



## Transcript for S9 E5 Celebrating 75 years

Jen (00:44)

Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Jen Sproul and as always I'm joined by my co-host Dominic Walters and Cat Barnard. And we're really excited today to bring back, I think this will be our second podcast together, Michael Heller and Joe Chick who are leading on the fascinating research project which is the institutional history of internal communication from the 1880s. So Joe Chick is by way of introduction, the research fellow on the project and he's currently at Northumbria University and Michael is Principal Investigator and also a professor at Northumbria University. I think myself and Michael, we started chatting, I'm going to say, could be five plus years ago about this project, quite some time.

Michael (01:32)

I think so. I think so, yep. Before it started. Yeah. Not. Yep.

Jen (1:36)

Last year when the funding go through. And Joe, I think we spent many times together in a lock up at the IoIC archive. So, we've got familiar over this project. So hopefully that gives us good grounds for a conversation. So welcome. And as we know, this is the 75th anniversary year for the IoIC as well. So we thought it would be great to bring back Michael and Joe to give us an update on the project and all the things that they're discovering about the history of internal communication.

So to kick us off, give us a bit of a recap of where we are on the history project and what have you uncovered since the last time we spoke?

Michael (02:11)

Okay, well, it's going really well. What we're doing at the moment, so we're in our second year now. It started in October of... 2022. So, we've got two more years to go. It ends in 2026.

Michael (02:22)

We're basically in the data collection phase. All history really goes through three phases and any project, any history research project, is kind of your data collection, then your data analysis, and then your data write-up, where you then start producing your outputs from. What we're doing at the moment is we're still... It's big. I mean, we're looking at 20 archives.

That's huge. I mean, I've been doing business history now for over 20 years. I don't think there's ever been a project which has looked at, which A, has looked at so many archives at the same time, and B, has so many wonderful project partners, such as the Institute of Internal Communication. So I think what's really unique about this project is that, and that's really, really nice. So to use a quite nice technical phrase in history we talk about diachronic and synchronic something is synchronic and



diachronic. Diachronic is when you're looking at something in the past at a certain point in the past it's a diachronic. If I was to look at the foundation of the British Association of Industrial Editors in 1949 that would be a diachronic piece of analysis, if that makes sense. It's hitting a point. Synchronic is looking at a point in time across time. So what else was going on in 1949? Does that make sense? Yeah, but also synchronic can also link to the present, What I think is really nice about this project is it combines, as Carlisle, the great 19th century historian said, it combines past and present.

Michael (03:49)

History is always a dialogue between the past and the present. Always. That's why it's fascinating. One of our co-investigators, Mick Rowlinson, he wrote in 1993 with John Hassard, Professor Mick Rowlinson, he wrote, what was it, the history of the histories of Cadbury. And he got the histories of Cadbury, but he looked at different histories written over different times, because there's been multiple, and of course those histories change because the way we look at the past is always different. The past is constantly changing because the present has different questions of the past. So, for example, the way we look at the past now, I mean, a key theme, and I know the IoIC is big on this, is wellbeing. You wouldn't have wellbeing being looked at of a history of internal communications 30 years ago.

Jen (04:32)

Or was it just a different name or were we looking at it in a different way?

Michael (04:35)

You would have actually, that's not true because Joe and I are writing a big paper on this at the moment actually. That is true to be fair. It would have been called industrial welfare and that was hugely about wellbeing. The idea that, the past had no concept of wellbeing is... There's a book by a very important, he's like one of the founders of management thought in Britain, it was written in 1923-24 by Oliver Sheldon, the Philosophy of Management and Oliver Sheldon was a manager at Roundtree and Roundtree was huge by the way for developing all you know internal comms, industrial welfare and Sheldon went on actually to set up the Institute of Labour Management which is now the CIPD, not Sheldon sorry one of his colleagues but they were all vitalists.

And in the philosophy of management, Sheldon talks about social responsibility. He uses that word, and he talks about employee wellbeing. And he uses the word employee well, and the responsibility of employees to look after the wellbeing of their staff. But anyway, I'll hand you over to Joe, because Joe's been doing the bulk of the research but I think the two things we've done over the last year which is huge we've done huge archival research. I think we've done about seven or eight, six or seven of archives and we've also done tons and tons and tons and tons of engagement with our project partners.



Jen (05:52)

Brilliant, yes, we have obviously spent some time together in the archives as well, so I know we're already one of many. In all the reading that you have done picking up from Michael what have you picked up so far? And anything that's really surprised you as well?

Joe (06:04)

Yeah, well, I suppose when we spoke to you at the podcast last year, we hadn't got that far of actually doing any research. I guess the organisations we've looked at have been Unilever and Boots and John Lewis and the BBC we've looked at as organisations. But then as you say, we've also been looking at some of the institutes that have actually helped to shape the practice. Obviously, the IoIC has been one of those and there's also been the CIPD and the CIPR and the Chartered Institute of Marketing. We had a quick visit to that as well. I guess the kind of things we've been looking at so far. And I think probably one of the things that has surprised us has been how you see some of these themes that you think are quite modern ones are actually still appearing in some kind of form, at least those discussions are happening quite a long time back. So as Mike was saying, we've been looking at this theme of social responsibility as one thing where we found that actually after World War One, they're not necessarily using that term, but this idea of industrial welfare is actually quite similar to what we talk about now as social responsibility. And it's maybe slightly different in that it's more focused on the employees rather than not quite as much and wider society. And I guess now you'd expect that to include the environment and things like that. But these concepts actually do go further back and actually sometimes the language we're using is what's changing. But then there's been other things like that as well, where we had one of our blog posts we wrote was about where we found the use of giving employees a voice, we found that 100 years ago being spoken about as well actually in a magazine. Of course you tend to think of employee voice as quite a recent idea, but a lot of these things, they exist in some kind of form earlier. But then obviously sometimes the emphasis changes as well. So another blog post we wrote was about, I guess, kind of personality testing and obviously now there's sometimes interest in some people specialise in how do you communicate with introverts and extroverts and different personality types. And actually, there was a lot of interest in personality after the first World War. But in industrial psychology was something that got spoken and written about a lot. But the emphasis was quite different because it wasn't really about necessarily trying to tailor to the actual employee and it wasn't about their wellbeing. It was more sort of how do you kind of, how can you use this to mould your employees to fit an industrial process? Sometimes the same themes but with subtle differences like that is what we found.

