

INTERNAL
COMMUNICATION
2017 & 2018

FROM HOPE TO REALITY

How Far We've Come | The Road Ahead



Title: IC in 2017 & 2018 - FROM HOPE TO REALITY How Far We've Come | The Road Ahead

Published online by IC Kollektiv, December 2017.

Free download at <https://www.ickollektiv.com/from-hope-to-reality>

Special thanks to Claire Watson for proofreading this publication.

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INTRODUCTION

"No other discipline will prove more important to business leaders over the next three years than organizational communication," according to the Institute for Public Relations. Indeed, recent studies point to the critical role of internal communication (IC) in the success of organizations, and some underscore what executives are expecting from CCOs and IC practitioners.

Last December, IC Kollektiv asked a group of communication professionals from different parts of the world what their greatest hope for the IC profession was in 2017 in terms of where the discipline should be. Many spoke to the need for shifting the role of internal communication from a tactical to a strategic approach that supports organizations in achieving their business results. Some voiced the value of IC and the need to get recognized by executives. Some focused on the imperative need to measure and evaluate what we do, while others talked about the importance of investing in our professional development, knowledge and skills, and so on.

How far have we actually come? Our collaborators share their views on the progress made over the past months, to what extent they believe their hope has translated into reality and what they see on the road ahead.

Readers will notice that the spelling of some words varies from country to country. We have chosen to use the local version of spelling out of respect for the authors and in recognition of the global community.

For more relevant insights on how the discipline of internal communication is redefining itself, download our free eBook, Disrupting the Function of IC - A Global Perspective. Visit the different sections of our website and find out more about the mission of IC Kollektiv.



Claire Watson MC, ABC
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Internal Communication Drives Business Results

My biggest hope for internal communication during 2017 is that the executive team embraces internal communication as a key business driver that has a halo effect on all business operations. In doing so, internal communication is elevated to the decision-making table, consulted in advance of key business decisions so that communication professionals can harness the power of communication to help drive business results. My hope for internal communication professionals is that they manage communication strategically, demonstrating its value in ways that forever change the way that business operates.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

This noble aspiration set a goal almost impossible to reach in one short year. Sadly, in most organizations recognition of the value of internal communication is progressing at a snail's pace.

Undervalued equals under-resourced. Executives have yet to connect the dots between well-managed internal communication and business results. To be blunt, communication professionals are partly to blame. Many practitioners continue to focus on tactical delivery, skipping the most critical components of strategy.

Not to be confused with a tactical plan, good internal communication strategy is rare. When strategy isn't aligned with business needs and supported by audience analysis, measurable objectives, a strategic approach, clear, concise, relevant, timely messages and a measurement plan, there is no dependable outcome. Data drives decision-making and resources. As long as internal communication is seen as a cost centre, organizations are doomed to hobble along like they have always done.

It's a double bind. Without experienced communication professionals and a healthy budget, there's rarely an opportunity to do the serious planning and measurement works that needs to be done. Moving internal communication from the popular 1960's top down, command and control, unreliable

cascading of information position to be a facilitator of conversations that drive results is next to impossible. However, without this shift, a commitment to planning, research, measurement and reporting against business outcomes, it's next to impossible to command more resources. This doesn't even account for the fact that the landscape has drastically changed and it behooves senior executives and communication professionals to embrace that change.

It's time to stop preaching to the converted. Most senior communication professionals are acutely aware that when properly managed, internal communication drives business results. Most are very clear that the rules of the game have evolved, changed and continue to change.

There are knowledge gaps between senior professionals and mid-to-entry level professionals. Equally there are knowledge gaps between senior communication professionals and business executives. One of my favourite quotes by [Courtney Stevens](#) is "Nothing changes if nothing changes."

This "chicken and egg" syndrome calls for a three-pronged approach:

1. Education
2. Advocacy
3. Action

Starting at the university level and spreading through every single IC training program and accreditation process, it is incumbent on us to teach and mentor up-and-coming communication professionals how to manage internal communication and take their place as leaders and trailblazers in their organizations or businesses. While we're at it, let's teach them how to advocate for the value of the profession in ways that cannot be ignored.

Let's not be complacent in our own organizations or in our work with clients. Entry to senior level communication professionals at least know the basics. Many senior executives do not. What a great opportunity to educate, advocate and demonstrate the value of internal communication at every turn. Senior communication professionals have a key role to play in bringing change. The gauntlet has been thrown. Will you take up the quest?

Keep talking. Keep writing. Keep teaching and mentoring. Keep walking the talk and delivering results. Keep advocating for the value of strategic communication. Although there is no magic wand, there is a critical mass. That critical mass is us working together toward the same vision, delivering the same messages time after time until we succeed. Walt Disney once said, "The difference between winning and losing is most often not quitting."

Let's change the game.



Priya Bates ABC, MC, CMP,
IABC Fellow
President
Inner Strength
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Canada

New Mindset. Build Skills.

For 2017, I hope that internal communication (IC) professionals embrace their integral role in delivering business results from the inside out. I've always said that our greatest opportunity is not to communicate on behalf of our organizations, but INFLUENCE how our organizations, their leaders, their managers and their people communicate.

In 2017, successful IC professionals will be defined by their ability to let go of the tactics they enjoy delivering, and instead focus on aligning strategic communication plans that contribute directly to goals. I hope that IC professionals find the courage to change the conversation, ask more questions, and measure results.

I'd also like them take a lead on new technologies aimed at internal audiences. We've heard too many stories of failed internal social networking due to IT simply turning on a switch versus integrating and launching technology as part of a business solution. I've been amazed at how many start-ups and technology companies are starting to turn their focus internally this past year. Great solutions now exist for employee apps, recognition and rewards, engagement and ideation, manager communication and culture creation. All of them are designed to help organizations encourage conversation and storytelling among their people. IC professionals need to learn about the solutions and understand how they can help increase awareness, engage employees, and measure results.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

As I look back at 2017 and ahead to 2018, I've noticed a distinct shift in thinking about internal communication.

