#Trending: IC Trends 2023

SEQUEL

insight
content
technology

The age-old IC themes remain: How do I make the most of my budget? How do I give people what they want, in the way they want it? What do I need to do more, or less, of? But as 2024 gets started, there's one theme that is influencing all others.

The more things change, the more they stay the same

In last year's Sequel Trends report – our 10th – we decided to take a lead from our client feedback, and focus on shorter-term themes. Because what might have been a three-year plan a few years ago had become a three-month plan. Social, economic and political factors were all playing their part in clouding over our crystal balls.

So what's changed in the last 12 months? Everything and nothing.

Nothing, in terms of the core themes we're seeing in our work – particularly from an insight and strategy perspective. Our clients continue to be focused on many of the core themes we identified this time last year, particularly making hybrid working work; perfecting their digital strategies; and supporting colleagues with their wellbeing during this cost-of-living crisis.

But in terms of how those challenges are being tackled, everything is changing. And fast.

And so much of this change comes back to AI. Back in April 2023 we dedicated a chapter to this topic, as we could see how new technologies were starting to make their way into the world of IC. Whether you were using AI features to generate images, summarise a document, or analyse data, new ways of working were emerging all the time.

They aren't perfect – yet – but they're already giving us some new ideas and fresh inspiration. At Sequel we're working in ways that we could only have imagined a few years ago.

And of course that's only going to continue. The cat is well and truly out of the bag. The pace of change has been incredible in the last 12 months, with the systems becoming increasingly powerful, and generating even better results.

AI even found its way into The Beatles' final single last year, helping audio engineers to isolate John Lennon's voice from a rough cassette recording made in the 1970s.

You could argue that AI is already mainstream, with AI-powered features

HELLO

included in the tools and apps we use every day, including the Microsoft 365 suite. And as the likes of Microsoft's Copilot evolve in the next few years, we're all going to have to adjust and i) understand and ii) make use of these powerful new technologies.

We're already talking to clients about reshaping their digital strategies, so that they're ready to launch Copilot, or bespoke AI systems, in the future. Some forward planning is needed, so that you don't take a wrong turn now and find out in a couple of years' time that you need to go back and start again. There are implications in terms of governance too, and the ethical issues around AI.

"We can't say that we know how this AI revolution will play out, because nobody does – but we can certainly keep you informed during the journey."

But the opportunities will be there for you to take advantage of.

Want better data to inform your thinking and planning? AI can help you to collate and analyse huge volumes of information quickly and effectively.

Want to get an idea of how a particular message might be received by a specific audience group? It can help you with that too.

Need to read through a 200-page document, but don't have the time to pore over every word? Use AI to get a brief summary, so you're all over the key points.

Every quarter during 2024 we'll share updates and the latest thinking, to keep you up-to-date on what we're doing with clients, what we're hearing across the industry, and what we think is coming next.

2024 is going to be a fascinating year. We can't say that we know how this AI revolution will play out, because nobody does – but we can certainly keep you informed during the journey.

Suzanne Peck
Managing Director, Sequel Group

If you only do one thing in Q1 this year...

If you don't want to be 'all gear and no idea' when it comes to AI, then take a moment to step back and review where you are.

There's no point investigating the latest AI-driven tools if you're not clear about the basics: your channel mix, and your audiences. So this is the perfect time to carry out a review, or a more detailed audit, of the tools and channels you have, so you can consider what to stop, start and continue; and where you might be able to implement some AI wizardry to improve that mix in 2024.

The same goes for your understanding of your different audience groups: you can't make the most of AI-driven personalisation options if you don't know who should be getting what, and when – plus what the needs and preferences are for each of those groups. A little planning will go a long way here.

With a clearer understanding of your channel mix and your employee audiences, you'll be much better placed to analyse how AI could help you and your colleagues to communicate more effectively.

AI: the one tool to rule them all?

We used AI to generate all the images in this chapter

Dystopian nightmare-in-the-making or handy helper? The debate around AI has surged in recent months, as the likes of ChatGPT have taken the world by storm. But how can organisations avoid AI's pitfalls, while making the most of its benefits?

