



## **Episode 23 – Emotion at Work in the Workplace Chatting with Monica Parker (@monicaparker)**

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition. On today's episode we are looking at emotion at work in workplaces in particular. Because the theme of emotions in the physical workplace is something that has interested me for a few years, partly from a self interest point of view because I've worked in a number of different places and locations, I've worked from a mansion hall through to a great big open plan office. In the work that I do I get to go and visit lots of client offices as well. I get to experience lots of different places and I've always been fascinated by the way that physical spaces affect people's feelings and also how those feelings then can transform and move around a space. So I really wanted to get somebody on the podcast who knew what they were talking about more than me just talking about my experiences. Because often people talk about slides or bean bags or other things, ping pong tables, that's another thing, that look cool in the workplace, but I wanted to get someone on the podcast who knows a lot more about it than me. So let's get our guest on the air, so our guest today is Monica Parker, hello Monica.

Monica: Hi Phil, how are you today?

Phil: I'm very well thank you, how are you?

Monica: Yeah, excellent. Thanks for having me.

Phil: I'm really excited for you to be here as well. I think even before the podcasts went live I've been wanting to get somebody on to talk about the workplace, so I'm really, really excited for today. It's been nearly a year in the making for me to get someone on the podcast talking about the workplace so it's really good.

Monica: Oh, goodness, the pressure is on then.

Phil: Yeah, no pressure. But before we get into the topic in detail I wanted to ask you what I call an innocuous yet unexpected question. So what I'd like to know from you is, what makes a great travelling companion?

Monica: I have someone in mind because my first trip to Australia was with a co-worker and I was really nervous about it. Because I thought this is very intimate, you're in close quarters with this person for a long period of time. I discovered he was a marvellous travelling companion and what made him a great travelling companion was that he was easy going, he had a high level of EQ, so he was always noticing how I was feeling, he was a low stress, low pressure kind of guy, so nothing really got him too riled up. I would say that he was also a good traveller. I think to be a good companion you just have to enjoy it. That's my, I guess summary of a good travelling companion. If it's long term, curiosity helps too, that they're excited about things. They always say if you want to know if you've got a good partner for life lose your luggage early on in the relationship and you'll



learn how they deal with unexpected challenges. So I think to be able to go with the flow is probably the most important quality of a good travel companion.

Phil: I've not heard that one before about lose your luggage with somebody, that's a new one, I've not heard that one before. I like that idea.

Monica: Or run out of gas, that's a good one, you could run out of gas on a road trip too.

Phil: I guess something that puts you under an element of pressure I suppose in a way but not so much that it's an insurmountable amount of pressure?

Monica: Yeah, it's not life or death but it helps you see how someone deals with a little bit of unexpected chaos and whether they add to that situation, whether they exacerbate it or whether they actually help smooth over the wrinkles. I've found a good partner who I can lose the luggage with and he's definitely a guy who likes to smooth over the wrinkles for everybody, so that's a good quality.

Phil: We've never lost luggage but whenever we go away I'm always of the mantra, I think the only time it's been different is when my wife and I went on honeymoon to the Maldives, and then we over packed. My wife is a massive over packer and we didn't lose our luggage for long, our luggage arrived the day after we landed, so it wasn't like a lost forever it was just a day late. We were left in our travelling clothes for 24 hours or so.

Monica: If there's some place to be left in your travelling clothes probably the Maldives is not the worst.

Phil: Exactly. Whenever else we've been away I've always said there's always shops around.

Monica: None of it is insurmountable, yes.

Phil: Some of those qualities that you've talked about there, are they some of the qualities that you look for in people that you work with as well?

Monica: Well I think as a consultant being able to go with the flow is pretty important. I think the EQ quality as well, we're paid to listen as much as we're paid to give advice. So we deal with change. A lot of people want to call us workplace strategists, we're not, what we say is that we are human analytics and change consultancy that specialises in the future of work. Really at the heart we're talking about change and how people are going to manage change. Sometimes that change is unexpected, sometimes there's a little bit of chaos mixed in there. So we're there as I said to try to smooth out some of the wrinkles to help people feel less anxious about the process. So it's really important that while we hire for a certain level of capability and skill sets, that at the end of the day they're people that our clients will feel have a high degree of psychological safety with. That they'll feel safe with, that they'll be willing to experience change with them. I think that means, yeah, they've got to go with the flow, they've got to have high EQ and they have to enjoy what they do.

Phil: When you say human analytics and change consultancy then, can I unpick that title a little bit more?

Monica: Yeah, absolutely.

Phil: So what does human analytics mean then or how do you go about that human analytics?

Monica: There are a lot of folks out in the future of the work world who are ex-designers, who are ex-project managers or moves managers, and I think that they certainly have a skill set that can be brought to bear in the change field. I am believer that in the same way I go to my dentist for dentistry and I go to my mechanic to fix my car, I don't mix the two, that there is an actual science behind change and that science is social science. All of our consultants are master's level social scientists or above and the work that we do is gathering human analytics information, so gathering social scientific information that we then analyse to help us give one window into the organisation. It's very much like a thermometer, you're not going to take somebody's temperature and then go, oh but I can diagnose you wholly that way. It's a set of diagnostics that allow us to understand how the organisation is operating and then we go in and start really doing some of our ethnographic and observational research, really just talking to people to understand. That's where the communications element comes out. That's a bit more when we move from the heavy social science into the change, that's when we start using consultants who have experience in more of a corporate environment and they're mixing that with our consultants who have that social science background.

