to say, because that was an illuminating conversation, but if anybody missed the episode that we recorded with Roger Steare, which was all about ethics, go and listen to that episode as well, because he gave a brilliant explainer as to the importance of the role of ethics in business.



Dom (17:05)

So Cat, you've heard our top three, suppose, if you like. I know it's hard to choose. There were so many excellent conversations, but what would you put towards the top of your favourite list?

Cathryn Barnard (17:14)

And yeah, it's hard because obviously I take care of inviting all the guests on so I didn't want to offend anybody. And you've both been very diligent and given three and I've got four written down that I'm really gonna struggle with so I'm gonna break the mould and I'm gonna go with four. So I loved, loved, loved the conversation that we had with Ellen Van Oosten about helping people change. I think it was a game changer because all too often organisations think about transformation as some kind of linear Gantt chart process that is so entirely dehumanised. And as Ellen pointed out, if we can take time to listen and understand the progress that people hope to make in their own lives and somehow synthesise that with, the greater organisational endeavour, then you are far, far, far more likely to achieve lasting change. So I loved what she had to tell us about how people change. I know that you guys weren't around for this. So I felt like I was the spoiled child, but I had such a delightful conversation with Tracy Camilleri. She was the co-author of the book, *The Social Brain*, and she and I had a brilliant conversation about team dynamics and the role of conversation and communication in optimal team dynamics. That was a good one for me. I think I'm still pretty transfixed by the conversation that you and I, Dom, had with Joe Keohane, who is the author of *The Power of Strangers*. And that book is just such a wonderful invitation to strike up conversation with people that you don't know because you do not know what will happen because the absolute joy of a serendipitous moment of connection that kind of boosts your soul. And I know you and I, Dom, have done a little bit of work around the science of love this year, but micro moments of connection was the kind of topic, I think, of our conversation with Joe, and I loved it. And then I guess the final one for me was the conversation that we had in the late stage of the year with Deborah Hale about how to build a movement, how to build a campaign and what she shared with us about her work to orchestrate the London 2012 Olympic torch relay. I literally can get goosebumps thinking back to that because when she told us what her kind of key learnings were and that, consistency, there are no shortcuts. If you want to build a movement, you quite literally have to put in the hours and the weeks and the months. And I think that's the one thing that really strikes me across a broad church of conversations that we've had both within the podcast, but conversations that I've had on behalf of the Institute outside of the podcast or conversations that I've had more germanely, there are no shortcuts. If you want to build trust, goodwill, loyalty, cohesion and alignment, you've got to do the work and that's there is.



Dom (20:50)

Well, Cat, if you're going to cheat, I'm going to cheat.

Jen Sproul (20:57)

How can you all be a bunch of cheaters?

Dom (21:00)

Can I have a fourth one? I'm going add a fourth one. If we don't mention one of the podcasts from last year, please forgive us because we're doing a summary.

Jen Sproul (21:07)

We loved everyone, didn't we? We loved everyone.

Dom (21:08)

But I'll just think back to whom we had Ian MacArthur on, I think, from Manchester, who was behind Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, behind his drive for good work. I think just listening to what we've been saying, he helped us bring together the fact this stuff works. So it's easy sometimes to dismiss what we do around involving engagement, communication as being a nice to have when a business is doing well. I think what Ian MacArthur did was say we do this and it's making business boom.

And if you look at Greater Manchester, and we were lucky enough, Jen, to be up there for the one day conference at end of November, I think, last year. But it works. It is working. It is transforming the economy of that city. And so for a practical example and good evidence to say, taking care of people, involving them, listening to them, trying to shape things as much as you can around their requirements is good for business. And I think that was a really good practical demonstration of that. Jen, are you going to cheat?

Jen Sproul (22:01)

Am I gonna cheat? I've always been a very rule abiding individual, you know, not to throw any shade on any of you. But I think as well also as well if I was gonna cheat, I would bring in actually the chat we have with Susanna about the Index 24, which I think brings together that evidence piece. And we talked about how in the evidence we need more feedback, people want more listening, they want to be activist and they want honesty, they want clarity. So if you like, it's kind of the podcast is a beautiful marriage. That one is of all our other podcasts and say, well, there's the evidence and there's the answers. And I think to



your point, isn't it? There's no shortcuts. We need to present this is hard, consistent, deep, long-term work that cannot be short-cutted in any way if they want to get the optimal outcome to really, really make it something that's going to make a difference. And I think that with all of this evidence and all of these pieces and all of this extra body of work going in, we've never had a such, I guess, as a professional community an opportunity to make a case as strong as we do at the end of 2024, which we can take into this year.

Cathryn Barnard (23:08)

Well, what a beautiful segue, because my next question is going to be exactly on what we can expect from the podcast in 2025. Jen, you're the chief executive of the IoIC, and Dom, president-elect from May, you will be the president of the IoIC. And I know that both of you have taken your role as chief listener seriously because you fed back to me some of the topics and themes that you would like the podcast to focus on in 2025. So can you tell our listeners what they can expect to hear more about on the podcast in 2025, please? What have you been hearing from your key stakeholders?

Jen Sproul (23:57)

I'll start if you like, Dom, and then you can probably plug in any of the things that I'm missing. And obviously, we tune in to what the members are talking about. We obviously tune into the board and then we tune into the own research and the wider space of what's being discussed and what we can see is coming down the line for our, that we think members and internal communicators should be absorbing and learning to help them in their work.

