Transcript for S11 E5 Exploring techno-stress and digital overload

With Elizabeth Marsh

Cathryn Barnard (00:42)

Hello and welcome to a brand new episode of the Future of Internal Communication podcast. I'm Cat Barnard and as ever I'm joined by Jen Sproul and Dominic Walters. If you're anything like me, you're probably feeling on a daily and weekly basis, somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of technology that we are increasingly expected to adopt, assimilate and integrate into our daily work.

And today I am confident that we're going to have a conversation that dives into what we might be able to do about that a little bit. We're going to be talking about the concept of techno stress and digital overload with a brilliant, brilliant guest, Elizabeth Marsh. For those of you who were lucky enough to attend it, Elizabeth keynoted at the 2021 IoIC festival in Nottinghamshire and she is an expert on workforce skills and wellbeing in digital context. She's been working in that field for over 20 years and worked in a range of organisations and roles as a practitioner, a consultant and researcher. Her research spans topics such as digital dexterity, including AI readiness, protecting wellbeing in the context of issues such as techno stress and overload and the role of digital workplace and communications professionals in mitigating them. So she supports organisations with digital skills audits and recommendations for raising digital dexterity and protecting wellbeing. In 2014, she co-authored the digital renaissance of workbook and in 2018, she released the digital workplace skills framework report.

She is going to, I know, have a lot of things to share with us that will perhaps help all of us and have us thinking differently about the daily digital grind that we all face. So, Elizabeth, thank you so much for joining us.

Elizabeth (02:52)

It's great to be here. Thanks for that welcome, Cat.

Cathryn Barnard (02:55)

So I'm going to kick off with the most obvious question. What is techno stress? What's causing it and what are its implications for wellbeing?

Elizabeth (03:06)

Just one thing I want to say just kind of as a preamble to answering that is all of my research focuses on what gets termed the dark side of the digital workplace, which sounds quite interesting.

But it's not being about negative about digital tools for work. So in my research, always upfront acknowledge the tremendous capability that we get from our tools, not least doing a session like this, having greater autonomy and flexibility, being more connected to colleagues, et cetera, et

cetera. Where I'm coming from with the research on topics like techno stress is if we're going to really have the digital workplace fulfil its promise as a strategic enabler in a way that is going to help to support successful digital transformation, enable productivity and also do so in a way that isn't damaging to employee health, then we really need to be focusing on things like techno stress and understanding them so we can mitigate them. And then just the other thing I'm going to say is my research as a psychologist, I'm focusing very much on the individual view. So as you said, I focus on things like digital skills, digital wellbeing, and you know, I'm very interested in the ways that we can help ourselves in that respect, but that's not to say that organisations don't have a responsibility. When I first introduced my PhD topic to some friends over dinner one night, there was a bit of swearing from people saying, don't give us something like mindfulness or talk to us about technostress when, you actually digital tools we've got are really rubbish. And so this is a big preamble, which I apologise. It's important that there's that organisational responsibility to deliver good digital tools and workplaces, thoughtfully done, the information that goes through them, of course, and also help support staff with kind of skills, etc. So with all of that said, you look like you had a follow-up thought to that.

Cathryn Barnard (05:02)

No, I think that's really, really interesting framing actually, because I think that much of the public discourse around wellbeing tends towards the individual. And it's a really important point that you make that organisations have got a responsibility, a duty of care to make sure that their colleagues are as equipped and enabled as can be to use all of these tools. And my immediate reflection, as you were describing that context is, and yet we sit in an environment where it feels to me as if there's an open invitation to bring your own application to work. So almost people taking responsibility for the new apps, platforms, tools that they introduce in an attempt to make things easier in the flow of their work. And because of that, then it seems that there's been a stepping back of organisations to acknowledge their kind of holistic responsibility in this new world order. So without chugging on the mic too much. Please go ahead and tell us about techno stress.

