



EP#169: FIGHTING
DISINFORMATION IN CITIES:
INSIGHTS FROM THE GLOBAL
RESPONSE PLAYBOOK

WITH IKA TRIJSBURG

TRANSCRIPT

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Ika Trijsburg:

Our disinformation response relies on people trusting the institution behind it. Everyone needs to trust a trustworthy institution, and that institution needs to be networked in and working with the city.

City diplomacy allows us to see the breadth of different ways that this manifests in different cities and to be able to then apply that to our own context.

Collaboration is a really key aspect of the playbook. Everyone within the organisation does need to have a baseline understanding of disinformation and disinformation response because this is a really critical issue across the community right now.

Voice Over:

Welcome to the Centre podcast, bringing you the latest insights and innovations from experts and thought leaders around the globe in government communication. Now here is your host, David Pembroke.

David Pembroke:

Hello, everyone. And welcome once again to GovComms, a podcast about the practice of communication in government and the public sector. My name is David Pembroke, and thanks for joining me. As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land from which I am broadcasting today, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. And indeed, I'd like to pay my respects to all First Nations people from where anybody listening to this podcast today is joining us from.

All over the world, government in all its forms has a problem with trust. Global research conducted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs found that trust in most public sector bodies has been in decline since the year 2000. In the USA, research from the Pew Research Centre points out that in the United States, trust in the national government has declined from 73% in 1958 to just 20% in 2022. Now, a significant contributor to this lack of trust is the pollution of our information ecosystems by mis and disinformation. As digital channels propagate and the creation and distribution of content is turbocharged by technology such as generative AI, the risk of further decline is very real.

Now, fortunately, we do have some very clever people examining the underlying issues and addressing the problem and looking for solutions, and one of them joins me as my guest today. Ika Trijsburg is the leader of the Disinformation in the City project, which is a ground-breaking initiative that has just released a global response playbook on combating disinformation in cities. Previously, Ika delivered the City Diplomacy Melbourne Masterclass, which was funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with the aim of building capacity for city diplomacy in global governance. Ika has over a decade of experience in local government, refugee health, and intercultural education. And she has made a number of significant contributions to important international projects with the Council of Europe. Today, our focus is on the impact of disinformation on people in cities, the role of city diplomacy and how her team's new playbook can help address these pressing issues globally. Ika, welcome to GovComms.

Ika Trijsburg:

Thank you so much, David. It's great to be here with you.

David Pembroke:

Listen, before we get into the meat and potatoes of the conversation, what's the Ika Trijsburg story? How is it that you've come to this point in your career where this is your focus?

Ika Trijsburg:

Gosh, what a question to start with, the Ika Trijsburg story. I think I've been really fortunate to grow up surrounded by people who had really different experiences of society, particularly people who experienced marginalised spaces, whether that was through incarceration, through homelessness, family violence, through addiction, mental health, the things that really can make lives really complex and can mean that people have different experiences of community, different experiences of the systems that we operate within. And that's something that really frames my thinking around inclusion and around recognising the contributions that all people can make within communities and trying to find ways that people can meaningfully contribute that knowledge and those skills to the future communities and the cities and nations that we want to build.

In terms of my professional background, that's led me to weave an interesting path, not a linear path, beginning in interfaith dialogue, so in inter-institutional dialogue between Christian and Muslim institutions in Indonesia and Australia early in my career. Then I also worked for a network of uniting church schools in the intercultural programming and started some collaborations around reconciliation and programming up in Western Cape York as well that eventually took me to the United States and some of the opportunities that I had as a Rotary Peace Fellow in North Carolina.

David Pembroke:

Wow, that's a lot. When you roll up all of that experience, professional experience and obviously your personal background as well, how did that lead you towards this interest in, well, first of all, cities, but then the role of disinformation and the impact of disinformation in the lives of people who live in cities?