Phil: There was a lot in there as well that I wanted to ask more about. In terms of that social science bias then and the way that you go about gathering that data, are you doing that through interview, through observation, a combination of the two or are you analysing other...?

Monica: We have a few different ways. So we have online survey tools that use a predictive behaviour algorithm developed by a group of scientists out of UMass Amherst. We have a mobile app that people can download where we're able to gather photographic information, so people doing their own ethnographic research within their environment. We do observations and we also do interviews. We're quite cautious about the way that we do those, so we'll have different consultants collect and analyse one set of data and another consultant collect and analyse another, so that we're not coming into any of the analysis with a bias. I know that there are a lot of people that use survey tools out in the world and I would just encourage them to get someone who's a scientist in the science of surveys to understand that level of analytics, because I think there's a lot of bad survey data that's being thrown around. That people are not giving the rigour that they need to and that's something that we're really passionate about and stand very firmly behind is the social scientific data that we collect has a tremendous amount of rigour.

Phil: I was in with a client, I think it was last year and they asked me to...similar to you I did a cultural diagnostic piece, I went in and did some interviews with the representative sample of different populations within the organisation and then I transcribed those interviews. Plugged them into a corpus linguistics tool so that we could then look at it on a meta data level, what language were the different populations using and what could that tell us about their stance or their orientation towards different things within the organisation. The rigour that went into the questions that I asked

in my interviews was really important and as you said getting that validation from practitioners with experience in social science questioning and surveying. Then when I was asked to compare that with the, well not to compare it, because that's an inaccurate word, so when I was asked to look at my results in the context of the employer engagement survey results as an example, when I looked through the employer engagement survey questions, there were some really, really poorly phrased questions. Questions that were full of either presuppositions or leading or making implications and all sorts of things.

Monica: I think those bad surveys do a disservice then to everybody who tries to run a good survey. I still think a survey is a great way to collect a lot of information, it's great way to engage people. If you're authentic in your commitment to doing something once you get the data, I think they can be very helpful. They can't be the only thing you do and they can't happen in a vacuum but I think they're an incredibly impactful tool if done right. I don't think that people who don't have experience in it appreciate the depth that you go to, everything from whether it's a five point or a seven point fulcrum or non-fulcrum liquor scale to what methodology you use to analyse it. Even whether you're using R or SPSS in the analysis. There's so much detail that goes into it and to be fair I only scratched the surface, the hatchlings back in HQ, they're the ones who are the real geniuses behind this work. My job I think as the founder is to help deliver then the insights because the data is important and meaningful but then our job as consultants also is to help drive those insights. That's where combining things like you use sentiment analysis with observation data and envisioning, really helps us start to craft that what does it all mean? Because it's not enough for it just be data I think sometimes we're awash in too much for it to be insightful.

Phil: As you said earlier on, surveys are a data point just like interviews are a data point and it's about trying to build the richer picture that you get from the different data points is where some of the insight and the real benefit for individuals and organisations can come. You mentioned as well that people take pictures.

Monica: Yeah.

Phil: How does that form into the analysis?

Monica: We have a tool called Phido and what Phido does, we call it Pinterest for workplace emotions. In essence what it is, is the users, the staff at organisations, the employees will get questions fed to them through a mobile app that they download to their phone and it's on iPhone or android, and the app will ask them questions. The questions could be as simple as a keep, ditch, create exercise, which is great when we work with designers as well. So what would you keep about your workplace, what would you ditch and what would you create? But we'll also do some that will say, where are you eating your lunch today? What do you hope or fear the future of work is? They're able to take pictures or download pictures and then once they fill that out with their comment then they can see all of their colleague's pictures and comments and favourite them. So it creates a level of engagement, very much a small little social network for the organisation. What that allows us to do is start to get, again a picture is worth a 1,000 words, to start to capture some more visual information. We also know from an emotive point of view, from our research, that if you ask someone to respond in written language or to think in words it triggers their logical part of their



brain. But if you ask them to draw a picture, think in pictures, take a picture it triggers their emotive brain. Obviously you know that emotion at work is important, we're talking about changing their work homes, so we want to tap into that emotive part as well. We'll run the comments through sentiment analysis and that really helps us start to get into that, it's much more of a qualitative piece of work as opposed to a quantitative that we get from the survey. But it helps us to start to understand what are some of the real pinch points, some of the fears, some of the things that people don't want to lose and any kind of work place change. We found it to be incredibly interesting data that we get out of it and it's just fun, it's a little different way to engage people who perhaps aren't as keen taking a 15 minute survey online to capture them in a different way.

Phil: So the analysis then you said you do the assessment analysis of the text that comes with the pictures and then in terms of analysis of the pictures themselves do you do that by the likes or the shares or the favourites that other people get?