Jen (08:13)

I think it's that fascination, isn't it, of our language, the problems or how we label and talk about things has changed and evolutionised, but the fundamentals are still there that we want to be heard, that we want to be looked after. And we know that if we do all those things, that does create a better industry, if you like, and better working environments. So that's wonderful to hear. And I do remember as well, Michael, I think in one of our conversations many moons ago.



When we were talking about it, you said that all businesses is formed on chocolate and Quakerism.

Michael (08:41)

No, I said that I thought there was too much chocolate and Quakerism.

Jen (09:47.)

I have too much chocolate in my life, I know that much.

Michael (08:49)

But actually, I've there there's a lot of truth in chocolate and Quakerism. So we've got some very close colleagues of ours Professor Mairi Maclean from Bath University and Professor Charles Harvey from Newcastle. And they are very senior figures in our field. We're actually hopefully presenting with them at the Academy of Management in Chicago. It's the biggest conference in the world. You're talking about 12 to 14,000 people will be at this conference, it's a big four-day conference. They've done really interesting research which we're going to be using in our research. We're tapping in at a different angle, but we're doing of what's known as the British management movement in the interwar period. And I think this is a key milestone in the emergence of internal communication. And ne of the things that I think history, and particularly business history for practitioners is really good is that, and this is again what we mean by Institutionalisation is an embedded habit. So you do something, you think you've done it forever.

It just becomes normalised. Does that make sense? So if you think about having a meeting, taking minutes to a meeting. But two questions are really interesting here. When did meetings actually emerge? Right. And when did people start making minutes to me? Because that's all new. Romans didn't say, right, Tacitus, let's sit down and have a meeting and, you know, plot as you take the minutes. It didn't work like that. But once we start doing something a lot, we tend to think, oh well we've always done that. That's what we mean by institutional history. But one thing which is fascinating, I picked up on this earlier, but we're really going into it now, is that management, having managers, and most of your colleagues, most of the people in the Institute of Internal Comms will either be managers or professionals that work with managers, right? You wouldn't have had the Institute without the emergence of management. This is really important.

Management is new. There was no management in the 19th century. It didn't exist. So what you would have is you would have owners. So this is very important in the history of business, is at the end of the 19th century and into war period, you see the separation between ownership and control. That's really important. So who owns the company and who manages the company, that splits. Whereas in the 19th century, owners were controllers. Your owner controlled your... And that's another reason why company magazines and internal communication develops. Because whereas before, owners had this kind of very paternal, the employees were almost like his children. They had



this very close bonded relationship. When you see that split between management and there's this fear that there's gonna be a disconnect between management and employees. So they start then trying to develop forms of communication that could do that. So, and what's really interesting is that Maureen Charles, they've looked at the British management movement in the interwar period. And it is actually, I'm afraid chocolate and Quakers. It's all from York. So they start having management research workshop groups in the interwar period. All these managers come together they start doing lectures the roundtree lectures and actually Joe talked about Industrial psychology we use a lot of this stuff the first organisation in Britain that employed Psychologists and had a personnel department was the chocolate works at York.

Cat Barnard (12:01)

Can I just butt in? Because I think this is so, so interesting. When we do our work at Working the Future, we look the history of organisational structures and we try and understand, the future of work through the lens of, what we've seen work in the past. And a lot of the framing of management as I read it, seems to hinge upon the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor, who obviously was American and wrote his scientific, whatever, laws of management, very early 20th century. But who then guys, in your opinion, would be the British equivalent of him? Who was influential in the UK?

Michael (12:52)

Rountree without a doubt. So the establishes of modern management in America, but then the American stuff comes over to the UK. So it all gets, and the British stuff is going over to America, by the way. There's all of this cross flowing stuff. You know, in the 19th and early 20th century, British companies, particularly railways, but other companies, Cadbury would send fact-finding missions to America. And they'd go over there and go, what are you doing? And the Americans would do the same. They'd come over here. So there was a lot of this interchange of information. But in America, the founders of modern management, without a doubt, Frederick Taylor, with the emergence of scientific management. And what that does basically, just to explain that to your viewers. What happens is the British are the first people that... Well, we invent factories. We come up with the idea, hey, we're going to put all production in a building, right? Before that, production was done in people's cottages. It was called cottage industry, right? And merchants would give them cotton, and then they'd lend them. This is like the gig economy, which is coming back now. And then they would give them, you know, something to spin with. They'd give them machine, and they'd spin stuff, and then collect the stuff. And then what happens in the 18th century is with the development of steam energy. All of that's put in a factory.

What the Americans do is they take that one step further, right? And they start internalising all transactions. So marketing is now done by them. Management is done by them. HR is now done by them. You see, they start really internalising everything. And that leads to these huge corporations like Ford and Depod. That's why America becomes this huge power. What happened was, your workers would work in a factory, in a steel factory or in a coal mine. They wouldn't be managed. You would have almost subcontracting. They would come in and do, and they were skilled workers.



They'd all done apprenticeships, right? So it's actually the workers were managing other workers, not the owners. So, you'd have like a master craftsman come in, working. He wouldn't be managed. He would bring in apprentices into the company. Now what Taylor does is he gets rid of that system.

Michael (14:49)

And he looks at how these people work. He was an engineer, Taylor, you see. He worked in a steel plant. And at that time, all steel work was subcontracted. And he did time motion studies. He looked at how a worker did a piece of work and he recorded that. And then he said, right, everybody has to do that. And managers implemented that. And so what Taylor does is he kind of de-skills workers.