Ika Trijsburg:

I think cities, and I'm using cities as shorthand for local government in many cases or even sub-national in others, are really important in the way that we experience community. We've seen it from a policy perspective that a lot of really complex critical policy like climate resilience has been increasingly devolved to the local level. And this is where we experience life. We experience life in our neighbourhoods. The urban planning decisions that are made are the things that influence whether or not there are parks near us, whether or not we are able to walk to different places, how we feel in our community, how we come together or don't with others who may be like us and may not be like us in many ways. I think it's really, really important to our individual experience of life.

In terms of how I got involved in the disinformation space, it's largely because disinformation emerged as such a key issue in cities. And I've been fortunate to have the networks, the opportunities through my platform here at the University of Melbourne. I also have a visiting fellowship with the German Marshall Fund of the United States and a broad professional network with cities, a broad professional network through the Rotary Peace Fellow Alumni and others into other sectors, so journalism, tech, civil society, and then also the ability to reach into academia and to draw out all of the really important knowledge that we need to collate to be able to address disinformation as a really key issue of our time.

David Pembroke:

Now, I do really want to get into the detail of this global response playbook and also let people know where they can get a hold of it and read it, as I have done. But when you first started out on this particular piece of research and the assembly of all of these talented people around this issue, what kicked it off? What started it? What made you think I have to do something about this because I have seen or I know of a problem, and we really do have to address it?

Ika Trijsburg:

It kept coming up. As you mentioned, I've been co-teaching the city Diplomacy Masterclass that was funded by DFAT with my esteemed colleagues, Michele Acuto and Dan Pejic and Diane Hu. And my role in that is to work with cities to help them to analyse their own operating environment, their strategic opportunities, and look at how city diplomacy does and can enhance their functioning and their ability to meet their targets and the targets and aspirations of their communities. I have a lot of contact with cities through that and through other mechanisms.

And disinformation kept coming up. It was coming up because there were protests in chambers that were blocking climate emergency declarations. It was coming up because there were increasing threats to executive level staff or to elected representatives. It was coming up because there were a number of questions that cities had about how they manage safety and the wellbeing of their teams whilst also wanting to maintain that commitment to open and transparent and flowing interaction and community conversations and not wanting to curtail that unnecessarily.

And these have some really significant community implications and also organisational and implications, and so I started reaching out internationally to find out what was happening. I'm in city diplomacy; we do that. You reach out internationally to see where you can connect into other conversations, where you can borrow from what others have trialled.

And I found that this was a recurrent issue identified in cities across North America, across South East Asia, across Europe. And no one was actually undertaking the necessary research to try to create appropriate responses that were accessible to city practitioners and those involved in city leadership and city governance. And so we started it. I put together a collaboration team, a team of core collaborators across the Australian National University, Monash University, Deakin University, Victoria University, and obviously here at the University of Melbourne so that we could approach it from different perspectives. We're all from different disciplines all with different expertise in extremism within the community, in the complex ways that the policy can be mobilised across different contexts to start to look at how we take what knowledge is out there at the national and international levels and really apply that meaningfully to a city context, but also to recognise what knowledge just isn't there and where we might be able to find ways that cities can better integrate within the disinformation response network so that we can access those really important capacities of cities. They're smaller, they're agile, they're locally embedded, they understand the context and complexities of local communities, the nuance of that. That's a critical skill and strength that cities can bring to this that currently hasn't been, that's been left out of that conversation.

And it's been wonderful to see how quickly we've had responses. I've had interactions with the G7 rapid response mechanism looking at sub-national interactions in this space, working with... We were at a consultation last week in the Bay Area in California with UN-Habitat. And there's a lot of interest in looking at how we can actually do this. It's the right time. And we've been really fortunate to be able to put together the right people to be able to fly that flag really for cities and make sure this is on the agenda and make sure that we are that central collation point and collaboration point to allow that knowledge exchange.

David Pembroke:

It's interesting you mentioned that the commonality of the experience globally at the city level. You did mention some of the extremism and other things, but what about those impacts on officials? What was some of the impacts on them? Is it around safety? Is it around the ability to be able to do their job, the distraction that disinformation creates such that they're not able to do their job? What was some of those real common challenges that were grounded in the reality of a local official's day-to-day work?