Monica: We do the likes and the shares, and the favourites, and then we also compare it to our basically benchmark database. We can say well most law firms will say their favourite thing about their work day is the view out of their office. Or most people say what they couldn't live without is coffee, so coffee is important. So it becomes something that we're able to be comparative. It's really, really helpful also for designers from an aesthetic point of view that they can start to see spaces that might exist within the space that are particularly useful and helpful. And then those that people really want to get rid of. I have a great story about the insight that we've gained from this. We were working with the Premier League, with the football league folks, and they were doing just a small brush up on their offices, and they wanted to really serve the mission of the organisation, they felt it wasn't doing a good enough job of that. They have, if you're ever lucky enough to go into the Premier League offices, just trophies everywhere and of course they have the big, big trophy, it's the Premier League trophy and then little trophies everywhere else. It was really interesting when we got the Phido data back that a number of people said that one of their favourite trophies was this much smaller one that was given for community events, for children in communities that were playing a smaller event that was sponsored by the Premier League. Which is surprising to people because they said well a) this is great because our mission is about bringing sport to everyone. But people just didn't realise that this mattered so much and it's been stuck away in this little corner. So they were able, which is a small thing, to move this trophy to a point of pride, to a place of pride where people could feel that while equally the Premier League sends its message of a really big sporting event, that it's more than that, it's about the mission. That was gold dust for us as consultants, for the designers and for the business as a whole because they said, oh well not only is this a great message, but it means that our mission is being really internalised by the people who work for us.

Phil: That's a really great story. I was just trying to think either in my experience or if I may be so bold in my opinion, would that piece of data have elicited itself through a standard survey or through standard interviews? And I don't think it would.

Monica: We didn't, we found in the interviews people said sport matters and we like the trophies but we didn't narrow it down to that one. It was we like the celebration of the trophies, we like sport, we like being a part of a history of something that matters but not that particular thing. That

was such an easy fix and one we didn't pick up anywhere else. Yeah, it was a nice little nugget to see that there is a richness there. That's what it is, it's a tapestry, it's layers, if you look at art or music or any of those. If you're monolithic, if it's flat in its approach then the output will be flat. But if you can come at it from a number of different angles, which we do, then you start to get this nuance and this richness to the data, and then you can nuance and richness to the insights and the recommendations that you deliver.

Phil: How do clients respond to that data? If we stick with that Premier League example, I can hear in your voice a real strong sense of surprise and pride in that example. What other emotions or other responses do you get from clients when you present the findings from the real variety of data sets that you collect?

Monica: Well sometimes there is happy surprise, sometimes there's not so happy surprise. Often times there will be a few very senior people that will say I sort of suspected this is what it would be but now I can prove it. But, yeah, sometimes it's hard, we joke that if you've ever been to therapy a good therapist will say well my job is just to hold a mirror up to you, I'm not here to tell you you're right or wrong, it's just so that you can look at yourself more effectively. That's what this data does, it holds a mirror up, we're not trying to be pejorative when we tell someone what's happening or judgemental, but it's to say this is who your organisation is through this lens, is this what you want to be or do you want to change it? Sometimes there's some tough information to swallow, sometimes there are comments that can be hurtful even if you have people that are longer tenure within an organisation and they feel that maybe some of the new hires are not fond of the culture, and those other people who are responsible for building the culture, they may feel disenfranchised because of that. But at the end of the day most of the organisations who hire us did so because they have come to terms with this fear of knowing. They know that knowing of it itself is power and that then what they choose to do with that is really up to them as an organisation. Yeah, there is sometimes a bit of anxiety that we experience prior to it and a little bit of consternation or concern. But we usually work through that pretty quickly to say look these are the things that are solvable, these are the things that are going to be harder, let's break it out into phases and see how we can help move you forward.

Phil: When I think about workplace design a lot of the examples that I've been part of when I've been in organisations is when that workplace design is done from a top-down point of view. So someone will arrive with a plan, whether it be a desk plan or a layout plan and say this is what we're looking to do, and then people discuss and debate where stuff should be and so on and so on. But it sounds like what you're trying to do is do workplace design from a bottom-up point of view, would that be a fair...?

Monica: Well yes and no. So we're not designers. In the same way that I would say that designers probably shouldn't be doing social science, social scientists should not be doing design. I did study design so I can speak the language of it, I think I understand the basic tenance of it but I am not a designer none of the hatchlings are. But what we're doing is we are collecting social scientific data about space, we're also collecting it about people and about technology which are the oft quoted three spheres of workplace. I think that there are a couple of different theories on how to approach design. I am of the belief that and there are folks that have said that it's not that complicated. And

probably design itself is not that complicated. But even if you designed a great workplace and didn't engage people in the process of that journey then you're going to have potentially a culture problem. So really we're culture experts that can help ensure that the workplace appropriately reflects and aligns with either that present culture or your ideal aspirational future culture. At the end of the day I think design should be fluid because it was only ten years ago that the iPhone was invented, the whole world has changed since that time. I can't even imagine what will happen in the next decade, that's usually the length that somebody signing a lease, ten years with a five year break. So the idea that it's set it and forget it is I think is a thing of the past. Design needs to be able to be iterative. But the key is having that baseline of people data so that as you iterate you're always coming back to that question of, well what did we hear from people and how can we align it with them? But there's no question, people should have access to natural light, air quality should be good, they should be able to find places to be quiet and places to be collaborative. All these different elements. But I think more important than space is that people should have psychological safety, people should have a sense of wellbeing, they should be able to have fair options for progress through the ranks, they should have flexible working available to them. To me those are more important than the design, the design can be a facilitator for those things.