Elizabeth (06:25)

Yeah, and we'll get more into that. I've got an interview study that I've done, looks at some of those, or touches on some of those issues. For example, use of personal devices when there's no clear divide, how does that impact? That's one example of it being an issue. So techno stress, basically levels of stress, used specifically with using technology, so it's that psychological, physiological strain. In trying to cope with the demands of all the technology and often that can be due to a mismatch between the demands of the technology and the resources and skills that we've got available to us. sthat, you know, leading to kind of that difficulty in coping. A lot in the studies I've done have seen emotional exhaustion coming up and fatigue as a kind of outcome of techno stress, so a real kind of anxiety and fatigue around that. As I said, that mismatch of demands and resources. So techno stress is another demand on us in the workplace. And do we have the resources? So we just talked about support from the organisation. Do we have the skills? Do we also have the confidence with technology as well?

I guess also the chance to just step back and look at how we're using the technology. The other thing with techno stress is there's an element of it disrupting our working processes. So the level of interruptions, you know, technical kind of usability and accessibility issues and then the kind of pressure that we need to keep adapting all of the time to new technology, to new upgrades, different features, so kind of level of complexity.

Cathryn Barnard (08:07)

Well, that's certainly that point just there. That is something that gives me techno stress literally every other day, because what I'm noticing is that the systems upgrades and new features that get introduced are now performed so regularly that pretty much every time I go into Teams, there's something new or something has been repositioned or what have you. And I feel like exactly as Kevin Kelly, the co-founder of Wired Magazine in the States said, I just feel like a perpetual newbie. just feel like I'm starting from square one every single time I go into a lot of these tools. It's really frustrating. Last week I gave a webinar and I couldn't find the feature to allow me to present in presenter mode. It had somehow been disabled. And I think also just to add to the point is and you end up thinking, what have I done? What have I done? And a lot of the time it's nothing that you've done. It's just some kind of upgrade that has taken place overnight. And it's really disempowering. And it's, as I'm sure we all know you kind of get emotionally hijacked to the point where you're incapable of fixing your own problem because you've lost your logic and your reason you're so caught up in the in the anxiety of the moment. Yeah, it's disabling isn't it?

Elizabeth (09:36)

Yeah, and that theme of disempowerment has definitely come up in some of the work I've done and, you know, where, as you're saying, things are changing rapidly and we experience an overload. When we talk about overload, often we immediately say information and that's the sort of best known and one of the dominant forms, but it's also an overload of number of applications, number of devices, number of updates. So there's different aspects to that overload. And it can be disempowering and sort of almost diminish the sense of agency that we have in our work as well.

Cathryn Barnard (10:09)

And I think I might have shared it with you when we were back and forthing earlier this year, Elizabeth, but there was some interesting research that came out from the Institute for the Future of Work. They did a report looking into the impact of technology on worker wellbeing and they found two things. Well, they found a thing, which was that there's quite a marked difference between I guess the sense of agency that somebody feels if they're self-selecting on what technology they're going to use to perform their work versus somebody who is exposed to technology almost in a kind of surveillance capacity, like you've been told this technology is being introduced. And I guess that piece around agency and choice and self-selection is quite significant, isn't it?

Elizabeth (11:00)

It is. And you know what's interesting is we go through these various points about techno stress overload. Each of them links back into core good practices for running a digital workplace and for delivering digital communications. So, you know, are people involved in the way it's designed? If there is, use of analytics in some kind of monitoring sense.

How is that communicated? How is it done in aggregate? Do people maintain their sort of control over their data? And many more, the flow of information through the digital workplace. So all of these things link back to things that in our industry we've talked about for many years and know as good practices. I know we'll come onto that more later in the call. And so the interesting thing to me is that people working in digital communications, digital workplaces, et cetera, and with their colleagues in HR, are sort of at the center of this world of digital wellbeing and looking after people in that digital work landscape.

Dom (12:00)

Elizabeth it'd be great just to try and get some perspective as to where we are now with techno stress I guess because I don't know to what extent we've always had it. So I'm giving away my age slightly but I can remember being at school in the 80s and my friend Bob got a BBC computer and for me this blew my mind because it did things on screens that I didn't think were possible and I started to feel as if I was behind the curve to be frank a feeling I probably never quite got rid of so I had techno stress then. I know my mother-in-law would honestly say that a push-button telephone is beyond her understanding of technology. So we've always had this fear. But then I compare my children and they're early 20s and for them they don't seem to display any techno stress really. Their only frustration I suppose is that technology doesn't do all the things that they would like it to. So it would be really interesting to get some perspective on techno stress now, how it compares to what it may have been in the past. And if it is on the rise, why that is? A lot of questions there, Elizabeth, sorry.