"Let's enjoy a long AI summer, not rush unprepared into a fall."

So ended an open letter from tech leaders – including Elon Musk (SpaceX, Twitter) and Steve Wozniak (Apple) – pleading with AI labs to immediately pause the training of AI systems.

They believe that developers are "in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one – not even their creators – can understand, predict, or reliably control".

It makes for scary reading. And stands in stark contrast to those who are excitedly using the latest AI developments to write bedtime stories, create computer games and even get out of parking tickets in seconds.

The technology is even creeping into our professional lives.

We've heard from internal communicators who are turning to Open AI's ChatGPT to write communication plans and summarise reports for them, freeing them up to concentrate on other

strategic, creative pursuits. Microsoft has already added it to its Bing search engine, and there are AI-led features within various 365 apps like Teams and PPT.

While the debate rages on, how can internal communicators make sure they're reaping the opportunities, without falling victim to AI's risks?

My colleague, the chatbot

For years, we've heard cries of "the machines are coming to take my job!" It seems this is the prevailing opinion, with one Semrush poll finding that 38% of employees believe their job will become automated, and 13% believing that AI

"If a typical person can do a mental task with less than one second of thought, we can probably automate it using AI."

will make them redundant within their industry.

However, this fear doesn't match the reality, with some sources saying that AI will create 12 million more jobs than it's expected to replace.

You could argue that for internal communicators AI will just be another weapon in our arsenal – indeed, that it'll become 'the one tool to rule them all'. AI tools can help us to work faster and smarter, freeing up time to focus on the part of our jobs that matters most: improving employee experience for our people.

Content bots can help us beat writers' block, automatic translation tools can create accessible content for employees wherever they are in the world, and data and analytics tools can pull out the themes and sentiment from research in seconds.

We can take on marketing automation tools like Marketo and Manychat to help to create personalised user experiences ▶

13%

believe AI will make them redundant within their industry.

that rival those that we see in external and customer comms.

In the words of AI expert, Andrew Ng: "If a typical person can do a mental task with less than one second of thought, we can probably automate it using AI, either now or in the near future."

Responsibility and risk

So there's incredible power and opportunity in AI. But unfortunately that also means there's an incredible responsibility and risk that goes with it.

As the Institute of Internal Communication's Code of Conduct tells us, internal communicators have a duty to honesty, accuracy, inclusivity and confidentiality.

Do you remember when the Microsoft AI Twitter feed started producing racist and sexist posts, as it mimicked the biases in the data it was learning from? Even now, six years on, ChatGPT warns: "While we have safeguards in place, the system may occasionally generate incorrect or misleading information and produce offensive or biased content."

"AI cannot replace the human touch that is so critical in communication."

In April, Italy became the first Western country to block ChatGPT over privacy concerns and doubts about whether it complies with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). And according to the World Economic Forum, only 22% of AI professionals are women.

The tech may be thriving, but accuracy and inclusivity have a long way to go. Internal communicators need to make

sure that the information they're getting from these tools is accurate and fair, and that the data they're entering is protected and confidential.

Because while – to use it as an example again – the latest version of ChatGPT is estimated to be 10 times more powerful than its predecessor (and perhaps even more), it's still a far cry from having human levels of emotional intelligence. As communicators, we need to be the moderator.

AI might be able to summarise, automate and mimic, but as Vincent Terrasi of DnG. ai notes: "AI cannot replace the human touch that is so critical in communication". And internal communicators are the drivers of that human touch.

Fact:

77%

of the devices we use feature AI, whether we realise it or not.

(Creative Strategies research)

Your activity feed

1.

Double check what you're using – when using content bots, some people have found that they're plagiarising others' work, producing whole paragraphs verbatim without crediting them. And there might be issues with the sources they're using – are they up to date?

2.

Don't use any personal or sensitive information – while many countries and bodies are calling for AI regulation, it's still a long way off. Until then, think twice before entering personal or sensitive data into AI tools. Better safe than sorry!

3.