Phil: Do those things trump design?

Monica: Absolutely. I think you can have design that is so poorly aligned with basic human needs or with the organisational culture that it becomes a constant sticking point. But we only need to look at what Stewart Brand calls Low Road Design. So we have lots of organisations that started in basements or in garages and they were able to flourish in that environment. We know that there are a lot of different ways that design can meet certain needs. So I believe that the cultural element will trump design, however if we look at the idea of a two factor theory, that you can still be super engaged but really, really annoyed at the fact that the toilets are always dirty. Those two things can exist simultaneously at the same time and still create a lot of issues and conflict because the toilets are always dirty or the open plan is always noisy, but I can still be super engaged. I think that the idea that it's some sort of hierarchy of needs that at first you get the space right and then the culture right. Or first the culture right and then the space right. They really exist I think within two factors. But the culture is in my opinion a more meaningful and more difficult nut to crack.

Phil: You could have the sexiest, coolest, quirkiest workplace in the world with loads of natural light, with individual air conditioned pods so you never had the disagreements about who's hot or who's cold. You could have table tennis tables and a bar at the end of the room and you could have all of these things but if the culture is toxic then none of those things will matter because of the overriding culture?

Monica: Absolutely. It's called Herzberg's Motivation Hygiene Theory. So that's all those things you're talking about are hygiene and maybe touch a little bit on motivation. But if you've got a horrible toxic culture where people are being harassed, where there is rife favouritism, where there's bullying, where the business is unethical, where the work/life balance is so out of whack that you have people that have absenteeism and no one cares. There's no question that all that space will become a gilded cage, that's not going to help anybody. We only need to look at Yahoo, they





had some pretty groovy workplaces but the culture was toxic and we've seen what's happened to them. I think they are both important and I believe that design matters but culture is absolutely key.

Phil: Because if culture is about how people feel, how in your experience then has that linked in with or overlapped with the physical spaces that people work in?

Monica: Space can be a great messenger of culture, so if everybody's expected to work and I'll give you an example which I will not name the client, of a legal client that basically used some of our information to continue to give all of the legal staff palatial offices with beautiful views and then max packed all of their non-legal onto one floor overlooking a, we'll say not a nice space. That sends a very clear message. To be fair I think it was very aligned with their culture regrettably, which is that legal and fee earners have this much value and we'll show that in our workplace, and non-legal, non-fee earners have much less value and therefore we will give them a much less enjoyable space. You can see that on the positive side where if the business decides to go into open plan that everybody works in open plan. So this isn't based on a hierarchical nature that they say this is an organisational decision, there's nothing more hypocritical than working with a group that says oh we're very flat, we're a very flat organisation, but then all the executives say everybody else should work in open plan but we need our offices. I think that you can send that message by your ways of working, so are people while they're given these different work settings, are you actually giving them the organisational freedom and the technology in order to take advantage of them. I think using technology as the new key to the executive toilet, the idea that well I'm higher up the food chain so I get nicer tech than you do. I think that sends a big message. So I think messages in the culture around who's valued, hierarchical issues around freedom, flexibility and authenticity can all be very well displayed or less well displayed in a work environment, in the workplace design. I also think there's a great opportunity that gets lost in a lot of corporate environments which is the idea of a narrative workplace. Every business hopefully has a story to tell and I think that a lot of offices don't tell that story. There's some work that Adam Grant did that some of his research said that people's performance levels can increase by as much as 400% when they're given the opportunity to talk to someone who was a direct recipient of whatever problem you're solving for them. Imagine if somehow your workplace could tell that message of the people who were being helped by whatever it is you're doing. It's not just for non profits, it can be for any business, every business hopefully is solving someone's problem, is making their life a bit easier or richer some way. To tell that story as opposed to some of these cookie cutter offices that really maybe they have logos everywhere but don't tell a story, I think that's a lost opportunity.

Phil: Again I'm not asking you to do a name drop, have you worked with clients that have done that narrative workplace particularly well and if so what strategies did they use then? I suppose I'm thinking if I'm listening to this podcast then and thinking well that sounds really great, this narrative workplace idea, but what would that look like in reality? That's what was behind my question.