Elizabeth (13:02)

Yeah, there's quite a bit to unpick in there, really, really good questions and reflections. I don't think we have an objective, comparison of kind techno stress then and now in that sense. I think that when we look at the trajectory of, you know, the way that organisations are digitally transforming, of course, the effect that the pandemic had, both for good and sort of detrimental as well in terms of accelerating the way that we work digitally. And then kind of the way that it's, technology use in our work has just become so pervasive, contributing to things like that blurring between work and life, a sense of strain, kind emotional and psychological strain, and of course that rising techno stress that we talked about already. So I think there's sort of a compounding or a sense that it's growing. In an interview study I've mentioned which I'm hopefully publishing soon which has turned out to be very much about hyperconnectivity and overload. Through the experiences people are expressing there was a real sense of intensity, something I'm calling digital workplace technology intensity and also intensification.

And one of those interviewees commented, you know, this would have happened anyway, this kind of norm, this expectation that you've got to be available all the time, that you've always got to be, up to date, connected, ready to sort of work. He said, it would have happened anyway, but somehow it's come sooner with the pandemic and the extent to which it was really a norm and expectation really stood out as well in those interviews. I mean, kind of implicitly brought up, how is techno stress different for us, perhaps based on our individual differences, age being one of them. And there's not tons of research around that. And there are studies that have shown some differences and for example, older workers may struggle more with some of the complexity of features. Younger workers may be struggling more with information and communication overload, perhaps because of how they're engaging with those channels. So I don't think there's a definitive answer on who is experiencing techno stress? And this is one of the things I say with digital skills as well. We need to be careful not to make assumptions on who might be struggling with digital skills. Even someone very confident with social media tools in the workplace, it's somewhat different. So there's a level of confidence there. And so we need to do our research, ask the questions about, you who is experiencing techno stress in different ways. A few years back now I did a study for an organisation looking at, we were looking at digital skills for various aspects, communication, security, etc. But actually one of the standout messages that came out was the potential for digital burnout and it was kind of a surprising message. So think when we asked the questions around not just how people are experiencing the tools but their own kind of state of being, their skills and confidence, then we potentially get some surprising answers.

Dom (16:18)

So it sounds like then that it is on the rise, that it's not necessarily around people's age and stage, that's probably a false analysis. It's more about individuals, what they're being asked to do, the job they're doing, their access to technology, I suppose, and how much they rely upon it. But the other thing which is very striking from what you're saying is, if I understand it, it's not just about saying there's so much to learn, there's so much to do, there's so much to apply.

But it's also the fact that technology is making me more accessible to other people. So it's putting demands on my time. The fact that I'm available now means I feel as I should be available. So that's a side I hadn't really thought about, but I guess that does cause the rise of techno-stress as well.

Elizabeth (16:59)

Yeah, that level of availability that's almost implicit and again, talking to people even where it's not overtly expected by the organisation that you should be online and available to, you know, sort of outside of strictly work hours. There's a norm that's built up between people. So the behaviours are actually speaking louder necessarily than sort of the policies within the organisation.

So yeah, I think that availability aspect, and as I said, talking to people who were using personal devices for work and where that can obviously have certain advantages, but in certain roles and for certain people, it was really pernicious and almost impossible to disconnect from that or to have uninterrupted time, leisure time or whatever it is that one's doing.

Dom (17:50)

I'll pass over to Jen in a second, but one of questions you've excited then really is to what extent are there certain professions where you see techno stress at its most? Can you predict it that way or is it generally spread across different occupations?