Start small and supplement – the possibilities are endless and overwhelming. As you figure out what's what, look for small ways you can replace admin tasks with automated processes.

Measurement still languishes at the bottom of the IC to-do list. And it's at a time when the pace of change means it's more important than ever to know what our audiences need. Before we can adapt and refresh our comms strategy, we need to refresh our approach to measurement – but how?

It is a truth universally acknowledged that internal communicators have a big problem with measurement: "I don't have the right tools." "I don't do numbers." "I don't have time."

We hear that last one a lot. In fact, Gallagher's State of the Sector 2023 revealed that 58% of internal communication professionals report 'Lack of time / resource' as their main barrier to measurement.

But what if we told you that measurement doesn't have to be a burden? With some focused planning, you can set up measurement mechanisms that almost run themselves – or even have someone else run them for you...

What's happening now?

It's been three years since the UK was put into lockdown and around half of us were sent to work from home for the foreseeable. Since then, we've watched the working world transform.

Clients told us about drowning under an influx of digital channels, demands for better flexibility, issues with burnout and

mental health challenges, desire for more authenticity from leaders, and arguably a 'golden age' for internal communication as the pandemic put the profession and its value into the spotlight.

That might have been your organisation's experience three, or even two, years ago. But what's happening with your people now? Whatever their position during the pandemic, they'll have since settled into new working patterns. They could be adapting to full-time hybrid working or adjusting from switching to social-distanced practices on site and back again.

Plus that 'golden age' for internal communications has become tarnished for some, thanks to a cost-of-living crisis and threats of recession. Again, what worked before may not even seem possible now as budgets and resource are cut.

This means it's simultaneously a perfect and difficult time for organisations to dive into internal communication measurement and refresh their approach. But don't worry – making room for measurement in your strategy is easier than you think.

Refresh and recalibrate

When you think about measurement, do you think of trying to make sense of survey data or channel analytics? Perhaps trying to find the time to run focus groups? Well, you're not alone. Internal communicators most measure reach (for example, email and intranet analytics) and employee understanding (for example, through surveys and focus groups), according to State of the Sector 2023.

While these are great tools, they can be daunting if you feel you don't have the expertise or time to use them effectively. This is where a helping hand can make all the difference.

"After a focus on 'just getting through for now', we've seen a surge in requests for full-service communication audits as the dust settles," says Paul Jones, Sequel's ◗

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of internal communication professionals report 'Lack of time / resource' as their main barrier to measurement.

"Organisations realise it's time to recalibrate based on what people want now, not what was important in 2020."

Head of Insight. "Organisations realise it's time to recalibrate based on what people want now, not what was important in 2020."

However, it doesn't have to be an audit with all the bells and whistles to give you effective insight. Over the last year, our Insight team has helped resource-poor internal communicators to organise research with ad-hoc support, such as quarterly interview series.

And for those who don't have wider industry experience, we've carried out desk research, evaluating content and channels, and analysing statistics they already have, such as channel analytics and people data.

Because you might not even need to commission new channels or research. Spend a little time looking for opportunities where you can piggyback onto existing content, channels and events, or existing data from the likes of HR and Marketing that you can use to understand engagement and behaviour change.

You can also explore new ways of measuring. For example, if you feel that your people are suffering from survey or even focus group fatigue, try out new techniques such as keeping a diary of their communication activity, or mobile ethnography, where they film key moments of their experience. Jazz up focus groups with pin boards, heat mapping and mood boards.

If they're short on time, try out a bulletin board or forum where a group is asked to answer a series of questions or complete evaluation activities over a longer period of time, like a month.

Fact:

Internal communicators most measure 'reach' and 'understanding'.

(State of the Sector 2023)

"The key thing is to start, even if it's just small things often. After all, if you don't make some room for measurement, you'll shut out improvements."

You could also run listening groups to gather sentiment on larger issues, such as strategy, and diversity and inclusion. Better yet, ask line managers or champions to carry them out for you (after a little training) and report back.

Whatever your barrier to measurement, there's a way around it. The key thing is to start, even if it's just small things often. After all, if you don't make some room for measurement, you'll shut out improvements.