Leaders are asking me to help them use internal communication to influence manager communication, engage employees and enable change.

Progressive internal communication professionals that I have trained and presented to in Asia and North America are ready to have a different conversation, build relationships and create connections between organizational strategy and employee delivery.

I feel like we've moved from a number of lone wolves evangelizing the power of internal communication to the beginning of a movement in the right direction.

There's still a gap. Leaders and communication professionals understand the opportunity, but they don't know how to start, where they should focus or the questions they should ask. In Toronto we're seeing many senior IC roles and not enough people with strategic internal communication expertise to fill them. Clients complain about investor relations and public relations specialists with little internal experience applying for these jobs.

There is an opportunity to train and coach these professionals on strategic internal communication and employee communication and what makes it different than broadcasting communication.

In 2018, I'd like communication professionals to reach out and ask for help and focus on professional development. More often than not, I'm talking to leaders who don't believe their own in-house teams can deliver what they are looking for. I'd prefer to build inner strength. Own and embrace the change.



Jim Shaffer
Leader, The Jim Shaffer Group
USA

Driving Results Requires More Than Channels

I hope internal communication professionals will take a lesson from their HR colleagues who've shifted their work from low value-adding personnel administration work to building their organization's workforce capabilities. Internal communication professionals need to stop churning out activities that add little to no value and start helping their organizations improve results and value by eliminating communication breakdowns that make it tough for employees to do their work. Opportunities are huge for communication practitioners who want to play a major role in running the business.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

I see some progress in this area but not as much as I hoped to see and certainly not as much as the opportunity offers. Social media is today's bright shiny object. As with past bright shiny objects, social media is being used as a channel to distribute information rather than as a medium to drive improved business results. Social media is woefully underused for this purpose. Until communication professionals are held accountable for improving results and value they're likely to continue to represent a cost to the business. It does not have to be this way.

CEOs and other operations people need to better understand that the way communication drives results extends far beyond formal channels. It includes what leaders say and do and what messages systems and processes (e.g., reward, measurement) communicate. Leaders who understand how their peers have improved quality, costs, safety, productivity and service delivery by improving integrated communication will want the same medicine for themselves. That "pull" has happened many times. CEOs need to be exposed to what's doable. When that happens, results will improve. Everyone will benefit – employees, customers, communication practitioners and shareholders.



Mike Klein
Principal
Changing The Terms
Netherlands

Competence Alone Is Not Enough

My biggest hope for 2017, regardless of the political and economic circumstances we may find ourselves in, is that we become better empowered to support, guide and, where necessary, challenge our clients and bosses.

Too much of what we do in internal communication is driven by optics, and this freezes out approaches which might not be as flashy or visible, but which are much more effective at getting the job done.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

It's really unclear whether there has been any movement. With very few exceptions, the conversation has been about "how" to do, manage and measure and much less about "what" to do, manage or measure or "why" any or all of it is necessary.

Execution is critical. Fairly or not, our credibility as professionals depends on people not finding problems with the way we execute and calling our competence into question.

But we have to reject the idea that competence alone is enough.

We must add the confidence to challenge and the strategic mindsets to give our challenges coherence and our organizational presence a whiff of leadership. Otherwise, we simply become the sum total of what we do, the boxes we tick.



Stephen Welch, FRSA
Independent Consultant
UK

Stop 'Doing' Communication

My biggest hope for the profession is that we move from press officer to brand consultants or ad agencies. Internal communication professionals should become more coaches and strategic advisers to senior management, not people who actually "do" communication. Every time an internal communication person actually 'does' a communication, a leader somewhere is not doing his or her job. My hope is that IC profession starts to realise that output is not a measure of success. No advertising agency measures their success in terms of numbers of ads bought. Instead they win prizes for quality, originality, and influencing consumer behaviour. The sooner IC acts more like an ad agency or brand consultant for leaders and less like a press officer for them, the better. So long as I get to be Richard Whitman.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

The first step in solving a problem is recognizing that you have one. Are the majority of IC professionals press officers who worry about content and "sending out stuff"? Yes. But are there voices talking about the shift to brand consultants and ad agencies? Also yes. These are the vanguards of the profession, and listening to these voices gives me hope that things might change. The alcoholic has admitted her addiction, but that is a long way from solving the problem. I believe that, still, the majority of professionals in the field measure their work by activity, not outcome. I was speaking to a senior IC person in a large global company who was obsessed by the decision about whether the new e-Zine should be one column or two. I know of another organization that employs 300 communication professionals. What is going on? So, no, I don't think the goal has been achieved, but we are at least having a more powerful debate about the need for change.

We need to keep talking, and we need to keep listening. Listening to our customers more. Listening to the business. Understanding. Questioning. Clarifying. Learning. And we need to be more courageous. Sometimes the best thing to do is to say 'no' and challenge leaders. But it is tricky to balance your internal reputation with what is right for the organization. Saying 'yes sir, yes sir, three bags full, sir' (as the nursery rhyme has it) is much easier than the potentially career-limiting challenging conversation. But sometime the consequences of saying 'no' are less than you think, and you might get more respect.