Elizabeth (18:04)

I think there's one element that I reflect on in a recent study, which is thinking about the workers who are hyper-connected versus people who are potentially digitally disenfranchised. The latter might be more at the front line of the organisation potentially. And that can bring its own anxiety as well kind of what am I missing out on? What am I not having access to to kind of move forward in my career, the communications? So I think there are kind of different facets that could be different role types, different levels of digital access. I guess when we're talking about hybrid work, the kind of connectivity and devices that we might have available to us. Of course, that was talked about a lot, you know, in the pandemic with kind of education and work moving very much online.

I think there's a sort of connecting back to what we were just saying as well. I think there's a sort of productivity anxiety that can be going on. And one of the participants in this most recent study said, have to be a little green light. And that's needing to demonstrate presence, even when, perhaps they're not supposed to be working or there's the need to just read an old fashioned report or do something that doesn't involve having that green light on, but the need to kind of be performative. One lady I spoke with said, I feel like it's a real privilege to work from home. And so the price I'm willing to pay for that is that, I'll take calls and things at all sorts of times. So I think we need to look at how this works together collectively in teams and organisations to understand what's happening. I think just starting some of those conversations can be really interesting and revealing.

Cathryn Barnard (19:50)

It just makes me think about thinking and critical thinking. We're thinking a lot about the role of critical thinking here at the Institute. And how do you demonstrate that you're thinking? There's an anecdote in a lovely book written by Jenny Odell called, the book's called How to Do Nothing, I think. And she told a story about, I think it was Deloitte in Canada, where somebody went into reception and they were just sat down.

And because they appeared to be doing nothing, colleagues kept coming up to this individual and saying, what are you doing? And each time she said, I'm thinking. And eventually the colleagues couldn't cope with the fact that she seemed to be doing nothing in the reception. So she was reported. But arguably she was thinking. And if you think about Deloitte as a construct of an organisation, they are a thought leader and a management consultancy. So to penalise somebody for thinking, because thinking is an internal activity that doesn't manifest as a range of overt actions. I mean, it's a conundrum, isn't it? Just, anyway, I'll be quiet now.

Elizabeth (21:04)

Yeah, that's very interesting. We have so little time for real thinking and it's hard to make time. And yeah, that performative aspect of the digital that showing that we're active, that we're doing things that we're present is actually can be quite detrimental to that.

Jen Sproul (21:22)

I think it's really interesting to listen to what you said, but I think that sometimes we're kind of a living contradiction in many senses that, you know, we want to, we know digital and this can help perform us and we can do all of here, but we want to embrace it, but we also don't have time to think and to thought. So this is living kind of contradiction of being present is doing more, but actually where is, so you need to be online and green to achieve it.

But at the same time, we want to encourage you through our cultural narrative to have empowerment and agency and to think critically and innovate. So we have all these sort of cultural words that we want to encourage our workforce that drives us forward to achieve our organisational goals, whether that's through innovation, delivery, collaboration is the big word that we're using a lot at the moment we need to collaborate more. But at the same time, we're living this kind of sense of but you need to be on it and just doing and task performative. And if you're not green and not using every thing around you, then you're not living against that too. And I think that can be sometimes a really hard conundrum for an employee where you've built this normed behaviour where I have to be digitally seen to be doing something as opposed to, but at the same, your cultural thing you're trying to put across to me is that, you want me to innovate, but I can't do it anyway outside of a digital workplace.

So how do we manage those two sides and how do we lead on those two sides? And I think digital has the power to include but also the power to exclude employees, depending on that from a location and a delivery point of view. And I think as I'm listening to it as well, I feel there's a lot of sort of cultural behavioural challenges that are sort of being put to one side when we're designing digital workplaces that are not blending those two pieces together to make sure we're leading in the right way. You talked earlier, we seem to be on and the pace and we need to have a green light or respond quickly or be available at all the hours. We know, for example, in France they've put laws in place. I think there's been discussions in this country as should there be the same? My question is, how do organisations address this when I think the digital workplace and the culture that we're trying to create sometimes butt heads with each other?

Elizabeth (22:31)

I really feel like I want to reflect on that and what you've said there. But yeah, I think it's I think it's fascinating.

