Episode 35 – Emotion at Work in Digital Body Language
Chatting with Jo Cook (@LightbulbJo on Twitter)

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition and my guest today is someone that we've been chatting, I think for about five months about having a conversation about the topic we are going to talk about today so I'm delighted that I finally got my finger out and actually done something about it and organised an opportunity to chat with our guest today. I'm a bit nervous about chatting with our guest because she's this virtual digital interaction queen and because we are recording this podcast virtually, I am a bit, got to make sure I do well. Must make sure I do all the right things and I suppose the topic we're talking about today that also links into why I'm a little bit nervous. Anyway enough about me, let's get our guest on the air so I'd like to welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, Jo Cook. Hi Jo.

Jo: Hello, I've got the biggest grin and I'm just laughing at that introduction because thank you so much but also you're brilliant at what you do so I don't really see that you need to worry about me at all.

Phil: Well it's one of those, so the topic we are talking about today is digital body language and you and I can't see each other so one of the things that I do with all of the podcasts that I record virtually is I only do it on an audio only call so I don't do the video bit because what I've experienced in the past is if you have the video bit it sounds, the interaction changes because we can see each other but the audience can't see you and they can't see me so I do it with the cameras off to make it an actual conversation rather than us talking on video where we would pick up other cues, does that make sense?

Jo: Well it makes perfect sense to me in that's kind of what we are here to talk about.

Phil: Kind of what we are talking about yeah (laughs). Alright so we won't go down there yet, we'll hold that because as always we start the Emotion at Work podcast with an innocuous yet unexpected question and I had one in my head before I pressed the record button and it completely disappeared and then Jo mentioned something and I thought, ah yes, that's what we'll do, that question will work, so my innocuous yet unexpected question is what was the last thing you talked to your hairdresser about?

Jo: (Laughs) oh I knew I shouldn't have joked about my new haircut. What was the last thing I talked to her about? Probably something about exercise because she's been getting into running and she runs a lot over the winter and Christmas and I like swimming and it's all about health and what's right for you and if anybody's met me they know that I am definitely not a runner but it's about what's right for individuals in terms of their own, whatever their goals are for fitness so we were probably talking about that and healthy eating, something along those lines.

Phil: Okay, so I similarly had my haircut on Saturday but even though I was having my haircut the whole conversation was about my son Joseph who was also having his haircut at the same time so

he was sat in the chair next to me. So there were four chairs in the barbers that I go to and he was sat in the one next to me and he'd taken a book into the chair to read and both the lady that was cutting his hair and the lady that was cutting my hair were both talking about his reading so the one cutting his hair was talking to him about it and helping him with the book and the other one was talking to me about it, "How old is he? What does he like to read?" And all that sort of stuff so I'd love to say it was all about me but it wasn't. It was nothing to do with me.

Jo: What I found funny about my haircut is because I have gone from really long to a bit shorter to proper short and my hairdresser cut it and did everything and styled it and she gave me the mirror to look in and I kind of went, "Yep that's good, that's good" look around and then I went, "Can we go a bit shorter" and she just nodded like I knew you were going to say that.

Phil: I'm tempted to turn the camera on now so I can see your super short hair, but I won't, I won't do that. I will resist the temptation. I will save that one for off-air. Okay so we haven't got that video channel then, so we haven't got the opportunity to see each other which we said earlier on links into the topic of conversation that we were going about today, now I think digital body language is a really massive topic. It spans lots of different areas but I guess I want to clarify what digital body language is or might be so shall we start there. What working definition do you use to describe what digital body language is?

Jo: So there's a few different ways you could look at this topic. One is from the roots of the term if you like. So Steve Woods was very much instrumental in using this term digital body language and the way he explains it on his blog is it's the aggregate of all the digital activity you see from an individual and he goes on to say that's emails that are opened and clicked, websites visited, Google searches, referrals from social media, webinars attended, all sorts of different things. So that's very much from a data and a marketing point of view and that's really great because you can use that in learning management systems, your e-learning design, your moocs, whatever it is that you're doing around your content and your delivery you can use that information to analyse people's behaviour around what they're doing in work, in communication in applying these things and make adjustments so I think that's a good starting point. I develop it on from there.

Phil: Okay so you said there were three I think, you said there were three roots?

Jo: I might have done. That's the main one in terms of digital body language. The second one is taking it from that marketing aspect and looking at that from a learning lens if you like around the content. I think the third area for me and this is where I really concentrate on it is it's about doing something different from face-to-face communication like your saying, we don't have our video on right now so we are having a different type of conversation from face-to-face so most people will know that I focus on webinars, virtual classrooms and the other stuff that goes with that and in modern learning that includes communities and social media and so on, so actually digital body language is about all of those things as well and how can we do that really well so that we don't just go huh, we're not in the same room together therefore it's not as good.

Phil: Okay you did a podcast recently with the lovely folk at Good Practise.

Jo: Ah yes, I did.

Phil: Which is why are all webinars rubbish I think was the working title.

Jo: Something like that.

Phil: And that was what prompted me to pick up my phone and DM you and say "Oh, we must get that digital body language thing booked in" because I guess and I'm not a person to create the definitions by anyway but that big broad one in terms of the digital persona that we create based on the sites we visit, the stuff we buy, the things we retweet, the likes we give on Facebook and all of those things and aggregating that up to create a persona for somebody. When I think about digital body language I, that phrase takes me, I think similarly to you into the how can we interpret people's stance or sentiment or position or perspective on things when we are communicating with them digitally. I'm interested in the active bit, whether it be through a webinar, through a mooc, through a…

Jo: For social media for instance.

Phil: Yeah all of that stuff, so @thatmarkgilroy on Twitter and I had a conversation I think offline a while ago about emojis and what do emojis tell us about individuals and all that sort of stuff as well.

Jo: So yeah that comes into it, absolutely.

Phil: Because when I was researching the term, I like you found all this stuff about that broader digital persona aspects, which is unbelievably fascinating and that was arguably that's what the, if I may get slightly political for a moment, that's what the likes of Cambridge Analytica do, did before they went bust, or "bust" should I say in inverted commas, you can't see me doing that in inverted commas but "bust".