Monica: I will say the best one I've ever seen in the world is not one of my projects but I still feel like I have to say it because I think they did a brilliant job of it, which is IKEA. IKEA in Malmo Sweden. They did a really elegant way of integrating their product throughout the space. It's a very seamless experience in the way that going to an IKEA store tries to be quite seamless. You're led through the space in a very welcoming way. They don't have any hot food on site, they encourage you to go



across the street to the IKEA building, to the IKEA shop that's there, to have any hot food, so you're interacting with the customers. So again you're always having that opportunity to see the people you're serving. Everything from their staircases being made with offcuts of table legs that they used to use to some of their quiet booths being made out of some of their shelving. I just thought it was a really elegant way to design for a space. Probably one of our best examples is an organisation out of Australia called Porter Davis, and Porter Davis are luxury home builders and their spaces just were in the suburbs, very non-descript sort of corporate spaces. These are people who are coming sometimes to buy their first home, it's a big investment, talk about a story to tell. This is places where families will be grown, where people will draw the little lines up the side of the door jamb to show their children's growth. It's meaningful stuff. The designers that they brought in and with the work that we collected, they actually had all of the different neighbourhoods in this one giant floor plate reflect the different styles of homes that they design. It was done in a really beautiful way but again they fundamentally changed the culture as well, it was voted one of the best workplace of the year in Australia. They went to all flexible working, so work anywhere any time, hot desking, fitness programmes, fresh fruit and exercise, and space. It was a transformation not just of space but of people and technology as well.

Phil: Both of those sound amazing.

Monica: I was blown away but I can speak of Porter Davis, that takes courage to do what they did, that was a big leap.

Phil: In what way?

Monica: It was so different than what people had experienced in the past. It asked them to work in an entirely different way and it could have gone horribly wrong. So there was a lot of boldness there because the organisation it didn't just need a physical change there was a lot of culture work and process work that needed to be done. I think sometimes leaders are afraid that when you start to unpick things then they'll be on the hook for fixing them all. That's certainly not the case, you don't have to fix everything you can just own that there are problems and that you're going to do the best to ameliorate them. But this organisation really decided to try to fix everything that they unpicked and I was really proud of them for that.

Phil: I guess the bit that really resonates with me is the way that it was done to fully align with the stories that the consumer or the customer has. So rather than the driver being behind making some of those changes, whether it be about work anywhere any time or making sure we're looking after somebody's physical health and exercise or whether it be supporting somebody's emotional health and emotional wellbeing. Rather than doing those things because people say we should or because we want to save costs or reduce office space or whatever that might be, what was behind it was a how can we create a workplace or an environment where it's aligned with what we as an organisation do. That's what I heard anyway, would that be fair?

Monica: Yes, it is. And that it was evidence based. I think the challenge that every organisation has is that they might say well then we can get a designer and they can do all that work with us at the senior level. But I can say that a change of that magnitude had you not engaged with everyone to



say what are your thoughts, what are your fears, how can we support you on this? So that was reflected as well and the process, that's part of what made it successful, they had a full time change manager and support from Hatch for a year to do that project.

Phil: If I was to go to, I was going to say the other end of the scale but I'm not sure if that's the right phrase either. Let's think about that from a different point of view then, if I was to put myself in the shoes of your average organisational development or HR practitioner who might be listening to this podcast, and they didn't have that full time somebody within the organisation and the support from Hatch. What could that individual start to do to help them think more about the way that some of these aspects could be showing up in their workplaces?

Monica: I think the key to me is having an authentic regular trusted communication loop. So really listening to what's going on in your work life and that includes the physical built environment. How do you think we can support you and then feeding back, you are heard and this is what we're doing, on a very regular basis. So many organisations do maybe a year annual survey and there might be two or three questions in it about space. I would also say that HR should try to work more closely with facilities to elicit some of that information, maybe their facilities is gathering some data that HR can do something about and vice versa. But when we work with an organisation that says look we can't hire a full time person and we just want you to come in and be some of the course correction, the rocket fuel for the change programme, what are the things that we can do? That is the key element is to say decide what's right for your culture but develop some mechanism, be it a pulse survey or an email or happy/not happy buttons or whatever it might be, of a regular feedback loop, it's got to be a loop up and down and back up and again. You miss a week and then you've lost trust. If you say we're going to send a survey out every Friday and then you don't do it on a Friday then you've broken the trust. There's a social contract there that you've broken. I think being consistent, being authentic, radical transparency. There's a book by Chip Conley called Emotional Equations and what Conley set out to do was to understand the relationship between words. Because he said regular equations are relationships between numbers, mathematical equations, so I want to understand relationships between words. He picked the word 'anxiety' and the reason he picked anxiety is because there was a study done by Accenture that said anxiety is the single most common emotion felt in the workplace. So he said anxiety equals uncertainty times powerlessness, it's not additive it's multiplicative. Meaning that any increase in uncertainty, any increase in powerlessness increases anxiety. We know that anxiety is not a positive emotion in the workplace. So by creating that degree of certainty and keeping that people know that they'll be heard and then trying to give over some modicum of power, whatever that might be, that will decrease anxiety. But as soon as they feel disempowered, as soon as that certainty that they have has gone that anxiety will spike. So anything that as an organisation you can do to give over control and to give a sense of certainty will improve people's aspect on work.

Phil: You've just added a book to my reading list, thank you.

