



## Interim Insights: A conversation with Mark Mann

In today's evolving corporate landscape, the role of an interim leader in Corporate Affairs has never been more pivotal. These leaders step in at moments of transition, challenge or transformation – bringing clarity, stabilising teams and reputations, and shaping strategic narratives when organisations need it most.

As part of our Interim Insights series, Olivia Grant, Associate Director and leader of our interim practice, is speaking with Director-level interim professionals to discuss approaches and frameworks that enable them to make immediate and meaningful impact. We will explore what exceptional interim leadership looks like and why it continues to be a critical asset for organisations navigating change.

### ► **About Mark Mann**

My career has two distinct phases. In the first, I served in the Civil Service as a policy advisor, speechwriter, and Private Secretary to Government Ministers. In the second, I have spent more than 20 years managing the reputations of some of the UK's most scrutinised and regulated organisations. I have advised Prime Ministers, Chairmen, and CEOs on high-profile reputation issues, including hostile takeovers, cyber leaks, and nationwide industrial action, many of which have dominated national news coverage.

### ► **When you step into an interim leadership role, what are the first signals you look for to understand whether the corporate affairs function is aligned – or misaligned – with the organisation's strategic priorities?**

There is no single indicator; success comes from gathering and analysing all available information. Before starting a new role, research the organisation's strategic priorities and assess whether they are reflected in external communications. Any misalignment can provide valuable insight. Request the latest engagement survey results and check for alignment with the organisation's vision and values.

### ► **Interim roles often mean entering during moments of change or crisis. How do you quickly assess the reputational risk landscape?**

With over 20 years of advising high-profile companies on reputational issues, I have developed the ability to identify red flags and address core issues quickly. Some reputational challenges are constant, while others evolve, so it is important to monitor media coverage and commentary. Whether in a role or preparing for a new assignment, I track key issues across the media and organisational responses to ensure that I'm best placed to provide strategic counsel when the opportunity arises.

## ► You're frequently the 'new face' in the room, sometimes managing established teams. What's your approach to earning trust rapidly with both senior executives and key external stakeholders?

It is essential to engage colleagues and key external stakeholders, clearly communicating decisions, their rationale, and their impact. Be transparent about timelines for change. Provide regular feedback to demonstrate progress and accountability. Trust is built, and concerns are eased when you show clear direction and deliverable results.

## ► Contractors are expected to deliver value immediately. What is your approach to restructuring teams?

What might have looked like a restructure could be reset. It could be that you have the right pieces in the wrong holes, or teams that, having been exposed to significant periods under pressure, have lost their mojo. Don't rush to conclusions but do move with purpose. Uncertainty breeds anxiety, and that helps nobody.

The focus should be on spending time with the individuals on the corporate affairs team and with those they work most closely with to understand what's going on. When the time comes to reset or restructure, be transparent and clear with what you're doing, why, the timeframe, and your expectations. My preferred method is to coach through change, and central to that is including the team in the reset or redesign.

When resetting teams, I've found *Campaign It! Achieving Success Through Communication* by Alan Barnard and Chris Parker is very helpful in getting teams to refocus and get back to being engaged and focused.

## ► What legacy do you aim to leave when stepping out of an interim role, and how do you measure the value of that longer-term legacy?

Each assignment begins with specific organisational requirements. However, experienced communications professionals add value by expanding what is possible. While stabilising an organisation, you can also reinvigorate the corporate affairs team and build confidence among senior executives. My goal is to advance every brief with clear, measurable outcomes, enabling all stakeholders to track progress and address potential issues early.

## ► What advice would you give to someone navigating the job market during a challenging geo-political time?

1. Stay on top of your brief. As a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and a Chartered Practitioner for 10 years, I am committed to ongoing professional development and adapting each year to changes in the media landscape.
2. Monitor the media closely. The most influential person in my career and my former boss, Ian Hargreaves, taught me the importance of always being across your brief. Each week, he'd check in to ask me what business editors and correspondents were reporting broadly and what they were thinking about us. Even when not in a role, staying informed about media trends is invaluable. There will always be a need for skilled communications professionals.

### How we can help

Whether you are seeking your next professional challenge or building a team to achieve lasting impact, Ellwood Atfield supports communications, policy, and advocacy professionals at every stage of their career. We welcome the opportunity to speak to you.

**Book a call**

For all other enquiries, please contact us using the details below.

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