Jo: No I can't (laughs).

Phil: (Laughs) but that's, in terms of building that overall perspective and persona on or about the individual to try and then use that to determine what they're like.

Jo: Yeah and it's also, it's a lot about the detail as well so in Steve Wood's blog he says in the same way that body language as read by sales person managing a deal, it's an amalgamation of facial expressions, body posture, eye motions and many other small details. Digital body language is the amalgamation of all digital touch points and certainly from the data and the analysis part it really can be about drilling down into that detail, so yes it's about aggregating up but also it's about drilling down so I think those two aspects of the data part of it are really interesting too.

Phil: So aggregating up to a persona and then when is the drilling down take you then? Drilling down into, is that like user experience? Is that where that's going?

Jo: Yeah I think you can get into user experience, user design, customer service and it goes into, that's where the detail comes in and that could be analysis from a data point of view of dumping everything into a spreadsheet and what comes out or I think it could also be really manual analysis. So I have been doing some analysis on the training journal webinars recently that we run. All sorts of different stuff and I haven't got the greatest amount of data and the greatest depth of data but just by exporting what I do have and looking at it either through a spreadsheet or just looking at what's available to me, so one of the things that came up was the amount of chat messages in a session. So on the #TJ Wow sessions they'll be 200 messages of public chat for instance and it was just interesting, well what does that mean? Does more chat mean actually people are more engaged because they are typing away in the chat window or does less chat mean they are more engaged because they're sitting back and listening and taking it in and I don't know the answer to that but it's a really interesting level of detail to get to.

Phil: Do you also have any data to talk about or to try and assess the experience or the rating of that webinar. Do people, not necessarily filling in a survey because I don't, I'm not a massive fan of surveying everything, the life out of everything...sorry my head has gone off in lots of different directions now.

Jo: We are jumping on the data train here. I'm not sure that was your intention.

Phil: No, no that's okay. I don't mind that though. Where my head is going is the number of different things that could affect that data, so that could be about the structure of the webinar, so presuming you use a similar format for the TJ Wow webinar, you host plus multiple guests and then audience participation is through the chat, if you have a guest who encourages chat window use by saying, for example by saying "I'd like to hear what other people think about that, pop it in the chat window and let us know what you think," versus guests that discourage, maybe discourage is not the right word because you wouldn't say "I don't want to hear from you".

Jo: (Laughs) no we definitely would not do that.

Phil: But you got this active encouragement versus passive contribution type thing because that again could affect the number.

Jo: Absolutely and in the way that I manage that so if there's a webinar and this is where I don't have this data and I haven't done this analysis but what we could do is look through either a sample or a range and just go, well okay, how many times in a webinar did Jo read out a comment from the chat window as part of the whole flow of facilitating and on this webinar it was 13 times and on this webinar it was 28 times, what does that mean? Was there a difference in the amount of chat because people thought oh, she's reading stuff out. It's valuable therefore I'll type something or she's reading stuff out and she's scared me off so I'm not going to type something. This is the interpretation and this is the same with any body language. I was chatting to somebody the other day and I was really aware that I basically had my arms crossed and so many people interpret that as a barrier. I don't know you, I don't like you, I don't trust you but it wasn't, it was my shoulders uncomfortable, I'm now sitting more comfortably so it's down to interpretation a lot of the time as well.

Phil: Yeah absolutely and whenever, in the behaviour and analysis work that I do, so one of the golden rules that I was introduced to in the early days that I still abide to is, you can see things and you can hear things but you never know why. I was facilitating a design sprint last week, so five day Google design sprint methodology last week and on Thursday one of the members of the team was different. Momentary moments of looking sad, less engaged than they had been before, less certain in their statements, there was more hedging, more ums and ers and maybes and possiblies and sort ofs and sub pre-exclusion qualifiers, that sort of thing so as we went for coffee I went out for a walk with that person and as I was walking next to them I just said, "How are you getting on today", "Oh, I've got a lot on" I said, "Okay I just want you to know that if there's stuff that you need to do then I'd rather you do what you need to do to make sure you're okay and then you can come back and re-engage in the sprint whenever you are ready. Please don't feel obliged to be here if you've got other stuff that's on your mind. If I am going to have you in the room I want all of you in the room not part of you in the room and if one way we can help that is by you going taking some time and doing what you need to do and coming back then that is fine by me" and then when I closed the session on Friday that participant came and found me and said, "Oh I was so grateful for that" and then she told me everything that was happening and going on, which I didn't know and I couldn't know about but what I can see is the change in her style, the change in the way she was going about interacting with the session. So you're right, we can gather the data and we can try and infer some possible things but we've got to be hypothesising away about what that could be. So yes, if Jo mentions in the chat this, then this happens to the chat window, or this happens to the number of chat contributions but that doesn't mean you reading out a post always equals more chat contributions.

Jo: And I think that's the joy and the nuance of the focus that you and I place on digital body language a bit more is less about the numbers and the data and the analysis of looking at an LMS or whatever it might be and more about in the moment in a webinar or a virtual classroom or on some kind of social discussion whether that's Slack or Yammer or Twitter or LinkedIn, whether that's live or a synchronous based overtime, what's going on for people, what can I notice, what can I pick up and this for me is an absolutely key skill. Our lives are becoming much more social, our communication is much more electronic and remote. It shouldn't necessarily be distant physically as well as psychologically.