Your activity feed

1. **Start at the beginning** – when you're writing a comms plan, or planning a project, jot down one or two objectives and how you'll measure them. Set your intention from the start and you'll be more likely to do it.

2. **Delegate** – let others do some of the heavy lifting. For example, if you've asked line managers to share messages, ask them to send you a couple of lines afterwards about how it was received. You could set up a quick form or ask them to message you.

3. **Hijack your existing channels** – add a poll to the end of your town hall. Invite comments on your intranet pages. Put a feedback button at the bottom of your emailer. Get regular feedback without any extra effort.

You just can't make it alone

Oh great. Here's a trend chapter about 'process'. But before you close this document, please give us a couple of minutes to persuade you that a little thought about intranet governance can save you a whole lot of extreme pain further down the line.

The big day has arrived. Your new intranet / employee communication platform / employee experience platform / whatever you might be calling it these days has finally launched.

You sit back, relieved, exhausted, (hopefully) elated. The hard work is done.

Well, it may be in some cases. But it certainly shouldn't be.

If you bought a beautiful new-build home, would you expect it to stay in pristine condition if you didn't continue to maintain and clean it? The same is true of intranets.

"If we don't put governance in place that makes sure that it stays relevant, accurate and accessible, it'll quickly become pointless, out-of-date and confusing."

If we don't put governance in place that makes sure that it stays relevant, accurate and accessible, it'll quickly become pointless, out-of-date and confusing.

These are words we hear from employees all-too-often when it comes to their intranet (we're going to use that term for ease, but it could be any similar internal communication digital platform).

So how can internal communicators keep that box-fresh feel? Answer: they can't – or at least, they can't do it alone.

The importance of governance

First of all, let's explain a little bit about governance. It's a mix of rules, guidance, policies and processes that keep an intranet in tip top shape. It covers every aspect – from the technical aspects (like permissions, settings and security) to content we share on there (how it's written, structured and designed).

We need it because it aids consistency on the intranet. For example, by having an agreed structure for the intranet that people use

to place content, it means that people know where to go to look for information. By having agreed standards, you help to maintain quality and accuracy, so employees can be confident that what they're getting is up-to-date information.

There's much more too – improving search, ensuring content goes into the right place in your channel mix – but the core benefit is that governance will build trust: in the intranet, in the messages you're sharing, and ultimately in the business.

A complaint we often hear from employees in our client organisations is that they don't trust the content they find on their intranet. They'll think it's out of date, for instance. Often that's because there aren't processes in place to check and review content, to make sure it stays relevant.

In a focus group just the other day, someone told us: "A colleague asked me to update an intranet page about my team. I had no idea that page existed.

And I certainly had no idea that I had been named somewhere as the owner of that page!"

So what's the problem?

As ever in our lives – and particularly the lives of the employees – it comes down to time. When an intranet first launches, you'll likely have a dedicated team working together to make sure things are in the best shape for launch.

But what happens when that team goes back to business as usual, with other things to claim their time? Plus, intranets are rarely (if ever) completely maintained by one person. There's often a swarm of people adding content on there, with different needs, skills and time pressures.

So that's why it's so important to have a consistent approach to how we plan and create intranet content – from where it goes on the intranet to how we build pages.

But with many internal communicators busy just trying to get through the day job, planning falls behind. This year's State of the Sector Report says that "only 33% of respondents reported having a channel-specific editorial calendar".

On top of that, you need that swarm of people to be aware of their role and responsibility – and the importance of it – when it comes to keeping their intranet content relevant, consistent and valuable. Otherwise, they'll leave their page to gather dust.

Cleaning house

Even if you have a dedicated intranet manager (lucky you), they're not going to be a subject matter expert on every little thing.

But then those people who are subject matter experts probably won't view 'managing the intranet' as a core part of their day job. So their time is limited too.

That means we need to be as helpful as possible. By creating agreed standards for instance. Or putting together guides that explain how to build pages, how to archive content, how to use naming conventions, or how to keep the chain going when a content owner leaves the organisation.

