FIFTH EDITION

EIC 5

EXPLORING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Towards Dialogue in the Workplace

KEVIN RUCK AND MARTIN FLEGG

ROUTLEDGE

"This fifth edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* is both timely and uniquely insightful. It captures the profound transformations in organisational life with clarity, offering a rare and compelling mix of academic rigour and practical relevance. The expanded focus on ESG, ethical communication, listening, and AI reflects the evolving demands in internal communication practice. The strategic and evidence-based approach makes it an invaluable resource for students and practitioners seeking to manage internal communication more effectively and strategically. This book doesn't just inform – it inspires and advances the conversation around internal communication."

Rickard Andersson, *Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, Lund University, Sweden*

"This book is a must-have for anyone serious about internal communication. Grounded in research and real-world practice, it combines solid communication theory with insights into new communication habits shaped by technological change. It offers models, tools, and guidance to cut through noise, align people with purpose, and build systems that work. You can use it as a go-to handbook – whether you need a quick, practical answer or a broader strategic perspective. It raises the bar for internal comms as a professional discipline. For those who want to use internal communication to drive employee experience, clarity, and real business impact – this book belongs on your desk."

Ada Borucka, *Founder & Managing Partner at iComms/PinPoint, Poland*

"This fifth edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* is a timely, essential guide for practitioners navigating today's complex organisational landscapes. Grounded in robust research combined with practitioner insight, it offers the perfect blend of theory and practical application. From ethical communication and inclusive messaging to strategic planning and AI's evolving role, the book equips readers with the tools to elevate internal communication from tactical to transformational. Whether you're a seasoned professional or new to the field, this book is a must-read for anyone serious about making internal communication a strategic force for good."

Simon Cavendish, *SCMP® Internal Communications, Change + Engagement Consultant, Chair, IABC EMENA, UK*

"I've long been a champion of professional development for internal communicators and reading this book reinforced why it's so important for anyone, at any level, working in the profession. This book is packed with data, insight, frameworks and actionable next steps for anyone responsible or accountable for internal communication in their organisation. It's a must read. If you're struggling with engagement, knowing the right channel mix, how to build trust through communication and so much more, all the answers are here. Buy the book, read it, highlight it and write down the things you're going to do as you learn from it. It's the only handbook you need to build a strategic internal communication function that delivers impact for the organisation."

Jenni Field, *Founder and CEO, Redefining Communications, UK*

"This new edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* is a must read, not only for those interested in this increasingly vital specialism, but for anyone interested in communication. The lessons from this book about listening, integrity, intent, planning and integration are applicable to all areas of communication. Packed full of new material and a careful blend of solid but accessible research, practical templates and guidance, and examples that bring it all to life, it's a 'go to' book for practitioners and students who want to learn the basics and much, much more. Read it…often."

Anne Gregory, *Emeritus Professor, Ph.D, CIPR Hon. Fell., FRSA, FHEA, UK*

"Internal communicators often juggle last-minute tactical requests while striving to deliver strategic value. As an IC practitioner, I found this book a great blend of theory and practical application. Chapter 13 reinforces the importance of aligning communication strategy with business goals and using audience segmentation. I've long used the RADAR model to challenge reactive asks and encourage strategic thinking. Combined with insights on employee expectations of leaders, it helps build strategies grounded in

organisational and research insights. It also introduces curated vs. created content and embeds Inclusion and Accessibility from the outset. A valuable addition to your reading list!"

Elizabeth Hall, *CIPR Inside Co-chair (2025), UK*

"This book belongs on every communicator's desk – and should be well-thumbed. Flegg & Ruck offer a research-driven look at internal communications, but what sets this book apart is its clear focus on practical application. As the pandemic thrust internal comms into the spotlight, our ability to adapt has become critical to shaping the future of the profession. Covering timely topics like ESG, ethical communication, and AI, this book is both relevant and actionable. It's an essential resource for anyone looking to elevate their internal communications practice and stay ahead in a rapidly evolving landscape."

James Harkness, *Partner, HarknessKennett, UK*

"While some issues remain largely the same such as the key engagement value of the line manager versus the formal, more strategic presentational role of the senior leader, it is fascinating to see how societal changes have quite rightly drawn in the emphasis on ethics, diversity and language to support more bespoke and accessible employee communications. This book finds a perfect balance; it is a smooth read and is thoroughly based on impeccable and broad research. As a great admirer of Kevin's impressive library of work, I recommend this essential read which I would have loved in my in-house days."

