Transcript for S11 E1 Designing workplaces for human connectivity with Peter Mandeno

Cathryn Barnard (00:43)

Hello and welcome to a special bonus episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard, as ever joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Walters. And today we have a special guest that we are really excited about chatting with because I think you might all agree after the episode that his thoughts and perspectives give some glimpse as to what the future of the profession will actually look like based on where we are today. So without further ado, I want to introduce you all to Peter Mandeno, who is a native of New Zealand and an expert in science of human connection. Peter recently earned a PhD in design engineering from Imperial College London, and he has specialised in seeking to understand not simply why connections at work matter, but also to show organisations how to improve connectivity outcomes by design for improved engagement, wellbeing, creativity and performance. I don't feel like anything I particularly say on this matter is going to do Peter's background and research justice, but as a tiny bit more background, he's worked with organisations ranging from financial services, ABN Amro to pharmaceutical, including GSK to KPMG and Vodafone, helping all of those organisations communicate more effectively and designing experiences that get diverse and distributed teams connecting more authentically. So Peter, welcome.

Peter Mandeno (02:29)

Thank you very much, Cat. It's a pleasure to be here.

Cathryn Barnard (02:31)

I've been really looking forward to this conversation because I think you are going to bring fresh thinking to our audience. And I think probably the best place to start, as I said, I'm not going to be able to do it justice, is if you can tell us about your PhD thesis and also what prompted you to explore that topic.

Peter Mandeno (02:53)

Goodness, where do I start? Well, I think my journey into human connectivity really began if I trace it back to a time when I moved from, I'd been living in Amsterdam for several years and I moved to New York and I'd been working for about a decade in mostly creative agencies and communication, innovation and strategy type roles. And I was out in New York looking for my next thing and I was surprised and slightly frustrated with how difficult it was to actually make new connections in a kind of consistent manner. And in essentially

addressing my own challenge, I started an experiment, a social concept called Wok and Wine that proved incredibly effective at helping, as I came to describe it, helping people to find the people they didn't know they were looking for. So effectively engineering serendipity.

And I took that concept around the world, initially doing events for random groups of strangers, helping people to find and make really interesting connections. And then organisations started reaching out saying, Hey, this would be the perfect thing to get my marketing team and my technology team connected or what have you. Or for example, we have a particular client relationship that we're looking to strengthen. Could you bring the Wok and wine concept in and help us to do that? So I became, I guess through that experience, really fascinated with what I came to understand as this kind of central paradox of human connectivity, where being connected to others is a real fundamental human need. And yet at the same time, most people, at least in some contexts, struggle to satisfy the human connectivity needs. And then when I moved from New York to London, a couple of things happened. I think that were really the triggers for my or that launched me into my academic endeavours. So first of all, Wok & Wine, we were very fortunate that we were featured in Harvard Business Review in an article essentially talking about the business case for serendipity. So why organisations should really create the space for these unlikely connections to happen. I can share a link to that, or actually it's, if you type the words serendipity, shrimp and HBR into any search engine, you'll find the article, I'll leave it there. And the second thing is that I had a chance encounter with a young new professor at Imperial College who was fascinated by my work and we were looking for a way to collaborate and he was looking for PhD candidates. So that was kind of my path back from industry into academia and the rest they say is history. So I finished my PhD, almost two years ago and since then I've been looking at how best to apply the knowledge and tools that I developed through that process and helping organisations mostly to get better connected or the people within organisations to get better connected for the reasons you mentioned.

Cathryn Barnard (05:51)

And just before I pass over, what was the title of your thesis for the PhD was? know that I know this, but you're going to tell me because you're going

Peter Mandeno (06:01)

Sure, I'll give you the full title. So actually, importantly, I did my PhD at Imperial in the Department of Design Engineering, which sets my work quite a ways away from the bulk of human connectivity research that has been done to date that really sits within the social sciences and increasingly within management. So I took this subject into design engineering, which is very kind of applied in its nature. And so the full title of my thesis is designed for

human connectivity and exploration through contemporary work situations. I'm happy to expand on any of those, essentially by contemporary work situations, I was looking at these new contexts, these new situations in which many of us find ourselves where the old ways of doing things, the quote unquote way we do things around here is not fully established and defined, and especially where there is a heightened degree of diversity in the people we are trying to interact with, collaborate with, connect with.