But that isn't enough by itself. We learn best in groups, so set up an ongoing community in Teams or a similar platform. And then use that space to share updates, training, webinars and FAQs.

'Process' isn't a very exciting word. We get that. But a core part of having a best-in-class intranet is the governance behind it. The most creative designs, most engaging content or coolest AI features won't mean anything if the foundations behind them aren't in place.

Planning and then launching (or relaunching) an intranet takes time and effort. And without governance, you'll just end up back where you started.

> "Planning and then launching (or relaunching) an intranet takes time and effort. And without governance, you'll just end up back where you started."

Your activity feed

1. **Develop a community of intranet content owners and publishers** – define their roles, hold regular meetings, run webinars, keep them interested. Let them use their experience to help each other too.

2. **Create – and keep!** – a content lifecycle process. This will help to avoid those two very common complaints of "there's too much stuff on the intranet so I can't find anything" and "even if I can find it, I don't trust that the content I need is up to date."

3. **Have a triage process for what goes onto the intranet** – not everything belongs there. A few years ago, the default option used to be "put it on the intranet." And that's why so many got top heavy and fell over. Now we have more options like Teams (for collaboration) and Viva Engage (for social chat). Think carefully about what should go where.

Closer to home

Many employees say they feel adrift, unclear about their organisation's strategic direction. Here's how you can help them to reconnect, by bringing their internal communications closer to home.

"No man is an island," said John Donne of humans and our connection to one another. Well, the same can be said of employees and their connection to their organisation. Or, perhaps should be said.

Because various sources show that many employees are feeling adrift right now. Two-thirds of UK workers feel disengaged from their workplace (Robert Walters) and just over half don't feel a sense of belonging (Better Up).

What's causing this great disconnection? And how can organisations get employees to believe that their role plays a vital part in achieving success?

After all, this line of sight is critical. Employees with a strong connection to their organisation and its strategy are more resilient, satisfied, engaged, productive and successful. And 'clarity of purpose' is arguably the most important of Sequel's own Four Pillars™ of Internal Communication.

The great disconnection

For an organisation to be successful, it needs everyone pulling together and working towards a set of common goals. But while the objective may make sense to people, the strategy of how to get there may not be quite as clear.

The recent IC Index from the Institute of Internal Communication saw this (slight) strategy paradox in their research with UK employees. While 63% believe "our organisation's strategy is the right one for success", less (57%) felt that "my employer has been clear on the organisation's strategy and business priorities."

This worryingly suggests that while employees may think that the overall strategy feels right, they're not actually clear on the detail of what it is. If people don't have that clarity of purpose, how do they know that what they're doing every day is meaningful, relevant or helpful?

And, as easy as it is to blame everything on the pandemic, we do need to give it a nod here. Indeed, 48% of UK workers said they found it hard to recognise their post-pandemic workplace (Robert Walters). The change to hybrid working in particular has made it harder for employees to create and maintain connections with their peers, and to contribute to a consistent company culture.

Fact:

48%

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(Robert Walters)

There's also the growth of what Deloitte refers to as the 'Alternative Workforce', with 90% of organisations now using outsourced teams, be it freelancers or gig workers. These workers often operate at a psychological distance, without knowing – or caring – about the bigger picture, as they're unlikely to see its impact.

Then of course there's the level of noise. In our research work with clients, the most common employee complaint we hear is that "there's just too much!" People are overwhelmed with change. It's said that since 2016 the amount of business change has increased on average from two to 10 a year. And willingness to support that change has dropped from 74% to 43%.

Employees are bombarded with so much information that they feel it can't all be relevant. They don't know what to prioritise, find there's too much to digest, and so switch off completely. 'Change fatigue' is something we hear about regularly in focus groups we run for our clients.

Finding the meaning

So, people are confused, disconnected, indifferent and overwhelmed. What can organisations do about it? The answer lies in one of our favourite mantras at Sequel: 'think global, act local'.