Ika Trijsburg:

I think it's all of those things. We've seen increased threats and harassment towards officials. We've seen an increased polarisation and incivility towards the organisation. Not just elected representatives or executive level staff, but also planners and people and customer service, people at all levels of the organisation, which has significant health and safety implications for organisations that have a responsibility for the wellbeing of their teams and volunteers.

In terms of the commonalities globally, one of the things that a number of cities have spoken about, not just through the playbook creation process, but also in public forums and panels, is the real challenge of operating in this increasingly toxic environment where potentially other people running for election, other people who might see themselves in those leadership roles in the future are also playing into that and using disinformation, and how to navigate that when the lines between who's using disinformation are not clear cut in terms of it being an issue that's out in the community and city governments are needing to respond to it. City governments are made up of people, disinformation is a people problem across our entire society, and so really the complexities of how to navigate that at a time that people are also experiencing that personal cost.

David Pembroke:

Okay, well, that sets up the problem statement pretty clearly. The playbook is about helping people to address these issues. How about you take us through the playbook and how, not just officials, but how can communities and city communities address some of these challenges?

Ika Trijsburg:

The playbook is around 52 pages, so I won't take you through every step of that. We actually had anticipated it would be a shorter playbook to begin with, but in the creation process, having 40 co-creators from different sectors, unsurprisingly perhaps we discovered that it was very, very hard to create a succinct, clear guide that would just get straight to the point when it's such a complex challenge and there's so many facets to it.

But what we did do in the playbook was we began first by being clear about the principles that underpin the playbook and disinformation response in general. And I won't go into all of those, but one of the really important ones is that it has to be nonpartisan. The disinformation response must be something that sits above politics because whoever's using it, even with the best of intentions, even if we entirely agree with it, as soon as it becomes co-opted for partisan purposes, it erodes the entire process. Even the term disinformation has become associated with a particular brand of politics in some places, particularly in North America, and so we use other terminology there, though for the playbook we did use disinformation because it's just more catchy than information integrity. But that is a real risk in terms of disinformation response. It must be a trustworthy, non-political response.

Then we also looked through the different phases of disinformation response. A lot of what's happening in cities... Because cities are already responding to this in a whole raft of ways, but a lot of that sits in the after space. Once something's happened, and then it's quite limited often to communications and looking at how you communicate out maybe evidence-based information in the debunking space, but actually broadening that to the whole response life cycle we've called it, there's three phases of that.

The first one is around preempting and early intervention. And so that's really about understanding what's happening in the community, making sure that there are mechanisms to be aware, whether that's social media analysis, whether that's making sure that there's just robust communication between institutions, between community and governance bodies, but to make sure that there's an understanding of what's going on and when something's brewing, to know that that's coming, but also to understand what are the fault lines in the community? Disinformation really flourishes along those fault lines. And those are fault lines of prejudice, of distrust. Sometimes they're historical, sometimes they're based on gentrification or new emergent issues within communities. And for cities to understand what their likely weak points might be in terms of what sorts of things might help disinformation narratives to get traction is really valuable. And that's one of the things

that we saw recently with the UK race riots in many cities. It was one of the things that there were a number of existing racialised prejudice narratives that were brought into that, as well as cost of living narratives, all sorts of things that were existing points of tension.

The next phase of disinformation response is pre-bunking and spread prevention. This is when we know that something is out there, we know that there's a likelihood that there's a disinformation campaign to try to limit the amount that it spreads, but also to try to pre-bunk. Pre-bunking is when you try and get ahead of the curve and you say, "Okay, well, there's this climate disinformation, for example. This is what is being presented, and this is why it's inaccurate," and to make sure that we're actually starting to prepare the community so that there is that robust, evidence-based understanding within the community.

