Episode 43 – Emotion at Work in Job Crafting
Chatting with Rob Baker

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition, having conversations that you might not necessarily expect. If you've looked at the title for this particular episode which is Emotion at Work in Job Crafting, you might be thinking what on earth has job crafting got to do with emotion in the workplace? Well even though a lot of the podcasts that I do, do get really nerdy about emotions in particular, we also look beyond that. So for example fans of the show will remember Monica Parker from Episode 23, where we looked at the interplay of physical spaces and how we feel? So looking at how the spaces that we work in can affect our emotions but also how our emotions can affect the physical spaces that we work in? We'll be doing something similar here. So we're starting to look at how does the way that we feel about either our work or the work that we do, how is that affected by a discipline that our guest today has written a book about, and we'll hear more about that as we go, but looking into job crafting in particular. So anyway, the other thing is on brand, on message our guest today is an evidence based practitioner, so I know he takes a strong evidence base in his work. So you're right on brand for the podcast. Anyway enough of me let's get our guest on the air, so welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast Rob Baker, hello Rob.

Rob: Hey Phil, thanks so much for having me, I'm a big fan of the show. I think you mentioned at the start of this I love the conversations that you have and you have with your guests, so I'm hoping that we a have a good and interesting conversation today, which I have no doubt that we will.

Phil: Yeah, similarly I have no doubt that we will, I'm really, really looking forward to today. Way back from when, I think it was around this time last year, where we were both at the CIPD's applied research conference in Nottingham, if I remember rightly, I think I was presenting some of my research and you were presenting some of yours, and I was fascinated at the time to hear more about what you were doing. I'd heard a little bit about it and thought that just sounds a bit like a load of old rubbish to me and then when I heard you talk about it some more, I was like, oh, okay, I think this guy's got a point. I'm delighted to have got you on the podcast, so, yeah, I'm really looking forward to it today.

Rob: Great. And similarly if you think that anything that I am saying might be a load of old rubbish challenge me on that and I'd be really happy to reflect and challenge my perspectives as well.

Phil: Okay, that sounds good, thank you for giving me permission, that makes my life a lot easier, so that's good. All right as per usual for the Emotion at Work podcast we begin with an unexpected yet innocuous question to get to know our guest a little bit more. So what I would like to know from you then, Rob, is what pub sticks out in your memory?

Rob: Okay, immediately I'm recording this in Durham but my partner lives in Sheffield and probably the Kelham Island and the Fat Cat, so that's the quintessential real ale pub. In Sheffield we've always had lots of them but I've had lots of opportunities to go and meet people there and different social activities and they've got a back room that we've used for club nights and social activities, lots of get-togethers. So, yeah, the Fat Cat and Kelham Island in Sheffield was the first one that jumped to mind.

Phil: What were the club nights that you, and at the risk of sounding really innuendo-y, what were the club nights that you used to do in the back room?

Rob: They're not that exciting unfortunately, they were generally orienteering AGMs and orienteering South Yorkshire orienteers meet-ups, some Christmas dos were held there as well. So, yeah, for work and for play and for pleasure, lots of different activities were taking place in the Fat Cat. There were lots of interesting people from all walks of life as well, you're always assured of an interesting conversation with someone, interaction and a good pint of beer, which for me is quite important.

Phil: Yeah, I agree with you on that one, I do like a good pint of beer. So orienteering featured a couple of times in there then, so is that one of your extracurricular activities then?

Rob: Yeah, so it's something that as a junior I started when I was about ten doing orienteering and cross-country running and really increasingly seriously and competitively.

Phil: You can compete at orienteering?

Rob: Well you definitely can, yeah. I was lucky enough to compete for Great Britain actually when I was a younger man, so in terms of as a junior and in my twenties, and orienteering gave me the opportunity to go travel all over the country and the UK but compete internationally as well in terms of Sweden, Scandinavia it's really popular. Now it's very much I'm going back to it for the grass roots of my family and taking them along to orienteering and introducing them to the sport. So it's a really…something that I really enjoy. It's a mix of getting outdoors, getting into the woods or the moorland and having a purpose to it, a bit of a physical and mental challenge combined at the same time. So that's right up my street.

Phil: Well I did not know that a) orienteering could be a competitive sport or b) that you could compete at it for your country. So not only have I got somebody who's interested in job crafting I have got a Great Britain athlete then on the podcast then today.

Rob: Yeah, former, I think very much former unfortunately, Phil. So the most important resource, I will send a link to the British orienteering fixtures, so if anyone's free and piqued their interest that's probably the number one resource that people will be looking for at the end of today's discussion.

Phil: So, wow, genuinely please send a link to the list of competitions, you can get to an orienteering competition near you as a result of this podcast. Wow, that's brilliant I love it. See now, I just love like an unexpected question just gets us to orienteering, that's wicked I love that. For me then I think there's been a few important pubs in my life, but I would probably say the one that held the most meaning for me was the Crown & Cushion. So it was in the centre of Bristol, after I'd finished work at McDonalds when I first started to work in there, that would be the place that we would go after the shift. Then I joined the pool team, played for the pool team for way, way too many years and drank way too many beers, spent way too much money behind the bar, wasted way too much money on fruit machines in the Crown & Cushion. But, yeah, that was a big formative pub for me, lots of stuff

happened in there, went from being single to having a girlfriend, to being engaged. The barmaids from the pub came to the wedding and all sorts, so it was a big part of me life.

Rob: Wow, a big connection then with that pub community?

Phil: Yeah, definitely and then it got knocked down [laughs] when they redeveloped the city centre of Bristol to put in Cabot Circus, it was one of the properties that was then earmarked for demolition to build all the new stuff. So there wasn't a tear in my eye actually, I was a little bit sad, there wasn't a tear in my eye. But, yeah, I think it must have been at least ten years that I drank there for, so it was a big, big chunk of time, a quarter of my life that was my local. Some good memories.

Rob: Oh, brilliant.

Phil: When you orienteer then, and this is where you can tell me off for making an inappropriate link, but when you're orienteering I'm guessing there's hundreds of different ways that you can run that, there's a hundred different ways that you can…

Rob: I like what you're doing here, Phil, I like it, carry on, I like it.

Phil: …thank you, that you can orienteer. So I guess if you were competing then, you're dropped off at a particular destination you need to get somewhere else, I'm guessing that's the premise, but how you get there is completely up to you. Would there have been some job crafting at play when you were competing?

Rob: It's probably an interesting analogy, I must admit I haven't thought about it, you're the first person to make the link. So I suppose, I'll give you the definition of job crafting in a second, but very much with orienteering the idea is that basically you're given a route to follow from a starting point and the winner of the competition if you're doing it competitively is the first person to get round. The art of it is around using your individual strengths to work out what's the best route for you. So for some people it might be going along paths because you're a fast runner, others it could be going through the terrain and doing it in a more tricky way in terms of using navigational skills. Whereas if you're not such a strong navigator you want to minimise your mistakes so you take easier routes into the different checkpoints and controls, which could on the face of it be slower, but for you a better way of performing in terms of making sure you're not going to make mistakes. So in terms of job crafting in terms of work very much I suppose that you do have clear outputs, most people would have clear outputs in terms of what they're trying to do and the best organisations I think are those that enable people to find their own way to delivering those outputs, rather than being prescriptive in terms of saying this is the route that you have to follow. So there is certainly autonomy and personal freedom and choice are at the centre of job crafting and orienteering, and maybe that's one of the reasons that I'm interested in both. I hadn't thought about it but I will do now, so thank you.