Phil: Yes, absolutely and I'm now thinking back through my personal experiences I am trying to work out if it's easier or more difficult to enquire as to what's happening or what is going on for an individual, so I can think of a Twitter chat that happened, I can't remember how many years ago it was now, it was on, let's do shameless plug time, so there's a Twitter handle called @LnDConnect and the L&D community is a non-for-profit organisation who run wicked and fantastic face-to-face events in terms of unconferences but also they run Twitter chats and one of those Twitter chats is on a Friday morning, between eight and nine UK time and it's called LD insight and I remember there was one chat in particular where one of the participants was quite different from how they would normally be. So the contributions were much more challenging, they were quite accusatory at times and I was reading their contributions thinking, that's different, that's changed from how that person would normally be and again I didn't know why so I moved over to the DM option in Twitter and just sent a separate message saying, I can't remember how I framed it now, I did my best to make it

again, non-accusatory but something along the lines of, "Noticed that you're interaction seems a bit different to normal, is everything okay?" It would have been something along that line but also my question that I began that with I suppose was, if you are on a webinar or Slack or whatever is it easier or more difficult to contact that somebody and say, "I noticed you're different, is everything okay".

Jo: I think like with anything it depends on the relationship you have with someone. So I had a not so recent experience about something similar on a public webinar that I was hosting and there were 80 or 100 people in the chat panel and like you say somebody was being different. Actually they were being very quiet which they weren't normally and I had privately messaged and just said, "Hey, how are you doing today, hope you are okay" or words to that effect. Actually I said something like, "You're different today are you okay?" Words to that effect and the response I got back was, in my terms, "Blimey how did you know just from this public webinar chat" and like you say you're different from normal and because I got a relationship with that person I could pick that up. If I didn't have the relationship with that person I wouldn't have known that because you have to have the previous experience to contrast that with so by having the previous experience to contrast it with that means I have some kind of relationship and therefore I can approach that in some way.

Phil: Yeah one of the things that I do a lot is build what I call baselines for people. So what's their typical behaviour in this context. So they go I've managed to get 19 minutes into the podcast before I mentioned context, I've done well. What's that person's typical behaviour in this particular environment or in this context and that differs from face-to-face, to online. It actually differs across different social media channels as well. So one person's baseline on Twitter can be different to Facebook and can be different to Slack or somewhere else but building that baseline and then making a contrast between and one of the challenges that I find on the webinars that I run is often the people I am meeting I have never met before so building a baseline for them is really tricky because I haven't got that past experience to contrast it with.

Jo: If you don't always meet these people, you don't always know them so instantly the term in my head Phil is your falling into a trap and I don't know if that's accurate of also then, going well I don't have a face-to-face relationship with you before so immediately I'm either disadvantaged or it's different but that's the reality of a lot of the work that we are doing.

Phil: So the implication then I think in what you just said was that face-to-face is more valuable than virtual in terms of an environment to have or make or build a relationship or that's the influence that I picked up. Is that fair or am I accurate in my in prints?

Jo: I think that's what I picked up from you and was reflecting back to you. Is that what you mean?

Phil: Yes.

Jo: Good in that case yes (laughs).

Phil: (Laughs) good because I disagree with that and maybe that's an outlook thing, as in a not a Microsoft Outlook because that's awful, but in a perspective outlook thing because some really

strong relationships that I have got now were first made online and then moved offline which I never thought would happen. I remember, I think I might have shared this on the podcast once before, I can't remember but I was walking across, I was in Farringdon, I just gone to an amazing place that does these 250 different varieties of tea with Meg Peppin, Jo Wainwright and Fiona McBride.

Jo: Oh lovely.

Phil: It was lovely, it was really wonderful catch up and then we were walking across the road to a pub because that's what you do after tea, you have beer and as we walked over, I think it was Jo said to me, "So we are friends now?" And this was quite a long time ago, I don't know how long ago this was now, it must be at least four if not five years ago and my response was, "I don't know, I think so" and she was like, "What do you mean I don't know"…

Jo: Way to go Phil, well done (laughs).

Phil: Here's a shovel, can you dig it fool, but it was the first, they were the first people that I met online and then met offline and spent some time with and so there are a few things that were coming together, one was I have a thing about who I call friends because the word friend means something different to me I think. The word friend means to me is someone I know really well, I absolutely trust and would happily talk to about stuff and that might be different to, so at that point in time I guess in my head there are a couple of things I was struggling with, one, I don't know if I know you well enough for you to fit in to my category of friend in terms of what I call a friend as but also I had never made friends in that way before. It wasn't something, that meeting and chatting to somebody online and then taking it offline and making a friendship online and then carrying it on offline was something I hadn't done before and I said, I came up with a nickname of the word T.A.N. which is my Twitter Associate Network so in an attempt to dig myself out of the hole I tried to play with humour and said that's okay, you just part of my T.A.N. your some T.A.Ns to me because you are part of my Twitter Associate Network but I can't even remember where I started with this but anyway…

Jo: It's online versus offline I think is really interesting. I interviewed or chatted with Jeff Cortonbosh from Ikea on my podcast recently all about virtual classrooms, The Lightbulb Moment podcast and he's been running some virtual classroom and webinar sessions and just a handful of them so I really wanted to get some fresh insight from somebody and one of the interesting things he'd said was how different it is, the experience of people when they've met online first in a webinar for instance and then they meet in an office, maybe they've travelled to another office or another shop and then they meet someone face-to-face, almost like their walking past and say ooo, your so and so from the webinar the other day and he was explaining what a different reaction it is rather than the people we already know and we happen to be on a webinar with so again it's about relationships and this whole digital body language thing when we are talking about moderating facilitating, getting to know people is all about building relationships, whether that's in a webinar for 60 minutes in a virtual classroom for five sessions on social media for however long, it's about building those relationships and it was just really interesting what Jeff was saying about the difference between whether you met someone face-to-face previously or not.

Phil: Yeah and I see similar experiences of that, tweet-ups or get togethers whether that be at events or just generally organised tweet-ups where people say right we are going to be at this pub at this time and whoever comes along and you go, "Oh it's you" and you recognise somebody from the avatar. It's a different, whereas if you were just attending and you were meeting somebody for the first time and you had not met before it would be, but then you've got that shared experience haven't you. You've got that shared experience of knowing each other and conversing and conversing online first before you then take it offline as well.