Jen Sproul (06:57)

So fascinating Peter and just so relevant to I think that many of our listeners be going that is the struggle that we're having because I think you talked about it we know that that you say that need for socialness is within our DNA It's a human construct, but we seem to struggle at it and we struggle to create it. And there's many questions that go around I think the the internal comms community is how do we create something that feels natural that as your words serendipity as opposed to feeling, everything's beginning to force and therefore trying to flex into what is the modern workspace where perhaps some of those old tools or old ways don't exist in the natural way relationships should go. So I think this is, but we also know through this podcast that human connection is and conversation is just a vital, vital need in organisations today. But obviously I'm sure your PhD thesis covered so much in that. And I think that that contemporary environment, as well as thinking about design engineering approach to it, but from all that you did, which I'm sure I can only imagine took you some time to do the PhD and write that thesis. I'm sure that wasn't an overnight job. But if you could take one finding, I think that you think that was really stood out to me, or the number one thing you think that you really have taken away from the work you've done that perhaps our listeners would find of value.

Peter Mandeno (08:20)

This is a bit like that question of asking me to choose which is my favourite daughter. I'm going to be a little bit sneaky and give you one group of three things that I think kind of summarise the high level highlights, if you like, or takeaways. And I'll do it as succinctly as I can. So the first is, I think as organisations, we need to take the onus off individuals. As much as it's incredibly valuable to, help people to be better networkers, to be better listeners, for example, more empathic, there's a lot that we can do as organisations to create the conditions in which connecting has the best chance of happening in the first place in the ways you mentioned where it's not kind of forced and contrived. The second is we really need to stop treating human connectivity as this kind of singular, all - encompassing challenge. Once you sort of start boiling it down and start to really understand where to look and what to look for, there's an incredible amount of nuance that I think a lot of organisations are really overlooking. And once we understand that, you can be much more deliberate in terms of creating progress. And the third thing is really shifting

our approach from what I describe as intuitive to being much more informed. So essentially by that, it's not just doing what we've always done, doing what the competitors are doing, doing what we kind of think is right, but actually leveraging this increasing body of knowledge and tools to help us to be a lot more deliberate in our decision making to know, to have confidence that we're actually investing in the right things that are going to have that change. And this was really the focus, as I mentioned, design engineering is quite applied in its nature. And so this was really my focus is okay, we understand the importance of human connectivity, but what are these tools? What are these approaches? What are these processes that can give people the confidence they need in order to be a bit more deliberate and informed in moving forward.

Jen Sproul (10:12)

That word I think that you said and think the way you phrased it is that we need to be more intentional about delivery and how we create that and bringing that kind of design systems thinking approach to how you create that condition. And I think that reflecting on perhaps we'll get into it a bit more as well is that what does that look like in today's world? What are the things that we deliberately need to do that are perhaps different?

I say this, I reflect on many things that organisations have done in the past from staff away days to fun things to team building exercises to tell us a fun fact about yourself, let's all get to know you in a way. And you see some of, I don't know whether it's me or perhaps the freedom, but I feel that's becoming more cynical in terms of the view of the employee about whether that creates connection.

So I think that perhaps we'll go through that a little bit more, but that deliberate conditions that we created, do you think those have massively moved on from perhaps some of those historical practices of team fun, if you like?