Phil: All right, so you said you're going to give us a definition of job crafting, so do you want to do that now?

Rob: Yeah, so job crafting is making smaller subtle changes to how you do your job to make it a better fit to your passions, your strengths and your interests. So it's not necessarily a wholescale reimaging of the job itself, it's making smaller changes. And the way that I often describe it is the way that you might think about a semi tailored suit, so if you go into a shop and they say this suit could be semi tailored to you, what effectively you're doing is you're saying the colour of the suit is there, the fabric and the style of it is not going to change. But what you can do with the suit is change the dimensions a little bit so it's a better fit for you, so it feels more comfortable, you can maybe look better as well. And similarly in terms of jobs, the basic job that you're doing is there, it's fixed in terms of what the key core elements of it are, but job crafting encourages you to make small changes to it to make that a better more personal, more comfortable fit. So that's how I introduce it.

Phil: I guess so if I take up your challenge from earlier on, I guess part of me might think two things and we'll take each of them in turn. So one of the things I might think is, isn't that just what everybody does anyway? Isn't that just common-sense that you're given a task to do and you then go right how can I do this best for me? And then I play with it and adapt it as I go. Or the second one might be that's all well and good for people that work in offices or work for one of the big four consulting firms, but if I was to quote Simon Heath, if I was a panel beater from Solihull there's only one way I can beat a panel, so thanks very much for all your job crafting stuff, Rob, but actually that doesn't really work for me.

Rob: Yeah, both good challenges or questions I suppose. So I think a lot of people when you introduce job crafting will say I've done this whether they've done it deliberately or not. But what I think is distinct from just day to day work and crafting is the fact that crafting at the centre of it is someone deliberately doing their work in a way that makes the job more personal to themselves, makes the use of their strengths, the passions, makes it more them as it were in terms of the job. You're maybe doing this without any, you might naturally just be changing the way you do duties because you think it's a better more effective way of doing it. But if you're not doing it deliberately, if you're not doing it with foresight, if you're not really thinking about how you can make that job more meaningful, more engaging for you, then you're not maybe fully doing job crafting in a technical perspective in the way you described it from a research perspective. I think for me the changes around doing it deliberately with foresight and with planning, rather than just doing it without knowing that you're doing it. So in a way that a runner say or a jogger or whatever, you can be active, but you can sometimes change it, to say actually if I'm going to be a runner I'm going to start being a bit more thoughtful about how I plan my activities and maybe the races I enter or whatever. Similarly with job crafting you're maybe doing lots of changes to the job on a day to day basis, but if you're doing it deliberately and actively I'd say you're maybe not tapping into the full benefits of job crafting in the way that I would describe it to other people. Because that proactivity is at the heart of what's going on. So that's the first point.

Phil: Okay, can we stick with that one just for a minute and we'll come back to our panel beater from Solihull in a second. So it's the intentionality behind it then you're saying? I'm with you completely in that one of the things that I talk about a lot in the work that I do, is that if we're going to do something, let's do it deliberately and let's do it on purpose. Let's not just do it haphazardly or do it by accident or do it by osmosis, if we're going to do something let's do it deliberately and on purpose. So one of the things that I do is outside of work is I'm a governor, I'm a governor of my local

primary school, and that affords me some interesting insight into a workplace where I've got no vested interest beyond my children going to the school. I find it fascinating that we talk about well that will just happen, okay well all right, but are we just letting it happen or are why are we hoping it will happen? What are we doing to actually do that deliberately and on purpose? So for example I had a conversation a while ago about parent communication and parent engagement, and parents know what's happening because we send them a text round and the text round is like an automated email system that you can either email by class, it's like a mailing list essentially. So therefore parents are engaged. I'm like well not really because what we're doing is we're talking at people, we're not deliberately and intentionally, and purposefully saying right let's engage the parent community in whatever this thing is that we're looking to talk about, we broadcast at them by sending a text round.

I can see the intentionality of it to be rather than just going oh I know I like things ordered and structured so I'll put things into a spreadsheet or into a formula or into a to-do list or whatever that might be because that works for me. It's about, and if I've interpreted you correctly, it's about looking more than that and going right how can I work for me to be at my best and then how can I shape lots of aspects of my work to allow me to make the best use of my passions and my strengths, and the stuff that I'm good at?

Rob: Yeah, I think I would agree with everything you've said and I can separately have a rant about engagement with schools and primary schools in particular, but we won't do that, we'll stay on topic. I think one of the ones around you used of intentionality, purpose, being deliberate, are all things that you would see within job crafting. I think also we need to be careful assuming that everyone does this and the fact that we know, we say we know…

Phil: Well done, you caught yourself, I was going to catch you on that.

Rob: When people have surveyed people to analyse their job crafting behaviour in terms of you ask questions of do you deliberate shape your tasks and activities? To what extent do you try and make things better? Again I can send you some links at the end of this, resource links that we've got in terms of say questionnaires that you might want to ask or evaluate people's job crafting behaviours. Not everyone necessarily associates with it, it's something that a lot of people that I know do do this naturally, without thinking about it. But I think it's dangerous to assume that it's something that everyone does do and that's two aspects of that, one is that maybe they haven't been afforded the opportunity to do it, and that comes back to the panel beater which we're going to touch on in a second. And others that people just don't necessarily see them, a) maybe have the confidence to do it or the opportunity to do it either. So I think it's definitely intentionality is part of it, but I think we also need to be a bit careful about assuming this is something that naturally everyone does. I think when I describe it most people can visualise and understand what I'm talking about, either they've done it themselves, they've seen other people do it. So it's relatable but I think it's important we're a bit careful about that.

Maybe I can give you an example and this will link a little bit to maybe touch on the panel beater stuff. Part of the work I do I'm fascinated by job crafting stories and encouraging people to deliberately explore job crafting. And as an experiment and again for me the idea of purposefulness is to understand actually if I do this and action this way, is there going to be positive or negative benefits

from this? Should I continue doing this? Be curious about what the outcomes of changes will be. So I did some work within a call centre because often when I'm challenged on this within organisations I ask them to test this out with different groups of people, those that you think are going to be very receptive to it, those that you think are going to challenge it and those where you don't think it's going to work effectively. So I did some work with Virgin Money and they're very happy for me to talk about the case study, they feature in the book. And one of the areas that they asked me to test was in the call centre. When I ran a session with the call centre team, one of the individuals was saying what matters to me, what's important to me is the fact that I feel I'm helping customers. So that's her mindset and that's one of the things that was important to her as an individual. So she probably would be doing that on a day to day basis anyway, in terms of her work she would always when she's picking up the phones be trying to help people, that's the spirit which she was approaching every call. Which you'd hope most people were but I don't having spoken to a lot of contact centres you wonder sometimes whether people would agree with that perspective. But she also realised that she little opportunity within her day to day in terms of the call centre itself to make big changes to her tasks. So she was thinking about how can I shine more light on this?