And then the third phase of disinformation response is the debunking phase, so the after the fact phase that I mentioned earlier, and recovery. That's one of the things I think the recovery aspect that many cities already do with many things. For example, emergency management plans, there's a clear recovery phase, but that hasn't yet been applied to many of the disinformation responses. And when you've had things like race riots, your community needs support. There are targeted groups throughout that process, but the community needs that healing period as well, the recovery phase so that it helps to heal some of those fault lines and it doesn't actually create a situation where the community is more vulnerable to future disinformation attacks. That's where cities are, again, well-placed because often they have a lot of these mechanisms already, but they're not necessarily yet being applied to the disinformation response area.

David Pembroke:

How important, then, is the role of the communication function inside these city organisations in order to be able to create and distribute the content that both preempts, pre-bunks, and debunks and recovers? What function and just how important is that function in the role of combating disinformation?

Ika Trijsburg:

Communicating and listening is critical. We're talking about our information environment, and we communicate and listen to information, so it's critical. But it's not just your standard comms team that needs to be involved in this.

One of the examples that's provided in the playbook is from a Swedish city. So several years ago, there were a number of Swedish cities that were targeted by a foreign interference disinformation campaign that was accusing social services, which are run by cities, of stealing Muslim children from families and deliberately placing those children with Christian families as a way of trying to erode their cultural heritage. And there were a number of accusations about what else was happening to those children. This had huge impacts in terms of the willingness of Muslim families to access healthcare, to access social services. It eroded trust in government and in the city functioning.

One of the things that we provided the case of in the playbook was a city that then had an embedded communications approach. They kept their social media analysis, they kept their social media streams of information going out, but they also made sure, for example, that they were working with mosques in the city, that they were embedding some of their social services activities in mosques, so they were co-locating, that they had communications and community engagement. Often, communications is used as the sharing information and community engagement is the listening to information, but so that those were co-located and that they were making sure that there was that interpersonal connection and listening and building of relationships through the community networks as well because of the significant level of distrust that had been stirred up and created in that context. And importantly, they maintained it for the... It's still going. It's something that's been maintained for a couple of years now in recognition that communications needs to not just be the sound bites and the immediate aftermath, but it's actually part of that long-term relationship maintenance building.

David Pembroke:

Throughout your research and your discussion with your collaborators from people around the world, how mature is that function, that evolving function around communication and engagement to address some of the challenges that you are seeing and you have seen through your research? And perhaps one area I'd call out is, again, the ability to reach culturally and linguistically diverse audiences at a local government level. Again, more resources, more capacity is required to be effective in that particular space.

Ika Trijsburg:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think there's a variety of levels of maturity. There are some cities that are doing this incredibly well and there are some that are still figuring out how they want to best approach this. In terms of, particularly in the Australian context where our communities are very culturally diverse or often very culturally diverse, there are particular additional considerations for cities and local government. And this is not just about culture and language, but culture and language can be additional barriers to people accessing other forms of information.

But it's also about the kind of information that we trust. Some groups within communities really trust academic knowledge, for example. They look at research from a university and they go, "Yep, absolutely. That's gold standard. We know it's gone through a robust ethics process. We know that it has all of these procedures, and we know that we can trust this information." And there are other people in the community who see universities as partisan, as politicised, as elite, as removed from their everyday existence, and actually for that reason don't trust academic research or are less likely to engage with academic research.

There are groups within communities that place a huge, a very high value on storytelling and individual sharing of information from a personal perspective or from a communal perspective. And that's actually the legitimate form of sharing. And there's the online versions of that with WhatsApp groups and things where it's the individualised sharing. Recognising within communities, how people... The information that people trust, who people trust to receive that from, because we don't all trust, for example, politicians to share accurate information with us. We know that politicians enjoy a relatively low level of trust across the community, but understanding who is trusted, the trusted places. And so this is physical places like libraries, for example, but also online places. A lot of younger people trust TikTok, for example, as a trusted place. There's issues with that because it's largely untrustworthy in many cases, but it enjoys that trust. If we're going to look at that, then we actually need to say, "Okay, well, how do we then create more trustworthy content on TikTok? How do we help people to access that if that's the place that people trust information from?"