Peter Mandeno (11:14)

Think what this makes me think of is that what I often get is, people saying networking is a waste of time. Networking is icky, it's cringeworthy and what have you. How I respond to that is I don't think networking per se is the problem. I think poorly designed networking experiences are the problem. So again, this is, we fall very quickly into this trap of labelling things and kind of categorising everything, away days are terrible, networking events are terrible, whatever they might be. But often if you think about the people in charge of designing and organising those things, and this is absolutely no discredit to them, but it's often assigned to someone who is not trained in experience design, who's not trained in kind of understanding how humans think and what people really need. And they don't have the space to really take the time to understand who is gonna be there and what is the kind of state of mind that they're bringing and therefore what are the kinds of exercises that are

gonna be best suited to achieving the outcomes that we're looking for. So again, you use the word intentionality and that's exactly it. But at the same time, I'd say there's intentionality underpinned by or supported by enough resource, enough knowledge to really be intentional and turn that kind of intentional thinking into intentional action.

Cathryn Barnard (12:41)

Sorry just to chime in because it's really interesting that you say that, like it's quite a niche skill set to design an experience that is memorable, that moves people on, so it's not just something that happened that everyone had fun at and I totally concur with what Jen was saying about, you know, team away days, like there's a certain amount of predictability, isn't there, about those kind of old school events. And I like the fact that you are highlighting, actually, it's a niche skill set. And I think, at this point in 2024, this is really important, because actually, if you look at burnout risk in the people professions within organisations, burnout risk is quite high. Engagement is still, I mean, in the UK, we are literally like the sick person of Europe. We have 10 % engagement in the UK. Yes, Europe is not far behind with 13%, but that's a terrible accolade, I'm not even sure that it is an accolade. And I think the point that I would like to make is when I speak to people in HR and engagement and internal communication, they are terribly underfunded and overworked., I just want to put that on record when our organisations and this isn't a question for you to answer, by the way, Peter, I'm not asking you to crack this nut. But when our organisations going to realise that actually human connection at work is a superpower and you cannot over invest in it.

Dom (14:31)

Well, let me pick up on that, Cat, because one of the things that's really struck me from the conversation so far, Peter, is this phrase, engineered serendipity. And I think echoing what Jen said, I think back into my own career where either we've made events where we basically force people, give them a glass of warm white wine and say, get on their network. And not being terribly surprised, suppose, it hasn't worked. I can also think of my own experience when perhaps previous employers and consultancies have pushed me into a social scene and basically said, don't come back until you've got a contract. And I've looked around like someone caught in the headlights looking around for conversations and being very forced. First of all, before we talk a bit about why it's so beneficial, could you define what you think good human connection is, please?

Peter Mandeno (15:17)

Goodness, this is the million dollar question and I'd say it's actually the question that I often in the engagements that I have, it's the question that I start with because it's only useful being intentional if you know what you're aiming for. And so I mentioned, we throw around

these phrases like getting everyone on the singing from the same hymn sheet or on the same page or what have you without really defining who everyone is and what the nature of that hymn sheet or that page are. And therefore without it's this kind of basics of any, whether you're talking about trying to motivate yourself towards something or complete on any goal without a really clear understanding of what you're aiming for, your chance of getting there is really poor. So thinking back to the examples that we've been using, whether it's an away day or a networking event, it could be as simple as everyone needs to make one new connection and reconnect with one person they already know. It could be that you're trying to grow a network and so everybody needs to make two new introductions, which is another massively underutilised approach that I see constantly overlooked. We're all connected to so many people and often we are each other's best friends when it comes to expanding our own networks. So I'd come back to the word that's been used a couple of times already, is around, I often talk about authentic and meaningful connections. And so these are connections that are grounded in something more than just a transactional value exchange, although those can also be, useful in certain contexts. And the meaningful part is it doesn't necessarily just have to have social meaning, but it has some kind of value for, ideally for both parties.

So what is the definition of a good connection? It's really being connected to someone that is going to deliver me the kind of value that I'm looking for in a relevant and timely manner, considering the way that that value may manifest is almost infinitely broad, depending on the context and the people trying to connect.