Virginia Hicks, *Chair, Comma Partners, UK*

"Every profession needs its definitive book – one that is regularly refreshed, rooted in evidence and alive to how the world is changing. *Exploring Internal Communication* is that book. Whether you're just starting out or looking to reappraise your approach, Kevin Ruck and Martin Flegg provide the grounding, the guidance and – most importantly – the confidence to elevate your impact. With timely chapters on ethics, AI and strategy, and a renewed focus on listening, leadership and segmentation, this edition couldn't be more relevant. It will sit – well-thumbed – on the desks of those who care deeply about making organisations more connected, human and effective."

Katie Macaulay, *Managing Director of AB and Host of 'The Internal Comms Podcast', UK*

"Listening is one of the most powerful tools in the comms arsenal, and yet it is often overlooked. The authors do not only set out why listening is key to engagement and reputation, but they also share how you can best use listening in your own communications work. If you want to transform how you communicate and engage with any stakeholder group, this book is the one you need."

Alex Malouf, *Senior Director, Public Relations & Media, ROSHN, Saudi Arabia*

"Editions of *Exploring Internal Communication* always seem to arrive just when the industry needs them most and this is no different. This book is written for this exact moment in our profession. As I turned each page, I saw internal communications as it should be – strategic, ethical, effective, human and insight driven. It speaks to the heart of our work, aligning people with purpose, creating genuine dialogue and building trust that lasts. I cannot wait for you to read it because I know it will spark the same excitement, reflection and renewed commitment it ignited in me when I first discovered the book during the pandemic."

Eduvie Martin, *Group Communications and Engagement Manager, BAT, UK*

"Internal communication veterans and CIPR members Kevin Ruck and Martin Flegg have produced a standout, must-read book for organizational leaders, managers, and internal comms practitioners as well as educators and students. This latest edition offers a stellar set of relevant, strategic applications, models and best practices firmly rooted in current and emerging principles and theories regarding internal communication. Dealing with faltering engagement, communication transparency and feedback issues, lingering pandemic effects, division silos, appropriate use of AI, remote/hybrid or diverse workforce challenges and more? You'll find sound, practical, ethical, effective answers here."

Nance McCown, *Ph.D., Professor of Communication and Public Relations (retired), Messiah University, US*

"In an era of rapid and profound transformation for organizations and the workforce, the fifth edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* offers a timely, research-informed, and practice-driven guide. This new edition masterfully addresses the evolving demands of internal communication – from hybrid work, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) responsibilities to ethical practice and AI – while maintaining a clear commitment to evidence-based professionalism. Grounded in both academic insight and decades of practitioner experience, it is an essential resource for anyone committed to elevating internal communication as a strategic management function."

Linjuan Rita Men, *Ph.D., APR, Professor & Director of Internal Communication Research, University of Florida, US*

"*Exploring Internal Communication* is back and better than ever. Full of fresh insights, new perspectives, and practical guidance, this book is a must-read for internal communication professionals. The chapter on effective and ethical practice is a particularly valuable and important read. You will pick up ideas you'll want to implement immediately, and it will inspire you to try something new."

Rachel Miller, *Founder, All Things IC and author of Internal Communication Strategy, UK*

"It's something of an understatement to say a lot has happened since 2020, the year the fourth edition of this book was published. Geopolitical events that reverberated globally, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests, shaped global politics and economies dramatically. The same can be said for the internal communications profession, which rose in prominence as organisations and leaders sought new ways to communicate, and interact with, colleagues working remotely. This edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* charts the evolution of the internal communication profession, highlighting how internal communicators today need a combination of commercial awareness with a strong theoretical understanding of ethical communication practice to drive performance. Part 1 covers theory and it's fitting that in the ongoing global political and economic turbulence that culture, purpose, values and strategy and leadership communication feature strongly. Part 2 moves into evidence-based practice, including AI, content creation, and listening before concluding with practical guidance on implementing plans and professionalisation – something authors Kevin Ruck and Martin Flegg are passionate advocates for. Whether you're an internal communication professional, leader or HR expert, *Exploring Internal Communication* will deepen your understanding of what strong, and ethical, communication practice looks like, and more importantly, how it can support organisations to grow and boost performance."