With so much organisational change, it's likely that internal communicators are often tasked with engaging employees with company-wide issues – from changes to pay and benefits, to digital transformation. As the experts in communication, the temptation to control the message and execution from the centre is strong, lest it get lost or diluted by others. But actually you'd be missing a trick.

Yes, Internal Communication should be working with leadership to decide the core narrative and brand of change communications. They need

to align with the business strategy and values, otherwise there's no point communicating at all.

But you must make it relatable for the people on the ground who need to understand and follow it. And what makes sense to Gilly from Prague, who works in the regional HQ, may not make sense to Simon from Bradford, who works on the shop floor.

Just as we mentioned in our last Trends chapter, internal communicators can't do it alone. We need to partner with communication contacts – whether that's local communicator managers or informal champions – around the ▶

% In-Office
% Remote

HYBRID

"The most common employee complaint we hear is that "there's just too much noise!"

63%

believe "our organisation's strategy is the right one for success"

organisation to translate lofty strategic priorities and overarching goals into everyday speak and tangible actions.

Our Insight team is helping organisations do just that by supporting Internal Communication teams to redefine their role as curator and coach.

For example, providing core narratives and key words to shape local messaging, and editable templates so campaign pieces can be translated into local languages and finished with imagery of real, local employees.

And developing local communication contacts and networks with training sessions, how-to guides and do-it-yourself toolkits, housed in shared, community areas.

"Building a network of communicators means that they can connect with each other, share ideas and solutions."

If the boost in understanding wasn't enough, you can also help to reduce communication noise by working with local communicators on timings. So your big diversity and inclusion push doesn't fight for attention at the same time as a country-specific product launch.

On top of that, building a network of communicators means that they can connect with each other, share ideas and solutions, and give you real-time feedback on what's working and what's not.

Ultimately, leaning into localised internal communication practices means that you'll bring your global messages closer to home, creating relevant, accessible and meaningful conversations that help your people to engage and connect.

Your activity feed

1. **Understand your locales** – work to understand the differences between your audience groups. For example, languages spoken, the culture and societal attitudes, communication habits, preferences and behaviours, and what other projects / campaigns you may be competing with.

2. **Create a hub** – to help embed this as an everyday way of working, create a hub that houses all the resources and tools local communicators need to adapt communications locally – from how-to guides to adaptable templates.

3. **Make it worth their while** – show your local communication support that you value their contribution, and want to help them better it, by offering development opportunities and training, and – where you can – a little creative freedom so they can add that local flavour and some independent spirit.

Stable or stalemate?

Hybrid working may have embedded itself into our workplaces, but that doesn't mean anyone is nailing it quite yet. Almost four years on from the pandemic, what questions remain and what does it mean for employee engagement? ▶

All images in this article have been generated using AI

National Statistics (ONS) showed that

63.9%

never work from home, while

21.4%

work from the office and from home.

In a few months, we'll mark four years since the Covid-19 pandemic made hybrid working mainstream for many. Yet still the concept of hybrid (or blended) working is generating more questions than answers. Business analysts and employee engagement experts (us included) aren't shy of saying that they're yet to see anyone who's nailing it.

That's because blended working is itself a work in progress. For many organisations, these working patterns started in response to a global health crisis, rather than a carefully thought-out approach. Many are trying to retro-fit a blended working policy, working it out as they go.

A study from global management consultants McKinsey concluded that the optimal number of days to work from home is between three to five a week. So even the research can't give us a definitive answer.

So with experts still scratching their heads, and organisations testing and trialling as they go, where have we got to?

Resurrecting the office

So far, the rumour of the office's death has been greatly exaggerated, in part thanks to leaders' refusal to let it die.

> **"Recent research from Ipsos Karian Box shows that three days of office working per week is optimal for key aspects of employee engagement and workplace culture."**

Many are pushing for their employees to increase the amount of time in the office again. Even Zoom – the face of remote connection during the pandemic – has asked its people to come back to the office two days a week, joining the likes of Apple and Google.

Of course there are benefits to this approach: better collaboration; easier innovation; stronger work/life boundaries, to name a few. Recent research from Ipsos Karian Box shows that three days of office working per week is optimal for key aspects of employee engagement and workplace culture.