So what she did then was actually put a diary on the seat of her car and before she drove off at the end of the day, she just jotted down her best customer experience for that day. The reason she was doing it was because she wanted to recognise and almost celebrate to herself that she was making a difference to customers and remember the people she was helping, rather than necessarily some of the customers that made were maybe more frustrating or weren't as positive as she'd want them to be. She wrote this down and then over time the list got bigger and bigger, and bigger and she found, again from this idea of being deliberate, because as part of the workshops I ran with them, I got them to reflect on what they felt afterwards. And she said one of the things that she noticed, and this wasn't the purpose, the driver for the job crafting, but she noticed that she left in a more positive frame of mind because she was thinking about a positive customer experience before she left. She saw this list growing everyday when she adding to it, she felt that she was making a difference to customers and helping people. So rather than going home and renumerating and being frustrated about the calls that didn't work very well, the customers that she couldn't help in the way she wanted to, she was focusing on the things that went well. It buffered her for a little bit from those negative experiences, that wasn't the reason that she did it but that's an outcome. And if she hadn't been purposeful and deliberate or intentional, to use your language in terms of the job crafting, she wouldn't have noticed that or picked that up.

So that's one example of a call centre where obviously they've got low autonomy. Another example in terms of in the examples of where the people have got low autonomy, I encourage people to think about what are small and tiny changes and micro changes that they can make to their job? I often challenge people to do something with less than five or ten minutes a day or an hour a week. So it really is the equivalent of going to a loo break effectively, so people approach this with a bit more playfulness, it's low stakes if it works or not. But also as we know from habit building it's easier to start small and build up to it than be overambitious and not reach your target. One of the things that someone again stuck in my mind from the call centre was that they decided that they wanted, one of the strengths that mattered to them was tidiness or clarity. And they got frustrated if the customer notes that they saw weren't as clear as they could and again if you imagine everyone's busy writing notes down, they're not always going to be as clear and crystal or coherent as you'd want them to be.

So once a day she gave herself permission to tidy up her notes in terms of the one customer. So five minutes a day she'd invest in terms of saying she saw some notes she thought were particularly bad, she was going to tidy them up. She'd decide when to do it, she couldn't do it for everyone because she had calls to receive and there were targets to meet. But she could do it once a day. And the unintended consequence of that is that people noticed that she has a certain style in terms of her notes. I can't remember exactly, I was going to say Sally but it may not have been Sally in terms of her name. People were saying you can tell Sally's notes a mile off when you see them because they're just brilliant, her colleagues later said they're really good. But also they realised that their customers get a better result because of the fact that they can serve them better because they understand the notes more. Which again makes sense. So again this was an unintended consequence of someone doing a small change within an environment where you'd think there wouldn't be any discretion in terms of job crafting, but they found it.

I again think we sometimes make assumptions that this group can't do this or this group can do this or this group don't want to. I think again we talked about taking evidence base, I'm really interested in testing these hypotheses to see if they come true. Today I have been, the examples that stick in my mind tend to be related to the jobs that you wouldn't expect people to do this. You mentioned the big four knowledge workers who think there's more opportunity for them to do it, those stories yes they can job craft, it maybe easier to them, they don't stick in my mind as much as the ones which are more creative from these lower autonomy, more restricted jobs.

Phil: When you talked through both of those examples then, so whether that be Sally with her notes or the other lady with her enjoying the fact that she feels that she's made a difference to the customers experience on that particular day. When you talked about, especially when you talked about Sally and I think you mentioned her when you talked about the other lady, you talked about unintended consequences. So as I say if we stick with Sally because I definitely remember you using it for Sally, so one of the unintended consequences then was that other people had admiration for her notes, they felt they could serve that customer when the customer contacted them again and so on. If they were the unintended consequences what were the intended consequences of the work you were doing? Were both of those Virgin Money?

Rob: Yeah, that's the same call centre team, just I remember front of mind when you were talking about the other ones. So both of them did have unintended consequences. The first one was that she noted that when she went home she was in a more positive frame of mind about the negative calls that she'd had during the day, so buffered those, it wasn't the word that she used but one that I used to describe it. So in terms of Sally's example, and again I'm probably doing a disservice to Sally if I have misremembered her name, but I think it's right, she wanted to shine more of a light and bring more of her strength of exactness to life, that's what she was wanting to do. So that was something that mattered to her in her job and so it was a case of how can you do a bit more of that in your job, recognising that you're getting calls literally all the time being fed through to you? If you can snatch an opportunity of five or ten minutes, the recommendation that I invited people to do in terms of the job crafting, was to do something that aligns to your strengths or something that you're interested and engaged with. And again for me when I say invitation that's deliberate because job crafting has to come from the individual, it's not something a manager can say these are some great job crafting ideas for you Phil I think you should do. They may benefit you and they may have some outcomes but again

from my perspective that's not a job crafting, it's not driven by the individual. One of the things that maybe I found the research and the idea of job crafting so compelling was the fact that it was very much bottom-up driven by the individual and their agency in the process is critical and vital, and that's something that I think is maybe lost in a lot of organisations but really important to me.

Phil: So the intended consequence then was around, and if we stick with Sally, it was for Sally then to feel like she was giving a better experience and looking after her customers more effectively and so on. And then likewise through the other lady it was about feeling as though she made a difference in somebody's day.

Rob: Yeah, that's right.

Phil: But I would imagine the version where they didn't commission you to help individuals feel good. So what were Virgin Money hoping would come for them either across the call centre or within particular teams, what were they intending in terms of…?

Rob: Well it's actually interesting, they were interested in me trying to make them feel good effectively. So in terms of one of the areas that they were looking at, they generally as an organisation they have got very positive engagement scores and this was a couple of years ago, so this specific case that I'm doing now I'm sure they still have got positive scores, but I want to be careful and clear that this relates to a specific project I did a couple of years ago. They were recognising that in certain areas the engagement scores weren't, some areas they were dipping and this was across the organisation, not necessarily specific to the call centres, but they were dipping in some areas and maybe not static. And they were getting anecdotal feedback in from the different, and I've got be a bit careful and sensitive at the moment to the client in a second, that they were getting anecdotal feedback elsewhere that maybe the work environment that they wanted to create within Virgin Money wasn't being delivered in all the areas they wanted in the way that they wanted, to the standards they wanted. The people director Matt Lee at the time was really clear that he had a mandate, a leadership style that he wanted to promote, a diversity of ideas and approaches and experience, and enable people to bring those to life within the organisation. They saw job crafting as something that enabled people to do that because it tapped into the individual, so it was something that was very aligned to their approach of enabling to bring their own of their selves to work.

So that's generally what they wanted me to do, something to consolidate and support that approach that I had with an organisation. One of the metrics that we used to measure this was around engagement but also around satisfaction as well that they had in terms of these existing data, see it moves the needle on those factors within the team.

Phil: Without putting yourself in any delicate situations, did those needles move?

Rob: Yeah, well enough that they wanted to commission it for the rollout for the rest of the organisation, so, yeah. I've shared it, I've been commissioned to share the outcomes of it positively within those groups. The actual project itself didn't quite get off the ground because there was a merger acquisition within it, so it got more complex as these things happen. But the pilot they were really pleased with in terms of the success of the work that we did.

Phil: I think I want to take a step back a little bit if I may, so we started with me saying well what is it then? And you defined it as the smaller subtle changes that make better use of your strengths and your passions in the work that you do. I then levied a couple of challenges at you in terms of doesn't everybody just do this anyway and what about for when you have low autonomy or low control over what you might do? And you talked about a few of those examples. What was it that got you interested? What got you into job crafting as a thing then?