Yvonne O'Hara, *Group Head of Colleague Communications, NatWest Group, UK*

"While many books acknowledge the interplay between theory and practice, *Exploring Internal Communication* stands out as one of the few that genuinely delivers on this promise. In a unique and exemplary manner, the authors skilfully intertwine real-world business challenges with robust theoretical frameworks and research-based evidence. In an era marked by global turbulence, such as the pandemic and increasing polarisation, the significance and complexity of internal communication have become increasingly apparent. This thoroughly revised edition offers both communication professionals and students a well-founded, critically informed resource for addressing enduring and emerging issues in the field."

Charlotte Simonsson, *Associate Professor, Dept of Communication, Lund University, Sweden*

"It's fantastic to see this essential book now in its fifth edition. Dr Kevin Ruck and Martin Flegg have thoughtfully reflected the rapid changes and challenges of the last five years, with timely new chapters on ESG, ethical internal communication, and AI. They continue to showcase the strategic value of our profession, firmly rooted in theory-to-practice thinking. As internal communication evolves, this book reinforces the critical role we play in driving performance and ensuring organisations remain resilient and sustainable into the future. At IoIC, we champion the highest standards, and this research-led and practice-focused book is an indispensable read for all internal communication professionals."

Jennifer Sproul, *Chief Executive, Institute of Internal Communication, UK*

"Internal communication has rarely faced greater demands than in the past few years, shaped by hybrid work, digital acceleration, and growing expectations around ethics, inclusion, and engagement. *Exploring Internal Communication* responds to these shifts with a well-structured update that balances theoretical grounding with practical insight. The inclusion of new chapters on AI, ethical communication, and strategic implementation reflects the maturing of the discipline and its increasing relevance for both scholars and practitioners. By drawing on recent research and decades of experience, Ruck and Flegg provide a reliable resource for those looking to understand, improve, and critically examine internal communication in contemporary organisations."

Ana Tkalac Verčič, *Full Professor, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business, Croatia*

"Internal communication faces a big paradox – it's never been more needed, yet it increasingly has to defend itself against attack from – among other things – AI and eroding budgets. *Exploring Internal Communication* equips internal communicators to thrive in this tough environment. Grounded in proven research, experience and practice, it guides the reader from core principles to their practical use in an intelligent, accessible and applicable way. It is a great read for those seeking to build their understanding of effective internal communication and a key resource book for practitioners looking to have real business impact and help organisations be more human and connected."

Dominic Walters, *President, Institute of Internal Communication, UK*

"When exploring internal communications, you will find no better guide than Kevin Ruck; he edits with the diligence of the academic and writes with the elegance of a fluent practitioner."

Marc Wright, Strategist, *Digital and AI Transformation, Employee Engagement & Communication Consulting Practice, Gallagher, UK*

"Dr. Kevin Ruck and Martin Flegg's latest edition is a timely, essential guide for anyone serious about internal communication as a strategic business function. Drawing on robust theory, rich practitioner insights, and today's complex realities – from hybrid work to AI and ESG – it powerfully reframes internal comms as a strategic, ethical management discipline. With new chapters and deep emphasis on listening, segmentation, and leadership, this book provides practitioners and students with evidence-based frameworks for building engagement, demonstrating value, and shaping the future of work."

April Yue, *Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Advertising & Public Relations, Boston University, US*

Exploring Internal Communication

Long established as the go-to book for internal communication practitioners, this fifth edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* has been completely updated to reflect changes in the field, including developments in the expanding use of technology in internal communication practice, hybrid working and the greater emphasis on inclusive workplaces.

The book takes readers from applied theory and principles through to practical steps, such as employee segmentation and content and channel management, culminating in effective planning and professional practice. It emphasises the strategic importance of internal communication for organisations and broadly 'what' it can be used for – making the point that not all organisations are the same or have the same attitudes towards, and expectations of, internal communication. With updated and new chapters, the book looks at the evolving organisation and employee relationship in the light of developments in environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG), ethical internal communication, leadership listening and the expanding role of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital communication.