Jen Sproul (22:39)

I guess my question then would be, if organisations are approaching digital workplaces and continuous transformation and we're on the backdrop of this techno stress and the things that you've talked about, then what are those responsibilities they have? How can they address it? I think you mentioned earlier some certain things, but I guess what are those top tips, I guess, organisations to consider when addressing things around techno stress and digital workplaces?

Elizabeth (24:06)

There's different levels from the organisational level, technological and then that individual level. And as you said, even there's a societal level there of how it's regarded. The jury's out for me still on, if we put a law in place and sort of to protect that. In one sense, it's good at setting a good intent. But actually, we don't want to take away the benefits we get from the technology and the fact that you know some of us might like to connect at different times and work in different ways and you know it's more thinking about how we make that work together how do I work at an odd, what might be in an odd time without putting pressure on you so I think there's a lot around in the first place, enabling a conversation. Whenever I get into these conversations, sometimes at the start of meetings, and you get into people have learned and are learning through experience what works. And that came out in the interviews I did as well. People reflecting on, I used to do it this way. I used to message that person who I knew was out of the office, but in teams. I knew I shouldn't do it, but I quite often get a reply.

And then I don't do that anymore because it's not fair and I don't want it to happen to me. So listening to people's own reflections on those learnings. And I guess communicators have a real, really important role in that conversation and opening up those spaces where people feel that they can have those conversations about digital habits, about digital well-being, about the things that work and kind of sharing with each other. And then, potentially how can we maybe crystallise some of those things that we recognise work and don't work, particularly in teams where we can talk both about digital preferences. So again, from research, there can be preferences about segmentation or integration of work for different people.

So personality aspects, habits that we have, preferences for example for working in a focused way or being across lots of tools and updates. And then actually working out how we as a team can kind of flourish digitally together and both be productive but also have an agreement that's sensible between us. I guess that's a very people oriented a kind of way of looking at it. I think at the sort of technological level and why I say, you know, people who are managing intranets, different aspects of digital workplaces have a really key role in this through their understanding of things like user-centered design, identifying and addressing pain points, looking at the policies around, you know, that do influence how we use technologies.

Elizabeth (26:54)

How analytics get used and in ways that are appropriate and don't kind of negatively affect well-being but may be able to highlight patterns of hyperconnectivity that are happening inside an organisation again at an aggregate level to show you know if there are things that need to be addressed in that sense.

And then I guess that always I come into the digital skills piece, the digital literacy piece, and really, I think we still haven't made this shift, even post pandemic from, and possibly we're even worse, I can't say that objectively, but from training individual digital tools, I will give you some training around this latest thing that's coming out versus taking a back and taking a much wider view of training around how to be a digital worker, how to be someone who needs to focus in a digital environment, who needs to connect, who needs to have healthy boundaries around work and life, who needs to have confidence that when a new tool or upgrade comes along, it's okay to go, hey guys, I can't find where it was last week and can we figure this out together? That we also kind of gets into the next phase of my research that I'm quite excited about is I'm looking at ideas of digital mindfulness and how kind of characteristics of mindfulness can be applied to our digital lives. This has been a long interest of mine and one of the sort of models of mindfulness has three facets. So looks at intention, attention and attitude. And as I'm applying that to my digital work life or any aspect of my digital life, the intention is very much around, am I clear why I'm using these technologies and what it is I'm trying to do, what I want to get from them before I engage the attention of, actually continuing to have an attention that's holistic. So I'm aware of myself and aware of my mental, emotional, physical well-being as I'm using technology. Can I focus my attention when I need to? Do I recognise different types of attention and what I need to enable those? And then also attitude, which is, and when you get into kind of kindness and compassion, which kind of sounds weird in this context, but actually approaching technology with, okay, it's okay that, wow, I just noticed that I did just completely get lost in social media posts or whatever it is, or noticing that I've made mistakes in the digital environment but having a sort of forgiving attitude. So I've gone off on a total tangent, but on my pet topic.

