Episode 65
Emotion at Work in Psychological Advantages of Working Remotely

Phil Willcox: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition. And today, we're hearing from Liam Martin, and Liam will share his knowledge of some really interesting research that we talked about in our off-air conversation, which I'm really interested in because it's not one of those like point in time pieces of research, it's something that gets updated regularly. But anyway, I'll stop talking about that now because Liam will talk about that later. And also we're going to talk about working from home, working remotely, productivity and there'll be a combination of research and also personal stories in there as well. Liam is the co-founder and chief marketing officer at Time Doctor, which is about gaining insights into productivity for remote teams. It provides reassurance that individuals are indeed engaged in their tasks and it officially handles the different systems and processes, and most importantly though, it's about enabling managers to focus on those interpersonal or those soft/crucial/critical whatever other kind of skills we want to call it. So let's get our guest on the air, so welcome to The Emotion at Work podcast, Liam Martin. Hi, Liam.

Liam Martin: Thanks for having me, Phil, excited to be here. And I know why you stuttered through that intro, it's because it's taken us 15 minutes to actually connect on this call, and I'm in the same boat with you, so I feel like let's just ride this sucker where we need to ride it and hopefully we get as comfortable as humanly possible with each other over the next hour and a half and talk about some deep issues connected to remote work.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, that sounds really good to me, I'd like that a lot. I'd like that a lot. So, as per usual for this podcast then we'll open with an unexpected yet innocuous question. So, my question for you today is what makes for a good vehicle driver? I was going to say car but I'll go for vehicle. So, what for you makes a good driver of a vehicle?

Liam Martin: What is the definition of good?

Phil Willcox: I will leave that open to you.

Liam Martin: Okay, the way that I'm processing it good can be a defensive driver. Good could be someone that doesn't get in many car accidents. A good driver could be someone that actually drives fast like James Bond, that's able to navigate things and is probably getting in a lot of accidents but is someone who is relatively dangerous as a driver. So, I think it's dependent upon your perspective. I'm going to go with the James Bond version because that's more exciting and for me, a good driver is someone that is actually looking down the highway and seeing what's going to happen in the next 20 seconds, the more that you can assess where danger is coming from and the more into the future that you can assess that danger, the more successful you are as a driver. Also my wife bought me a pair of driving gloves, like leather gloves and…

Phil Willcox: Oh, really? I've never had driving gloves.

Liam Martin: Oh, they look really stupid, but I got to tell you they actually work because you can hang on to the wheel, even with the side of your palm you can hold on to the wheel if you're turning and it just gives you more grip. And so that's also a really good thing for people to pick up, it's like, I don't know, they're probably 30 or 40 bucks. Try them, you may look stupid, but, hey, you'll be safer as a driver.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, I hadn't thought about it from a…I don't know why I hadn't thought about it from a grip point of view, but that absolutely makes sense. Yeah, that makes sense. So, what for me makes for a good driver? So, my wife is a really nervous passenger, but I really love driving. So one of the times where I feel most alive is where I'm throwing like a go kart around a track, where I'm pushing a Go Kart to its absolute, well probably not even to its limits, where I'm pushing myself in the Go Kart to my limits, where I feel like I'm just on the edge of maybe losing the tail of the Go Kart. So thinking, can I get down that small space in between the edge of the track and that driver? So I often have that, I don't know, it's a very English word, quandary, that element of where I really feel alive when I'm behind the wheel of a vehicle and also conscious that I can see my wife's right leg moving to go and press the brake when she thinks I should be breaking or telling me to slow down as I'm going around a corner. I think for me what makes for a good driver is one that considers themselves, the road and their passenger, because I think when I don't do that I get in trouble, my wife will definitely tell me off if I don't consider what I'm doing as well as what's happening on the road, and those that are in the car with me. She hasn't yet got to the point where she won't let our kids come in the car with me, so I can't be that dangerous, but very much getting on a Go Kart track and testing my limits out there is a safer option than doing it with my wife in the car with me because I get told off if I do that.

Liam Martin: Fair. I think that for me I also probably in terms of that question, I was thinking of driving on my own and I never really thought about having my kids in the car as an example or my wife, and if I recalculated that I would probably think, well, I would probably think the same way, but I wouldn't think about driving dangerously at all as an example. I did a defensive driving course, not a defensive driving course, I did, I guess, I think it is called defensive driving, but it's the opposite of that, it's aggressive driving, where you can do like stunt driving, where you'll do a doughnut and you'll try to park in a spot or high speed chase driving or you try to hit a car in exactly the right spots that they spin out, so that the car that you're trying to get off the road can spin out and all this kind of stuff. And it was so fun. I did it in Vegas and that's the type of driving that I remember the instructor was saying, you need to identify danger as forward thinking as humanly possible. So you need to be as forward thinking as possible in terms of danger and if you can assess that then you will be just fine.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, definitely. And my eldest is 16, so in the UK you can start to learn to drive at 17, so she's going to start to learn to drive next year, and I've already started with, as we drive down a road together, I'm saying to her, right, tell me what you see? Where are the hazards? Describe to me what you see ahead of you or what you see coming or what are you interpreting from what's going on around you? Which is really interesting because often she'll look very closely, so she'll look in the, if you said seconds, I think she might look three, five, six seconds away. Whereas I'm with you it's about looking up a little bit and just looking that a little bit further ahead to go, right, what else can I see? What else is going on? So, yeah, I'm with you on that. And I think I'm going to use that as a link