If you look at McDonald's, I used to work at McDonald's years ago, you have like a time motion book, it shows you the motions you have to do to get the chips **into**. These time motion studies that you do. Now at the same time as Joe said, the other founder of modern management in America is a German called Hugo Münsterberg, right, Hugo Münsterberg, and he brings in industrial psychology, basically personnel management and also Dill Scott, and the important thing here is the First World War. For the first time they start bringing in psychometric tests, we can scientifically work out who are the best workers, how to train them. So the control of bodies is by Taylor and the control of minds is by Dill Scott and Munsterberg. That's the basis of modern management. In Britain, it's basically the Roundtrees that do this. They pick up on industrial welfare. Oh, and the other person is the Hawthorne studies. So that's really famous. So the Hawthorne studies is the biggest ever study. This is the human relations movement. So that emerges. So Western Electric, which is a huge factory of 40,000 people that gets studied by the they're from the Harvard Business School, it's Mayo and a human relations group and they do this huge study from like 1928 to 1933 and what they do is they're kind of arguing against Taylor because Taylor's treating people like machines and the human relations group say no you know you have to treat people like human resources you have to look at what they call the human factor in production.

Michael (16:47)

You can't just mechanise people. They call it the human factor in production. And what they discover is social man. They say that employees have social needs, yes? When they're at work, they work in groups, they have social needs. And if employers do not meet those social needs, you don't get engaged workers. So all of these words we can see now, engagement, employee commitment, this is from the human relations. So it comes in three stages. You've got Taylor, that's all the efficiency. He's an engineer. Then Münsterberg and Dill Scott, they're the psychologists. And then the human relations movement are the sociologists. So there you go, that's a potted history of management.

Dom (17:30)

And a fantastic part of history. Thank you very much, Michael, because that leads us neatly, I think, into this area about some of your findings around what's most boosted internal comms. We were, funnily enough, having debate, a few of us the other day, about what one thing, looking back over



the last few decades, has most accelerated the impact and acceptance of internal communication. I think there were three schools of thought broadly. One was about tech. People saying, without all the great tech we've got at the moment, we'd never be able to reach people. They wouldn't be able to talk back. We wouldn't be able to have the exchange.

Another one, I think builds very nicely on what you've just been saying with around management and leadership. The fact that certainly the last three or four decades has been much more interested in leadership or it's come to the fore anyway. And the last one, perhaps a bit tongue in cheek, but someone actually said they thought it was the Profumo scandal in 1963, which many people will know was a great British political scandal. But the reason they mentioned it was it started to erode deference and trust. And that accelerated such that people no longer accepted what their leaders would say. And we've seen that get worse and worse, or sorry, get more and more, should I say. So those are three different takes on what's accelerated. It's probably a combination of all of them, but going back over your research, what would you say is, if you can, what the one thing has been that's most changed the face of internal comms?

Michael (18:45)

I think it's two because remember what we're doing is we're actually saying that internal comms goes through two big phases. We talk about kind of logics. So that sounds technical but it doesn't. All that means is how it works, how you understand something. What's the logic of, you know, if you think in marketing, obviously Jen's from a marketing background. If you look in the past, marketing had what was called the product-centered logic. It was all about make a good product. And then the role of marketing is just to sell that product. It's called selling and telling. Whereas in the 60s, 70s, that logic shifted to what was called the customer-centric logic, which was, so now, you do not begin with the product. You begin with the customer, you understand the needs of the customer, and then you develop a product around that. And then marketing is all about understanding needs, satisfying needs, communicating them, and then developing relationships.

Internal comms kind of does something very similar. So the problem with that question of what was the most important thing which of course all your listeners are going to ask. The problem with that is it conceives of internal comms as being static. It's like that's internal comms and it just starts here and it goes it doesn't it starts it goes it suddenly shudders and changes it reforms itself and then it becomes something else so I would say in the first phase, without doubt, the most important factor was the rise of the large scale organisation. The growth of these huge organisations. So just to put that into context, the Prudential Insurance Company, when I did research at 1870, it had about 1000 workers. By 1914, it had 20,000. That's incredible. You see these corporations go bang. And within the growth of those large scale organisations, they develop internal labour markets. So the idea that you work for a company for life, you have an internal and your children do as well. And you have pensions and you have, you know, company sport, a sense of company identity, the internalisation of labour, that's the fundamental basis of communications. But then in the 60s.



Michael (20:51)

It suddenly changes and we go from an editorial logic, it's all about magazines and you know that shift it's in your organisation because you used to be called the British Association of Industrial Editors so you were following an editorial logic does that make sense but then you shifted to the next logic which is the internal communication logic and now you are the Institute of Internal Comms so that's what we're arguing is even in your name, we see that shift. And I think in the sixties, without doubt it's about the collapse of deference. It's about the empowerment. You remember what Macmillan said in fifties. It's about the emergence of an affluent society. People have money. People are more educated. You got, you can't talk down to people and then you see the emergence of two-way communication. And employees now have voice.

Joe (21:40)

I will have a go at naming one factor if you want that I think has been maybe the main shaping thing, but this is one that could apply at all ages. And I think this is a question we've been asked a few times across the years, so I've kind of had to think about it a few times. And I think probably, and it's probably not a good answer for internal comms, but I think crisis is probably the main thing that's shaped internal comms. Because I think whether it's each stage where it seems to have developed a lot, usually it's been in response to a crisis. So we've been talking quite a lot about after the First World War and how you got the, there were kind of like councils that were created during the First World War, where potentially the government was trying to take over British industry to run it more efficiently. But also at that time, of course, you've got the rise of trade unions and there'd been the Russian Revolution. And at the time, there was genuine concern among managers that something similar might happen in Britain. So actually, a lot of the communication developments that happened then was their concern about a potential crisis and responding to that.

And again, I guess you have further developments after the second world war, where again, there'd been obviously all the kind of propaganda that had been going on had been quite an influential thing in shaping ideas about communication. And we can talk about the sixties and seventies and of course that's again, when you're starting to get industrial action happening again and a lot of the kind of new methods that were getting brought in then were in response to how can you have more harmonious industrial relations.

