



# VOICE ONLINE

Where IC professionals come to talk about the challenges, triumphs and evolution of internal comms

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## **A** little more conversation



Diving deep into unconscious organisational life allows leaders to see clearly and communicate effectively, says **Tom Cotton**, psychologist and programme director at Mind Environment.

### How do you bring a psychological approach into the corporate world?

Broadly speaking, as a psychologist, I help people work with the unconscious forces that covertly shape how they function. Organisations are made up of complex groups of people, and so much of organisational life is shaped at this unconscious level as well.

In a corporate setting, my focus is on helping leaders and organisations to see the whole world that they operate in more clearly, and then helping them to work more productively and sustainably with it. Developing this level of clarity also leads to less conflicted communication.

**At what point might an organisation bring you in?** I'm typically consulted during points of transition, such as when a leader moves into a more senior role, when an organisation goes through an M&A process, or when individual or organisational purpose needs to be reinvigorated.

Often, when a company is in transition, a lot of work goes into strategic planning, but, when leaders try to translate that plan into actual change, they encounter unseen obstacles, particularly at the level of culture.

**Can you expand on the particular issue around culture?** Sure. Received wisdom tells us that behaviour in organisations should be dispassionate, especially when you're at the top. Of course, this is nonsense – success and failure evoke some of the most powerful feelings, such as love, fear and resentment. Ignore these emotions in your workplace and they play out beneath the surface unconnected from your gleaming new strategy, and manifest as obstacles to change, stress pinch points, staff turnover, etc.

### Tell me more about your process.

At Mind Environment, we take leaders and leadership teams on a psychologically immersive journey into their purpose. We then help them connect this knowledge with their strategic goals, and develop a purpose map through which they can action what they've learned. This ensures that what leaders are building during transition is based on clear, 'whole environment' thinking, not strategic idealism alone.

This experience helps leaders and their teams to lower their barriers, have the tough but necessary conversations that they have been avoiding, build trust with each other and become clearer in their communication.

**What impact does this have for internal communicators?** If you've got clarity at the top and there's less conflict spilling out, leadership teams are more likely to be aligned when it comes to the messages they want to communicate. This makes it easier for internal communicators to connect leadership with the rest of the organisation and communicate their vision clearly.

### Can ICers actively use some of these techniques to support leaders?

Absolutely. Encourage leaders to invest time into looking beneath the surface and understanding the full picture before communicating major decisions. By doing this, messages are likely to be clearer, have greater awareness of emotional impact, and be received as intended.

Also consider facilitating open discussion groups that are free from operational objectives, so they can address what might be lurking beneath the surface. Often, it's not a case of addressing one elephant in the room, it's a case of addressing 50! So, consider how you can help leaders to feel safe and comfortable surfacing the unspoken.