Shel Holtz
Director of Internal
Communications
Webcor Builders
USA

We're Only at the Beginning of the Inevitable Reinvention of Employee Communication

In 2016 we have seen more internal communication departments disbanded or absorbed into other departments such as marketing or corporate communication. My hope for 2017 is that internal communicators expand their thinking about the department's role. The internal communication departments that are being eliminated are those that continue to see themselves as a conduit of news and information to employees. This role evolved when employees had limited access to other news and information sources. Today they have instant access to everything from the company website, including media and investor relations content, to Glassdoor.com. If all we do is share news and information, we are redundant. To thrive, internal communication must become a vital management function that reaches across all departments and functions to improve the flow of all of the company's internal communication. We must be able to measurably improve the employee experience, build employee engagement, influence the culture and ultimately affect the customer experience.

We need to be the drivers of employee advocacy while steering the organization through times of crisis and change. We must be able to monitor employee conversation to identify opportunities and risks, help mold the employer brand and employ all of the right channels for multi-lateral communication, which includes driving adoption of new channels that may not be traditional but will grease the wheels of effective internal communication.

In short, if all we do is publish email newsletters and intranet content, internal communication is toast. If, on the other hand, we are the drivers of communication between and among employees at all levels, measuring the impact on the business, we will be indispensable.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

I have only casual observations to go by, but I fear the internal communication profession has not made much progress in embracing the roles that will keep it relevant – in fact make it indispensable

in a post-mass media world. Mostly, I still see internal communication professionals cranking out copy and other media for one-way distribution to audiences, even as solutions to real-world challenges posed by leaders and other internal clients.

Sending content is messaging. Communication is defined as an exchange of information and ideas. Two-way communication isn't something to bolt on a process. It is not something to strive for. It is at the very heart of communication. Our role as counselors to leaders at all levels of the organization needs to become a core part of what we do, facilitating the exchange of information and ideas throughout the organization, whether it is in the form of an employee call to human resources or problem-solving on collaboration software. Our expertise can be invaluable in making everyone in the organization communicate more effectively.

We also need to study what our colleagues in marketing are up to these days and adopt the personalization that has come to characterize their industry. Look at the ads and the sponsored news feed posts you see in the social media channels you use. While we may not have the same artificial intelligence-driven software at our beck and call that marketers use to target individuals in the external market, we can still take major steps toward ensuring every employee gets and has the opportunity to engage with news and information that is relevant. One size definitely no longer fits all.

Knowing how much we are moving the right needles is also vital. Business leaders make decisions based on data. Companies are gradually undertaking digital transformations in which everyone begins using data to make decisions, ultimately reducing bureaucracy and empowering employees to take action without going through layers of approval. The alternative to going along for the ride is being left behind or thrown off the bus. We need to use data and understand the nature of digital transformation, measure the right things and know how to present our outcomes to leaders in a meaningful way.

There will always be room for craftspeople in internal communication – creators who produce memorable, compelling content to post on the intranet or share through mobile communication platforms. All of us need to be amazing storytellers who can weave vision, values, purpose and other vital elements of a company's culture into the stories we tell and inspire others to share. But that is just part of the job these days. The complete internal communication professional will be up to speed with technology, data-driven in decision-making and responsive to the all of the organization's communication needs.

We'd better get there soon or our leaders will find someone else who can fill these shoes.



Anisu K. Verghese
Corporate Communications
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Tesco Bengaluru
India

What Makes Employees Tick?

The state of internal communication is gradually improving although there is more we can aspire to do. My hope is that the profession gets more inclusive in its approach to driving organizational change and success.

- *Inclusive in taking managers along to become better communicators.*
- *Inclusive such that different generations at the workplace feel they belong. It is predicted that there will be 5 generations working together by 2020.*
- *Inclusive in being sensitive about helping employees make sense of communication and manage the 'noise'. Employees are overwhelmed by the amount of messages they receive.*
- *Inclusive in giving employees a voice at the workplace.*
- *Inclusive in inviting and embracing ideas beyond the profession such as drawing on insights from research and academia to grow the function.*
- *Inclusive in thinking about the future of the organization and not just the profession.*

How far we've come. The road ahead.

- It is probably early to gauge whether a shift in the profession has taken place or not. However, there are positive signs that communication professionals can take note of.
- Organizations are considering newer actions to make their workplace more digitally inclusive through the use of collaborative tools. Cross-organizational collaboration is also growing steadily.

- Personalized experience, a thriving work environment and support in managing an uncertain world are few of the expectations employees have of their employers. An inclusive employee value proposition will seemingly drive how organizations invest in their staff.
- Productivity at the workplace is increasing because of stronger social media networks, one of the ways of making the environment more inclusive.
- Communication is valued more as a high impact resource, especially when it comes to strategic approaches to engagement and benefits.
- Organizations are investing in sensitizing their managers about diversity, inclusion and unconscious bias with communication tools.

We need to revisit all that we know about how employees think and work. Employees seek more control over their lives and expect employers to respond to their needs. It means focusing on the crucial role of internal communication, allowing staff to be their best at work, directing tailored and meaningful messages and encouraging boundary-less behaviors.



David Grossman
Founder and CEO
The Grossman Group
USA

Communications Professionals Must Find their Voice as Leaders

My wish for 2017 for internal communications professionals is to continue to elevate our own skills in an intentional and purposeful way. Too often we're so busy supporting others that our own development as leaders and advisors gets pushed aside. Let's keep growing in significant ways so we can support senior leadership even better in leveraging communications to drive performance.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

What's encouraging to me in my work with communication professionals is the growing recognition of the need to change the way we approach our role. That recognition is a critical first step, but we still need to work harder to ensure that it actually happens. Too often, communication executives let themselves get pulled into the daily demands of planning communication, getting up to speed on social media, and supporting their own leaders, without taking the time to elevate their own skill set as leaders. As a result, efforts to truly make communication a critical leadership tool for the entire organization are stymied. Why does this keep happening? I think it's partly a matter of courage and confidence. We need to summon more courage to articulate the critical role we can play in achieving the organizational strategy, and that means continuing to elevate our skills as "leader communicators."