And then I suppose the most recent one would be, and I guess most people working here would agree, would be the pandemic and lockdown. And of course, we said technology shapes things, but a lot of technology wasn't actually really getting used to the best of its ability until there was a crisis. And then that's when suddenly things came in. So I'd say maybe if you're gonna name one thing, I think probably it's crisis, which I don't know what the message is then for that, whether you need to create a false sense of crisis when you want to bring in changes.





Dom (23:20)

It does if I just I pass on to Cat in a second if I just comment on that because as you know one of the debates that internal communication has with us within us It's a profession is who do we serve do we serve the organisations or do we serve the people within the organisations? I think the real answer is somewhere between the two I guess but what you're saying is what's driven the growth of the profession is the need of the organisations to communicate with their people because either there's lots of them. They've grown and or because there's fear that a crisis is going to get out of control or people need to know what's going on in the crisis. So perhaps what's driven the profession has been the needs of organisations. But within that, from what you're saying, we also need to understand that we're not just the mouthpieces of organisations. We have to work with people who are not going to blindly accept what we say.

Michael (24:05)

I think so. I mean, I think what has really driven internal comms and actually, I mean, what I said earlier, I think it is that. I mean, I think Joe is absolutely right when he talks about these triggers, you know. History, a lot of history is really about causation, it's what's causing something, right? And we're trying to find thing. I'm sure you remember at school, you know, what what caused industrial revolution? What was the cause of the Second War? And it's true, I mean, a lot of history is about causation. I think Joe's right there. And don't forget one other crisis there in the 60s. When we see that shift in the 60s and 70s, it's, you know, which is very apposite to today, isn't it really? It's the inflation of the 60s, the oil crisis, you know, with the mass inflation. And that's when you start seeing this word internal communication. You see that shift from magazines, that editorial logic goes because they realise that you can't use magazines anymore to manage affluent workers who demand a voice back and that collapse in deference and also people who are just going on strike, the coal strike. You know, and obviously, it's interesting these big figures who pop up, so you know, was it Lord Rogers was in the the National Coal Board. He is a huge figure in the the 70s, 60s and 70s. And it's fascinating, you know, if you look at the shape of magazines, they go from these very kind of glossy things to tabloids. We were in Unilever, you had the lever mirror. And again you have the post, the courier, and they bring in editorial teams. And really a remnant of that still is John Lewis, isn't it? John Lewis still has huge editorial teams with their magazines. And they run them almost independent. The aerial used to be a good example, you know, where magazines had an independent. And that goes back, Dom, to what you're saying about is the magazine the mouthpiece of the management or is it serving the workers? You see that. But I think I think what it is, is that there is this realisation. Which develops around 1900 which is when the internal communication is the magazine is being developed and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger that your employees aren't just capital they're not just someone who works for you but there is a growing awareness that employees are strategic resources and that if you develop your employees better than your competitors, you will have a competitive advantage. Does that make sense? And that idea that your workers will be more productive, they will be lower turnover, they will strike less, they will be more committed. And that discourse in the 1990s and even now we see it with social media, internal social media, which is really changing. Your employees will become ambassadors, brand ambassadors, they will go out and spread the word.



Michael (26:52)

This idea that somehow, if you create what was earlier called industrial goodwill, by the way, that used to be its early name. We now call it employee engagement and motivation, and that's why I think companies started ploughing lots of money into, I think before it was almost, it was caught up in that industrial personnel profession used to be called the Cinderella profession. You will go to the ball, but it was kind of looked down on a bit. It was never seen as, you know, marketing strategies more important. They're the people who arranged the Christmas party and whatever else. And they bring out the magazine. And then I think over time, they changed themselves to human resource management. But I think there's always been this idea that employees are a resource and their organisations use them better.

Jen (27:41)

Just going to jump in as well, I saw this in our archive the other day, which is a BAIE, one of our old association and headlines is 1979. And the headline says industry must work hard in internal communications. Just thought it was the first time I'd seen it said in that way. So I just thought relate so much to what you're saying.

Michael (28:00)

Incredible. It really does and I think the government was part of that. I'm sure a lot of your listeners, we were watching The Crown again last night, it was in its last series really. And I think what that has done very well is show Prince Philip. I'm sure you know that, Philip was a huge figure in the British Association, he was one of the patrons. The other big change I think that happens is after the areas there.

Jen (28:27)

That's in our magazine, the company and the individual.

Michael (28:31)

So what you have after the second world war and you still have that is obviously the McCloud report. It's the government gets involved. The government starts saying you need to have better relationship with your workers. So after the war, it's about productivity. There's a huge balance of payments crisis because we owe so much money to the Americans. So there's a huge emphasis on productivity and the government gets involved with this in internal communications. And then obviously in the 70s it's about getting rid of strike action. Then in the 90s, 2000s it's about engagement and so forth. So I think that's really interesting as well. How internal comms has become politicised, that I think is interesting.



Cat Barnard (29:14)

I think what is so interesting about this, and by the way, credit to you guys, because you make Mrs Bowen and Mr Richmond really dull as dishwater, and that's why I was disinterested in history at school, but I could listen to you guys literally all day. But I think what is so interesting when I think about the past, present and future of internal communication is Joe's point about crisis as a driver of change in the way that we communicate internally because yes the pandemic was another crisis point but since the pandemic we seem to be bearing witness to somewhat of a mass unravelling so are some examples that I could include there obviously Russia's invasion of Ukraine, disruption of previously assumed secured international supply chains, the escalating climate crisis, cost of living crisis, which is obviously to do with those international supply chains and failing crops due to climate change, all of these kind of interconnections and convergences. And what we're seeing now in real time is a rise of employee activism. So a willingness to call out perceived inaction or inappropriate action by business leaders. There was an article in, I think, The Guardian just before Christmas about students on university campuses boycotting one of the major UK banks for its continued financing of fossil fuel industries. There was also an article produced by the BBC about the rise of climate quitting where young adults are just walking out of organisations that they perceive to be not taking a forceful enough stand on climate carbon emission reductions and so on.