Rob: Well that's a great question. I first came across job crafting when I was studying for a master's in positive psychology. So I was a psychology undergraduate and I've worked in HR all my life and consultancy in standalone roles. And I was searching for something new in terms of some further study and self development and Google in this instance was my friend, it's not always, but Google in this instance as my friend. I was just Googling and something about positive psychology popped up, which is fundamentally the custody of flourishing and positive outcomes in different environments, so be that from work or in life or even education, in lots of different contexts, it's around actually what does the signs say about creating those positive outcomes in terms of how can we do that? So it's something I found really intriguing, that started at the research centre in the University of Melbourne where I was working at the time as well. I got funded to work on the first master's programme part time, which was fantastic, and through one of the modules looking at work, as a throwaway line actually I think but one of the researchers or the lecturers were talking about the concept of job crafting. I was really intrigued and I looked at it and thought this is fantastic. I'm always interested and a bit frustrated as well, particularly having worked in universities in a HR capacity rather than as an academic one, is the fact that we don't translate the research and science and the practice as much as we could and should do in my perspective.

Phil: Amen to that my friend.

Rob: I was looking for ideas that may potentially I could test out to see actually is there a real world practicality to this? So again if I was to be critical of the research is they don't always make it easy for people to apply these ideas in practice. So job crafting I came across through my studies and at that time most of the research was correlational, so they surveyed people and said, to what extent do you job craft? And there was a series of questions that people ask, but effectively to what extent are people shaping how they act, their interactions with other people, how they think about their job? How much are people doing that deliberately, and is that related to any positive outcomes or negative outcomes effectively? The research at the time has continued to build, shows really compelling links between globally around wellbeing, all different measures of wellbeing, around performance and around growth in terms of career growth and personal growth as well. Different studies have found different findings but within those broad things, but there wasn't at that time any research that had shown this being applied in practice. Well actually there was, I tracked down someone who'd done their PhD and it was actually a paper in Dutch that somehow had job crafting in it and I made contact with the person which was quite interesting. It was Maggie van den Heuvel who subsequently published a number of papers on job crafting interventions, and she was the first person to publish one. But other than that the PhD data there was nothing published. So I was really curious about this and I said right, for my thesis, which I had to do for the master's I'm going to test this out within the University of Melbourne context. Universities have a really broad range of skill sets and roles that

people have from finance, HR, IT, estates to academic roles, so it was a really good broad range of roles.

I just advertised sessions saying are you curious about making your job better and learning an approach to do that? I ran workshops, designed some workshops based on the research and theory, my own ideas of practice about how I could communicate these ideas and encourage people, and enable to make a job crafting change, and then I evaluated the results. And I found that initially I wanted 100 people for my pilot to see if we got that and I ended up having to turn people away when I got to 250 people, because I hadn't asked permission for this from the HR team, I just went off and did it and was doing it at lunch time and doing stuff, and it just got too big. There was clearly an appetite for it, people were interested and they were recommending other people came to these workshops. Because obviously I found in terms of the sample size they weren't in of themselves significant because I hadn't reached the power in terms of the numbers to demonstrate that. But they did show a number of positive outcomes. And my anecdotal feedback I had from speaking to people and the feedback that people rate in terms of their questionnaires and the examples they gave of how they've used this, was enough to convince me this was something that was worth pursuing. I'm really interested and curious about the fact that for whatever reason job crafting just hasn't made the jump into common understandings and within the HR or leadership community in say maybe the way that say growth mindset, which is linked to positive psychology principles as well that psychological safety has. If you talk about it most people know there's eons of articles written about them. But in terms of a research perspective job crafting is up there with those if not got more peer review papers on this concept than others and it just hasn't translated yet. I've got lots of ideas about why that is but I'm hoping to challenge and change that from the book and from the work that I do.

Phil: We'll come back to that then, so we'll come back to why do you think it's translated from those peer review journals and that research arm over into practice.

Rob: That was a very long answer to your very short question, Phil.

Phil: Oh, no, you're the guest so you get the freedom to give me long or short answers and then if you get boring I'll cut you off, but other than that you're okay. So I think what you're talking about reminds me a lot about my area of interest and passion, and that's about identity in the workplace and the different identities that we take. In particular I'm interested there's a researcher called Erving Goffman, he's a sociologist who back in the fifties/sixties/seventies talked about this notion of face and face being the micro identities that we take. So when we take a line or when we take on these small identities at different times and those small identities can then aggregate up to be bigger aspects of who we are and what we do. And his research just doesn't appear in practice at all. So if you think about one of the hardest transitions I ever had was going from being a member of a training team, I was a trainer alongside a load of other trainers, but I was then promoted to be a training team leader. It was a development opportunity which meant I didn't get the formal title and I didn't get any salary, but that's a whole other bone of contention. But the upshot of it was I had to renegotiate who I was. I built an identity with my peers and then when I got promoted I had to renegotiate that because now I was their manager, I was doing their appraisals, I was observing them and feeding back on their performance. I was monitoring their actions and what they did and how they did it, and all of those things. I found that renegotiation really hard, partly because I got some poor advice from a colleague,

but that renegotiation of who we are in the workplace is something that happens all of the time. And it's very, very rarely explored.

I think about all of the first line manager development stuff that happens in the workplace or that I have experienced in the workplace, nothing in there talks about the renegotiation of identity and relationships that you all need to have with those people that are around you. It's all about the processes of being a manager. It blows my mind that there is nearly 50 years worth, no more than that, 60 years worth of research about the importance of the sociological phenomenon and it just has not made the transition over into the workplace, never into practice should I say. Because it's in the workplace, the workplace is riddled with it but nobody knows or it's out of awareness for people that it's even happening.

Rob: Well, yeah, I think that's a really good interesting area and I must admit I haven't come across specifically you mentioned some of the areas, some of it I've stumbled on in terms of the job crafting perspective. I think within the workplaces we're so focused on task and output without embracing or understanding the innate humanity of people, the messiness of people, the complexity of it. I think again from my perspective, we both have a shared interest in tapping into that and exploring it. Because effectively you can't ignore it and that's what makes us human but rather than just ignore it and hope it works, and in some people are able to manage those challenges in the way that you've described and wrestle with them, which I'm sure you managed to do but probably with some hard work and effort, is how can we actually make that easy and have better more informed conversations? And able managers themselves to reflect on this themselves, but also maybe the leaders that they report into have some understanding that they can make transition a bit easier for the people that they manage as well.

Phil: Yeah, absolutely.

Rob: Yeah, I think I've got a shared fascination by why that doesn't happen and I think some of it is because it's not output, it's less easy to manage it, that's one of the things I'd look at. But that's a really interesting observation, Phil.

Phil: So let's stick with that for a minute then, so you mentioned you got some ideas about why, can I say a plethora, is there that much research on job crafting?

Rob: Well in terms of in 2018 there was 140 peer review papers about job crafting, this is since 2001 when it was first coined, and every year it's growing in terms of the numbers of references and citations of job crafting papers as well. So in terms of if you look at references of job crafting as a concept and foundational papers, they've been growing consistently and separately papers which have job crafting at the heart of it or one of the areas they're measuring in terms of the investigations or the paper, there's 140 of those now. So it's substantial enough that there is meta studies and there's systematic reviews as well looking at the impact of job crafting as well. There's that level that there's enough to have some confidence that it can be impactful in certain scenarios when it has been tested in a variety of different ways. Yeah, in terms of plethora, I wouldn't use plethora but I think it's substantive and I think the research is compelling but that's my own personal view/interpretation of it, it's supported by these systematic and meta analyses that I've seen and read.