Jo: Yeah so that goes back to building relationships and that's why digital body language is important in todays (a) society but also our working life is because we, a lot of people depending on their roles and companies are attending skype meetings or Microsoft team meetings or whatever it might be and whether that's video on or video off, you've got to get to grips with people. I'm chairing a session online, a couple of sessions and in one Skype conversation with no video we had literally 15 minutes for four of us or three of us to get to know each other, get comfortable with each other, talk through the details and the logistics and what we were going to do and get offline again. How do you do that in 15 minutes with no video and only audio. This is digital body language and being professional and being a good communicator and all of those things.

Phil: I just wanted to take us down that video route for a while. So I did some work with a multinational communications company recently and one of the things that came out through the exploratory discussions I had was that whenever people Skyped each other the default setting, not the default setting of the application, the default setting of the function I was working with was video off. Now the reason and I've done my inverted commas again and I hope I communicated that in my pronunciation of the reason that was given for that was bandwidth yet when I forced it to happen and I said no, so I was running sessions where people were physically present and they were virtually present as well so I had one session where I had a group together with me in one country and three other countries at the end of a laptop and we were all working together, working our way through a, what ostensibly was a face-to-face workshop with some people online and one of my requirements was if that's going to happen it's got to be on video. Everybody has to be on video because audio only just isn't going to work and the feedback afterwards was how much more valuable it was but the default setting still remained we want to do it without video because to save bandwidth but I think it was actually because it was more comfortable but I think based on the discussions I had with that client in particular and I haven't done the investigations of what the research would say but I would imagine that video is always better than not in terms of building relationships and communication.

Jo: So one of the other pieces of work that I have done to complement the digital body language stuff is to look at face-to-face communication and then what this means to the virtual classroom. So what I found was and I am going to scroll through my own blog on this to see if I can find the detail. I found a study about neural synchronization during face-to-face communication that was in the journal of neuroscience and it was a whole load of scientific stuff in here which I am not going to read out, it is all in blog post, go and read but basically the idea was through brain scans and other various different things the quality of the communication and face-to-face dialogue was basically better. They were saying face-to-face is a better way of communicating for all sorts of reasons and all sorts of measures and one of the other things in the analysis that they did was it was not only

better face-to-face but actually it was to do with body language, it was to do with also the turn taking behaviour, the non-verbal communication between participants, now this is nothing inspiringly new, nobody is going to be shocked at this and go "Oh my God that's the most amazing thing ever," but what I found interesting about this is well then, let's put this in the context of like you are saying about that session or webinars, or virtual classrooms or online meetings and what do we miss by not having the video on. Well what we miss over all of those non-verbal communication parts are the smiles, the air quotes as you've mentioned, the nodding but what's then also interesting is you take that another level and go right, okay, from there what that would recommend to me is, like you say let's have webcams on. In a webinar, maybe not, but webcam on me when I'm presenting some or all of the time will make a connection with me. If we are doing a virtual classroom with eight or ten people there can be great times where everyone or individuals have their webcam on all the way through or at various points. There's all sorts of arguments and ways of doing it and that's another conversation but the essence is let's have more face-to-face like conversation but the other part of this is about the turn taking behaviour so there's an element of what we can do actually is take some of these things that we have learnt about turn taking, maybe about verbal communication as well and I don't have it handy, but I used to quote a piece of research that basically says you can trust people's voice more than you can trust their body language and their facial expressions and if we are focusing on that part of it, well actually we don't need video so much so what we can do then in a situation like we are today or if we are on a virtual classroom or a little something similar is as long as we are taking turns, as long as we are making sure to follow that etiquette and all of the other good things with our voice therefore, have people talking in your virtual classroom. Make sure there's time for that and there's not just lecture. That will really improve your communication and your relationship building and you'll learn a lot from other people so yes, video is important, but you could look at these things in different ways and apply different things to what you are doing.

Phil: Yeah absolutely and turn taking itself is an incredibly deeply researched phenomenon. I'll take a step back from that and come back to that in just a second so is it possible Jo that when we finish can you ping me over some links, the links to your blog and the different papers that you talked about and where the papers are found in what you've got. So turn taking is a fascinating phenomenon in terms of how people signal end of turns and the way that the floor or the conversational floor is negotiated, it's just a fascinating thing and you're right, with the non-verbal communication channels missing it can be harder for people to discern when a turn is finished. Two of the strategies that I use, so one is, depending on how long the webinar's for or who's involved then I'll do a ways of working type thing to say that we always need to leave at least a second of pause before someone else comes in because that way we know that person has finished. So somebody might sound like they have finished but let them actually finish. Just leave a second, that's all it needs to be to make sure there is nothing else they want to add before somebody else comes in because there could be a slight delay. There could be something else that is happening. Secondly I use signposting a lot in terms of where I am going. I did a workshop recently where it was a two hour live class pre-session two day face-to-face together and then a two hour post then one discussion. So when it came to the first one before I fired up the live class I wrote down the names of all the participants on a grid and then I had a number of different interactions that I knew I was going to have. So I had introductions was one, what are you up to at the moment was two, what are your thoughts on this reading that I gave you as three and then there was a four and a five, I can't

remember what they were and then using my grid I was ticking off when I had contributions from people and then I would signpost who I was going to next. So for example, I would say, so Jo, I am going to hear from you in a second but before I do just to let you know Jim, I'm going to come to you afterwards so that that person knew and everybody else knew then, who was going to have the floor next and how that was going to work and then when I'd introduced Jim I'd then say right Jim, we are going to hear from you next but then after that we are going to go to Kevin or whatever that might be so that I was able to set the boundaries of who's turn was coming up and when it was coming up so that they could both get themselves ready but also we wouldn't get lots of over talking or interjections from other people as well.

Jo: Yeah and it gives people thinking time to get over panic and "Oh, I've to unmute my microphone where the button again" because all of those things can be barriers. So that's a really good technique for managing that and then thinking about the turn taking and putting it into a synchronise form so you're on some kind of forum, Facebook group, I see a lot of people in that form of communication will type something and it's very me oriented and it's what I think about something or my experience or what I want to say but there's no turn taking element. So when I managing my forum I really attempt to say well here's some information, this is what I think, what do you think or versions of that so that you are encouraging that turn taking or saying, this is just my opinion, you might disagree or whatever terminology you want to use because that opens up communication and I think that a text version of being approachable as opposed to saying something like, "I think it's this" is very different from going, "I think this, what do you think Phil?"