Cat Barnard (31:31)

And I think all of these things are bubbling under. So I think we are arriving at another, you know, the crisis that was 2020 in the outbreak of the pandemic is transitioning into what the World Economic Forum has called a polycrisis or a permacrisis. I think we're hearing those terms of phrase become more prevalent in mainstream discourse. So I think the shape and nature of internal comms is gonna change again. And when I'm listening to you guys about the history, all of a sudden, like lots of light bulbs are going off in my brain. And I can see on both of your faces, you're so animated when you speak about what you have discovered. So my question would be to each of you at a personal level, what has been your most fascinating discovery in the last, 15, 18 months?

Joe (32:35)

Maybe too hard a question because there's been so many. Do you want to start actually, Michael?

Michael (32:38)

That's a good question. This sounds a bit rubbish, but it kind of goes back to what Joe was saying about continuities rather than breaks. So things that we thought were new have kind of been a lot older than what we thought, if that makes sense. And I think that's something very reassuring.

I was amazed when we were looking at this, looking at this emergency, this kind of social responsibility. We knew it was there before, but it really came when we were at, particularly at Boots at Unilever, and some of the stuff Joe's done, more research in the Industrial Welfare Society. And



also one other thing, I mean, we kind of touched on this is the marketing that we tend to think of internal comms going into marketing in the 80s and 90s. We've spoken to Mark Wright, for example, he spoke about sheep dipping in there, but they kind of dip workers in, you know, what's his name, Ollie, in the 80s, that corporate identity, there was all of these big changes going on.

We've actually found that that's been happening earlier on that companies, they weren't doing as extreme, but they were using internal comms to market with so but one thing I know and I know this from when I was commissioned to write the history of the University of Westminster from when it went from Regent Street.

One thing that we found, and I think that is really interesting when you look at what's called the long Joret of history, you look at history over a long period. What you actually see is, and that's the weird thing about history, it's a combination of stability and change at the same time. So some things just stay the same and other things completely change. It's just completely weird. So you know when we looked at the University of Westminster, it still had the same mission statement of educating people from poorer backgrounds, disadvantage of levelling up, but other things were different. You've seen that, I think, with internal comms. So I think for me that it's quite reassuring that history is kind of doing what it's meant to do, but it is quite incredible as well.

Cat Barnard (34:36)

Before we go on to Joe, I just want to say, and thank you so much for underscoring that, because that is a golden nugget for us to take forward into the future of internal communication, actually, a golden thread that while things change, other things remain constant over time. I think that's really valuable for us to remember.

Michael (34:56)

I think so, I really do. I've just become a professor of business history and it's nice, you know, that a key turning point in your career to reflect and look back. I started doing research in 96, you know, there's 27, 28 years of research there looking at archives and writing, you know, I've written about 30 articles, books, chapters, where there's a lot of stuff that I've actually produced over that period. And it's funny that the more you do something, you start, there's that lovely line in the Bible where Paul says, what is it, first I see through a glass darkly, but now I see through a glass clearly. In history, some things start clarifying, if that makes sense. I know it sounds a bit. I think that's important for organisations, because one thing I've seen in a lot is, Joe talks about crises, you know, and he's right, the history of business has been the history of crisis, continuous crisis, and having to react to that. But I think businesses need to be very careful because sometimes you don't want to throw away the baby with the bath water. You don't want to throw everything out. Some things they have to continue and other things have to change. Good management should be about continuity and change, not about change and particularly not about change for the sake of change, which we've seen a lot **of organisations do?** And then of course a lot of employees go through kind of change fatigue, don't they? You know, where organisations are constantly trying to reinvent themselves. I just think that's very bad.



Cat Barnard (36:21)

I think that is a wonderful anchor actually, because we're all submerged right now in a very strong Silicon Valley narrative, which is that technology is going to continue to accelerate and enforce continuous disruption and change upon us. And while I don't dispute that may be true, what I think we should be looking for as internal communicators is the constants, the things that remain continuously consistent over time. I think that's a really lovely anchor point for us to all hold onto. But I'm very aware, Joe, I haven't asked you the question and I can see you, waiting to chime in. What's been your most interesting discovery?

Joe (37:15)

Like I say, I suppose there's been lots of interesting ones, but I was thinking one particularly interesting thing was when we were looking at Unilever or as they were called at the time, Leaver Brothers, who were soap manufacturers essentially, because some of the earliest magazines we've looked at come from then. And I think look at ones right at the start of the 20th century seeing how strategic they were with their use of words right from the very start. These weren't just things they had done for the sake of it.

I think what was interesting in particular is sometimes around that era, we talk about something called paternalism, which is basically where I guess companies are treating their workers like children almost as acting as their protectors. Of course, the word Peter is the Latin word for father, so it's referring to family, that word. What's interesting is how they literally do use lots of words to do with family in their writing.

We found extracts from there where they're talking about the apprentices as being their children or something like that. I think this was Lord Leaver, who was the head of the business, talking about that. And they started to talk about, because they have this big manufacturing site, the kind of huge task there was doing the laundry of all the overalls for the workers each week. And they refer to it as the family laundry, this thing that they're doing. And they talk about how we managed to do the family laundry. And then they also built this town for their workers called Port Sunlight and they certainly kind of talk about it as a kind of community with a kind of family spirit. And that's quite interesting because then one of the podcast interviews that we did with our series was with Alex Gapud, who I met actually through the IoIC Festival. And it was interesting because he did a PhD on anthropology and his kind of special kind of thing is like the Rattinger family. So he has then been looking at it in modern day organisations. One of the interesting things he said about its use in modern day organisations is that in a way it can be slightly predatory kind of using that language because it breaks down boundaries between employers and employees by making it sound like you're all a kind of happy family when you're not necessarily. I thought it was particularly interesting seeing a lot of the same strategic language being used right at the start of the 20th century in the earliest magazines that we'd looked at and that the same kind of thing is sometimes gets used in a strategic way today.



Jen (39:20)

That's so interesting. Thank you. And it is just that brings back that point around language and what we say and how we say it and how we use it and how we are intentional perhaps with around it and what we're trying to get out of it. And I think I see many modern day debates over the word family being used in business and it can have definitely some negative reactions as well as that.