All of us who care about communication need to start by taking a look at ourselves: how are we succeeding and where are we falling short? How can we personally be more respectfully authentic in our dealings with our own teams as well as with the leaders we support? How can we be more truthful and helpful in our advice, rather than just checking the box to get things done as they've always been done? We also need to take every opportunity we can to share the message that communication matters a great deal. No organization can achieve its goals and move forward in a positive way without great communication. Communications professionals need to find their voice as leaders to carry that message. That can start by spending time with leaders to tell that story, again and again, and by showing leadership what's possible when they begin to see communications as a strategic partner, not just a tactical assistant.



Rita Zonius
Director
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Australia

Keeping Communications Real Is a Long Game

The unfettered flow of information powered by new technologies and social media continues to challenge the way we do our jobs. With the demand for timely and authentic communication on the rise, in the year ahead I'd love to see internal communicators put more energy into keeping communication real. This means shifting our focus from the traditional role we inhabited as communication gatekeepers for our leaders, to instead coaching them to be their genuine selves through engaging communication and conversation. This includes helping leaders understand that being social is not an optional extra today or something to be delegated to internal communication, but a critical general management skill.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

Putting greater energy into keeping communication real continues to be an ongoing challenge for internal communicators. Changing work habits takes time and while IC people may be prepared to take on a more significant role coaching leaders to manage their own communication, we must remember we are playing a long game. Company culture, systems and processes shape how we work and unless organisations are prepared to make changes to these foundations to enable more authentic communications to flow, many IC people will, I'm afraid, continue to capitulate to leaders who are simply not interested in working in a more social way. I'm not trying to paint a totally grim picture here. For every challenging leader we deal with, further down in our organisations we see the lightbulbs go off as more of our people discover that a social way of working is enabling them to get real work done, faster. Now that the social genie is out of the bottle, there's no going back to old ways of working for them and that's truly exciting.

Organisations that commit to a more social way of working, including leaders who role model those behaviours, will provide the right environment for IC people to put more energy into keeping communications real. The caveat, of course, is communicators must still be willing to make the shift from being communication gatekeepers to teaching others how to manage their own

communication. The bottom line is IC people have some decisions to make about how they want to work in the future. Do we want to work in companies that are embracing social technologies? Are we happy to continue managing communication for disinterested leaders? Do we want to be the brave supporters of social ways of working in companies with closed cultures? Personally, I think the best IC people will seek out roles in organisations that are embracing social already or at organisations curious about becoming social.



Paul Barton, ABC
Principal Consultant of Paul
Barton Communications
USA

Seeking Authentic Dialogs With And Between Employees

My biggest hope for internal communication in the coming year is that we focus less on sending messages out and more on creating authentic dialogues with and between employees. Changes in the economy, the culture and technology demand we sharpen our focus. Now, more than ever, authenticity is critical to connecting the minds of an organization's leaders with the hearts of its employees. We also need to enable and facilitate peer-to-peer collaboration between employees through enterprise social networks and other means. I believe great things will happen for organizations that embrace these opportunities in 2017.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

Driven by internal and external influences, many organizations are gradually realizing the importance of authenticity in their communications. Many organizational leaders are more straightforward and taking steps to be more personable. Many see these steps as "risky" so they are tiptoeing into it. Other evidence of authenticity includes fewer staged photos and fewer slick corporate videos. Most organizations still have a long way to go, but many are moving in the right direction

On the other hand, organizations are not embracing Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) and mobile apps as quickly as you might expect given the proliferation of social media in the external world. Many organizations already have invested a lot in other communication technologies. Many organizational leaders don't see the value of ESNs and they fear governance issues as well. Meanwhile, most internal communication professionals don't see the facilitation of collaboration through ESNs as being in their wheelhouse, and they too have invested heavily in policy development and funding of other communication channels.

The world has gone social and mobile, and that has made authenticity the coin of the realm. Organizations need to continue to embrace social and mobile technologies, and seek authentic dialogs with and between employees. Those that create authentic dialog with employees will gain a more engaged workforce and those that facilitate authentic dialog between employees will realize higher productivity. Organizations that do not move toward authentic communication will create an ever-widening credibility gap between leaders and employees that will threaten to undermine all communication efforts.

Just as all organizations ultimately embraced email and web technologies in the 1990s, the move to social, mobile and authenticity will eventually come to pass.



Lee Smith

Co-founder of Gatehouse
UK

Measurement and Evaluation: Keep Up the Pressure

My biggest hope for the IC world is that we finally learn to embrace measurement and evaluation. We have seen a slight improvement in recent years. The number of practitioners conducting some form of measurement has increased a little since we first started our annual State of the Sector review of the IC space nine years ago, but the approach remains fairly unsophisticated for most and non-existent for many. Without measurement, we are working in the dark professionally, unable to demonstrate our true value and blind to the effectiveness or not of what we do.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

We will have more evidence in January, once the results of our 10th annual State of the Sector study are released, but my sense is that we have made good progress on measurement and evaluation this year. As an agency, Gatehouse has done more research work this year than ever before – a sure sign that people are taking measurement more seriously. We have done a record number of IC audits during 2017, and judging by the number of enquiries coming in over the last few weeks, this trend is set to continue long into 2018.

We have also been supporting many clients with regular tracking research, particularly pulse surveys, and much more sophisticated and regular upward performance reporting. Meaningful budgets are now being allocated to research and evaluation, which is fantastic to see. These are all very positive signs! I have also been delighted to see more professional events focused on this topic and more people talking online about the need to get this piece right. Also, on a purely tactical level, IC teams are now much more interested in analytics and data and are going out of their way to select channels that provide insight. That said, there's still a long way to go and many practitioners still have their heads in the sand when it comes to measurement.