Jen Sproul (29:42)

No, no Elizabeth it's fascinating. No and I think there's so much you just said there isn't there? For internal communicators to take an opportunity on. You've talked about the fact that we need to be thinking about how we design and think of the rhythm of content, the rhythm of what we do and how that all comes out when you're being considered in that design, how we can personalise so we don't overload people unnecessarily, but also the important bit in there as well as about how can we empower our people managers or our people in our organisations to have those conversations to really talk about how do we, we know we've got all this digital tool in our, but how do we want to work? How can we get the best out of it so that we can achieve our goals rather than so it's about our goals rather than how, I don't know if you agree that sometimes I think that we let technology just take the lead and our goals take the second rather than our goals being front. So therefore, because I think technology can feel really exciting as well. It can feel really exciting to like, let's adopt and let's consume it. I guess my question to you is, and I think you said an important word in there as well about attention. We've certainly seen the impact of the digital workplace and not just digital workplace, but just general content consumption and social media. What happens in our private lives means that our intention spans are significantly reducing and we're being sort of shimmied around here or there, I guess then going on from what you're saying, and I think there's so much in there for internal communicators that we could be more mindful, if you like, in the way that we approach it. I guess for internal communicators, we're not on our own without suffering our own

techno stress, because we feel like we need to keep up to date. Is there anything that you think could be a really big implication that internal communicators need to be aware of for techno stress?

Elizabeth (31:29)

Yeah, and I just want to pick up on you put it so well that we want to be led by our goals and for the technology to support those goals. And that's a really good, simple review, isn't it? If we step back just for a moment from all of the technology and things that we're using. Are we being led by those? And this is what, has inspired my research, actually, with some of those observations when I went on a mindfulness retreat, but it could be anything, when we step away from our technology in whatever way we like to, and we notice the state of our awareness, when we go on holiday and we disconnect. And it's not necessarily we can have that state of awareness all the time, but can we be intentional and make sure that technology is serving us? So I just wanted to pick up, I think that was a really great way of putting it. And yeah, I think internal communicators have a really important role in modelling this and understanding individually and as a team how this is playing out for them. So what I talked about earlier in that team sense, creating those spaces and of course in the day to day running and that strategic running of communications so the latest I've published is exciting at the moment. I've waited for years and I'm finally actually publishing some of this, which is a very gruelling process. So it's lovely to be able to talk about them. But one that I've just published that seems to have really chimed in this community is around either information overload or fear of missing out.

Elizabeth (33.00)

And people kind of almost bouncing between these two poles. So there's just too much flowing towards whether it's updates, emails, communications through different channels. And on the other side, people worrying about, am I missing out on stuff? I've been off for a day and I feel completely behind. I've kind of heard people saying this in some of the research. And ironically trying to manage overload by, okay, I am going to shut off notifications and just focus. But then I'm so worried about what I might miss out on that I can't really focus. So it's kind of almost a vicious circle in that respect. And the point I make in this research, and I wanted to really take the opportunity to support what people are doing in our community, is that good information management, good communication management, principles again that we've talked about for years that professional communicators understand, okay we're all learning as new channels come on board and you know how to kind of integrate those into the mix, but those good principles of planning and delivering communication and trying to make sure that people are not overwhelmed I think are really, really key. So again, this is about communicators having a really critical role in digital wellbeing and I think that's also quite exciting as well.

Jen Sproul (34:19)

I couldn't agree more. Go on Dom, take that excitement piece to the next stage.

Dom (34:23)

Well, actually, you've just sparked another thought, really, Elizabeth, which is probably a poorly formed thought, but let me articulate it if I can. To some degree, as you've been talking, I've been wondering how much techno stress is manufactured by people who have an interest in us being techno stressed. Now, when I say that, I know that all industries have people who sometimes generate work, but I do get the feeling sometimes with technology that there are people who want us to be confused because they can then sell us the solution to that confusion. How cynical is that and how much truth is in that shameful assertion of mine?

Elizabeth (35:01)

Well I think it kind of gets into the extent to which workplace technology echoes and is similar to technologies we have outside of work, which are, as you know, very much designed around hooks and nudges and trying to get us to stay online more and being really antithetical to us actually managing our boundaries and our attention. And there's a movement. I'm sure you've heard of sort of calm technology and the idea that, technology is actually designed to be less interruptive. So I think it's important to look at the features that we're bringing into the workplace about whether they're really supporting because at the end of the day, we're not going to be more productive if we're stressed and burnt out.