Phil: Yeah I agree, that's a connection I hadn't made before so that element of and this is a word that sounds a bit dodgy but I like it and that's elicitation so that elicitation of response and information is and you have used two different techniques within, that user one is asking a question and the second one is leaving option to disagree. There's a number of other techniques as well but that way of encouraging that interaction and it links into the podcast I did two episodes ago with Ady Howes talking about communities and how do we get communities vibrant and people engaging and taking part and part of that is about how do we create the conditions that allow them to feel like it's safe to contribute in whatever way that contribution comes in.

Jo: Exactly and whether that's in your forum, in an email chain, whether that's in a webinar or a virtual classroom, because you don't have the necessarily, the physical body language or all of the non-verbal cues or in some cases the voice or the live element of it, what comes across in your words and how you type those and going back to things like emoticons and emoji's, it could a smiley face at the end of something makes that okay whereas without it it isn't and again it's a bigger topic and actually somebody to look up on that on is Esta Barrett who works for Jysk and she does some really good stuff around the use of emojis and language change so it's about using those things appropriately in the different forms and getting to know people. There are people that I chat with that are all about the smileys, there are people I email that never do the smileys. There are some people that use the ellipse, dot, dot, dot on everything and that drives me mad because that usually means unfinished sentence, there's more to come but I am not saying it but they don't mean it that way and as somebody who trained as a journalist that drives me mental, but that's my issue. Sorry we didn't come on here to talk about my issues did we Phil.

Phil: I've talked about my own so I think the forum is there.

Jo: But that's why it's an interesting area because you can take it so many different ways.

Phil: Okay now I am doing the the whole over analysis thing. So I've just done okay…

Jo: You, no (laughs).

Phil: Which means I've done a, I've now signified we've done a change of direction and we are going to talk about something different which implies I didn't want to pick up on what you were talking about which isn't the case. Oh, I just need to be quiet now (laughs).

Jo: (Laughs) so have you gone bright pink now even though I can't see it. I am hearing it in your voice Phil.

Phil: (Laughs) I don't know what you mean Jo, I don't know what you mean.

Jo: So what else shall we talk about Phil?

Phil: So one of the things that I will do is I'll plug a book so there's a book called The Human Voice by a lady called Anne Karpf and I'll put a link to the book in the show notes and what I love about that book in particular is that it does two things. It talks about the, I think the word is thematology, so it talks about some of the biology aspects of how the voice is produced, so it looks at voice production from voice book to larynx to mouth to tongue to roof of the mouth and all of those things so it gives a breakdown of how the voice is constructed but then it goes on to talk about what the voice can tell you and what you can notice or attend to in the voice and I think there's a, sometimes there's an over reliance on the words that people use and we don't pay enough attention to the voice itself which links back to the point you are making earlier on that the voice can tell us an awful lot.

Jo: Absolutely and I know I have definitely been on virtual classroom sessions where I am getting to know people and they've been on audio and I remember somebody just, I heard a breath in, you know that kind of (gasp sound) "I want to say something" and then nothing else came and so I said, "Oh Lisa" or whoever it was, "Lisa did you want to add something?" And she was like, "Oh, erm, yeah, how did you know I didn't say anything and you can't see me" well actually I just heard you breath in but it was just enough to know, because somebody breaths in in that way when they want to say something.

Phil: Yeah and as with a lot of things you can use that strategically, so if there's no conversation and you want to take the floor, often people will negotiate the floor by trying to finish the end of somebodies sentence or to come in really quickly in a gap but one of the more subtle ways of trying to take the floor is by doing the in breath because it sends out that communicative signal to people that there's something that you want to say or something that you want to add or contribute which depending on who's doing the communication, they could either just ignore that completely and carry on anyway or they might stop mid-sentence and let you in or at the end of their utterance they

might then say, "Oh Phil was there something you wanted to say or wanted to add" and I guess there is…

Jo: And…see we've just done it.

Phil: We've just done it.

Jo: And speaking of books I just wanted, I can't remember if Ady mentioned this but there's a book called Buzzing Communities by Richard Millington, it's not very much, it's a fiver for the Kindle version and I found that really good when I was starting to work on the community element about communication and how do you read people. It goes into a bit more about building your community and the process of that but certainly it looks a little bit of this topic area as well.

Phil: Yeah so you recommended that to me a few months ago.

Jo: Oh did I?

Phil: And I read it, it's good, I agree it's a good book, definitely a useful resource. Oh shameless plug time. I read it because of setting up the Emotion at Work Hub which if you want to join by the way go to community.emotionatwork.co.uk and you can sign up for free and you get access to lots and lots of evidence based resources on the topic of emotion in the workplace. The shameless plug how now finished, this podcast was brought to you by the Emotion at Work Hub, thank you very much (laughs).

Jo: And it is really good, I've seen lots of different bit and pieces on there and it looks really good, actually it's really nicely designed as well and it's really nice to be able to have that stuff that you can trust from someone as well.

Phil: Thank you Jo.

Jo: Oh I didn't mean you, I meant the other people rating it.

Phil: (Laughs).

Jo: I'll include you there as well, okay.

Phil: I took the compliment as the curator that's all.

Jo: Absolutely, I do mean that of course.

Phil: Okay earlier on we touched on techniques or strategies that you can use and we talked about turn taking in terms of signposting and getting some kind of rules of engagement. What other strategies or techniques do you use to try and understand somebodies digital body language or to encourage that communication and encourage people in?