Phil: Okay, and so with that substantial body of evidence or that substantial ever growing body of evidence, what do you think are the things that have stopped it translating into practice, that have kept it within that academic and research setting rather than it translating over into day to day practice in organisations?

Rob: I think there's probably lots. So one is around probably we're not always very good translating academic ideas into practice. So in terms of just that barrier and the fact that the people within academia for whatever reason don't always translate to practice. Thinking back to that conference that we both went to, Phil, I think there was probably five practitioners that were there that I could have met or bumped into that I was aware of and the majority of people at that CIPD conference for applied research were academics themselves. I don't know if your observations are the same or not?

Phil: Yeah, I think there's a couple of bits. So one I think part of what makes a good academic isn't whether your work makes a difference in the real world, in terms of what, and I maybe speaking out of turn for universities here, but my impression or my understanding is that there as a lecturer or as a researcher in academia, what you're judged against is the types of articles that you publish in, how much publishing you do or how much research and/or publishing that you do? It's not necessarily about how your research or your work is being taken and used, and applied in the real world in that world. I think in part the way that the system is set up is not set up to encourage research to be taken and used and applied in practice. So, yes, I think often there's a challenge for research to be replicable and this is where something like say growth mindset and/or the notion of Grit. So growth mindset from Carol Dweck and the notion of grit by Angela Duckworth, over the last probably 18 months to two years there's been a, I don't know how best to describe it, a toing and froing I think…

Rob: Yeah, a vibrant debate about it, yeah.

Phil: Yeah, in terms of the replicable-ness, I'm making words up, of some of those findings and/or the degree to which they've been generalised across into other areas. I think without going on a diversion down that particular track, there's a podcast recording in the pipeline between myself and Good Practice, we're going to do a dual podcast on growth mindset and Grit in particular. We're going to go in and unpick a lot of the literature and stuff that sits around it and go what's actually going on then? What's actually happening? We're going to go and unpick some of that stuff. I'll save that fair listener for you for another day. In answer to your question, why do I think it doesn't happen? I think that's part of it and I think the way the academic system is set up, researchers aren't encouraged to do so. And then if you get people like myself who is a practitioner who also enjoys doing research, the ability to take what I do in my practice and then bring that across and get it published is hard and takes time. So the paper I got published last year, it took me about 18 months to go from first draft to published, which is actually quite quick in academic publishing terms, I was quite lucky that I got to go in a special edition of the journal rather than in the normal edition of. That's one of the challenges that I find as a practitioner is I could do some research now and it might take two years before that research actually get published. So even as a practitioner trying to take what I do and further the research agenda, the time delay can almost make me think, oh what's the point? I've moved on and I'm three projects further down the road now than I was when I did that piece of research, that was two years ago. Because that's the process that you need to go through in terms of writing the

manuscripts, finding the right journals, submitting it to the journal and then getting reviewed. There can be a massive delay between you submitting a paper and the time it gets reviewed and then gets fed back. I think there needs to be more done, well there needs to be, I think there would be huge opportunities for both practitioners and researchers if more could be done to make the transition from one to the other and back even better.

Rob: I'm nodding furiously to a lot of things you were saying there, Phil. I won't add to that, I think you've that really eloquently in terms of that. I think that academic translation is one point because we asked about, why has this not happened? The second point would be around that there is an element of scepticism in terms of you were saying people are concerned about what will happen if you allow people to rip up their job descriptions, wouldn't there be anarchy in terms of the roles in the organisation? I think there is maybe people who are sceptical about it and maybe a little bit scared about it. If you're a leader at a conference and you hear about a number of different ideas, and one of them involves you conceding power and control, and giving it to other people to shape their roles a little bit, you may even think that's maybe not the way I'm going to take forward, and maybe doing something I can lead on an initiative or tell other people that they can adopt certain behaviours and perform better. So as a more top-down approach and job crafting as I've described is very much a bottom-up approach. It's not to say the leaders aren't critical and key in terms of enable job crafting but I think when people are seeing it, not all leaders naturally think this is something I really want to explore and encourage within my work environment.

Phil: I agree, and therein lies the reason that you're on the podcast for me. That's the second of the two reasons why you're on the podcast for me, so one is the impact you were describing earlier that it had on Sally and the other lady in terms of the impact on them and how they felt as they were driving home after reading their log of customer experiences or how they felt when their colleagues came up to them and said, you know when you do notes that's really useful for me because it just means I can service the customer so much better. And then the other reason why I wanted to get you on the podcast is because of the emotional impact it has for individuals and maybe unfairly, but the emotional impact it has for managers to let somebody have that degree of freedom, even if it is only ten minutes a day, which is an hour a week of freedom to shape or craft the job in the way that they do. Because often, as you alluded to, what we think is better is if we control everything, so if we can control everything then that makes more efficiency.

Rob: Absolutely, and I think that is something that is absolutely critical and I think we're having a shift as well, I think in terms of there is recognition. Certainly the organisations I work with, I'm sure similar to yourself that are interested in some of the ideas that we are exploring and want to encourage people to experiment with, that they recognise that actually it's getting the best out of people. So lots of organisations talk around enabling people to bring their best and whole selves to work, and when you say whole selves, that's their emotional selves. But they don't actually have any kind of evidence based or well thought out approaches to do that. So they just say it and hope that happens. So I think leaders have an absolute critical role in enabling and creating the opportunity for people to personalise their work and their experiences. So the first thing if you're going to personalise something there's lots of different elements I'd say in terms of personalisation in the first instance, and if you don't give people that choice then they're not going hit anywhere. And secondly that opportunity and if the manager says we're not going to give you an opportunity, you shouldn't be

doing this then it's not going to happen. And similarly people need energy to make changes to what they're doing. And if they're beaten down by their leaders or work in a controlled environment where they've tried multiple times to try new things and they're continually getting told not to do it, eventually over time they'll stop doing it.

So you're going to need all those different factors in terms of choice, opportunity and energy, and the leaders I'd say and would argue are critical in terms of doing it. So leaders when they're at a conference and they hear about four ideas and one of them is around encouraging the people they manage and people in the organisation to experiment more with how they do their job, some people are maybe a bit concerned about it. Some are really excited about it, some are concerned and I think that's one of the reasons it hasn't translated. I think also just in terms of for whatever reason some ideas get the zeitgeist and are more sexy and more interesting than others. I think for whatever reason at this moment in time job crafting hasn't hit it, but I do believe more and more, and particularly if you look at the future of work, when people are talking about hybrid jobs which you're having to reimagine how work exists, we're going to shift our focus, particularly in the HR community I'd argue around actually looking at job design, in a way that we just haven't for a long time. And actually how jobs are created and enabled. And job crafting I think could provide one of the mechanisms to enable people to do that in a well thought out way, it's not going to be the only solution to it, and again I'm not naïve enough to think job crafting is a panacea, we can talk about limitations as well, I'm sure you're going to ask me about them.