Dom (17:19)

And that's very interesting. So to just go that little bit deeper, it is valid then if you were going out to make connections to do so to get benefit for yourself, providing of course you're doing it in the right way and the other person is also getting benefits. So it's legitimate, I think, too, from what you're saying, to seek out connections for benefits rather than just because they're a good thing in themselves. That's an interesting point, I think. So building on that, Peter, one of the things we know that listeners are going to be very interested in is how this can inform the role they do and the conversations they have as internal communicators. So again, a very difficult question. Sorry to add another one to you. But that's why is human connection so valuable, do you think, for organisations and for individuals?

Peter Mandeno (18:02)

Yeah, thanks, Dom. And I love this question. I think I'd go back to what we were just talking about because being connected to someone and kind of the benefit of just being connected is a benefit. It may not be something that you can quantify or transact, but still feeling like, you have a sense of belonging to a group, to an organisation, to a team that is incredibly,

incredibly valuable and important. And I think, if you've been paying attention at all for the past decade and especially since the pandemic. The value of human connections, the value of human connectivity has been made very, very clear. You may be aware, and this was kind of going around headlines probably about five years ago, a big meta study that a group of researchers did looking at the links between social connection and mortality. And essentially that, you know, the headline grabbing things were lacking social connection is the same as negative health effects as chain smoking or obesity or living a sedentary lifestyle. And what I have traditionally been seen as societal challenges are gradually moving their way into organisations. And I think during the pandemic, it was really accelerated. But even if we look before the pandemic, I think it was around 2017, 2018, Harvard Business Review ran a special feature looking specifically at human connectivity in the workplace. I think, from memory, the catchy headline they used was talking about the loneliness epidemic or the loneliness epidemic in the workplace, which is, really pushing this challenge home. But at the same time, if we think about prior to this, think people hadn't really thought about loneliness in the workplace. And, but ever since kind of this conversation has moved over into organisational spaces and particularly since the pandemic that has accelerated. Now, the other thing, I mean, this, this was really a starting point for my, for my research. I wanted to really understand, okay, what is the nature of the value we get and essentially where I came down to is these three broadish categories of value and we've already looked at two of them.

So one is this emotional or socio-emotional connection - the sense of belonging, the feeling like you have the support of the people that you're working with, your ability just to show up to work as yourself, to be confident in asking that tricky question in that meeting or whatever it is without being shut down or worse.

The other side I think organisations have really traditionally focused on is what I'd call "transactional value". I have a problem, you have a solution, through my connection to you, I get access to that solution and so I'm able to progress. And so when we look at things like knowledge transfer, it's absolutely crucial. But also things like business development, if I'm looking for new leads, you have a great network through my connection with you, I get access to those leads.

Now, these three categories, the acronym to help you remember them is TIE, so T-I-E. We've spoken about transactional and emotional. In the middle is this really interesting space that I think is becoming more and more important, and the I stands for intellectual. So this is really saying, how through my connection to you are you helping to grow or to change or to broaden the way I think? And so you can see how this sits in, for example, when groups get particularly diverse. So it's essentially going back to the example I just gave. In a transactional value, I have a problem, you have a solution. That's how I get access to that solution. In the case of intellectual value, it's saying, I have a problem, you don't necessarily have the solution, but you have a really interesting way of addressing similar problems. And so therefore I learn not the solution I'm looking for, but a completely new perspective to start to tackle my own challenges. And this is, as you can imagine, infinitely scalable. It's not

just about solving a single problem, but it's about changing the way I think in my approach to all problems. And therefore my value to the organisation grows because I become a lot more adept at kind of moving, particularly as work becomes increasingly complex. So hopefully that kind of helps you to understand and sort of organise if you like the different types of value traditionally there's been a real focus in society on the emotional value and organisations on the transactional value and now what we're seeing within organisations is this kind of amalgamation of all three.