Monica: It's a good one. I particularly like that equation and to be fair I use it just about every chance I get because I think it's really powerful. I know that executives have the most of both of those, they have the most certainty. There's uncertainty in the world but they have the most power and the most certainty out of any part of the organisation. So if there's something keeping them up

at night imagine how the rest of the organisation feels. To be empathetic to that anxiety and to help people, I think a lot of executives think I will hold onto information until I have the whole story, because I don't want to create anxiety. But they've got to start realising that that news is travelling whether you want it to or not, people are talking and the sooner that you can start to share and create a level of transparency then in my experience that anxiety begins to decrease.

Phil: I was doing some mentoring recently with the HRD, the organisation was in a state of turmoil and uncertainty about future and so on. The conversation we were having was, what should we share, how should we share it, how much should we share and how quickly should we share it? I said well the more of the void you have the more that...people want to fill that void and they will fill the void with gossip or with rumour or with supersession or even just blatant manufactured information if needs be because the void is the worst kind of place to be. The response I got was, yeah, but the challenge with that is if any of this got out then that could affect the long term commercial success and future of the organisation. I said well for me there's got to be somewhere in between, if it can't be all it can't be nothing either. So there needs to be something in between and even if that is I want to reassure everybody that we are working incredibly hard to find a future and your long term stability of the company is important or securing success or securing jobs or whatever that might be, there needs to be some kind of story that you tell. It needs to be a true story, don't make stuff up, to reduce that uncertainty has got to be a good thing. Because the more vague you leave it and the longer you leave it vague the worse it will be. I said at a minimum you need to reassure people that they have a choice about their future, so even acknowledging something like I can understand that people want to be going and looking on job boards and if they're looking around for other roles. I understand that completely and if I was in your shoes I'd probably be doing the same thing as well, because we don't know what the future is going to hold and I want you to know as soon as we can share then we will. That sort of thing I said for me that's a much better place to be than just saying nothing and leaving radio silence.

Monica: Absolutely. And that is a similar concern we hear when people are considering on embarking a workplace analysis, well what if we learn things and then we can't do them all and I'm not sure if we should and it's a bit of this feeling of as you said all or nothing. It doesn't have to be that way, let's just start to see what can you tackle, how do we start to pass this out and then what can you communicate? So of course you can't negatively impact the commerciality of certain aspects. We find that when people are negotiating for a new building that they want to move to, we can't tell people what building or what neighbourhood because it could affect the negotiation. But you can still say to people, some part of it and say what you can't say, say what you can't fix. These are the things we learned, we don't know how to fix these yet but we've heard it and we'll do everything we can to try to mitigate it. Or these things we can't communicate to you quite yet because we're not sure what the impact would be, but we know that you want more information and we're going to try to communicate it as soon as we do. I tell people to regularly communicate, I don't have anything else to say right now but we just want you to know that we're here and we're listening. That can be powerful as opposed to this radio silence that organisations engage in and think no it's all fine because the executives are all chitchatting and know that things have progressed. The last the employees have seen was a survey that went out and then nothing else. I think that can be quite demoralising, again going back to the uncertainty and the powerlessness, you think I engaged in this exercise they asked me to do and now I've heard nothing back.

Phil: I'm curious, so off air you mentioned that you have a couple of new hatchlings coming onboard and you mentioned the word hatchlings already, so when it comes to, and when I say the workplace I don't necessarily just mean in terms of design, I'm talking in the broader sense as we've been discussing through the conversation so far. So what do you do within Hatch to apply what you know and what you learn through your work, how do you use that and apply that within Hatch and with your hatchlings themselves?

Monica: So it starts before we even hire, we had a few hires that didn't quite fit in the early years, we tried to understand why that was. What we learned is that we were hiring from pools of designers and from folks that didn't have a social science background trying to teach them the social science. What we've learned is we need to flip that around. So now we blind hire, we work with a great recruiter who helps us with that and basically she knows that we won't look at anybody that doesn't have a master's in social science or above. The reason for that is that we need them to understand in particular the statistical analysis that we know one learns in a master's social science degree. She will collect the CVs, take any identifying information off the top of them, send them to us. We'll rank the CVs and then say that we want the top five CVs to write a blog post. We'll get the blog posts, we'll rank those and then based on the top say three of those we'll ask those people then to come in. At that point we still don't know which blog belongs to who, which CV belongs to who, we'll ask them to present to us a deck on some aspect of the future of work. By that point we might start to suss out who belongs to who and then we vote as a team, and based on that is how we hire. One of the reasons I also did this is we kept hiring women and I thought am I biased that we're hiring women because I want to hire more women to the industry. I was worried that maybe my own hiring biases were effecting the people that we were bringing in. Interestingly now that we have moved to blind hiring we're still hiring women and in fact right now we've only got two men and the rest are women. So that's just the beginning. What we do once they join we're members of WeWork, so we're one of WeWork's oldest tenants. So we have two offices in London, one in Melbourne and we're looking at opening one in New York as well. And that really helps from an organisational cultural point of view because it's hard being a consultant and frequently if consultants are doing their job well, you don't see each other very often because everybody's on client site. So to have a community that supports you even when you can't be with your other hatchlings we find is very important. We also don't police time so we have a work anywhere, anytime culture. Come into the office, don't come into the office. We have a staff member who's from Munich, she will frequently go and work for a week from Munich and work virtually for us, that's not a problem. And then we are trying to slowly build on our mission together and it's hard as you are growing, growing, growing to build that. But what we also don't want is for...there's this expression we see this in our work where people say oh it's like a family. And we do think that we treat people as if it's a family, but sometimes a family also means that you're afraid to call people out for their behaviour, because well I wouldn't want to hurt my family member's feelings. So we're really trying to balance that dynamic. Two of our most recent hires we're hoping will start to bring a bit more rigour to how we approach some of those elements as opposed to what's been a fairly loose family environment up to now, to create more solid feedback mechanisms. We use technology to support as well, so we use Asana, we use Slack, Dropbox and the like which allow us to help support each other from anywhere in the world.