We need to keep up the pressure! Effective research and evaluation is at the heart of our desire to be a robust, professional and respected business function. Without insight, we are working blind. Without

evidence we cannot prove our value. If we don't track our progress against outcomes, how do we know we're making a difference? If we don't have baseline measures, how can we demonstrate progress? If we don't show how we're contributing to the success of the organisation, how can we hope to survive? It's great to see more practitioners stepping up to the mark and asking these questions of themselves and their internal clients. We need to be brave in our budget conversations and fight to win. Measurement and evaluation is not a nice to have, it's absolutely vital. We need to put our necks on the line and be accountable. Instead of waiting to justify our existence when the next round of budget cuts comes, be proactive and report on your contribution, regularly. There is no excuse for not doing it. There are so many accessible tools and so much free knowledge out there, it really is time to just do it! I carry this hope with me into 2018, but I really do think we've turned the corner.



Peggy L. Bieniek, ABC
Communication Consultant
and Blogger Starr at Blue
USA

Driving and Inspiring Innovation in Organizations

My biggest hope is that we continue to reinvent our roles as communication professionals to help drive and inspire innovation. Internal communication is the foundation of a collaborative company culture, which leads to innovation, a necessary element for sustainable business success, but this requires transformation. Begin 2017 by building new relationships while nurturing existing ones. Venture out to seek new experiences and people. Re-imagine your role to expand your perspectives and activities that will sustain innovation for you and your organization.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

I'm inspired by the many efforts of innovators in all industries to support their organizations' sustainable business success in 2017. As I outlined in ["Reimagining and Reinventing: The Corporate Communicators' Sunrise to Innovation,"](#) corporate communication professionals should focus on transforming their roles to drive and inspire innovation for their organizations. Transformation begins by seeking ideas and resources in new areas within and outside of your organizations.

Successful transformations have been ongoing during the past few years as described in ["5 Success Stories About Finding Inspiration in Unlikely Places."](#) To sustain these transformation efforts, communication professionals must not only rely on online relationship building. In ["Lou Reed, Big Sisters and Influence,"](#) John O'Reilly stresses that "off the grid" experiences in the physical world and making connections with seemingly contrasting concepts will expand your perspectives to reimagine your work and your world. It will make your "sunrise to innovation" all that much brighter.



Alan Oram
Founder and Creative
Director of Alive With Ideas
UK

Creativity and Flair Matter

I hope that the profession continues to earn respect from all corners of the organisations that it operates in and beyond, and while building trusted relationships at the very top we don't lose the flair and creativity that makes the profession so special. I feel that IC comes in many different shapes and forms and we often talk about what the role of the profession is. I think this is a positive discussion and it needs to continue but I hope that collectively we find our sweet spot.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

It's heartening to know that, according to the latest research from CIPR Inside, 'The most senior people in our organisations understand the importance and value of IC and the difference it can make to achieving success,' and the industry is moving in the right direction in terms of recognising and respecting the function as a valued and vital one.

I would add, whilst focusing on continuing to strengthen this position as strategic trusted advisors within our organisations, we don't lose sight of the equal importance of the tactical work that we do. In both aspects, we can stop our stakeholders in their tracks, make a bold and lasting impression and achieve significant impact across the business. This will not be achieved without a whole heap of creativity and flair. We continue to see brilliant examples of this as we work with communication teams who have a hunger to step away from the norm with the communication they create. Whilst we have achieved a great deal in terms of raising our profiles as true professionals, my hope is that as this respect as strategic business partners grows, so too will our reputation as brilliant communicators with creative edge and a flair for presenting new and innovative ideas than can compete with the bold and vibrant communications that our people are exposed to outside of our organisations.

The Future of Jobs report by the World Economic Forum suggests that "*Creativity will become one of the top three skills workers will need. With the avalanche of new products, new technologies and new ways of working, workers are going to have to become more creative in order to benefit from these changes.*

Robots may help us get to where we want to be faster, but they can't be as creative as humans (yet)."

In my view, there is a real desire for creativity and it's becoming more commonplace, rather than a 'nice-to-have', it's an accepted and a necessary part of the job. But maintaining that creativity in internal communication is an ongoing challenge that affects different individuals and teams in different ways. What works for one individual may not suit another and what is seen as highly creative by one organisation may be viewed by the next as run of the mill communication.

So, whilst it's enormously encouraging to hear the conversations about communicators' commitment to professional development, I also feel that, as individuals, we need to personally dedicate time and energy to more creative pursuits and educate ourselves on how to cultivate our own unique creative flair.



Katie Macaulay
Managing Director, AB
UK

Finally, the Right Tool for the Job

Communication in the workplace has come a long way since the birth of the industrial revolution. Now we know communication should not merely instruct and inform. It should inspire, embolden and energise. What we do is no longer a side-of-desk activity, but a recognised and valued profession. I hope the year ahead is marked by bravery. Let's tell the best stories, spark the most interesting conversations and turn employees from passive recipients of a message into fans and followers. Let's create a workforce of active subscribers – people who, given the option, would choose our content over others. Sure, we don't have mega budgets or massive teams. But these limitations just require greater imagination. We work in interesting times. 2017 is the year to be bold and give convention the elbow.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

My hope for 2017 has not been achieved in its entirety but I believe we will look back on this year as a turning point.

I have long hoped we would turn employees from passive recipients of a message into fans and followers. But all too often this required an uphill struggle on behalf of some very resilient and determined communicators. Much of the problem stemmed from inadequate tools. Enterprise-only social media platforms were often clunky and unintuitive. They needed 'digital adoption' programs with champions, trainers and leadership sponsorship.

This year we conducted an experiment at AB. We introduced Workplace – Facebook's new collaboration tool for colleagues. It was like flicking a switch.