But I think it's in terms of everything we hear about in terms of the future of work, job design is key to that and job crafting sits within that as well from my perspective. I'm hopeful that it will change and hopeful conversations like this, one conversation at a time makes a difference and I'm hoping things like the book and others will change people's perspectives. So that's a marketing aspect or a section of aspects to it as well as one of the problems. There may be others, have you got anything that you think I've missed there? Maybe you can relate, not necessarily job crafting, but maybe to some of the work that you do?

Phil: I don't know because I was listening to you, so I'm not sure to be honest. I was so busy listening to you I haven't thought about it. Is there anything else I would add? I don't think so, at least not for now anyway. What I would like to do though is come back to the three things you talked about, so choice, opportunity and energy. So where did those come from because one of the questions I had was about what are the variables that seem to either encourage or enable job crafting? I think what you've done there I think is list either those three or at least list three of the variables that can encourage job crafting. Where did choice, opportunity and energy come from?

Rob: So literally towards the end of the book, we need a conclusion in terms of how can people make it accessible? So this was a formula that hasn't been tested, it's something that literally I'm putting out there to people to say this is my suggestion in terms of some factors you need to consider when you're looking at personalisation. And that's it. So it's informed by the reading that I've done, informed by the research, but it's the idea of that formula that popped into my head, well not popped into it, a bit of thinking behind it. But there's no theoretical underpinning to it that I can point to specifically.

Phil:	That's okay. Tell me a bit about those three then, so from your perspective, tell me more about why those three? Why are those three the hooks that you're hanging it off of?

Rob:	So my perspective in terms of if you're thinking about any element, and this goes broader than job crafting and personalisation, and the fact that when I've had conversations with people who are saying, "My leader says I can job craft, I've got an opportunity to do it." But in reality when you're saying, "Why don't you?" Saying, "Well actually I've got so much to do and in terms of the outputs I need to do that I haven't got those time and energies." That's one example so I was thinking, okay, so theoretically they've got the same choice, they could do it but they haven't maybe got the opportunity or the energy to do it because they're spending it elsewhere. I think the energy aspect is something that I recognise that if you want to do something differently from your standard behaviour, to your routine habits and behaviours, that takes effort and if you haven't got the energy, if you're not in the right state to do it, then it's going to be very hard to have the motivation to do it. Similarly if you want to start a new diet or a new habit or whatever, if you're not full of energy, you've not rested, it's going to be that much harder to do it. So that's the energy aspects of it. The choice was around actually fundamentally you need to have that opportunity there, it's either there or not, and then the opportunity is actually, can you take it forward?

So if you think about, I don't know, in terms of people's working hours or where people work from in terms of their working from home, you could say people can personalise their working week in terms of where they work. So they may have lots of choice because the organisation may say you can work anywhere, it's up to you. But in reality if the manager is saying actually we want everyone to be here regularly and it's important to me that we're here for one to ones and then maybe don't embrace technology. That may impede that opportunity aspect of it. And then in terms of again some people will have the energy or the courage to challenge it anyway, and say well actually well the policy says this or the organisation says this. Others necessarily won't have the energy to fight it or to try different things. So for me I was speaking to a group of HR managers and leaders last week and I was saying when you're looking at a policy or an approach or even something such as change, maybe think about these different factors in terms of are they there? In terms of change it gives people the opportunity to actually influence that in some respects? So have they got a choice in terms how that change is done to them? Have they got opportunity to share those ideas in terms of how the change initiative or whatever it is, is introduced? And have they got the energy, are they in a place to be able to do that? Because sometimes again people say, oh we asked people if they want to do this but no one showed up or no one's made any suggestions. It doesn't mean to say that they haven't got the ideas, it's just either they haven't had the opportunity to do it because they're so busy or they're just so downtrodden they just haven't got the energy to suggest them in the first instance.

Phil:	Certainly when you talk about change that the choice aspect of it came out in the podcast I recently did with Hilary Scarlett about organisational change. She talked about the importance of choice within that. You can't necessarily choose the change but you might be able to choose the way the change works or how the change goes or the process that the change is communicated by or anything you can do to give more of the choice, has a beneficial outcome or result or an impact on what it is you're trying to do.

Rob: Yeah, absolutely, I really enjoyed that interview. Since you gave an example about choice, if you haven't listened to that podcast, stop listening to me now, you have my permission…[laughs].

Phil: No, stay [laughs].

Rob: It was a really good, I really enjoyed it. She gave some really good examples there about choice. But again choice, it's not just enough to give choice people have got to have the opportunity and energy to actually follow through with it, because it's just not going to happen. So that's where that formula came from. There isn't a theoretical direct link to a particular academic who's presented it but it's just my sense of what's out there.

Phil: That's all right, a lot of ideas have got to start somewhere so that's all right, that's okay. So in terms of you mentioned about limitations and I want to come back to that, before that though, is there a difference between job crafting and micro crafting or are they just variations on a theme?

Rob: So again in terms of gaps of research when I was studying for this in the first instance, I mentioned most of the research had been correlational, so it had been looked at job crafting activity and there wasn't any analysis at the time of what the makeup of the job crafting activity was, so it was just say did you do it rather than…

Phil: How did you do it and how do you feel?

Rob: One of the pieces of research that I undertook with the university in terms in terms of positive psychology in Melbourne was to actually, that workshop example I mentioned in Melbourne, I collected lots of examples and we actually analysed them. And we found that the majority of the job crafting activities that people were doing tended to be pretty small, so ten minutes a day or less, which is why I've used it for workshops in terms of encouraging people to do it. I together with Gavin Slemp who's the academic I was working with we came up with, we came up with this idea of micro crafting. So job crafting in a sense is making any changes to a job, micro crafting is specifically and intentionally making small changes to your job. That's certainly the way that we present it as an idea and we think it could be useful as an idea both in research and in practice in terms of enabling and starting people on their job crafting journeys. The opposite of the micro crafting is macro job crafting and I've come across examples of people who've completely created their own jobs over time through the work that they've done. So people can craft in a really substantive big way but the area that I've seen most people do this, and this has subsequently being ratified by other research, that people tend to do it in small ways, on a day to day basis. And that's why I think we just from a practical point of view I'm interested in making it happen, so my perspective is let's start small. As I said people approach it more playfully generally when you start it small, it's something that there's low stakes, so it doesn't matter if it doesn't go right or go wrong.

Phil: So out of interest then if you had to choose between, I know the revenues are obviously better if you went for a big four knowledge economy consulting firm, but if you could choose between a firm of panel beaters in Solihull and one of the big four consulting firms, would you rather go after the panel beaters in Solihull because the potential, if I'm interpreting what you said correctly, the potential in the big four consulting firm for example might be actually macro crafting. But in terms of the micro

crafting aspect of things is your panel beater from Solihull going to be more applicable for the type of research that you might want to do in the future or am I talking out my arse?