Dom (22:27)

Just before I pass over, we have spoken about, I guess, the T and the E of TIE previously, not so much on the I, on the intellectual development. That's fascinating. So as organisations, we can encourage connectivity and connections as a way of harnessing and building on the knowledge that's available within the organisation, but also, I guess, for innovation, for starting to encourage new thinking or generate new products or developing new ways of approaching stuff, which may otherwise not be there. I'm just thinking about hooks for organisations.

Peter Mandeno (22:57)

Absolutely. Creativity and innovation require this sense of intellectual input. It's why the old mantra that diversity is the driver of innovation or you need to get diverse groups around the table, but you can't just throw a bunch of very diverse people in a room and expect magic to happen - it just as it's just as likely to result in conflict as it is collaboration. So it has to really be managed for, but exactly Dom, is, this is the point of, this can really help to drive your creative capability and your innovation capability.

Cathryn Barnard (23:32)

I do find myself wondering, I mean, I think it is such a fascinating topic. I wonder why so many organisations struggle to see this value in a tangible sense. So I'm thinking about the socio-emotional value that you talked about. Even now, even despite these decades of research within the fields of the social sciences to understand exactly to your point, the health benefits of social connection. I don't know, I can't remember. Did you and I nerd out over the work of Barbara Fredrickson that she's done in the United States showing where she defines love as moments of micro connection. And she has investigated - well not singularly she, she and her team have investigated the physiological effects of a moment of micro connection and how it boosts your immune system. I find all of that really fascinating. But a lot of these things are still regarded in the commercial world as being non-essential. And yet that socio-emotional connection underpins the release of intellectual value. And I wonder, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think also shifts us on from transactional value

because one of the reasons why I think networking is perceived as icky is because of its transactionality, because people don't feel that the experience yields authentic connection. They might feel that it's an extrapolative exercise designed to benefit one party over another.

So for me, in an organisational context, the whole topic deserves urgently much more airtime, not least as the future of work becomes real and we shift to ever more distributed asynchronous ways of working and I think we did discuss this when we met for our coffee, and we moved towards ever more on-demand ways of working. So in your view, Peter, what do you think organisations are missing when they attempt to address engagement and wellbeing at work?

Peter Mandeno (26:24)

Just quickly back to a couple of things that you mentioned. Number one, I 100% agree that the emotional, socio-emotional value that we get from our connections is absolutely critical in underpinning both of the other forms of value. And mostly because it's where trust resides. And so even if you are looking for some kind of transactive value and there's nothing wrong with that, businesses exist to transact. So there's nothing at all wrong with that. But the point is if I have a strong social or emotional connection with you, the likelihood of me getting to that or having access to that other form of value is going to be increasingly - is going to be much greater. And similarly, if we're looking to collaborate and we're talking about intellectual value, often that requires showing up in a different kind of form, or in a different way than the person you're looking to collaborate with. And, and so that can be quite scary. And so again, in order for me to put my perhaps what you may see as crazy ideas on the table, I need to be able to trust you. And so that's the first thing I'd say.

The second is one of the reasons I think human connectivity hasn't had the necessary air time, hasn't been taken as seriously as it needs to be within organisations is because it is very difficult to quantify. So it's difficult to measure. We are connected - and I don't know exactly what the value, what the commercial value of that connection is going to be. And the second is, I don't know when it's going to manifest. So I meet you at a conference or an event, we click, there's clearly potential there to do something together, but I just don't know exactly when that's going show up. And so when you don't know exactly what form it's going to take and you can't measure it - those are the kinds of things that organisations immediately shy away from.

But I think back to the question of, I'm very encouraged by the increasing kind of volume of the dialogue that's going on in organisations. There was a really interesting piece of research that PwC did, I think it's about four or five years ago now, they interviewed or they surveyed, sorry, about 1200 senior leaders in close to 80 countries and they were looking at the divide between what I describe as recognition and action. So do you understand the importance of human connectivity within the organisation and to what extent are you

taking action towards supporting people in satisfying their human connectivity needs? And on all of the measures that they looked at, there was this sizeable gap. And so I think there is enough awareness, but again, organisations haven't had the knowledge, the tools to take that kind of much more nuanced and targeted approach to be intentional, to be deliberate. And therefore it's easier just to shy away from it.