And I think for me, it's keeping an eye on those trends. We need to be as an institute providing that meta trend so that we can help put that against it. I think some of the couple of areas from just sort of the wider piece, I think Dom, I don't know if you want to go anything more specific. We want to continue doing work to demonstrate the value of internal communication. So how can we keep having conversations about how we make our case? We've also heard that I think that, you know, we recognise it's a tough economic environment. It's a tough jobs market at the moment.

It's tough to work at the moment. Working is hard for any individual, don't think anyone in my personal or professional life that's finding work and making ends meet a joyful experience. But we recognise as an institute there's more we need to uncover in terms of where are we as careers, where are we in our skills in the context of the future and how we're experiencing that and burnout. So we want to take more of a look at that. So I think those are sort of the meta areas, A, our value but also what's going on for us as a profession internally and how we can take these opportunities and these skills forward. And then



there's a rich tapestry of topics that we can discuss beneath that. Dom, I don't know if you wanted to add any more on that kind of rich tapestry.

Dom (25:30)

I think you've painted that tapestry, that's not right is it? You've woven that tapestry. But I think just a few things. One thing we've come through very loud and clear, particularly in the last year, is uncertainty.

You mentioned professional uncertainty for communicators and that's definitely something and we need to help communicators make the case for communication, internal communication. But also for internal communication, helping people navigate uncertainty. So, internal communication has a unique position where we can provide continuity, consistency, we can reinforce key messages, we can give some sort of security to people. So, I think we need to be focusing on that over the coming year. I think there's going to be a lot of pressure upon, well there has been in 2024, that will continue to be economic pressure upon Intel communication functions. We're still quite exposed. We shouldn't be what we are. So therefore, how can we make the case and make sure that we're tuned into the business requirements or the organisation requirements, I think. But notwithstanding all that, I still think we're going to be focusing on culture.

Cat has spoken already, there's going to be increased pressure about return to work and that is a catalyst I think for cultural disagreements between people who run an organisation who want to do it a certain way and people who work there. And I think that's an opportunity for communication in bringing the two together as we were talking about earlier, having those conversations, helping each side understand each other and finding a way forward from that. So I think we're going to be incredibly involved with doing that. So conversation is going to be important, the way leadership behaves is going to be important and how we demonstrate our value as well. So that's what we're going to be helping, people do as a professional body.

Cathryn Barnard (27:07)

And just to sort of dovetail that, I think, this whole topic of the future way of work and return to office mandates and so on, I was talking with somebody just this morning who was sharing an anecdote about a company that she's done some work with where they have used the pandemic to recruit nationally. The statement was we are no longer location based. We can hire from anywhere in the country, which opens up our talent pipeline considerably. And now they are asking those people that they hired with a work from anywhere mindset to relocate to their headquarters. And so for me, immediately, I perceive a trust issue. So where we had started to talk about trust and focus on trust, certainly with the Index, the IC Index in 2024, but also that conversation that we did have with James Ball,



we are going to have to double down on this conversation about what is trust? How do you gain it? How do you break it? I think we can all agree that it takes a significant amount of time to build and it can be relinquished in a heartbeat.

Cathryn Barnard (29:30)

I think we need to continue that thread at the core of the conversations that we have on the podcast. And just to circle back to the trends that we spoke about, Jen, you mentioned just then, in case listeners aren't aware of the trends that we're specifically interested in at the Institute, we're focusing in on the impact of next generation digital technology, including artificial intelligence.

We're looking at the sustainability agenda and the opportunity that that presents for internal communication professionals. We're looking at people, how people feel at work, shifting attitudes towards work, how we can use internal communication to build that cohesion and that shared understanding of what we're all here to do. But we're also going to keep focusing on employment because I think there was some data that came out just before Christmas showing that we are literally on the teetering on the brink of recession. and I think this is going to be a tough year and I think, we will need to perhaps rethink our conventional attitudes towards employment and think a bit more laterally. So that obviously has a massive opportunity for internal communication.

Dom (29:56)

Cat the good news is that people listening to the podcast won't be going through this alone. We'll be there to help support them and guide them. So tell us about when the next series of the podcast starts and what we can expect.

Cathryn Barnard (30:09)

So in earnest, the podcast will start on the 22nd of January. So we are gonna dive straight in. We are going to look at things like the role of business in a well-functioning society. We're gonna look at things like the rise of workplace activism. We're gonna look at topics that I hope really do help listeners because we all now face very different work futures, we're going to look at things like the role of learning, unlearning, relearning. We're going to look at things like how to recognise the signs of burnout, both for ourselves as professions, because, you know, when you're being asked to do more with less, that is a lot, a lot, a lot of pressure. But also what we can do to help colleagues if we, you know, recognise the the kind of indicators in order that we can provide better support to one another in our places of work. So we've got all manner of things in series 12 coming up. And yes, I am beavering away behind the scenes to keep a steady flow of engaging conversations for all.



Jen Sproul (31:27)

Well, I think we'll all look forward to it. think that's we've given hopefully in this a kind of snippet of what we've taken away from last year, what you can expect from us this year. And I don't know about you, Cat and Dom, but I am super excited for all the conversations that we're gonna have.

Cathryn Barnard (31:40)

Yes, I love it. Thank you so much.

Jen Sproul (31:42)

Thanks everybody.

Dom (31:43)

Thank you. Bye bye.