And then trusted institutions. A lot of this relies on institutional trust. That's something that is eroded through disinformation. And our disinformation response relies on people trusting the institution behind it. All of those other things are important, but we have to have the institutional trust as well. And not everyone will trust city government or local government. And that's actually, that's fine. But within a functioning democratic city, everyone needs to trust a trustworthy institution. And that institution needs to be networked in and working with the city. A good example of this, for example, might be an Aboriginal community controlled organisation where there might be existing historical distrust of other authorities within the city. If there is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation that has the trust of people within the community and they are networked in with the city government and working in conjunction to make sure that we're restoring the information integrity of the local environment, that that's actually a very effective way of responding to disinformation.

David Pembroke:

That's interesting in that what your research has called out is that there's the commonality of the problem, but the response is actually very localised, very personalised. Wherever you are, your mix of however you're going to do that with channels, with institutions, with whoever it is that you're going to be working with as part of

your solution, it's going to be very different for your community as opposed to another community that may be located close by.

Ika Trijsburg:

Absolutely. And that's where city diplomacy is so useful because it allows us to see the breadth of different ways that this manifests in different cities, so the different types of trusted institutions that cities have, the different types of trusted people, and to be able to then apply that to our own context and analyse that and go, "Okay, well, that actually might work in our context, but this other thing won't."

When we were developing the playbook, we had people from Canada, from New Zealand, from Australia, from the United States all of whom had a particular focus on First Nations and disinformation related to First Nations communities and needing to build trust with those communities. We also had representatives from Finland and Germany and Italy and the Netherlands that were not, this was not something that was applicable for them. And so that's where we could actually say, "Okay, well, these are some things where it's really helpful for these four nations to be able to learn from each other." But there were other things that, for example, some of the Dutch cities were doing in relation to other communities that we were able to then look at and say, "Okay, well, that actually might be something that's effective."

David Pembroke:

What you seem to be suggesting also is that not only this requirement for, in marketing speak, personalisation around the plans to understand trusted people, trusted institution, trusted places, et cetera, but you're also suggesting that very clearly disinformation or the response to disinformation is a team sport and everybody has a role. The comms team is the comms team, but it's not... The comms team plays a role, but it is very much everybody in a institution, in an organisation, in a community has a role to play in combating disinformation. Is that fair?

Ika Trijsburg:

Absolutely. I think collaboration is a really key aspect of the playbook. And there's different elements to that. The first of those is internal collaboration. And that doesn't mean that every person within the organisation needs to be involved in disinformation response. Everyone within the organisation does need to have a baseline understanding of disinformation and disinformation response because this is a really critical issue across the community right now. But in terms of the organisational internal collaboration, that should at the very least include the social policy areas, executive team, probably planning. We know that the key areas that are impacted by disinformation are urban planning, sustainability transitions, social cohesion and cultural diversity and gender and sexual diversity. But there's also infrastructure and tech transitions, a whole variety of other things, and so it needs... Disinformation collaboration internally needs to include those voices, but also be aware when we're planning new policy development, for example, when there's policy that's going to be developed that's likely to touch on any of those fault lines or likely to be something that attracts significant disinformation, that whoever that policy owner is is also looped into the internal collaboration conversations to make sure that they're fully aware of what's happening organisationally and able to build that into the policy making process, the engagement process, and also the communications process around the adoption of that.

But then there's also collaboration between cities. This is the city diplomacy space that we're particularly active in. But it's really, really valuable for cities to have the opportunity to learn from each other, to support each other, and to be able to share those learnings across borders. But also, cities can have greater collective efficacy if they work together. If one city is trying to get a meeting with Meta or Google, for example, depending on the city, they might not be successful. Not every city has the kind of global profile that would be able to secure that meeting. But if cities work together and they all decide, hang on, we have this particular

point that we need to have a sit-down with Meta about, then there's the opportunity to do that. Or I'm using that as an example with Meta; it could be any other body as well.