The other thing I'd say is that there's been back to what I shared earlier, there's been a real focus. So even in the organisations who are doing things, this real focus on improving individuals. So we're sent to networking classes. We're sent to empathy classes and so on. The final chapter sort of literally and metaphorically of my work was extracting out the factors that can help us to understand and design for improved human connectivity outcomes and there were 19 of these factors - it's a it's a dynamic list. So there may be a 20th added at some point in the near future.

But of those things they're organised into three concentric circles. In the middle you have the individual layer, the individual factors. In the middle are the social factors. And then on the outside are the contextual factors. Now individual factors make up only four of the 19. So that's about, what is that - 20% of the total are individual factors. And yet that is where the focus of most organisations is. And if we start thinking about these other factors that really help us to understand why connections are not happening in the first place or the things that we can be doing to support the right kinds of connections happening in the right way, then I think we'll see huge progress in a very, very short amount of time.

Jen Sproul (30:31)

Sorry, Dom, before you go I just wanted to interject quickly because I just find what you say so, so interesting and it so resonates with me and I'd love to find out what we can find more about those 19 factors as well because I think many of our listeners would like to know that. But one of the things that I just was thinking that strikes me as we're talking - and perhaps this is a question for all of us to reflect on maybe or maybe Dom this is the next part that leads into what you want to talk about next.

This point around creating the conditions and the intention to have that sense of connection. I think, like you say, it's risen up the agenda. It's great seeing that where the pandemic has changed things five years on, et cetera, et cetera. And you brought in the topic of trust as well, which is something we've just done some research about. And one of the things we found in our research is that where it's gone - this return to the office mandate has come in that we want you back in the office, basically where employees are at. And it's been branded as the opportunity to collaborate, which you could give us another

word for connection, another word for networking. And most employees just don't believe it. They think it's all about monitoring.

So I wonder if there is kind of a communication challenge about what actually the importance of connection is amongst each other. Because I wonder if we've now just got a really cynical/distrusting employee groups that perhaps don't believe in the intention however great it could be. I don't know if that makes any sense, but I wonder how we bring those two sides of the people back together onto a shared path, rather than it feeling like the words of collaboration and connection are being used in a mystified way just to basically monitor you. So it's not about the connection, but it's about how we're branding the need for connection in our organisations, I think has a worrying misstep in recent years.

Peter Mandeno (32:20)

Absolutely, Jen, I think we could make a separate podcast or perhaps even an entire series just on that. And it is true, but I think we've covered many of the words that I think are relevant here as well. Authenticity is clearly one and where that message is around, there's some ulterior motive and as humans we have incredibly good radars, incredibly good senses when it comes to spotting a scam, spotting someone who is being disingenuous. So I guess one of the things that you've got me thinking about, and this is really critical as well, that we sometimes overlook is like where you're so focused on thinking about, who are the people in my team who I'm trying to get better connected in order that they can collaborate in order that they can, you know, do whatever it is that they're trying to do.

But we forget about our connection with them as leaders. What is the health of that connection and kind of where does it show up or where is it potentially breaking down? And this is the thing. An organisation is a system. My research looks specifically at what I refer to as dyadic connection. So essentially, in this case, I have three connections, with Dom, with Jen and with Cat. And ultimately, even in a network of a million people, that's made up of millions and millions and millions of these dyadic connections. So, one team doesn't connect to another team or one department doesn't connect to another department. It's a person within team A connects with a person in team B or hopefully multiple people across multiple teams. And it's the health of that, the kind of combination of all of those connections that really adds up and gives you the value or creates the challenges that you may see.