or as a segue into our conversation today, because one of the things that I find with remote management or with those that are leading and managing remote teams, and I suppose it might be different if you've always worked in a remote way, but if you've worked a lot in person, then you make the shift to working, rather than a hybrid or a remote way, my experience is that managers or organisations can look really closely, they look like here in terms of right in front of their face for their fears and their worries, and their concerns, and their risks, without necessarily looking that bit further ahead and going, yeah, but what else could be happening and could be going on? So, if that's an appropriate segue, I think I'll take that, if that's all right? Do you think similar to me? And I'm happy to disagree, we said off air let's disagree if we need to do that. What do you think to that?

Liam Martin: Well, so I agree with you but I think that it's totally reasonable for the vast majority of management to think in that context, because to be honest with you, we're in a state of emergency remote work still in July of 2023. So, just to give everyone context, in February of 2020 4% of the US workforce was working remotely and by March 45% of the US workforce was working remotely. That is the biggest shift in work since the Industrial Revolution, but the Industrial Revolution took about 80 years and we did that in March. Everything that we can possibly think of has changed with regards to how we interact with work, how our economies interact with work, how we even socialise. If you take a look at downtown San Francisco today, there are no restaurants, there are no coffee shops, it is an absolutely dead core because of that corporate real estate that has disappeared and will never be coming back. And so when we look at where the economies of the world are currently going and how management interacts with that, it's not surprising at all that they just don't know where to go next because they don't have the tools, they don't have the skill sets. We're talking about people that have spent the last 10, 20, 30, 40 years of their lives managing in an office environment, what remote work people call on premise management. Whereas with remote, we look at distributed management and more specifically, there are methodologies inside of that management that are very, very different from on premise management that most of those managers don't understand. And they will continue to only be thinking that one to two seconds in front of their faces, until they actually figure out how to build a long term successful methodology for managing remote workers.

Phil Willcox: That's interesting, I like the frame of on premise rather than in office, that's interesting, on premise management and remote management were the two frames you used, yeah?

Liam Martin: Yes.

Phil Willcox: So, what might be a remote management methodology that you see used? Is that right? No, let me try again. What might be a remote management methodology that you think could be quite effective for someone if they first dipping their toe in the water, they're going from on premise management to remote management, what might be a methodology that could help them?

Liam Martin: One of the biggest things that on premise managers don't really understand is that the application of results is completely different in terms of the measurement for on premise versus remote. Remote is an out based organisation and on premise is a, well, it's an on premise based set of activities. It's an activity based measurement. So, one of the reasons why I wrote a book about this subject about ten months ago, which was also called Running Remote is I looked at what all of

these companies that were remote before the pandemic were doing differently from companies that are currently working remotely, and the one singular thing, and it's really only just one thing that they do differently from everyone else is something that I call asynchronous management. Which is the ability to be able to manage people without directly synchronously interacting with them. So, we're communicating on Zoom right now and the average newly remote company, a company that is remote since the pandemic spends 56% of their work week on video communication, on synchronous form of communication. And the average asynchronous organisation spends about 20% of their time communicating synchronously. So, 56% of people's work weeks are simply spent preparing to do work as opposed to doing work and it's because the feedback loops of actually collecting that information and identifying what are the people that are under me currently doing is broken. And it's a system that doesn't understand that you can actually create project management systems, feedback loops, forms of measurement that are not dependent upon the manager manually collecting that information. We call it the platform being the manager as opposed to the individual. And so the platform is what collects all of the metrics and the manager just focuses on the EQ side of the business, how can I get you through these problems that you're currently experiencing in terms of achieving success? And success is whatever you want to be able to define it to be, because the measurement of that success is actually completely automated. So I would probably say the most important thing that a manager can recognise is that your goal inside of a remote organisation is to try to reduce your employees distractions as much as humanly possible. And unfortunately, the manager is the primary cause of distraction for the employee. So you need to be able to figure out how to extricate yourself from that environment so that the employee can focus on work, as opposed to telling you what they're currently doing as opposed to doing it.

Phil Willcox: Okay. What helps that mindset shift? So you described what the mindset shift is, what helps that mindset shift then?