We had 90 percent adoption in days. Within weeks it was changing the way we work. Collaboration, especially across functions, started to increase. The rate and quality of the information and ideas we were sharing was unparalleled. The everyday familiarity of this tool and the deep pockets of its

creators are game-changing. Those of us keen to improve the quality and value of workplace communication now have a tool equal to the job.

Our focus is creating a best practice approach to adopting Workplace, responding to its analytics wisely and creating compelling social content that sparks conversation. After all, even the very best channels need a great story.

By finally being able to connect and converse with ease, we are opening the door to endless possibilities, entering a new era in employee communication and realizing benefits we have not yet imagined.



Liam FitzPatrick
Managing Partner Working
UK

Come with Data. Leave with Respect.

"I hope that more of us can turn the rhetoric about measurement into reality. Data is the route to improving our practice, helping our colleagues make better communication decisions and gaining fresh insights into our audiences."

How far we've come. The road ahead.

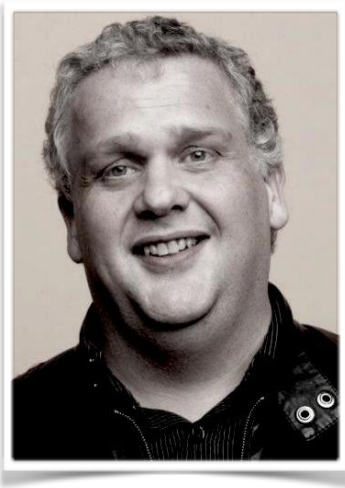
To be honest, when you get asked to forecast a development in the IC profession which will happen within a year, you know that whatever you say is going to be a bit unrealistic! I'm old enough to have seen endless predictions come and go; a few were pure fantasy and those that came to pass often took ages to do so! It's taken decades for organisations to really understand what good employee communication can do for them but I'm still waiting to see intranets deliver some of the benefits promised at conferences in the 1990s!

But, when it comes to the use of data it's surprising me at the speed with which the conversation is developing. OK there is still too much obsession with measures that focus on reach, but people seem to be talking more and more about the power of intelligence gathering. This year I have heard in quite a few places about how good quality insight is being used to help senior leaders, and I was quite excited to see Poppulo developing their suite of tools to support the communication leader who wants to bring evidence to the executive table. If the guys at Poppulo think it's worth doing, I'd wager a lot of the profession are asking for it. It's now routinely a topic in pitches for work so I'm really thrilled to see how the world is changing.

I imagine people like Angela Sinickas will point out that it's taken her years to turn data gathering and measurement into an overnight success, but I sense an acceleration in adoption. And with it I sense that the professionalism of our craft will evolve. When you are looking at hard data about your performance you simply have to ask how you can improve; facts will shame the amateurs and spotlight the real pros.

I think the real opportunity for us is to move the conversation in IC away from doing stuff and towards the impact we have. Whilst it's nice to show clients and stakeholders how hard you have been working and where their budgets have been going, the gold standard will always be to show how things have changed as a result of our interventions. Naturally we're a long way off having robust and agreed ways of tracking return on investment and there is often a leap of faith involved in making the connection between better communication and a business outcome like higher sales, better safety or improved staff retention. However, the advancement follows curiosity and I hope more of us will be asking ourselves and our peers how we can better understand and track the outcomes of our work.

For me, I'd love to see us develop a culture of case study sharing that goes beyond promotional puff or professional bragging. I believe our profession will evolve when we treat our craft even more seriously and are willing to have respectful, robust and generous debate about what works and what doesn't. Let's start by sharing more of our experiences.



Jonathan Champ
Chief Communicator
Meaning Business
Australia

A Time of Transition

My hope for our profession in 2017 is that we take bigger steps as facilitators of shared meaning, and as a result, shared value in organizations:

- *Using disruption as an opportunity to solve new problems, deepening collaboration with other disciplines and ensuring that the future of work is built on human dialogue*
- *Using disruption, whether technological, industrial, social or economic, as an opportunity to test everything we do against a simple purpose: do we help people make sense of their working life in a way that grows contribution?*

Internal communication is the business of sense-making: we work at our best at the intersection of how people are experiencing their organisation and where that organisation wants them to be. My hope for our profession in 2017 is that we develop our practices in ways that contribute creating connections, cutting through complexity and growing empathy. I hope we can be forward-looking and human. If internal communication is a start-up, maybe it is time for us to pivot and reinvent in response to the disruption around us.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

My hope for the profession this year was that IC would be in a position to facilitate more shared meaning in organisations and in the process create greater shared value. How have we fared? I think the results are very mixed.

As a trainer and facilitator, I see a lot of individuals who are striving to improve their impact. But so frequently they are swimming against the current. As an advisor, I see a range of obstacles to this in so many organisations. There is a paradox: Leaders recognise the need for increased innovation and collaboration, concurrently, they actively prevent it. Can communicators become 'future of work' ready? Can organisations?

Internal communication is a fragmented practice. There are practitioners who are finding innovative ways to be fluid, focusing on outcomes and bringing all the tools and methods to the table, traditional and emerging, that they can. There are practitioners who are developing their practical skills across existing and non-traditional areas: digital, change and innovation.

As a past regional co-chair of the IABC Gold Quill Blue Ribbon Panels, it has been so exciting to see the range of strategic and creative ways that communicators solve problems. But awards programs are only one slice of practice. The “on the ground” experience that practitioners talk about during training or events or when I am working with them reflects that it is too often still a slog or a struggle to convince an organisation to try something different. I’m still optimistic. There are communicators doing wonderful work, finding organisations that are open to doing things differently, being change agents and working across disciplines and boundaries.

There really is no magic solution to this. The technologies may have changed, but the underlying problems of internal communication really have not changed significantly in 20 years. So, what next? We keep working the problems and keep developing ourselves.