The quality of connections between different hierarchical levels in an organisation, even if you have a relatively flat structure, is absolutely critical. I think often, if you're a communications professional, it's a bit like, don't shoot the messenger, right? You're essentially passing on information. You're kind of neutral in your position and often get blamed because you seen to be the one delivering the message. But it's got to start a lot deeper than that. And this is the other thing that I, in the kind of three levels of the work that I do, again, I love alliteration. You may have noticed already, but policy principle and practice and what we're really talking about here is the policy level. It's seeing human

connectivity as a strategic objective, not just a kind of fun thing that we do on Friday afternoons to get a few people around the water cooler or whatever it might be. But I would gladly go to town with you on that on that topic, Jen, but I don't think we have time for it here, unfortunately.

Dom (35:05)

I would like to scratch the surface a little bit though, Peter, if we may, because we also, we love alliteration and when we're talking with leaders, we talk about three Cs. We talk about clarity, connection and conversation. I think that reinforces a lot of things that you were saying as well.

So many of our listeners are heads of internal comms or internal communication manager or people who support those that are. And I guess, I think I would be sitting listening to this thinking it's fantastic. You've talked about being intentional, about being deliberate. You talk about the 19 factors. You've outlined very clearly the benefits to individuals, to organisations, to businesses of improving connectivity.

But the question might then be, well, how do I start? Particularly if I've got a limited amount of capital internally to use in terms emotions or a limited amount of time. So from your experience Peter, what are some the practical things that internal communicators can do to start to promote better connectivity within their organisations? I know that's a very tough question, forgive me for it.

Peter Mandeno (36:04)

Yes, I feel like we really need to set up a whole series for all of these questions because we could speak for some time on all of them. I think back to what I was just saying and you're going to either love or hate this, Dom, because I've got three Cs of my own. Because essentially when you think about if the internal comms professional is not necessarily always the owner of the message. You're helping to communicate messages that may stem from other parts of the organisation. I think thinking specifically about the role of the communications professional purely from a human connectivity perspective, the three C's that I would throw back at you are content, channel and context.

So essentially content, this is about understanding what is it that people are wanting or needing to say. So thinking about as workplaces get increasingly diverse, as the nature of work is changing from synchronous to asynchronous, in person to remote or whatever, I think that the nature of the types of messages are changing and the way, again, if you have a culturally diverse a team, organisation - I would imagine, most organisations in your network are, or most of your members are, different people receive different kinds of things in different kinds of ways. And so being really deliberate about, or taking the time to understand what exactly is the kind of nature of the content that I need to deliver and push

back. If someone has a particular message. I think the role of playing sort of gatekeeper and filter is really interesting from a comms perspective. The second is, is channel. And this is really about the tools that people are using to connect on and again, being really, deliberate about your choice of tools. I heard a really interesting podcast exchange a couple of weeks ago, there were two hosts of this podcast and they were sort - one was very much firmly in the Slack camp and the other was in the email camp. Essentially where it came down to was that the person who was very pro Slack, his point was, I know within Slack, everyone is kind of, to have a seat at this table, they're vetted. Whereas email is kind of like an open door. Anyone can fire a message into there.

And I thought that was a really interesting way of looking at it. It's not so much about the length of message or the interface or whatever, but it's just like, what are the social norms and how open or protected as that back to the point we were talking about earlier around trust. So I can kind of trust any message here as a message worth reading. And then the context - I mean, this is the huge, big, wide open one, and it's really understanding the kind of backdrop against which a lot of the work that we're doing now is happening. So we're looking at the business, the cultural, the social backdrop, and how that's really changing. Again, to your question, Jen, around, in the office or working remotely and what are people doing?

What is the potential for proximity bias where the ones closest to the office or spending more time in the office are the ones that are getting the titbits in the hallways that the others aren't getting access to and so on. I was looking at your website and there was a quote around transformation, around business transformation and essentially, internal communication being the linchpin of business transformation. And I would go further than that. I'd say it's way beyond transformation. And I think if we think about the linchpin in this human connectivity dynamic, you have such a critical role to play. I think adopting that sort of sense of, the filter, the gatekeeper, the innovators, thinking about different ways of changing the nature of the interactions essentially if you're the medium across which many connections happen. I know I'm kind of walking in circles here a little bit Dom and this is still at a fairly high level. I think if we transcend another level it's going to get very much into the weeds and we can really expand that out a lot.