And then the third is about a collective heat shield. Cities are now increasingly risk-averse often with disinformation response. When you're operating in a context of increased threats, of increased incivility, a very, very normal reaction to that is to retract and to not want to attract attention, to not want to stick your neck out and try new things. It creates a risk-averse environment.

And we need the opposite because we need to be trialling new ways of addressing disinformation because this is a novel challenge in the way that it presents. Obviously disinformation is not a new thing, but the way that it's impacting governance at the moment is definitely new. And the way that cities can work together is to create that heat shield with each other to say, "It's not just us sticking our neck out; we're all doing this, we're all trialling this. And we know that some of these things might not be effective, but it's still worth it." And to be able to support each other in that. And it's a critical aspect of city diplomacy.

The other levels of collaboration are around multi-sector collaboration, making sure that cities are working... And a lot of them are working with tertiary education and research institutions, for example, with media. Many identified that they want to be working with tech companies but currently aren't. Need to be working with other levels of government, with civil society, with local businesses, with community groups and have that important role both as convener bringing those groups together as the legitimate convener, as the level of government governance for that area, but also in terms of being able to build the collective capacity of those. As cities build their own or city governments build their own capacity to respond to disinformation, finding ways to support other key institutions like the health system, like the education system, like local media to actually build their capacity to address disinformation and make sure that they're not engaging in sharing disinformation or counterproductive activities in that space so that it actually has, again, that holistic networked approach.

And then the final area of collaboration is around multi-level. And this is making sure that all of the great work that's happening at the international and national level is actually deeply and agilely, if that's a word, connected to... With agility, connected to what's happening in the live daily experience of sub-national, whether it's state or city level government so that communication can go through.

One of the key areas that cities find really challenging is they don't have their own intelligence apparatus for the most part. And so that's an area where national governments can really help cities to understand what are the current terms? What are the dog whistles this week that we need to be looking out for? And that's something that's a relatively straightforward sharing of information that can be structured in. Likewise for cities then to be able to lend their agility and local knowledge and embeddedness to the national and international efforts against disinformation. Making sure that that's a two-way collaboration as well.

David Pembroke:

It's the very definition, isn't it, of a wicked problem? The complexity of just exactly what you outlined there in terms of an effective response. And I just wonder how do you feel about this? Do you feel hopeless? Do you feel that this is just too big a problem to solve when really the tech platforms who can play a much greater role in this don't seem to be massively engaged around this, they don't see that it's their responsibility? X, for example, under its current leadership, let it rip is the way that the governance seems to be in that particular organisation in the United States, such an influential place, first Amendment rights that protect free speech. There is so much that rolls up into all of this. As somebody who has had your hands and your heart and your head and every other part of you involved in this over the last couple of years, where do you sit now? Because I listen to a lot of this stuff all the time, and your articulation of the complexity of how to assemble an effective response just leaves me thinking, oh my gosh, this is going to be really, really difficult to solve.

Ika Trijsburg:

I'm entirely optimistic, actually.

David Pembroke:

Good. Good. Good.

Ika Trijsburg:

And that's not negate the fact. This is a very serious complex challenge that we're faced with. But it's not the first serious complex challenge that we are faced with. And certainly at a city level, cities are actually pretty good at this and getting better at complex problem solving. That's one of the reasons why so much policy is being devolved, particularly for wicked problems, is being devolved to the local level. Full disclosure, I'm an optimist by nature. However, I have the privilege of being in these rooms.

Last week, UN-Habitat, which is the UN Agency for Urban Settlements, convened a group of experts from around the world from the tech sector and from cities and some people like me who were in between, and we had input into the new guidelines for human-centred smart city transitions globally. This is something that's going to be endorsed next year. But in that conversation, I was left entirely buoyed by the fact that there are fantastic people who are really committed and very, very clever working in cities who are actively working on this. There are fantastic people in the tech sector who are finding all sorts of ways of working towards the cities that we do envision.