1. Strength in shared practices. Continue to talk about what works, not just with other communicators, but across disciplines. Ask the questions like “why did this work in this environment?” But don't just ask communicators. Ask marketers, change managers, leaders and innovators.
2. Invest in development. Don't wait for your company to value you. Skill up, both communication skills and non-traditional skills: design thinking, user experience and business acumen.
3. Change what you can. Look for the opportunities to add the value that our profession can deliver. Be brave.
4. “It's not me, it's you.” Know when to stop pushing the rock uphill. There are amazing organisations that foster and grow innovation. If yours is not one of them, find one that is.
5. Keep the faith. As a communicator, a great day at the office or in the field is a humbling thing. Bank those experiences as a reminder of why great internal communication matters.



Marc B Do Amaral
Owner, SPUP
Netherlands

Dialogue at work or 'The strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'

Ubuntu. "The problem with communication is the illusion it has been accomplished." This aphorism by the Irish playwright and writer George Bernard Shaw seems to have lost little of its relevance today. The world seems on the brink of a perfect storm. Trust in government and the media and admittedly, in business leaders, has never been lower. Many people feel sidelined and powerless. There is growing aversion against immigration and international collaboration. Populism is on the rise, playing by its own rules. Even freedom and democracy are under attack. Political communicators across the board serve their masters by engaging in a senseless race to the bottom, feeding narratives of fear, war and retaliation.

It is my hope that business communicators will set the spotlight on an alternative way. All business is founded on trust and collaboration after all. As Desmond Tutu said, "In the end our purpose is social and communal harmony and well-being. The principle of Ubuntu does not say, "I think therefore I am." It says rather, "I am human because I belong. I participate. I share." It is no coincidence that in recent years traditional principles of trust and dialogue such as epitomized by Ubuntu have spread like wildfire in the business community. It simply works. Nothing is more effective in fostering well-being and collaboration than upholding essential human values such as respect, fairness, trust and openness in all interactions and communication. This is no less true of society at-large than of the work environment. So, if our political culture is sliding back into primitivism, why not let business communicators flip the narrative. How wonderful would that be?

How far we've come. The road ahead.

I want to discuss a paradox. This paradox is that while the world has become a more prosperous and safe place than it used to be, levels of trust in government, media and business have plummeted in recent years. Obviously, there are many different explanations for this, some very real and others maybe less so. The point I want to make is that a lack of trust is always mirrored in a lack of dialogue and vice-versa. Trust and dialogue are mutually reinforcing. Sadly, in the public domain dialogue seems to have been all but sidelined.

Where we ought to be talking with our real or imaginary foes and seek to bridge our differences, the opposite has been happening. We massively retreat to our bubble where we are sure to enjoy nothing but the pleasant company and opinions of those who belong to our own tribes. Not surprisingly, the narratives about “the others”, that we create in these bubbles, take on a life of their own. These narratives are feeding a vicious circle of increasingly unfriendly conversations.

The organizational domain seems to be heading in the opposite direction. In many organizations leadership has been waking up to some pretty fundamental truths. Many assumptions of classical management theory and economics have been proven to be completely wrong by scientists such as Nobel-prize winner Richard Thaler, Kahneman and Tversky and many others. It has been proven beyond doubt that deeper values such as purpose, autonomy, learning and relatedness are stronger long-term motivators than self-interest and greed. And yes, organizations have found that they do need to balance the legitimate interests of all stakeholders, not just those of shareholders, if they are to protect their license-to-operate.

These ‘revolutionary’ insights are profoundly changing how organizations are managed. In short, command and control are on their way out, employee well-being, self-organization and sustainability are in. Organizations have learned the hard way that there is nothing to be gained by fostering alienation and distrust. While I certainly don’t want to paint an overly rosy picture, the trend towards dialogue in organizational communication is unmistakable.

In terms of prosperity, education, health and safety, life has never been so good for earthlings, certainly in the Western world. Yet, trust in our institutions and fellow citizens has crumbled. Our inability to connect and embrace diversity might well be at the heart of this paradox. Where there is only discussion and debate and no dialogue, people become alienated. Essential in dialogue is the intention to collectively create new, shared meaning. In dialogue one aims to understand other people’s perspectives rather than to sell one’s own. This inspires what David Bohm has called “the flow of meaning” within a group. It also strengthens feelings of relatedness.

Dialogue has become part of the conversational fabric at work, lack of dialogue has become the norm in (social) media, politics and society as a whole. Which brings us to the “Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde”. Why are most of us perfectly able to interact constructively with colleagues at work and then somehow transform into vicious cynics as soon as we take our working clothes off? Maybe because we know that in the workplace we simply have to deal with a diversity of opinions. Alienating different-minded colleagues by behaving like a jerk is very bad career advice these days. Outside of work, behaving like a jerk is what gets you the presidency or a tsunami of likes from your fellow bubble-inhabitants. At work we are held accountable and that helps to create a dialogue-friendly environment.

Could we repair the quality of the conversation in the public domain by somehow building more accountability into the system? Is that even possible? I would love to hear your ideas and suggestions. In the meantime, whenever you participate in public conversations, ask yourself this question: Who do you choose to be, Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde?



Jane Revell
Strategic Communications
Consultant
Jane Revell
Communications
UK

Measurement: Knowing What and Why

My biggest hope for our profession is that internal communications continues to become a more valued strategic management discipline. I'd like to see our excellent IC professionals recognised for the critical role they play in helping businesses achieve their goals. As part of this, as a profession, we need to work with leaders more strategically, using evidence and measurement to plan more engaging and involving two-way communications to meet the needs and wishes of our people. Here's to 2017.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

Internal communications is recognised and valued in different ways by different organisations and leaders. This year I have consulted for a number of large, global organisations and it has been really refreshing to see internal communication teams providing strategic counsel and support to leaders, demonstrating clearly how internal communications can help organisations boost employee engagement and achieve overall goals.