Dom (40:01)

No, I love those three Cs. I think they are very helpful and they give us a framework. I think you've also equipped us on this conversation to start doing a fourth one, which is about making the case. I'm slightly tongue in cheek, but I think you have, because it strikes me that if communicators aren't making the case for connection and connectivity, then very few other people are going to do it. And I think you've given us some of the tools now to start having conversations with leaders, with our fellow communicators, in fact with anybody about it's worth investing time, it's valid and it's doable and it brings benefits. So think you've been very incredibly helpful in supplying that as well.

Jen Sproul (40:36)

I would totally agree, Dom, with everything you've just said. I think the things that I would as we close down this episode, I have one final question for you in a minute. But I think the things that, there's a phrase that I've written down many phrases on my notebook, some of which I think are valuable, some of them I'm like, I'm questioning my own self, but that's okay.

But I think something I've written here is this is about how we canhelp engineer a great working future. And I think it's about how we use that sense of deliberate where there is a value exchange for everyone involved and that can be emotional, transactional, intellectual and I think that there's so much to be done and I like the idea of thinking about that intentionality of it within those constructs as opposed to how we reframe that in a new way and I think that there could be some more podcast episodes to delve into that, that how will we get down to that because there's so much more detail to it but I think that we can certainly work to think about how we as a community can help engineer those environments where value exchanges happen across those areas. But the last question, Peter, if there is one thing that an internal communicator can take from today's conversation, I know the one question is always hard. We often end up with three. But if you've got one, that would be great for our listeners to take away today.

Peter Mandeno (41:49)

Absolutely, Jen. you're 100% right. I think back to where I started right at the beginning, there's this real paradox in human connectivity. We know it's important, but it's really hard. And that becomes and remains a challenge. And the other part of the challenge is that because human connectivity is such a fundamental part of the human condition, we kind of overlook it. And we don't give it the timing and credit that it deserves.

Yeah, it takes some time to really dive into and to understand these things and it can often take a full day session or a workshop to really kind of have the time to figure that out. But the one thing I think I'd say is you've kind of already, well, between you and Dom have made this point yourselves and it's really the case for the internal comms professional as playing this pivotal role. We know that human connectivity is absolutely critical for both well-being and performance. And we know that internal communication is absolutely critical for supporting or powering human connectivity, so that's kind of your answer. I think the caveat that I'd add there is that this is an incredible opportunity, but there's also the way business is going now, there's a huge challenge.

And so if we kind of just amble on in the way that many, people are - the problems are already popping up and they're only going to get bigger. So by taking the time to really stop

and acquire the knowledge and tools to be able to apply that intentionality, that's going to absolutely set you apart from any of your peers and definitely any of your competitors.

Jen Sproul (43:27)

Peter, that is brilliant. Cat, and thank you as well for whatever coffee you and Cat had together. It inspired some great conversation, as you promised, Cat. So I don't know if you want to close out this episode.

Cathryn Barnard (43:38)

Absolutely – on one level, I'm looking forward to more coffee with Peter, but on another, I think this could be just the beginning of a whole raft of conversations and educational material for members. And I think we need to have a bit of a brainstorm around that as well, because just to summarise because the world of work isn't going to be any less complex tomorrow. So we need to start designing for these very fast paced, transient futures. And how do we do that? Well, it starts with connection, doesn't it? So Peter, thank you so much. I really, really, really appreciate your time coming today and look forward to more conversations with you.

Peter Mandeno (44:24)

You're welcome. This was an absolute blast and I would welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation in any form.

Cathryn Barnard (44:31)

Awesome, thank you.