Jo: There is so many and it really depends a lot on the format of whatever it is that you are doing so webinar, virtual classroom, private groups, social media, all sorts of different things. I think if we focus on the virtual classroom part of that for a moment for me it's all about deconstruct your behaviour and understand it and this is the difficult thing I think when we are going from body language to digital body language is we understand the concept of, I'm looking at your face, hearing your voice, seeing your body language and I know generally how to interpret that. If you're stepping towards the door and your body is turning that way, probably you want to open the door and get rid of me so I should finish what I am saying and get out, but online we need to learn those new queues so for me it's about, okay, what would I normally do face-to-face, how would I normally understand this and once I understand that really well I can then think well how could I do that in a virtual sense, in a webinar, a virtual classroom. So it could be that element of turning towards the door or looking at somebody else and nodding and going your next. We can't do that online but it could be, I mute myself and I type Bob you're coming up next or maybe I move the slide on one so it's away from the question that I've asked and onto the next topic. Other techniques to basically say you've had your time, let's move on. On the Training Journal webinars I host, I ask somebody a question, you've been on as the panel a couple of times, you know how this works, ask a question and say, "Hey Phil, what do you think of such and such?" And you start saying what you're saying at which point I am still listening to you but I am reading the chat, I am looking at the questions, deciding what to ask next, which panel member to go to next and so on and at a point when I am thinking okay Phil, you've kind of had the floor long enough, I unmute and I start going, "Mmhh, uh uh, okay" and sometimes that works if somebody is in tune with that, other times it doesn't and I just carry on but that's the case with all body language and interpretation with those kinds of techniques and there is loads more but I'll pause for a second.

Phil: I think that is really useful and I like the sending a private message to someone to let them know you are coming their way as well as I different way of doing it.

Jo: Yeah that's really useful to say, "Hey Phil" you're next in the questions about such and such because it gives you thinking time and you can do that in a webinar where you can't always do that if I was charring at the ELN conference recently, the questions were coming up and the people in the panel all had the planned questions beforehand but then it was a case of we don't know which ones coming next, we don't know the spin of it, we don't know what's going to come from the floor or how I am going to interpret the question and there's no way in a live event for me to type, "Hey Bob, this is coming next" but there is in an online event. It's about then, how do you make the most of the technology that you've got.

Phil: Yeah definitely and do you think that, so for most of the webinars, no that's not true, they are not webinars, they are not omnidirectional.

Jo: I love that you're just talking to yourself. This is like, I've had a thought, I'm talking out loud, let us in Phil, what are you thinking (laughs)?

Phil: So in the virtual classrooms that I facilitate then, I do work with the CIPD where one of the modules on the level five L&D qualifications is about context of L&D. So I do a live class on that particular topic and the setup is me on camera, there's a standard chat window. There's slides

and/or a whiteboard and then all of the participants are listed down the side and one of the things that I work really hard to do is to do my bit, but also follow what's going on in the chat window so when people are posing questions and so on, but also I have got a facilitator with me who is doing all of the, what I am going to now politely describe as the techy stuff, so when I need to shift from the slides to it being a whiteboard, when we move from it being whole group to being in subgroups. So we split people out and put them in what I would describe as syndicate rooms. They are in their own…

Jo: Yep breakouts.

Phil: That's the word, there you go. So they do all that techy stuff for me and I think I'd really struggle to do all of that myself. That is where I am coming from, the cognitive load of concentrating on what the content that I am paid to talk about as well as keeping up with the chat window, as well as keeping an eye on time and then doing all the techy stuff as well, I think I would find that incredibly difficult. There is one thing I do where I do it all but it's much, it's a slightly different setup because everyone else is on camera and stuff as well so it gives me a bit more, but either way, so I guess where I was going with that was, is there and I know we can't unilaterally say, yes you should always have a facilitator, in your experience for live virtual classrooms to be effective, does it need two people to take on those two roles or can one person run it on their own do you think?

Jo: See you have described a really good example of how to run a session like that. The question I have for you on those sessions is how many people are attending roughly?

Phil: Roughly, 25 – 30.

Jo: Okay so this is where the difference between a webinar and a virtual classroom comes in for me. So a virtual classroom I would say is eight to ten people max, a webinar is any more than that and it's not that cut and dry. There is always all sorts of considerations to take into account and I've certainly done sessions at that number of people but at that number of people you're not getting to know individuals, you're not getting to build relationships and you don't have the time to process everything in the same way as you do when you've got half or less than half of that amount of people. So personally I wouldn't describe that as a virtual classroom. Maybe that's an intimate webinar and therefore the load on you is different so in that situation absolutely by having a facilitator or a host or a producer and there's all sorts of different labels you can use and they can do different parts of the roles with or for you, that really helps because it helps you concentrate, A on the content and B on the people and not on the technology part of that. You can absolutely run it all on your own and for four of the five, six years or whatever it is that I have been running Lightbulb Moment, I did it all on my own. I did the whole thing and yeah it's challenging and I didn't always do it very well and there are limitations but you can do it but I was doing that with eight to ten people where you can still build that relationship and you can manage stuff as well as doing the technology. Out of all of the other advantages of having a facilitator, technical facilitator, host, producer, whatever label you want to use, A there's the technical support but what I find, I've trained up Michael who works with me, I've trained him up to be a producer, he's actually the Business Operations Manager, he is my producer now as well, partly because I wanted him to learn the nuts and bolts of what we actually do in our business and what I really like about him being my producer

is that he will private message me if I have missed something or if I have interpreted something wrong or differently let's say. So I could have gone, "Oh thanks Bob for your question blah, blah, blah answer" and actually Michael will private message me saying, "I think he meant X" at which point I can choose what to do but I could say, "Oh Bob, maybe you meant such and such in which case the answer is this" or let's come on microphone or whatever it might be and Michael isn't always right, sometimes somebody will write, no, no, no you were right the first time at which point it's like, "Hey Michael I was right".

Phil: (Laughs) ten points to me.

Jo: Exactly, that's partly because we are siblings so we can have a bit of a laugh like that but also actually you can have a real laugh. There's somebody I work with who is a producer and we have such a laugh because we have got that private chat and it's not a laugh at the expense of people, please don't get that wrong but it's a laugh at ourselves when I do something wrong or she does something wrong and I'm like, "Wake up, change of layout time" or I'm behind time and her favourite phrase is giddy up and stuff like that so you can still have a real laugh like that but that's all digital communication is, it's all digital body language. So did I answer your question about do you always need that person?