But also is one of the things we've spoken about as well is how more brands actually, particularly those older ones are tapping into their own heritage to drive that sense of identity in today. You know, we've seen that quite a lot. How do brands use their heritage to drive that, that sense of culture and identity and language and standing out. And that's something that's, uh, certainly being, I see more featured of certainly the entries.

Michael (40:06)

Yeah, and I'm really glad you brought that up, Jen, because actually, we haven't really spoken much about this now or in the other podcast, but we're doing a lot. Actually, if you look at our research project, it's really looking at, it's looking at three things, I would say. On the one level, which we've spoken about a lot, it's about the history of internal communications. And that's probably the basis. But on the other level, it's also talking about the professionalisation of internal comms.

So how internal comms has professionalised throughout its history. It's a history and I think that was missing in the past. We tended to look at internal comms as just this object, this phenomena. But what we were missing was that the motor that was driving that was the increasing professional, which is still ongoing. It's not like, oh, it happened and then everybody professionalised, everyone was happy and then they kept pushing her up the hill. It hasn't, that process of professionalisation is ongoing and ongoing and that's fascinating. But the third thing we looked at and Joe's actually writing a really good paper on this, he's written something and we're really proud, this is our first public, although Joe has written tons of stuff, our first academic paper and we're actually going to hopefully present it in Chicago, so we'll be mentioning you guys in Chicago at this huge conference, the biggest management conference in the world, the Academy of Management. And that's looking at what's called rhetorical history. And rhetorical history is really, really interesting. That's our third question. So the first one is about the history of internal comms, second one is about professionalisation and the history of that profession. The third one is about, rhetorical history is not actually about the past per se, it's about how organisations in the present use their past. It has other words, heritage is one of heritage branding. So we've seen with the London Underground, 175, lots of companies mark their anniversaries, but the use of the past and the present, and managers realising that the past is a resource, because all organisations have pasts.

Michael (42:10)

By being organisations, they have to have past, but some organisations use their past better than organisations, they use that as a real, if you think of an organisation like John Lewis or Cadbury, they really, they have heritage centres, visitor centre. An amazing museum which if you haven't been, you



should go and your listeners should go, is the Museum of Brands in London, which is an incredible museum and you really see some organisations and what they would do is that they would celebrate the country's history and their history we often see this a lot in what you call it jubilees, royal jubilees so marmite they renamed it for the one it was marmite you know and if you go to the museum of brands you really see that they would bring out biscuit companies, chocolate, soap and they would tie their history to the NAIT to give them legitimacy to enhance their corporate brand. Now one thing that has been a lot of work done on brand heritage and rhetorical history, but what's missing a lot is the way that internal communication was the vehicle to communicate that rhetorical history. And that mixes up with something which I think is fascinating, which isn't history.

It's linked to organisation studies and that's organisational memory. Or it's called OMS, Organisational Memory Studies. And this is a fascinating question, which I don't think in internal comms, you guys haven't looked at this either, but is how do organisations remember and how does internal comms help organisations remember and why memory is so important to an organisation?

Jen (43:52)

Well, you've given us a whole area now to explore, I think another topic area for IoIC to have a look at, but it is fascinating. We are here releasing this podcast today on IoIC's 75th anniversary because, and we're trying to expose that, our heritage, because even though we are well aware we're in the present, we think it helps build confidence, gravitas, credibility, all those things. And I think as a professional community, internal comms, one of our aspirations is to have a more confident profession. And so all of that kind of that memory piece or knowing where that comes from. I want to talk about the project when I'm out and about to members. There's sort of the faces where you sort of go about the history and the longevity, not necessarily of IoIC, but of our professional community. It does something in terms of that pride and that gravitas, absolutely.

Michael (43:37)

But you do as well and I think that's something, and I think you are probably the oldest internal communications profession in the world. Or you're either the oldest, the Americans may have gone, but because your history actually goes back to the 30s, because you were formed in 1949.

But before that there was another organisation which you formed yourselves out of. The House of Organisations.

Michael (45:06)

And they were you. So you were formed. So what happened in 49 is the people from the House Organisations got together and said, right, we're going to disband us. We're now going to call ourselves so you are really old. You're nearly hitting 100 actually. And that's something that...



Jen (45:22)

Well, now we've got to rebrand the whole campaign, Michael. I've got a whole logo and everything.

Michael (45:26)

You're 75. Don't worry. They're not the same organisation you were grounded in. Those members of that organisation, it's not like they just changed their name. They came and they created a much bigger organisation. And actually, if you look at the House Organisations Institute, what's important about them is they were mainly concerned with customer magazines. So most of their members... So what happens in the interwar period is you see this huge growth in customer magazines, customer publications, right? You see it in the car industry, you see it in the gas industry, interestingly, in the electrical industry. So companies start writing magazines and they hand them out free to, mainly to housewives, to develop a sense of engagement, of loyalty. Today we would call that content marketing. What happened was that got so big with these magazines being written, these editors, so people from the newspaper industry started working in companies and then some of those editors started writing internal magazines as well and they formed that association. But it was primarily about customer magazines with some company magazines and then members of that group then formed yours. But you could argue that your roots go even further back if that makes sense.

Jen (46:41)

Well, I'll use that. I'll use that Michael. I'm not afraid.

Michael (46:44)

Jen and I, Jen, we've had lots of conversations. You were really important for us getting, the IoIC and you were really important for us getting that grant, really. And one of the things that we kind of emphasised was, you're a really old organisation, and it's not a critique of your members who were wonderful, but there's a lack of

Jen (47:00)

There's a lack of awareness of that heritage. Absolutely. And hopefully we can do more of that. So with the heritage in mind, if we could have just your thoughts on this next question. So we've got all of this and with the thought of stability and change and all the things that we've spoken about, where do you think internal comms will head next? Joe, can I come to you? Have you had any thoughts about where you think we're gonna go next? What's gonna keep being stable or is it what's gonna change?