Phil: Because I was interested in one of the phrases that you used right towards the start of our recording, you said we're redesigning their work homes, which I thought was an interesting way to phrase it. The reason that that's jogged in my memory was because mentioning family there and the idea of they're linked together family and homes.

Monica: People spend almost more waking time with their colleagues and their work environment than they do anywhere else and yet people have so little say in the experience. That's why it's naturally very anxiety provoking if people are going to change it. Even if it's not great the notion that it's going to be changed is frightening. If someone were to come in and say well I'm going to change everything about your house, wait a minute, this is my house I live here. It is their work home and what I want is for people's work homes to be more compelling, to be more welcoming. I went into this work, I have largely a background in non profit and activism. I went into this work because I believe that with better work comes a better world. I truly believe that and believe that if people can feel better about their work, if they can feel more valued then they will be happier, they will have a greater sense of wellbeing and balance, that will have a knock-on effect to their families, to their communities. I'm a big believer as well in work not needing to always be what you get paid for, so the idea of universal basic income is something that's very appealing to me. So that our work can have a real meaning and that meaning isn't necessarily based on the monetary value that society puts on it. Yes, I'm very passionate that it's not just your office it's your work home and we do try to cultivate that at Hatch as well.

Phil: You mentioned about the universal basic income there, I'm going to use that as a segue into the future of work then. What does your research or experience or what does your insight tell you about what the future of work is likely to be?

Monica: I don't have a crystal ball. I think there is some very interesting research that's being done by some other people. One of the groups we're partnered with is an organisation called Foundation for Young Australians. They've done a lot of work about what the future looks like for young people today. Two of the things that I find most intriguing are the ideas that this need for constant learning. One of the primary elements of resiliency will come from our ability to learn skills at a rate that perhaps we haven't seen before. What that means then also is that rather than graduating with a degree that is somewhat monolithic, degrees will look more at skills clustering. So saying that you have this cluster of skills that is around delivering a message or you have a cluster of skills that's around being a technician, but it's not specific. Because at least what their research shows is that a child entering or a young person entering the workforce today will have 16 jobs in five industries. Some of those jobs will be because people will choose to move, some of them will be lost or fundamentally changed to automation, some of them may just be redundancies. But as people move through these jobs they will not just simply stay in one industry. This is a big blow to some of the very traditional models like law, where people are saying I don't want to go into law and stay in law. I don't want to become a partner. I think the knock on effect of this need to always be learning with people changing jobs and industries more often, is that the benchmarks that we set for people about what success is, is going to naturally change. So the idea of becoming a partner in a law firm that was the pinnacle of what you sought within the legal sphere, but now more and more incoming legal grads are saying not really interested in that. What are they interested in? Access, meaningful matters, learning from the smartest, the best and the brightest within the firm and then having the

ability potentially to pivot. I think recognising that there will be different benchmarks that we measure ourselves against certainly is something I see in the future. Ability, I don't see automation as this bogeyman, I don't see it as a negative at all. I see it as the ability for the crappy work that we probably didn't want to be doing anyway to be removed from our lives and then what we're left with either is more meaningful work or more time. What I'd love to see is a model whereby there was not so much judgement, if people chose to work half time, part time, jobs where the remuneration was not as great because they felt it was more meaningful. But they could do that with the safety net of knowing that they could see their families, that they could have healthcare and that they could have a decent quality of life.

Phil: I was reading a piece I think it was on the BBC website today for some research that has been done in the UK and how to, I want to make sure I get it right, I reference it, there was a report by the Resolution Foundation chaired by a guy called Lord Willets talking about how the contract between young and old has broken down. Recommendations included giving £10,000 to all young adults at the age of 25 which is funded by a lifetime receipts tax that would replace inheritance tax. So the idea being that an older generation pays more tax and then what that does is that then gives a...but rather than saying a universal income it gives a set figure to say right here's £10,000 at the age of 25, that would allow you then to, in a way, do what you want with it. But it could provide a strong deposit towards property, it could provide for additional retraining, it could provide for whatever. But recognising the fact that the younger generation have got more to do to achieve the same kind of things that the older generation currently have. If that makes sense?