There's all sorts of gaps. However, that's the challenge. And I think that when we're working... Again, obviously I'm a strong collaborator by nature, but when we are working in collaboration and we do have the collective power and opportunity that's presented by that, I think so much is possible. And I think that including cities in the disinformation response network, we are actually profoundly expanding our capacity to meaningfully address this and to make it not just something that gets stuck in legislation that takes years to be bickered about at other levels of government, but actually to really have boots on the ground, for want of a better word, and start to address this in local communities.

David Pembroke:

Yes. Well, let's hope. When you think of the lobbying capacity of the big tech platforms to be able to engage at the national level in particular where they can make it complex, make it hard, make it difficult, make it slow, but as you say, there's really no choice other than to be positive and to move forward and to be collaborative and to operate collectively. On that positive note, I think we might leave it on a positive note there. Ika, thank you so much before you go. But what I do want you to do is to tell the audience where they can get access to this fantastic global response playbook that you and your collaborators have put together.

Ika Trijsburg:

You can access it from the Melbourne Centre for Cities website at the University of Melbourne. If you enter disinformation in the city response playbook into your search engine, it will come up. You can also access it from the German Marshall Fund of the United States website, who are our partners in this project.

David Pembroke:

Okay. And if people want to reach out to have a further conversation or perhaps want to get involved with you, what's the best way to make contact with you?

Ika Trijsburg:

Through my Find an Expert profile on the University of Melbourne website. It would be wonderful to hear from anyone who's interested in this space and to hear from those who are also engaged in different aspects of disinformation response.

David Pembroke:

Excellent. All right, Ika Trijsburg, thank you so much for giving up some of your very valuable time to share with the audience today. It is critically important. And this is the GovComms podcast. And it really does, to me, outline comprehensively what that challenge is and where does comms sit in that? And what is that evolving role of communication and engagement? And how can comms and engagement teams across governments at a local, state, and federal level and multilateral level, what role can they play in being able to effective contributors to the response to disinformation? Which is so critically important as trust continues to be under threat. Thank you so much for joining us on GovComms today.

Ika Trijsburg:

Thank you.

David Pembroke:

And to you, the audience, thank you once again. What a fantastic conversation. And aren't you glad that Ika Trijsburg on the job? Because really, that optimism that she shared with me, I've got to tell you, sometimes I just find this stuff... I don't know. I don't trust the tech companies to do anything positive. I don't like the fact that they're lobbying, that they're so powerful in that space.

But as Ika says, we've got what we've got and we've got to do what we can do and change what we can change, do what we can do, and not worry too much about things that are outside our levels of influence. But certainly that evolving role of comms and engagement and the insight that Ika had there, that really, to look more broadly. It's not just about that comms team that sits at the centre, but everybody who's in that ecosystem. And how can you influence, how can you support, how can you think more broadly? And indeed understanding just exactly what is that unique response that's going to meet the needs of your local audience? It's going to be different everywhere, so you've got to ask lots of questions, do the research, test and learn, and really get after it and to understand just exactly where can you sit in terms of that pre-empting, the pre-bunking, and indeed the debunking and recovery? And what role does content play in all of that? So much to think about there.

But also, it's a fantastic playbook. I have indeed read all 52 pages of it, and I enjoyed it. And I learnt a lot, which is one of the great things that our academic community often gives us are these gifts. And there's so much there. And again, sit around, distribute it to your teams, why don't you? And have a conversation about it, about what indeed you can take from the research in order to strengthen your capacity to be able to support your organisations. But there you go. Wonderful conversation today. Very grateful to Ika for coming on today. And again, grateful for you for coming back once again.

If you do have a time for a rating or a review of the program, it does help us to be found. Please, if you could do that, that does help the program to be found. I was saying to Ika at the beginning of the conversation we've been going since 2015, and we're now up into the multiple hundreds of episodes in this very critically important area. Thanks for your support over many years. And we will keep doing it for many years because you can get to have conversations like that one today with Ika Trijsburg.

We'll be back at the same time in a fortnight with another episode and another guest from the wonderful world of government communications and engagement. Thanks once again to Ika Trijsburg. My name is David Pembroke. This is GovComms. And it's by for now.

Voice Over:

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