

Charu

Hi, Eleanor. Thank you for joining us on Mrigashira.

Guest

It's my pleasure, thank you for having me.

Charu

Eleanor, you have experience working across 14 APAC countries and cities. And I really envy you that you have implemented programs working in close consultation and partnership with regional and global leadership teams, how difficult or easy is cross border communications through top most challenges?

Guest

I think is understanding that each and every country has their own cultural nuances. There are different stages of development as well. So you know, is being sensitive to this cultural and national and international boundaries that will say and you know, you have to be mindful as you do communication actually. I mean, APEC itself is is pretty diverse, actually. I mean, you look at Southeast Asia itself, you know, where Singapore is, is already a hub in itself. And then you look at the wider East Asian economies as well. And, of course, in in the Pacific, as well, where you have Australia and New Zealand. So it's pretty varied, I would have to say, but I think at the end of it, we must remember that when we communicate, we don't do it in a vacuum. We are actually communicating to people. I mean, you could, of course, you know, you could say, yeah, I'm communicating with governments, depending on which aspect of communications that you do, but I think fundamentally, communications is about reaching out to people about evoking emotions, it's about, you know, helping them to understand, for example, why certain initiatives are important for the team for the organization, I do a lot of work in internal communications at the moment. So it's been very interesting. In my current role, it was also my first time working with colleagues from Papua New Guinea from Fiji for some more as well. So you know, it's been interesting actually, because there's a lot of warmth from this colleagues and you know, they're very, very supportive of communications and you know, even the the internal communications the I think sustainability work that we do we get a lot of support from them, actually. So it's been really enriching on a personal as well as our professional basis.

Charu

When it comes to oral communications, the differences in culture play, you know, detriment when it comes to building team camaraderie. So how does one navigate those choppy waters?

Guest

I'm not sure. To be honest, whether choppy waters is overstating it. I think right also with the internet. It is actually democrat Taste information. You know, at the end of it actually we are more similar than we think we are. So you know, it's also understanding when the cultures, nuances and appreciating it actually. I think, effective internal communications is really respecting what, what your colleagues, the cultures that they work in the field actually. And being mindful of that, I mean, I will give you an example, as simple as organizing my global town hall meetings, actually. So the bulk of my workforce in

my current organization is, is in a Pacific region, so I'm based in Singapore, so they're easily five hours ahead of us. So you know, for my global meetings, I usually put a 11 o'clock Singapore time so that it's not too late for my colleagues in the Pacific Islands. And most of us in Singapore can, can attend and actually, you know, so that's one way of how we work with them. And, you know, of course, if we really can't find our ideal timing, also, because, you know, there are a lot of different offices that we work in. And we have to do something that's not, not ours that can do safe to them. I think it's offering recordings on our intranet, as soon as possible is about sharing writeups, or takeaways, you know, through my newsletters through the intranet, so that, you know, we engage them as much as possible, actually. And I think also, you know, before we roll out key initiatives, to also engage with my colleagues, my country, my country leaders, to ask them, you know, what do you think of this initiative, where they work in your country? Are there any cultural nuances or references that that we need to be mindful of actually. And I think it's also understanding, you know, what is language that most of us would understand, actually, I remember in one of my previous workplaces, right, we get a quarterly newsletter. So our colleagues in the US were writing about MC Hammer. So that's, you know, a rap artist, someone from my region, who totally didn't understand, and she caught me. And this is from a Southeast Asian country, she said, was this MC Hammer? is a toolkit or something like that. So these are little things that we learn and we pick up along the way. And, you know, I am hopeful that, you know, with the internet and the access to information that more of us will become culturally fluent actually, in the days to come. Actually, yeah. And I find that when I engage with my colleagues across the region, actually, when when you take genuine interest in their cultures, they're really proud to share with you, you know, oh, this is what we do here, you know, for this festival, we do here for Independence Day, we do this. So it's it's been a really fun experience actually interacting with other cultures as well.

Charu

If I'm going to take culture beyond, people and what they do to really characteristics of human nature, what are the challenges you face, you know, as, as people culturally, we are very different, you know we've been brought up shapes us in a big way, in the way we think our values are the way we work. How do you navigate that?

Guest

Also, you know, understand how your colleagues want to be communicated to understand their working styles as well. I think it's having that basic respect for colleagues, if you're not sure, ask, and I find that you know, when it comes from a position of wanting to help others wanting to achieve common goals together, having that common understanding and language is important, and I find that it actually can help you go a long way. Actually, the way I look at it is it's a somewhat simple answer, but I find that it has been effective for me actually. Does that answer your question

Charu

So as communicators sitting in India, what are the things we need to be mindful of where, you know, when it comes to the media when it comes to the government, or the customers, you know, wanting to work in some of these APAC markets?