Rob: I don't think I've ever heard you talk out of your arse, Phil, but I'll look out of that in the future. I think there's a couple of things in that question, who would I like to work with? I think I'm interested in seeing and hearing about the changes through the application of the ideas, so I'm relatively agnostic about what audience I'm serving within that. But I do think that we as certainly within, and I'm talking about the HR community here in terms of speaking to people, make assumptions about what people can and can't do in terms of say you can't do this if you've got a low autonomy job or you can do this, they for whatever reason they don't make the grade in terms of saying these ideas are applicable to you. I think that's maybe giving them a disservice in terms of…maybe people in that group maybe more people who are just happy just to do their job and show up, and aren't interested in it. That's a sweeping statement, it may not be true. I think the make up of that group may be more complex in terms of the reasons for their work and the extent to which they're doing it for a sense of meaning and fulfilment for their wider life. But I think we need to be careful that we're making assumptions about what does and doesn't apply to them. I think the areas that I've had the most fun from working with is when organisations have taken this as a whole organisational approach, in terms of saying actually we want to encourage everyone, no matter what job you're doing, from the call centre or from the cleaning crew, to the C-suite, applying these ideas, like a shared language. That's what I'm getting really excited and I've been really lucky to do that with a couple of clients, where they've actually really embraced this idea, and I've got examples from literally all levels of the organisation where they've implemented this idea. We've talked about two examples and maybe I'll give you a couple more at a more senior mid level as well just in terms of…

Phil: Oh, yeah, I was going to say…

Rob: So in terms of how they're used. One example we had that stuck in my mind and I won't name this client because I haven't got permission for me to use it, but it was at the senior level. And they were saying that what mattered to them was connecting other people and they spent all their time with people in meetings and things, but they ran from one meeting to the next and their day had been diaried to an inch of its life. With the best possible intentions they didn't actually connect with people because they were literally running from meeting to meeting. So what they decided to do with their five or ten minutes a day was to actually rather than sending an email, once a day they would go out and speak to someone or pick up the phone to talk about an issue, if they could do. Now again this is practical realities, the opportunities may not have afforded themselves everyday, but when they could, that's what they wanted to do. They described it as if they were swimming against the tide of their diary, they should be doing this but they wanted to just make this connection and do this, invested five minutes, it was fine. They felt that they were taking control of their day, they felt positive for the connection they were making and it made a small and subtle but significant difference in terms of they were wrestling a bit more control of their day. Because in reality you don't think this, you think they've got loads of autonomy, but actually at the senior levels a lot of the time they don't have much control over their diaries and things, it's dictated to them by others. Which again it surprised me but that seems to be…

Phil: Yeah.

Rob: That's actually subsequently been played out in terms of some research about job crafting at the CEO level actually in terms of the, again in terms of the positive psychology in Melbourne, that came out. So that was an example and again the unintended consequences of this is this person noted a month later that one of his colleagues came out and actually was saying to them, "You've been walking the corridors a bit more, is that deliberate thing to get out and about, to be seen?" Because that's something that people might say in a conference with a management, you need to be walking the walk…

Phil: You got to be pressing the flesh.

Rob: Exactly, pressing the flesh that's exactly right. And that was the antithesis of what the idea behind it but this five minute change had been noticed by colleagues in terms of the dynamic, and so it made a difference to their colleagues as well in terms of this person was a bit more approachable. They say they're approachable and they've got an open door policy but if you're never in the office or if you've always got your head down because you're running from one thing to the next, in reality you're not that accessible. So that was just one example. Another example was with the change team who worked in project management from an IT perspective, and they have retrospectives in terms of their work. So a month after the project had landed they'd have a meeting, they'd say what went well, what hadn't gone well? But they found that actually those conversations were still quite, it was everyone's interest to not pick over the bones too much, the relationships were still quite tense in terms of just deliver the project. It wasn't maybe necessarily everyone's interest to actually really deeply reflect on what went well and what didn't go well. But what they wanted to do, so they decided that what they were going to invest in, an hour a week to meet up with customers that they delivered projects for a year ago, to go back in six to 12 months in terms of projects they delivered to. And what they found was they had conversations about things that went well and what didn't go well. The big stuff are the things that stuck in people's minds. The fact that they were six or 12 months ago meant there was no stakes in the game, so they could be much more open in terms of their feedback that they got from the conversations. They found a number of different things that came out from these discussions that then they used to shape how they manage their ongoing projects as it were.

So they learned quite a lot from these retrospective six month, 12 month conversations that you wouldn't normally have had. But they wanted to do it, the driver for it was that he wanted to again feel that he was making a difference in terms of his project. Sometimes he felt that actually his projects maybe wasn't delivering the impact that they wanted to, in terms of that was the intention to deliver efficiency savings or make life easier for people, but in reality he sometimes wondered whether they actually did or didn't in reality. So that was the purpose of it and he found that actually there was positive outcomes for it and the feedback he got was something that was a different context, shape and nature from the traditional textbook retrospectives that happened a month afterwards. Again you stumble upon opportunities for learning and unintended consequences from having small experiments and doing your job differently.

Phil: So I really like two things, one really useful different perspectives and different examples and case studies from what you talked about earlier on, which I think is fab. Also selfishly everything you've just described is all about face and face work. Everything, I'm sat here as a researcher going that's all

to do with face and face work, it's all about how by doing it quickly the likelihood of threatening somebody's credibility, so the likelihood of threatening their face or threatening their relationship in terms of oh we just finished this work and if I say it didn't go very well then that might damage our relationship or by threatening somebody's competence and their ability to do their job, so saying that project didn't land or didn't deliver as well as it could have done, then it could be threatening their competence and their ability to do their job. Likewise the company has said this is a really important thing and now we've done it, so if I said it didn't really work, then that's going to threaten the reputation of the company and all of those things. Whereas when you do it once the stakes are less then the degree of threat becomes less, which means often the honesty increases. It makes me smile…

Rob: Fantastic and again it's one of those things that the individual gave themselves permission to do. It may have been a threat the way you've described it makes complete sense to me, and I hadn't thought about it in quite those terms before, but it wasn't saying this is what you should do, it was just something the individual tried. That's the thing I'm fascinated by is how do you create more of those opportunities for learning and growth, and development that benefits everyone by just changing how you do your job on a day to day process.

Phil: So I want to start to bring us together and wrap us up then, so one of the things that I keep saying that I'll talk about and I don't is limitations. You mentioned that there are some limitations around job crafting/micro crafting. So what might be some of those then?

Rob: Yeah, so it's limitations, in terms of the research itself, I think it's really important to say, there's lots of research and it's compelling, there is also the caveat that within all research the quality of that, even though the peer review papers maybe mixed and I think within context is different researchers will have slightly different descriptions of job crafting and all the questions that they've used to measure it, and that's a frustration for everyone. Again there's lots of reasons that explain it in the fact that for most researchers want to do unique research, that's the purpose of it, so it's not in everyone's interest to necessarily replicate previous research or use someone else's definition of job crafting, and they're always constantly tweaking or changing it. So in terms of while I do believe that the majority of the research is looking at the same phenomena, from a very specific definition perspective, you can't had on heart say all those papers are going to be looking at it in the exactly the same way, you just don't know. I think obviously within the context, within the organisations that people are operating is there weren't the same organisations, all of it was different. That's a limitation in terms of the research. They're probably the two biggest ones from my perspective. So that's from a research perspective.