Joe (47:23)

Well, I suppose the thing that everyone's talking about at the moment is AI, obviously, and we've been writing an article for voice magazine that will be coming out later this year on the impact that new technologies had. And in that, we've kind of then looked at the past and when new technologies come in. And one of the things we found with that is that actually, quite often, there's a big rush to introduce the new technology and lots of thought like, how can we use this?

And sometimes it doesn't get used very well at first because people are using it for the sake of it. And sometimes those actual kind of fundamental principles of good communication that don't actually change then end up actually getting overlooked and forgotten about for the sake of trying to use new technology. So I think with so much new technology coming on now that's going to be one of the challenges really. So I guess people are gonna have to be thinking, how can we actually use this in a strategic way that actually helps those kinds of principles of good communication?

And so I think the new technology will be important because there's always something that can be gained from these, but trying to understand exactly what it is and how that supports all the things we already know about communication actually, and so that it's building on those rather than forgetting about them and using things just for the sake of it.

Jen (48:29)

No, Joe, great. And it comes back to human relations. Technology can't, it can help support us, but it doesn't do human relations and those things, those language and those words and all the heritage and history that we've spoken about that's really important. But how can it help support what we're trying to do, not hinder it? And it is that judgment of how those two. I don't know, Michael, have you got any thoughts about where you think IC will head next?

Michael (48:49)

Yeah, I think, I mean, it's interesting because I've picked this up really from, engaging with you guys. And I really love that. I think academics have to come out of their ivory towers. You know, if we want to be serious about business research, we have to engage with business. It's as simple as that. We can't just, you know, sit in an office and say, well, this is what's happening. It's a strategy. And so we've got to be in constant dialogue. One thing that I've picked up from you guys, also we went to a very good conference from Simply Communicate, also that was, we were picking it up, it was there as well, is this idea of a shift from internal comm professionals as creators of content, curators of content, and that's come up in the podcast as well. I really think that's what the shift is. And in 2004, there was a mind-blowing article that was published in marketing by Vargo and Lusch. It really was what we would call one of these, discourse change. And it was written by two scholars called, I think that article is now the most cited article, I think it's been cited about 60,000 times or so. And it's called Service Dominant Logic. Service Dominant Logic. And they said that marketing had shifted to a Service Dominant Logic.



and their argument was that marketing is fundamentally about creating services for people. So even a car is not a car, it's not a product, it's just something which provides a service of getting you from A to B. Everything now has shifted to this service dominant logic, so that was their big, big idea, but within that they came out with another idea which has probably become bigger, is the concept of co-creation. And so what they said was that if you think about this, historically marketing has been about producers and consumers, right, and about how producers can control consumers, get more consumers, get loyalty and sell them products and blah blah. And that's very similar to internal comms. Dom was talking for about this kind of semi-tension about all this question, is it about the organisation, the management, or is it about the consumers, the employees, where does the balance lie?

Michael (50:47)

What happened was, there was that shift, and it was not, no, it's about the customers, but the organisations produced the products and the customers still consume the products. That would always be the case. What they're saying now is that has changed and products are now being co-created. And what happens now is it's no longer about a business to a customer, it's about networks of customers with social media. They're all networked together and they're all creating content. And so what happens is the business and the customers create value together by their co-creation. I think that's happening in internal comms and I think that process will just get bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. I think that's the future. So it is curation and it's co-creation.

Cat Barnard (51:30)

And I just want to chime in on that. I think that has just, again, sparked a whole bunch of light bulbs for me, but almost to that point. And I think it is featured in maybe some literature that was created by Eric Rees, who wrote The Lean Startup. But definitely there is a story in one of his books about, I'm sure it was Dropbox, when it first set up could not get funding. It really struggled to get funding. If it wasn't Dropbox, forgive me Dropbox, but they couldn't get funding and they had to carry on a skeleton budget. And they invited early adopter users to help them shape and hone the products. And they entered into this active engagement with these early adopters who were almost like their beta tester community and effectively got to a critical mass where all of a sudden not only had they honed the product offering but they also had this kind of entourage this big following whereby suddenly the VC funders turned around and went oh my god actually there's something really credible about what's going on here and so their story's been told as a kind of prototype example of lean and agile product development in early phase startups in the software arena and this interaction between the organisation and voluntary engagement with these early adopters to shape and hone is a really strong example of organisational agility and motion. So I really like the fact that you've then tied that back into what internal comms could be if minded to be.



Michael (53:26)

I do think so. And I think that, going back to what I was talking about before about this concept of history is a process continuity and change, which is happening at the same time. We know that this has been going on. This idea that your employees are resources and if only the organisation could develop a system of internal comms to channel those resources, those abilities. This goes back to things like the development of suggestion boxes. When we were in Unilever, we found archive documents on development, huge files on the development of suggestion boxes, which were taken very, very seriously by companies a hundred years ago. And we've seen that continue, the idea of teamworking, of employee councils, of harnessing the energy of employees into the organisation. So we operate more together. I think that that's been going on for a long time and it's continuing. And I think this concept of internal comms is a way to access the energy to make your companies more creative, more engaged, more productive, more brilliant. And then this idea now that what social media has done, what Web 2.0 has done, it's enabled employees now. Because you see, the problem was before, even though there was a realisation of that, the technology wasn't there. The internal comms people still produced the content and the employees still read it. You had a few things like John Lewis, the employee letters were important. And we know from our research that the most read in the past part of the company magazine was always the letters. They loved the letters. So that was an early form of user generated content, if that makes sense. You know people talk about AI, but I would argue that we've taken our eye off the ball, seriously. I think social media is the big thing. Social media is still young. It's only been around for 20 years. Businesses have only used it. Internal social media is very, very young in organisations. It's only been around for 10, 15 years. It's in its infancy, that technology. It's implicated. And I think if you combine the social media with the AI, I think that's your future. It's your employee creating it and then, and your IC people kind of curating and creating some of their own content and throw internal comms people will still create content.

Dom (55:34)

I think Michael you're doing a trailer for our third podcast I think.