For example, employees are more likely to have career development conversations with their managers, and employee advocacy is up to 12 points higher compared to working exclusively from home. ➤

Make it worth their while -

Coach line managers to make 'in office' days worthwhile for teams, scheduling development chats and brainstorms that work best in person, so people get the most from their time together.

Consider the

63.9%

Remember the ONS data and think about your whole audience. How does your hybrid working policy affect those who don't, or can't, work from home at all? Make sure you frame messages and initiatives with them in mind too.

However, it's not been straightforward, with employees challenging and even protesting 'back-to-office' policies. You might have seen that more than 1,000 Amazon employees protested this spring against the office working policy.

There are still a few kinks to work out and, with them, some questions to answer.

Is it 'us vs them'?

Firstly, we need to put hybrid working into perspective and remember that this isn't a blanket problem for all organisations, or that all hybrid workers are affected in the same way.

To some of us, it may feel like the whole world went to work from home in 2020, but in the UK it was only 50% of the working population. More recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that 63.9% never work from home, while 21.4% work from the office and from home.

There's quite a size difference between those two groups, and organisations should bear in mind the impact working from home is having on those who can't do it. We've spoken to some factory employees who've said "if some of my colleagues can work in a flexible way, then good luck to them"; whereas others have said that this imbalance has

created envy and friction, adding to a greater sense of "us and them".

So if they're not already, organisations need to consider this group in their hybrid working policies, and ask themselves: how can we make the workplace experience as fair as possible?

What about the next generation?

Then there's the younger generation entering the workplace. The office is a place to be mentored, observe and mirror suitable workplace behaviours, learn soft skills and professionalism, and start building your network. It's much easier to grab five minutes with a senior manager when they're walking by your desk to get a coffee, than trying to drum up the courage to call them out of the blue.

"Ipsos Karian and Box research, they found that 53% of 18- to 24-year-olds report feeling always or frequently lonely, and learn fewer essential skills, if they work fewer than three days in the office."

Going back to the Ipsos Karian and Box research, they found that 53% of 18- to 24-year-olds report feeling always or frequently lonely, and learn fewer essential skills, if they work fewer than three days in the office.

There's also the chance that different expectations for those starting out in their careers could add to the 'us vs them' mentality. Consider newbies heading into the office to network and learn, while someone in the last 10 years of their career feels they get more done working from their home office. Right or wrong, fair or unfair, it all adds to the notion that not all are created equal when it comes to hybrid working, and could further fracture the company's community.

"Innovation relies on trust, gossip, fearlessness. I'm not entirely clear that working from home does that," he explains.

So, what's next?

There's still a lot of debate and no definitive answer. To help progress, we're advising our clients do two things.

First, organisations need to adapt their approach and stop seeing the different elements of hybrid working as polarising options. Rather than 'work from home', 'work from office', 'work from hubs' and so on, we need to see it as 'work from anywhere'. Then we're truly blending the options, showing that while different sites may have different purposes, they both have value.

Secondly, we need to see these options as tools, not just locations. Just as the likes of Microsoft Teams is a tool, so is the office. How can we use all of our tools in the best way?

Ultimately, this is the question that outweighs the rest, and the answer could hold the key to cracking hybrid working: How can I best get my work done? It just might take a little while longer for some organisations to work it out...

What happens to change?

While initial reports have implied that productivity hasn't been hampered so far by hybrid working policies, we're yet to see the long-term implications on change and transformation.

Speaking on the business podcast, 'Eat Sleep Work Repeat', Tom Goodwin (digital and work expert) talked about how the focus has been on maintaining culture while shifting to a hybrid approach, but what happens when it comes to changing culture and behaviours?

EAT SLEEP WORK REPEAT

Podcast
Eat Sleep Work Repeat

Keep checking in -

While many of us may have run 'back to the office' surveys in

2020/21

to gauge employee opinion, things have moved on. We recommend a quarterly survey to touch base and help you to tweak your hybrid working approach to respond to trends.

What else can we help you with?

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