We still need to do more as internal communications professionals to lift our heads above the parapet and work with our leaders to create an understanding about what internal communications is and its value to the business.

Using research and evidence to develop internal communications strategies and measuring outcomes achieved by internal communications continues to be a battle. It's still the key weakness for internal communication teams, partly due to time and budget pressures.

I think the next steps for measurement are to get back to basics and thinking about what you are measuring and why. There needs to be a better understanding of the need to set clear objectives and measure against them rather than getting overloaded with the myriad of measurement tools and methods out there.



Sean Williams
VP and Practice Lead
True Digital
Communications
USA

Slow Progress, but at Least it's Progress

My hope for the coming year is that we will continue our progress of unifying our IC practice as a strategic function of our organizations. That means both improving our execution (we have to be outstanding at the tactics; that's "table stakes") and embracing our roles as the communication experts of our organizations. The strategic value of outstanding IC lies in these two actions. If we do one and not the other, we risk being seen as a "warm-fuzzy" for employees rather than an essential asset that helps the organization attain business objectives.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

We're getting there, slowly. The academy has boosted the amount and quality of research attesting to the value of effective internal communication (see Dr. Rita Men's work or Dr. Marlene Neill's) and industry research, particularly from across the pond, supports not only organizational communication excellence but also the importance of measurement in driving for impact. In the States, we're discovering how a lack of institutional trust affects nearly every aspect of the organization/employee relationship, and thanks to social media, it's harder and harder for companies to ignore the impact of their decisions. The centrality of that relationship is gradually being seen as an urgent importance to the future of organizations and a significant influence in productivity, innovation and growth.

Research must continue. We have to be able to isolate the contributors to effective organization/employee relationships and better understand how individual factors within those relationships drive organizational performance. And yet, we need to be sure we don't get distracted by fru-fru and geegaws whether technical or merely faddish. Organizations must build strong relationships based on trust and participation – to be a great place to work they have to become great places to work! Treat employees well and they'll treat their customers well and everyone will be happy (paraphrasing Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines).



Rachel Miller
Director
All Things IC consultancy
UK

Let's Put Ethics Front and Centre

My biggest hope for the internal communication profession in 2017 is for communication professionals to take time to invest in themselves. With fake news on the rise, our role is more important than ever to encourage organisations to create a new code of ethics for employees. The IC profession needs to rise to these challenges, pool resources and commit to the highest levels of transparency at all levels.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

This year has been steeped in discussions about ethics and PR. High profile cases have brought it to the forefront of our profession and rightly so. There's more that could and should be done into 2018 and beyond to help communicators learn and seek guidance about ethics and making the right decisions.

The next step is to tackle fake news and seek verification at every level to ensure trusted communication prevails. Internal communication practitioners need to continue championing raised standards and transparency and investing in themselves. Lots of excellent conversations about ethics were sparked in 2017. They need to continue because we owe it to employees and publics we serve.



Adrian Cropley OAM, FRSA, ABC
CEO and Founder of Cropley Communication and the Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence Australia

Demonstrating the Value of Internal Communication

My hope for the internal communication profession in 2017 was to continue to increase the perceived value in all organisations. Going into a new year was a perfect opportunity to take stock of what we do and what value we add strategically to the business. We need to stop doing those low value activities that take up our time and start focusing on those activities that deliver a business outcome. Let's face it, someone else can pretty up the PowerPoints and manage the distribution lists, and HR can take back the events so internal communication professionals can focus on the strategy and facilitate a communicative environment that delivers business results.

How far we've come. The road ahead.

The needle moves very slowly and 2017 has not seen huge change, but I believe that significant steps are being made each year and 2017 is no different. What have I noticed in 2017?

1. The rise of insight

Internal communication professionals are starting to see the benefits of access to greater insight. The requests for audit, research and measurement support has certainly been on the rise through the work we do within organisations. Not only is insight easier to obtain through our digital world, but the hunger for using the outcomes from research to inform the business has grown.

2. Building strategic advisor skills

Internal communication professionals have been the most active in pursuing training and development that builds their consulting skills. Requests for more training in the areas of Strategic Advisor, Act Like an Agency and Advanced Leadership Skills for Communication Professionals have moved in-house. What I have seen is a need to grow the whole team's capacity to add value as the advisor rather than the order taker. The change is from individuals pursuing development in this area to teams, which is such a positive step in taking the team and the organisation on a journey of change.

3. Rise of IC partnering structures

Greater numbers of IC functions are making the move to an agency or partnering model within organisations. This has been happening for a while. However, coupled with the request for training in this area for the whole team, communication functions are realising their changed role in facilitating good communication rather than managing or running communication.

Although the needle moves slowly, this is due to lack of resources and in fact the resistance to the changing communication landscape on behalf of organisations. The good news is that with the greater focus on insight and embracing new skills and structures, we should see a quickening of the pace of change for IC as a valued function in organisations in the near future.

I really believe we must get tougher at defining and communicating what Internal communication does and does not do. We must use industry insight, research about the current world of communication to demonstrate that communication is everyone's job and that internal communication is there to support the organisation to do it well.

- We need to listen more, spend time understanding the business and responding with a strategic approach to the communication solution.
- We need to build our change communication capacity and be seen to lead change within our organisations as a value-added role.
- We need to continue focusing on insight, building our strategic advisor skills and structuring the function to be a partner within the organisation.
- Most importantly we need to ask ourselves an important question with everything we do now "Is this the way I want to be perceived as adding value?"

The future for internal communication professionals continues to evolve, but is bright indeed.



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