Cat Barnard (55:37)

100%, sorry, because I am that geek squad, and I am in awe of you two History Boys. So I had to go and just verify it was Dropbox, and they used the lean startup methodology to create a minimum viable product. This comes back to, and I think this is a wonderful kind of almost footnote for this podcast. You can see me getting animated now.

If internal communicators have the courage to experiment with what could be possible, but create new service offerings at a minimum viable level, and invite that co-creation process with their internal stakeholders, their internal audiences. And I use those words quite specifically, because I think slowly but surely we're shifting away from employees towards multiple internal stakeholders who will hold a range of different employment contract types. But that experimentation, the curiosity, but also the key skill here, the meta skill, which I know we've talked about a lot on air and off air, the meta skill is listening to what people are saying they want and building services around



that in that MVP capacity, the minimum viable product to test and measure, to see what works. And I think what you just said about the social media, internal social media platforms, I think there is the potential that AI can scrape and inform, but actually for now, it's still in its infancy and our human capacity to tune in and Listen is the most important skill set that we've got in that regard, I think.

Michael (57:26)

Yeah, I think you're spot on. I really do. And a big part of my research actually over the last 26, 28 years, has actually been looking at the impact of technology. So my PhD was actually on clerical workers. And you know, that's how we got into internal comms, actually. That's how I got into it. So and I published a book on this on History of Clerical Work, published by Routledge, The Search for Stability, London Clerical Workers, 1880s, 1914. And even in that book I mentioned magazines, right, because what was interesting is every time I went to an archive, I went into, Royal Bank Scotland, the first thing they would give me was, oh, you want to look at Clark's? Here's Company Magazine. Look at that. They're in there. Right. And then it was like, what are these things, these magazines? There's a chapter in my book, and I actually call it The Machine in the Office.

And you know a lot of these huge, very fearful debates about AI. Oh my god, AI is the buggy monster. And it's almost like horror films. Why do we watch horror films? Human beings take enjoyment out of getting scared, right? And that's why we read newspapers half the time. They're like, oh god, you know. Do you know there were the same debates going on?

120 years ago about, oh my god, the typewriter, the adding machine, There was a huge, oh my, we're all going to get de-skilled. We're all going to end up like those horrible manuals. And of course, don't forget Clarks, their families were manuals. They kind of clawed out of factories and got into offices. They were, oh my god, and you get that narrative of skilled professionals are going to be made redundant, you know, and going to university was a waste. It's like the middle class terrifying itself through its own technology, if that makes sense. I think it's a load of rubbish!

Dom (59:02)

Before we all have nightmares and we start to not be able to sleep at nights, I reluctantly, I think we have to come into land, I'm afraid, because I know we can carry on. What a rich debate we've had. I mean, it's a huge amount to digest, I think. And I think with your permission, you have set us up for a third podcast and possibly beyond that. But I think let's just, if we can bring us into land, it's almost an impossible question, but one of the things we like to do, as you know, in these podcasts is to give internal communication practices some practical ideas they can then use and apply in their role. And I've picked up lots from what you said, all the way from be careful of the use of language, use heritage. Remember that a lot of the stuff we're talking about now is being consistent, particularly your last point about we've all had fears about things are going to take our jobs and ruin our livelihoods. You've also talked about the importance of listening, of creating that creation, not creation, about creating the environment. So as we come into land now, I'm gonna ask you both really for one thing that you would advise internal communicators listening to this podcast, they should do. One thing they should do. Joe, what's your take?



Joe (01:00:03)

Based on what I said before, given that internal comms seems to change when there's a crisis, it's going to, I guess, see how a crisis can be an opportunity would probably be the message and not necessarily something to panic about where's the opportunity there. Obviously, Cat mentioned there's lots of things that could be seen as a crisis at the moment. I guess that's always the case. There's lots of things that could potentially become a big crisis. You're never sure which one will actually turn into the big crisis. I guess late 2019, probably a lot of us wouldn't have realised that COVID was going to become as big as it was. But of the things you mentioned, I guess, realistically, climate change is one that's not going away. So maybe trying to think about how the kind of working world is going to kind of like change maybe in the future with different working practices and maybe companies having to be shown to be kind of responsible and what does that actually mean for communication and will that kind of create opportunities perhaps for people working in communication if the nature of work is going to be different in the future.

Dom (01:00:54)

Okay, so it's important to recognise the opportunity with a crisis, I think, without paraphrasing what you're saying there. And then finally, thank you very much. And Michael, your take on that, please.

Michael (01:01:03)

Yeah, I think totally echoing Joe as well. I think mine would be, learn your past really, I'm paraphrasing, but he who forgets the past repeats the same mistakes. And I think, kind of echoing what Jen and I have been talking about for a long time is internal comms has such a long and amazing history.

It's just because it's changing. I get why that's happening. It's because it's so dynamic. People, it's almost you don't have time to catch your breath and look back. You're constantly dealing with the present and the future. But I think sometimes we do need to look back. And I think, and I think your listeners should do that for two reasons. I think that you can learn a lot from the past. Stuff's been done in the past. We need to stop thinking we're constantly reinventing the wheel and we can learn a lot from that past. But also, I think understanding your past liberates you. It frees you, it gives you agency because a lot of the time we're stuck in institutionalisation as a cage. I'm sure I mentioned this before, one of the key texts on institutional theory was 1983 by DiMaggio and he called it re-examining the iron cage and we're stuck in this cage of the pack. We think this is what we everything we do is normal, it's normal, but it's not. It's only normal because something happened in the past. If we go back to the past we can unlock what we do, we can stop thinking things are always this way and then we can reimagine different ways of being, different ways of doing and different ways of thinking and I think understanding the past enables you to do that.



Dom (01:02:24)

And what a brilliant way to conclude what's been a fascinating podcast looking at our history. Joe, Michael, we'd love to talk to you again a little bit later on into your research when you're coming to that final stage of analysis. We look forward to that very much. But for now, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

Michael

Thank you.

Jen

Thank you so much.

Joe

Yeah, thank you.

Cat Barnard

Thank you.