Enriched with models and authors' tips, this book is an indispensable tool for internal communication practitioners, HR managers and organisational leaders who are interested in developing a more strategic approach to practice. It is also a valuable text for practitioners studying for a professional communication qualification.

Kevin Ruck is an internal communication researcher and educator. He is the co-founder of PR Academy and leads the Internal Communication Research Hub's European affiliate group.

Martin Flegg is a chartered public relations practitioner specialising in internal and change communication. He has worked as a senior internal communicator and as a consultant for 25 years in public and private sector organisations.

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Fifth Edition

KEVIN RUCK AND MARTIN FLEGG

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About the Authors

Kevin Ruck is the co-founder of PR Academy, the largest Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) accredited teaching centre, and is the course leader for the Internal Communication Diploma. He has conducted extensive research into the associations between internal communication and employee engagement and the importance of leadership communication. He is also a member of the editorial advisory board of the *Journal of Communication Management* and leads the Internal Communication Research Hub (ICRH) European Affiliate Group.

Martin Flegg is a chartered public relations practitioner, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and a certified member of the Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC). He specialises in internal and change communication and has worked as a senior internal communicator and consultant for 25 years in both public and private-sector organisations. A past chair of the CIPR Inside practice group, he still regularly works in-house, witnessing the rapid changes in internal communication practice first-hand and blogging about them at *The IC Citizen*.

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Preface

In the five years since the 4th edition of this book was published in 2020, internal communication has arguably gone through its most challenging time of all in the 21st century.

The changes that organisations have had to undertake in this period cannot be separated from external events such as the global pandemic, political unrest, economic shifts of power and cost of living crises. At the same time, climate change, organisational sustainability and a long overdue better understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion at work have all significantly influenced leadership and culture. Which, in turn, has impacted internal communication management in profound ways.

This edition of the book incorporates major revisions to chapters from the 4th edition. It takes readers from applied theory and principles through to practical steps, such as employee segmentation and content and channel management, with more detailed emphasis on effective planning and professional practice. It emphasises the strategic importance of internal communication for organisations and broadly 'what' it can be used for – making the point that not all organisations are the same or have the same attitudes towards, and expectations of, internal communication. With seven brand-new chapters, the book looks at the evolving organisation–employee relationship in the light of developments in environmental, social and governance (ESG) responsibilities, ethical internal communication, leadership listening and the role of artificial intelligence (AI).

The book is for internal communication practitioners and students who are interested in developing a career that is based on theory and models that make practice more strategic and effective. It also provides practitioners and students from different backgrounds, such as media relations, public affairs, crisis communication, social and digital communication, HR and marketing, with a dedicated perspective on internal communication.

Of all the changes in the past five years, the global pandemic has had the largest single influence on internal communication and ways of working. Organisations that hitherto had minimal internal communication in place were forced to think very carefully about communication with employees, perhaps for the first time. In organisations where internal communication was more established, senior leaders realised just how important it was to be visible and empathetic, rather than simply relying on factual information cascades. Internal communication managers were often in the spotlight as never before. This put them under significant pressure and many embraced the opportunity to demonstrate the value of their work. The fallout from the pandemic is still unravelling as we write this book in 2025. Hybrid working currently remains the norm for most organisations and internal communication has to work out the best way to operate within this environment. And yet, despite the obvious digital communication challenges that are inherent in hybrid working, many 'traditional' challenges remain. Knowing how to demonstrate our value, how to constantly engage employees and how to listen to employees more effectively (as well as keep them informed) are as relevant today as they were five years ago.

Another, less noticed, development in the past five years is the rapid expansion of academic internal communication research and the associated publication of journal articles. A review of 247 articles published in six public relations journals in 2023 revealed that internal communication was the second most researched topic (sustainability and corporate social responsibility was the most researched topic). This is an important step forward on the path for internal communication becoming more recognised as a strategic

function, inextricably linked with employee engagement and organisational success. Findings from internal communication journal articles are included throughout the book as they include many useful and practical insights. The book does therefore include discussion and analysis of theory. Unfortunately, theory is sometimes deemed to be unimportant for internal communication, or worse, irrelevant as internal communication is simply about communicating – and what could be simpler than that? In reality, communication in general and specifically within organisations is highly complex and problematic and, if left to gut instinct, it can easily go badly wrong with poor outcomes for both organisations and employees.