From a practical perspective the limitations and the fact that you aren't always going to get the outcomes that you expect and they aren't always going to be positive. So an example that came across, and this is someone within an HR team, was say they were finding they were working too much, in terms of balance of their work, they were doing too much work in the evenings. And even though they were checking their emails and doing stuff, every time they were doing it they didn't really want to be doing it, but they felt compelled to do it and it was having an impact on their work. So one of the things they wanted to do was just say right from now on I'm just not going do this anymore, I'm not going to check my emails at all full stop, cold turkey kind of thing. And after two weeks they were asked about it and they actually said they felt worse because they felt they were letting people down,

they felt they weren't doing their job properly, and actually it took away an element of flexibility. Because occasionally they would just leave work a bit earlier or whatever and they knew they could do some work in the evening. So that self enforced, I'm going to stop doing this, may lead to improving lower levels of stress and wellbeing. If anything it actually increased them a little bit because they were like I'm not staying on top of my work, I'm not managing it. So actually they softened it in terms of saying well actually on a Monday and a Friday I'm not going to do this, that was their guiding light in terms of saying it. Actually they did do it in the evenings but they were mindful when they did it, so they it was more deliberate. So that's an example of where you think stopping doing something is going to lead to a better outcome but it doesn't. And similarly from a research perspective, from job crafting is that we know that when people stop or reduce activities, there is more likely that the result may be negative as well as positive. Whereas if you add to your task or do something that's engaging or build on something you know you like doing, that generally will lead to a positive outcome. You almost, I'm going to say almost universally, very much focused on the 'almost', but if you're doing something where you're reducing or limiting something, there is less of a certainty that that's going to lead to a positive outcome. And there's lots of reasons for that in terms of social pressure, I mentioned feeling that you're maybe not able to cope with your job, that the only reason you're doing this is that if you're say working too much overtime, the reason you're doing it is because you're not good enough at your job and just because you stop doing overtime, doesn't mean to say you're going to get better doing your job if that makes sense?

Phil: Yeah, it does.

Rob: That's one of the limitations. And thirdly I'd say, and there's more than this, there's a risk in terms of if you're encouraged to do this, say the organisation says I think everyone should job craft and yet your manager says, no you can't, you will actually feel worse than if you hadn't been introduced to the concept of job crafting in the first instance. Actually you take a step back by being impeded from job crafting if you're not able to do it. I think that's why people need to be cautious and careful about this in terms of the context that you're trying to introduce this for. So whilst I'm optimistic that it can have a positive benefit, most environments that I've come across it has to have the caveat of I suppose the opportunity, and the energy to do that. If you take those away then actually people may feel worse because they're feeling they're being in congress within the organisation, they're saying one thing but actually the reality is something different and that can make people feel worse. So there's off the top of my head some things to be curious and to think about it.

The others would be around job crafting in terms of limitations is why are you doing it? You asked me about Virgin Money, why do they do it? What's the evidence? What are you trying to fix? Why are you trying to encourage this an idea? It is not linked to something that you're trying to achieve or you've got something you want to get an outcome of this, then I'd question why you're doing it? I'm not saying you shouldn't do it but I think it's always useful to have a clear and strong reason for doing it and ideally evaluate what the outcomes are as well, to take more of an evidence based approach.

Phil: Fab, wonderful. Let's do a few wrap up questions then. So are there, and I'm asking this for certainty because as being part of the conversation I think you talked about these already but I just want to be sure, are there any myths or misconceptions around this personalisation and job crafting that you would like address or put to bed that we haven't talked about already?

Rob: That's a great invitation. I wouldn't say anything jumps out in my mind, I think the key thing is that it's not a panacea, that's one thing it's not going to fix everything, but I do think that people could be curious about seeing what does or doesn't work within yourself or without your organisation. I think the others is job crafting isn't around necessarily redesigning your complete job and ripping apart your job description, because I think that's sometimes a concern or maybe even how it's portrayed sometimes in a sexy glamourous way in terms of what you can do with that and the hard reality that that's not either achievable or nor for the research. The cases I've seen actually is the reality of it that people do the small stuff, which again isn't the sexy stuff, which comes back to this marketing aspect that we talked about a little bit, in terms of it's maybe less glamorous than some people make it out to be that talk about it. So they're probably two things that jump out for me. But it's been a really discussion so, no, I think I've had a good chance to talk about it.

Phil: Wonderful, thank you. In that case then, we haven't done it so let's plug the book, so, Rob, here we go, the floor is yours, book plug coming in three, two, one, go?

Rob: The book is called Personalization at Work and it's my attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice. I spend time focusing on actually what the evidence tells us about job crafting, what it doesn't, what are the limitations? And from that it's saying actually what are the examples of actually how you can bring this to life. So looking at different organisations ranging from Logitech and Google to Wideroe Airlines to Connect Health, to Virgin Money and Leeds university. So different settings of how people have used job crafting, so lots of stories. And then the focus for me at the end is around it's actually what are the practical ways? If you're curious about this, what could you do to explore and experiment with this as yourself but also with your team, and colleagues. It sounds like I'm trying to do everything with the book and maybe we'll find that that is a criticism of it, but I'm trying to make some practical and accessible but researched informed.

Phil: If I look at the people that you've got to do the endorsements at the start of the book, when you've got the likes of Adam Grant in that list then you're off to a strong start if I may so Mr Baker.

Rob: One of the things I would say about writing the book is it gave me an opportunity to contact and interview, and speak to some of my research practitioner heroes, in terms of their perspectives and that was a real joy and privilege in terms of what I did. So Adam Grant, Sharon Parker, there's to too many and I'm going to miss people if I start doing this…

Phil: Let's not do that.

Rob: But there are people that I admire and their thinking and their writing and their research, so it was great to speak to them.

Phil: Oh, good. All right. If people wanted to get in touch with you, how would you like our fair listener to get in touch?

Rob: So probably the best thing to do about the book you can look at the Personalization at Work and you can spell the personalisation with a 'z' or an 's' or tailoredthinking.co.uk is the business

address. And there's some tools for people that don't necessarily want to pick up the book I've tried to make some resources and references and tools available to people on the website tailoredthinking.co.uk so people can check that out as well.

Phil: Fab, wonderful and I'll make sure I put links to all those in the show notes.

Rob: And LinkedIn, Twitter, anything like that, I'm really interested and happy to share anything that I know or don't know as it were with people.

Phil: I'll put links to the website to the book on the generic online shopping store and I'll put links to your Twitter and your LinkedIn bios as well.

Rob: Perfect.

Phil: So my final question as always then, is there anything else then that you're thinking, feeling or want to say?

Rob: No, I think that's it. I think one question you sometimes ask people I'm prepared with is other resources that people want to…

Phil: Of course, yeah, sorry.

Rob: I would send them through to you but there's a couple of short videos that I think when I'm introducing job crafting that I think are really useful and one of them is Amy Wrzesniewski, who's the founder of the concept of the term. So that's something I'd put a link to. And the other is the researcher called Arnold Bakker who is an occupational psychologist but he makes all these papers and materials as accessible as he can do on the website and he's also a good follow on Twitter. So I'll send you his Twitter handle on the website.

Phil: Oh yes please.

Rob: If people are interested in that they can look at it and he's written some chapters on a number of papers about job crafting and he does his best to make them all openly available. Whether they should be or not I don't know but it's great and they're on his website, so share that as a resource.

Phil: Fab, thank you very much. All right, anything else?

Rob: No, I think that's it, Phil, just to say thanks very much and thanks for the series that you're doing, I personally benefit from it quite a lot.

Phil: Aw, thank you, that's very kind of you to say.

Rob: It's great to contribute, thanks very much.

Phil: Thanks for coming on, thanks, Rob.

Rob: Thanks, Phil, bye.