Monica: I want to try all of these things, I think that some of the models we have there is just this growing disparity between the haves and the have nots. I believe that when work becomes this thing that people dread so that they can just get money to put on the table or money to put in the bank so they can put food on the table, that doesn't help us as a society. I want to see the data, I don't want us to just assume, I like the pilots of all these. I don't want to assume that any one model works or doesn't work. Again I'm an analytics person I want to see the data but I'm very encouraged by some of the pilots that are being done around universal basic income and that are slaying these sacred cows of well if you just give people money they'll just sit around and be lazy all day. Which is not in fact the inherent nature of people. People do want to do meaningful work and to contribute, that's sort of what is in our basic nature.

Phil: I think I want to bring us together and start to wrap it up then if that's all right?

Monica: Yeah.

Phil: Earlier on I asked if you were an average HR organisational development type person what could they do to start themselves down this road. Is there anything else that you would add to that? What could some starting steps be for people to start thinking about some of the areas that we talked about today?

Monica: I think it goes back to starting to ask the questions, really think about how can you engage people in a process of authentically understanding people's needs and then responding to them? I don't think that in the initial it has to be complicated. I think there comes a time in all of these larger





transformations where you do need to pull in experts. Those experts may exist within the organisation or you may need to get them from outside the organisation, but to start, just start by asking real questions, and they may not be the perfect questions, and they may be a bit biased here or there, asking questions and really listening to the responses and trying to react to them in a meaningful way. That sounds simple because people go, oh I do that every day. But maybe just to question really how much commitment are you getting in that? I would also look at how are you going to access resources, how are you going to access decision makers once you gather this information what is your end goal? But at the end of the day I think it just starts with a really meaningful listening exercise.

Phil: Is it unfair, listening is really hard and is really hard to do, especially in a workplace where you already work. What I mean by that is there are the old stories that everybody says they hear, so when you say, if I was to take one of yours from earlier on, what would you keep, what would you...?

Monica: Oh, keep, ditch, create.

Phil: Yeah, even if you went with that, in the workplace tell me what would you keep, what would you ditch, what would you create? The risk is when someone starts to respond to that question you hear what you think they're going to say. You hear what you expect them to say not what they're actually saying.

Monica: Absolutely, that's the risk and that's why I think at some point when you really start to do the meaningful work you probably need some guidance. But I don't think that that's any different than anything else. If you want to lose 20 pounds you can read a bunch of stuff online about how to do it and then eventually you may need somebody's help to do that. Weight Watchers have been proven to be one of the best ways to lose weight. Why? Because you're with a community and those are people that know what they're doing. If you have something that needs to be done to your house, plumbing, you may do a little bit, you watch some videos on YouTube D.I.Y and then eventually you might have to bring somebody in. I think that there's tweaks that can be made, but there's always a risk. These are people, they're humans, you're not going to get 110% right every time. I guess we'll go back, this is a nice way to bring it all full circle, because what makes a great travelling companion? What makes a great co-worker? What makes a great person in HR who's going to support? Is someone who goes with the flow, has a high level of EQ and I think that those two elements that if you can look at yourself and say I'm really, really trying to listen to this person and I'm willing to be found wrong, either now or at some point in the future and deal with that with a little bit of personal chaos and issues with my confirmation bias that might occur, then I think that that's the answer. If you're willing to go there then I think that there's power in that.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you. A couple of final questions then, so as we worked our way through, I've captured a few references and links for places. So we talked about the Adam Grant study in terms of performance levels. I'll put some links into that particular study. We've talked about the emotional equations book. I didn't catch the author when you said it, who was the author of that?





Monica: Chip Conley. I can send you this and I can send you that and the information on Porter Davis, there's a great video that they've produced about the outputs on that. The Adam Grant study as well if you like?

Phil: Yeah, that would be lovely. If there's any other books or videos or TED Talks of anything that you would recommend for people that you think if you're interested in finding out more, if you're interested in reading more then here are some really good places to start. That might be everything from, I don't want you to create a massive bibliography, but if there are some key texts or some key videos or key audio that you think you know what this is a really important thing, then I'll put those in the show notes so that our audience can get hold of those if they want to.

Monica: Great.

Phil: My final question, is there anybody that you would recommend or anybody you think we should seek out to try and get as a future guest onto the podcast?

Monica: That's a loaded question, there's so many marvellous people I'm fond of. One of them is a woman called Ann o'Dea who I'm privileged to be on the advisory board for an event called Inspirefest that happens every year. Inspirefest's goal is to drive greater diversity in STEM, but she always has a future of work section on that. I think what is really interesting is recognising that the science part of STEM includes social science as well and psychology. She does a really brilliant job of that. I just think she's an incredible thought leader and will have some really interesting perspectives. I think that she's someone that comes to mind.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you. In which case all that's left to do is to say thank you, huge thank you very much for your time today, Monica, I've really, really appreciated it and we've covered a lot of ground and it's been really, really interesting. You've got me thinking deeply and hard so, yeah, I'm very grateful for that thank you.

Monica: Thank you, Phil, it was a real pleasure and it's fun to be able to talk to somebody about something that I'm so passionate about, that's my life's work. So I appreciate the time and you have a terrific day.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you.