I kind of said this particularly after pandemic, a lot of people working more hours online and from home is that maybe there's, a short term gain for organisations. Maybe they feel like they're getting more productivity, but actually the long term bill, if we just look at it in those basic terms, in terms of stress and burnout and turnover. It's going to be much higher. So I think it's a very short term view to look at it in that way really for organisations.

Dom (36:17)

And I think that's why it's very good to have, very helpful to have your objective and clear assessment of this. And I think it also leads on to one of the things you've just been talking about in terms of communication, because I think as communicators, one of our roles is to foster conversation within organisations. And you mentioned earlier, Elizabeth, about having conversations about our use of tech, about making it OK if we're not that clear about tech, about it's OK to ask questions. I think as communicators, we have a very strong role to encourage people to do that and to lead people through the fog, if you like. I'm mixing my metaphors terribly there. We've talked about a lot of great stuff. You've talked about not being performative, I think. You've talked about it's OK to ask questions. You've talked about the clarity of focusing on what we're trying to do, the job, the task, as opposed to purely focusing on the technology, and lots of other things. So to bring us into land, and it's a very unfair question, but in your mind, Elizabeth, what's the one thing that you think internal communicators listening to our conversation today should take away when it comes to their work and how they help organisations get the most from technology, I suppose?

Elizabeth (37:23)

I've been asked more unfair questions to be fair at the end of podcasts, not that done loads. So phew. In a way, because, I suppose because again, as a psychologist, I'm always coming back to the individual and that's my area of fascination. In some ways, if we can bring that reflection to our own digital habits and behaviours and coming back to what Jen said, you know, whether they're supporting us to do the things that we want. And maybe, again, just within the internal comms team, just experimenting with a conversation around that, around what has been found and using that as a starting point, perhaps to widen those conversations for messages around that. I don't think there's any easy answers in any senses, but again, I keep coming back to those core good principles, whether it's governing tools and information, that strategic view of channels and what we're doing. And obviously they're sort of under assault from AI, we'll just fix everything, but of course garbage in, garbage out and all of those. More than ever we need to sort come back to those good principles. So that's my little rambling answer to that one.

Dom (38:42)

That makes huge sense. I think it reinforces a point that's come through in lots of our recent podcasts about the increasing role for internal communication is to ask questions. Ask the right questions, to be curious, to get people to think about stuff and then prompt conversation. That's not the exclusive role of internal communicators, but I think it's becoming an increasing one. I think what you've said today has reinforced of that.

Cathryn Barnard (39:05)

I agree. I think somebody needs to, be asking the questions that need asking in organisational settings. And I know I sound like a broken record myself now, but I always come back to one of our first ever podcast episodes where we had Colin Archer on and he talked about the unique position that internal communication has of being able to go into any department, any function, any team setting and kickstart a conversation. So, I guess what I would add is as an internal communicator, it's the question that is the most important thing. You don't need to ask a question knowing the answer or expecting the answer. It's just asking those questions. And on this particular topic, I imagine that if we invited you back, nine, twelve months from now, Elizabeth, we'd be having a substantively different conversation building on what we've talked about today, but the pace of change in our workplaces is only going to accelerate. So to that end, I would like to finish today by saying, please, can we have you back at some point in the near future? Because I imagine by then, there'll be a fresh perspective to apply to all of this that we've discussed today.

Elizabeth (40:23)

I'd love to come back and of course we'll be able to see then what shakes out from this reactionary, let's force our staff back to the office phase as well. And that's going to be in the mix as well. So yeah, lots to talk about.

Cathryn Barnard (40:38)

Yes, indeed. Thank you so much for everything that you've shared with us today. And we will make sure that when we publish the episode, we link to your research so that any listeners can find out more about the lines of inquiries that you've been pursuing. And hopefully they'll be able to contact you directly or find out more about your work. But I think what you're doing is fascinating and much needed.

Elizabeth (41:04)

Thank you very much Cat, I really enjoyed the conversation, it sparked quite a few more thoughts as well from talking to you all as well, so yeah, I hope people find it interesting.