The focus in this book is on *applying* principles, established through robust research (by which we mean research that adopts an appropriate methodology), to effective practice. In particular, we draw heavily on Gallagher *State of the Sector* and Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC) reports (which provide an internal communication practitioner perspective) and IoIC–Ipsos Karian and Box IC Index reports (that provide an employee perspective).

Although grounded in theory, this book is fundamentally about practice. Good practice – for employees and for organisations. In addition to the underpinnings provided through research in the field, it draws heavily on the combined 50-year experience of the authors' experiences of working in internal communication.

As authors, we must declare our own beliefs about internal communication as they inevitably influence the structure and content of the book. First, we believe that internal communication is a critical occupation that enables organisations to be more successful. It is also a primary enabler of organisational engagement. Second, we believe in taking an evidence-based approach to internal communication. This involves research, analysis, reflection, objective setting, measurement and evaluation. It is much more than channel management. Third, we believe that internal communication is a management occupation in its own right. When it is positioned solely as a sub-set of public relations, marketing or HR, it is often marginalised and restricted to reactive tactics at best. Although we acknowledge that it shares many similarities with other disciplines, it is also very different because of the special considerations that apply to communication and engagement with employees, who are a higher-order stakeholder group. Fourth, we believe that effective practice includes listening to employees. If internal communication is simply telling employees what senior managers think they should know, then it is a form of 'distorted communication' or propaganda which is unethical and disengages employees. Smart organisations recognise that high levels of engagement and performance result from a combination of keeping employees informed about topics that they are interested in and giving employees a voice that is treated seriously. Finally, we believe in dedicated training and education for internal communication practitioners as a pathway to more credible professional recognition.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I covers principles, frameworks and models for effective and ethical practice. Part II is dedicated to planning and employee segmentation. Part III is focused on implementing a strategic internal communication plan. Part IV reviews the past, present and future role of the internal communicator.

In Part I, the chapters explore the following topics, drawing on theory and research to outline principles, frameworks and models:

- Culture, Purpose, Values and Strategy
- The Employee–Organisation Relationship
- Engagement, Alignment and Performance
- Leadership Communication
- Effective and Ethical Practice
- Change and Internal Crisis Communication

In Part II, the focus turns to good, evidence-based planning.

- Planning, Measurement and Evaluation
- Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Analysis and Insight Generation
- Employee Segmentation and Prioritisation

In Part III, the book explores how to put plans into practise.

- Making Content Work
- Employee Voice, Listening and Responding
- Channel Management
- Implementing the Plan

In Part IV, the book examines the evolving role of the internal communicator and what is shaping and influencing it.

- The Internal Communication Role and Professionalisation

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Acknowledgements

The writing of the latest edition of *Exploring Internal Communication* has very much been a joint enterprise, with each of us leading on separate chapters that were then reviewed by the other author. This enabled us to bring our individual academic, practice perspectives and collective experience together to create a unique blend of theory and practice which we hope will be a helpful guide for internal communicators navigating through a new era of internal communication.

Many thanks to Katie Macaulay, Managing Director at AB and host of *The Internal Comms Podcast*, for her comprehensive review of our draft manuscript. Katie's considered reflections and thoughts on the draft chapters provided us with valuable new perspectives on what we had written and helped us to make sure that we hadn't missed out on anything crucial!

We would like to thank Mark Terry at Neo for our book cover design. Deciding what should go on the front and back covers of *EIC5* has perhaps been a harder task than researching and writing the chapters. With Mark's help, we think that we have ended up with a cover design which is both eye catching and thought provoking and we hope that you like it as much as we do.

To everyone who provided an endorsement for the book, thank you. We were both overwhelmed and flattered by your comments and feedback and the messages of support and good wishes we received from our incredible internal communications community.

Thanks also to Rebecca Marsh and the team at Taylor and Francis (Routledge) for their support in creating this new edition and for giving us the opportunity to write it.

Kevin would like to dedicate this book to his two children, Cheryl and Jamie, who inspire him every day. And he would like to thank Ann for her unwavering support for every edition of the book.

Martin would like to dedicate the book to his wife Sara, in recognition of her support and patience throughout the very challenging year when this book was written.

Finally, to all the internal communicators who strive to be better at what they do every day to support their organisations and employees. Thank you, this book is for you.

Kevin and Martin

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