Phil: Yes so you did because you said it depends.

Jo: (Laughs) depends on the context Phil.

Phil: So yes you did answer the question and you also got me thinking about some other aspects as well and some of the other variables so this is part of my elicitation strategies thing so one of the things that I'll do in the preamble, so I normally go online say ten, 15 minutes before the webinar begins and you'll always have people that are late and you'll have people that come in bang on time and some that are there early, so the ones that are their early I tend to post questions along the lines of, where in the world are you or what has surprised you today and the class in particular that I do fits just after the group have done their first assignment so they have made their first submission and I am two weeks after I think the submission has gone in and they haven't had their results yet so I ask questions like, "How are you feeling about the assignments that you have submitted? How long is it until you get your marks back?" Stuff like that to get the conversation going a little bit early but also gives me some insight into the individuals and again one of the early activities that I run is about how we can categorise and segment organisations because there's lots of different things that make up the context for a company including the sets that they work in, how they are structured, what's happening in the big wide world, that sort of thing, so I get people to tell me. Give me one sentence summary of where they work and then what that allows me to do and this is where my scribbles of paper next to my computer get interesting, I am starting to link people up so that I know that Phil works in a small family orientated organisation that provides an IT service to customers or I know that Jo works in this kind of business so when I am them moving through the webinar and I am talking about the different aspects I can start to link that back to, not everybody because there's too many people to do it to everybody but I work really hard to pay attention to the details of information that people give me so that I can try and contextualise what I am talking about in their

world and then it also demonstrates the desire and willingness to build a collection and a relationship.

Jo: Absolutely, that sounds great because what you're not doing is phoning in your lecture. You're not doing the same session every time that you do that particular session. You've got the bones of topic X but your nuance is saying well actually that's small business, that's large business, that's that sector which is going to be different in the next session and that's exactly how it should be. Whether it's a webinar with 25 people or 25 hundred people there should be a version of that and this is what we are talking about here is again, it's context dependant on the format, webinar, social classroom, social network, public, whatever is taking what you normally do and adapting it to the technology and the people as well.

Phil: Yeah absolutely, mmm, okay. So earlier on I said what sort of strategies or techniques and you talked about there's lots of different things that you can do and there are lots of different places so we started on virtual classrooms and then I knowingly or wittingly took it into webinars so can I ask a similar questions then but with a webinar head on, what are some of the strategies that you use to help you understand where people are and to try and build a picture of somebodies digital body language. How do you do that in more of a webinar type setting?

Jo: So when you've got more people, it's different and you could argue it's more difficult because obviously you don't have the individual time and the people that are more vocal or verbal whether that's in a chat window or on a whiteboard, less it's going to be verbal speaking in a webinar, they're the ones that you're naturally going to build a better picture of because if Bob and Alice are always the first to respond, always writing a paragraph, always sharing something but actually Eve hardly shares anything, naturally you are not going to get to know Eve quite as well. So this is where sometimes the webinar technology can help you. You have to be really careful with the technology parts. Different software does different things. Most of them have a version of how engaged do people, which is usually how much have they clicked in the system or are they clicked on the system as opposed to clicked onto another piece of software on their computer. That can be useful so Webex gives you a red exclamation point next to somebodies name that only the host or the presenter sees when they have clicked on something else but again it's interpretation and this comes to confidence as an example is are they clicking on something because I'm boring them or are they clicking on something because I am saying something that's so amazing or so great that they are making notes about it and I have no idea which one it is so I choose to interpret it that I'm amazing because that gives me confidence to carry on so we have to be a pit careful about that but we do have those ques in the technology to help us. In terms of the webinar it's still all about the interaction and the turn taking but that's different. It's less about here's a question, use chat, use hand up, let's open up microphone and spend, four, five, six, ten minutes discussing this so it will be much more about using the chat window but also it's about using whatever technology is there for you so it could be, such on the Training Journal Webinars, I separate out the question panel and the chat panel. Questions still come through the chat panel, that's fine but it's a point about this is a specific question that you want me to see. In other technology it could be using whiteboards for instance or polling and getting people to answer the polls and as long as you have written the question and the options really well, which is difficult you can get a sense of the group but it's about then following up and saying okay, 100 of you selected this 100 of you have selected that, 50 did

that, 50 did this and 25 that, in the chat window explain why or let's use the whiteboard and maybe we are just using arrows or pens to scribble on a slide that I've designed to give me an indication of what you think or if you've got a webinar with less people, so 20, 25, 50, maybe even 100, let's use the whiteboard in order to answer a question and what those kind of things can do as long as the technology isn't a barrier is actually it can give people a little bit more of an organic creativity, even something like change of colour, change of font, where do I click on the screen. Do I type smileys, do I scribble a flower next to it, or whatever it is, that all gives you information about people.

Phil: It does and there are two things in that that I wanted to pick up on. I am really not sure about/hedging my words because I think I don't like the Webex red exclamation mark. On the version I used once I think it even said, not paying attention next to the exclamation mark.

Jo: Possibly.

Phil: And I thought well how do you know that?

Jo: Yeah.

Phil: And I now know a little bit more in that if it is the fact that they have clicked on a different application, they've clicked off that window and are not in a different application and as you said, what it's telling you is they have clicked on something else, it gives you no context and no idea as to why they have done that or and any meaning you should then interpret because it is often interpreted as, like you said this is boring and so on so I'm not sure how, I get the intent behind it, I think I get the intent behind it, I'm just not sure of the value of that as a function.