Guest

I think you're right, the media, A lot of them do want to run stories, at about the same time as every other person. Because you know, online media, basically, there's no restriction in terms of, you know, your heart stone and account costs, you know, where you where you lay the physical newspaper to bed, right. So I think, you know, there is always that hunger in wanting to run stories quickly, number one, and number two, to be able to differentiate their stories as well. So I think, you know, when you work in country, if there's actually a angle that is relevant to that country itself, you know, it'll be good to actually highlight that as well. And I think, you know, you've as well, a lot of the places I've worked in, they do have close ties, you know, they work with government officials, and all that, I think it's also helpful to, for example, when you have a press release, announcing a major initiative to also include them as well, because, you know, especially we know them, and you want them to be aware of what you're doing, too, I think build up that awareness and possibly goodwill to, to also include them as part of your information sphere, we are located actually, um, I think, you know, I've worked quite a bit with media that's based in China. So I think, you know, there's real hunger in China. I mean, it's really inspiring, I always tell my, my colleagues in China, when I went to visit them in Beijing and Shanghai, if only I could bottle their energy and bring it back to Singapore, where I'm tired, just gazoo it's only it'll be amazing. I think, you know, that is reflective of the of the media that I work with, as well, they're always very keen to find out, you know, why is this happening? Why are you doing this? You know, and now, and what benefits does it bring for consumers, or for people in China, or in the industry that, that the news is for actually, so there's a real buzz and energy I find, working with my colleagues in China working with the media in China, I find that for journalists who are just starting out in other countries, they really appreciate you spending a bit more time with them. You know, doing a bit of tutorial, I will see about your industry about trends. You know, I think we approach it from a point that, you know, you genuinely want to help the other person not because, I mean, of course, you know, in the bonus is a story in the in the media, right, in our organization that the journalist is working. But, you know, I see that it's important for us to actually invest in our stakeholders as well. So, for younger or new journalists, I've actually spent some time explaining our industry about how you were about our business as well. So you know, it's been very pleasant, I would say in that respect.

Charu

So tell me a little about your company what are the key challenges there? What are the things that you need to keep in mind, especially when you have to work across different markets?

Guest

Right now I work in shipping. The past 18 months, or two years since the pandemic struck, it has been a very interesting experience. Because the thing is, our stakeholders, internal stakeholders are not just onshore staff, but it's also colleagues working on board of vessels. So you know, my joke is that, you know, when people talk about remote working, I'm like, Yeah, but you know, when I talk about my colleagues on vessels, they are really, really Movies sometimes, you know, because they're really, you know, they're all over the world, in oceans all over the world. So you know, how do you engage with them? Right? So I think there was that desire to stay connected with our colleagues, you know, regardless whether they are onshore or offshore. So digital has actually played a very big part in it, actually, we have our monthly townhall meetings or vessels from whichever ocean that they are in the world can dial in to join in naturally, so they they hear what's happening across your organization in

here from the MD to hear from leaders, you also hear from colleagues on your projects and all that. So it's been interesting, but I would say very intensive approach to us internal communications.

Charu

So I'm going to just ask you one final question, and which is more on say five tips, you want to give people you know, from India who are trying to work or want to work with their colleagues in our clients in different geographies, specially in APAC? What do they be mindful about?

Guest

The first thing is about time differences, Singapore, Malaysia. Philippines, we're in the same time band, whereas, you know, for New Zealand, Australia, and even different parts of Australia have different time bands as well, I think, you know, is being aware of this time bands, I mean, it's, it sounds basic, you'll be surprised that, sometimes people send meeting invitations are totally, totally out of hours. So I always tell people go to time and date.com, you know, you can use that to even find what's the optimal timing across time zones, number one. And number two, I think before you rush into any project, or rush to engage people do research, I mean, the internet is there are all sorts of resources there. And also talk to people who have actually worked in these regions to to get an understanding of what their culture is, you know, how do they want to be communicated? For example, I think, in China, they use WeChat a lot. So in order to communicate, so that could be one way of looking at it. I think right now with digital communications becoming so often is also understanding whether they prefer a phone call or teams or like zoom, like the word we're using, are we using zoom now? Yeah, we are. So you know, is understanding that so soon as that then I think, probably in some societies. hierarchy is still important, for example, in fusion, influenced societies, right. She's great there. And the older person in the in the room first, even though is virtual? And, you know, how should you? How should you exchange virtual business cards? I was taught that in a physical setting, depending on which Asian society go to something you shouldn't give your cut to the most senior person first, for example, underlying it is the need to be respectful. The need to I think, you know, err on the side of being conservative until you get to know the person or the company or the client better actually, because you know, sometimes what, what do you think is normal or what do you think is usual business practice may not be practiced by the other by the other side, for example. So I would say this are quite basic, the way the way I looked at it, actually.

Charu

I think these are very useful tips. And thank you so much for joining us on Mrigashira Eleanor.

Guest

Thank you.