Jo: I think it comes down to again, how do you interpret it? So it's the cross arms thing. I could be making a barrier and telling you I don't like you, or I could be cold, those things so as an example I had a guy on my class, years and years ago and English was his second or third language and it was better than my German, don't get me wrong but from his point of view he was struggling with the class because it was in English. So after the first session where it was a bit like, well he's not answering very quickly, he is always the last one with the green tick, he is always the last one in the chat window, he's always the last one to put an arrow on the screen, that's all body language so that's a version of the crossed arms so at the end of that I said, can you stay online. Let's have a quick chat and it was a version of, "I've noticed this, what does it mean?" And he was saying class is great, really loving it, you're great, learning loads, this is my second language and I have to interpret a lot of the words.   I was like, right okay, at which point obviously I knew this was his second language, I was speaking slower, I was using simpler language anyway, so I was like right, I need to try and make sure I do that even more and then it was a case of how to use that in the future. So we came up with between us, we decided okay, if I'm saying hey, blah blah blah topic, green tick if you agree or if you have had this experience, the understanding between us was he was happy in green tick unless he said otherwise because I didn't want to interrupt him interpreting something just to come back and click a green tick and that the red exclamation point was him translating, no problem and if I did want him to do something, because that red exclamation point was there I knew when he'd click back on the software because it went away so if there is something I wanted him to do to unmute or to do something on the whiteboard I would say, "Hey Steven or whatever his name was,

Stefan or some like that, let's bring you back to the software because our activity now is to do blah, blah, blah". That just gives him that que to come back in and all sorts of other detail and nuance in that and other things I did. I typed words in the chat window as I used them as things were coming up. We translated them, we got comfortable as a group so he could type in what does this word mean and two or three people or me would explain it. It became really good because we were a group, because it was small, because I could read that digital body language, because I approached him and we discussed it, because I interpreted that, hopefully correctly most of the time and that's how it can be quite powerful and that's just one example of one person on one course.

Phil: That's a really, really good example and it got me thinking what I often will do is facilitating a face-to-face event, you can see when people are off and I don't mean off like disappearing but the way they are thinking and they are either thinking what does this mean for me or how am I going to use it or how am I going to apply it and as a facilitator you would wait for them to finish or you gently bring them back or whatever it is that you would need to do and it's the same ethos but just applied in a slightly different way in that digital or virtual world.

Jo: Yeah so what you would do virtually is you would present your topic or your argument and you would say I am going to let you think about that for a moment whilst I do X or whilst I have a sip of my tea or once you have finished thinking about that just give a green tick to say, yeah let's discuss it and then you just go quite and wait for every bodies green tick or if you are waiting you know that there is two or three still to come in and you say okay, if you've processed this, in the chat window just write a sentence about what you think and that gives people the time to catch up and then you start going, "Okay Bob let's unmute and have a chat or on the whiteboard let's go into X amount of detail," and that's how you start building that up because what you are doing and I have said this before, so many times is you're deconstructing what you do face-to-face because if you understand your craft really well, you can say what are the component parts that I build up in my face-to-face session and therefore let me, like a block of Lego, let me undo that and redo it with different Lego or Duplo or whatever analogy you want to use to rebuild that in a different way. It looks different a Duplo house and a Lego house look different but they're both a house and they have the same function.

Phil: Look at that, well there you go, there's our wrapping up. That's the summary done.

Jo: There you go. Brand new fresh, free for you Phil.

Phil: (Laughs), thank you, so there is one more thing I want to add though and that is as a facilitator of online things the bit you were talking about there in terms of turning off your mic or just being silent or giving people some time is such a, I find in both my personal experience and in terms of working with others that can be a real challenge for people to get their head round. The feeling of discomfort where you have put a question out and it can be, so there's one particular question that I ask and often it can be a minute, a minute and fifteen seconds before I get a reply in the chat window and what it says in the chat window is multiple attendees are typing so I know that people are contributing and they are giving a response but because I have asked such a big question it takes time to formulate a coherent reply even if it has got typos etcetera in it and I used to try and fill the gap but what I found was actually that was becoming an interference for people because they were

trying to listen to me whilst answer my question so now I just go quiet and I don't even tell people I am going to go quiet, I just ask the question and then just stay silent and just let it roll until people are back in because there often, if that was a real world environment they are constructing their response or articulating their response out loud and that's what they are doing here, I just can't hear them because they haven't got a voice in that format.

Jo: And I know we are supposed to be finishing but I am going to pick you up on a tiny bit of language there which is you've just said a real world environment if this was a real world environment and the thing is with webinars and virtual classrooms, that's why I often dislike the term virtual classroom because it means pretend is, it is a real world environment, it's just not a face-to-face environment.

Phil: I will apologise for my indiscretion.

Jo: How dare you Phil (laughs).

Phil: But you are right because words matter because what words do is they create frames so by saying in a real world that that implies that therefore that the other world is pretend so you are absolutely right to correct me on my language use so I will accept my indiscretion.

Jo: And on the point of my being right about something for once in my life (laughs).

Phil: Just while we are there (laughs). Alright so is there anything else then Jo, anything else that you're thinking, feeling or want to say before we wrap up?

Jo: I've got a big smile on my face because I am so glad we finally got to do this. We talk on and off about this kind of thing and we have done a few things together and we've never quite got here and now we have and I've loved it and I think it's been really interesting to talk about this topic in a slightly different way with you because you bring your nuance and your angel to things and I've really enjoyed a deeper dive into this topic at that slightly different angel so you've made me think and think about things in a different way, so thank you Phil.

Phil: Ah, you're welcome, thank you very much as well, it's been wonderful to have you on and like you said I am really pleased that you have managed to get there and we have got the time to do it. So thank you very much for coming on Jo, really appreciate it. Thank you very much for your time today.

Jo: My pleasure.

Phil: Alright so before we go then Jo, if people wanted to find out more about you, if they wanted to continue the conversation where can people get hold of you, where can they find you?

Jo: I would love to continue the conversation face-to-face, online or any which way. So on Twitter I am @LightbulbJo. You can find me on my virtual classroom community, if you go to Lightbulbmoment.community and I am on LinkedIn and various other different places, I have got all

sorts of resources to have a look at on this topic, so yeah come and find me and have a chat and tell me whether you agree or disagree maybe.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you very much Jo and what I'll do is I'll put links to your twitter handle and to the community in the show notes as well so people can get hold of that.