Liam Martin: When you look at the average employee that joins a remote organisation, the process of onboarding that person is a perfect example of how you can apply an asynchronous mindset. Inside of asynchronous organisations you will end up asking some questions on Slack or Microsoft Teams as an example, and within about three or four messages, usually someone will take you aside and will say, hey, you need to stop asking these questions of your manager, you're actually distracting your manager and your coworkers, you need to instead go into the documentation where all those answers are available for you. So, our organisation we have thousands of different process documents that connect to everything that an employee will do throughout work day or their work lives, and every single question that we can think about has been answered. And if it's a new unique question then we write a new process document for it. So, when someone joins the company, Phil, if you were to join the company, you would very quickly get a training on how to access this database, and it would be your responsibility to be able to navigate that database independently of your manager or your coworkers. And if you started annoying your managers and coworkers with a bunch of questions, we would actually then go back to you and say, hey, you need more training on how to access all this documentation and/or you might not just be a good fit inside of our organisation. And that's something that actually is really problematic inside for employees that are joining asynchronous organisations, because they think that it's a very cold organisation and it's not so much as it is a cold organisation, it is that what we want to be able to do is make sure that you are never waiting to get information, that you independently accept all forms of information inside of

the organisation. Which actually leads to another issue that we talk about, which is central to asynchronous organisations, which is radical transparency. And we believe that everyone should have the same informational advantage as the CEO of the company. So if you joined our company, you would be able to get access to our PNO, you'd be able to get access to all of our finance information, our customer information, our marketing information, our engineering information. We have this policy that if you have the same information as the CEO, you actually don't need to ask any questions because you know exactly what you need to do and how to do it. And that's the same trend that we've seen in these other asynchronous organisations that have become incredibly successful before the pandemic and then also have accelerated post pandemic.

Phil Willcox: So how did that feel when you put that radical transparency in? Because I can imagine that being really quite scary for people.

Liam Martin: There are some people…so we've always been quite transparent with everyone inside of the organisation and the only thing that we hold back is HR information, generally because we don't want our employees to know about the personal issues of other employees inside of the organisation. But outside of that people get access to everything. And it's very scary, particularly for the founders of the organisation, me being one of them…

Phil Willcox: Yeah, I was going to say you being one.

Liam Martin: But the beauty of it is that once you actually go through that transition, employees magically, it's almost like they've all gained 20 IQ points overnight because they actually end up, it's not that you're smarter than anyone, it's that you have an informational advantage over them. And no one has an informational advantage over anyone else, all of a sudden, people start making much more intelligent decisions and much more actionable decisions, which don't require you to be a barrier towards that decision making. We have another value that we have inside of the company, which is that you shouldn't ask me what to do, you should tell me what you did. And that's a mindset that's relatively difficult for employees and employers to be able to get their heads around. More for employees than for employers, but once you get that mindset locked in, then you have a lot of independent activity, that your failure rate goes up. So, in any company you have speed versus precision and the data is very clear, the faster your organisation is at the cost of precision, it's one of those things, it's almost like a teeter-totter, you can't have a fast precise organisation, that's not the way it works. The faster you go, the less precise you become. The more precise you become, the slower you move as an organisation. So, you have to choose. Speed is always the right decision. Now speed creates a lot of problems inside of the organisation, that's a lot more stressful environment, people get things wrong, people make wrong decisions, but fundamentally speed outweighs precision all the time. And when you have a group of people that have every single piece of information in front of them, it just allows you to be able to accelerate that speed at a clip that I don't think most on premise organisations really understand, because they just can't interact at that speed in comparison to, well, in comparison to anything. I'll give you a perfect example is someone in the company last week ended up launching a completely different feature set that I didn't even know about until it launched. And it was a great feature set, everything was done very, very well, because everyone had done their checks and balances on it. But I wasn't involved in it because I didn't need to know that piece of information. It was very cool and I think we're probably going to

generate millions of dollars in new revenue this year off of that particular feature. And it was amazing that I had nothing to do with it whatsoever, because everyone just had that information in front of them, they were able to look at the customers, how they interacted with all the other features inside of our company and they built an insight and built out a feature that is probably going to become one of our hottest features this year and I had nothing to do with it.

Phil Willcox: I don't know how I feel about that. I don't know if it's an ego thing.

Liam Martin: There's a lot of ego connected to this, Phil. I would say that probably if I had to really nail down why people don't do this, and there was a chapter in the book that I didn't include, which is I ran 20 case studies, I tried to take these companies asynchronous. And it actually ended up being a big failure. Only 10% got to the target that I wanted. I didn't reduce the amount of asynchronous time that they had and the remainder actually remained the same or increased the amount of asynchronous time that they had inside of the company. And what I realised was it really boiled down to managers like having an informational advantage over their employees, because they like to believe that they know more than their employees. And it's just shit you've got to get out of your business because that stuff that's just, it doesn't work. Because I'll tell you, one of the other things that asynchronous organisations all have in common is they measure management versus IC rate. So they have this interesting metric and I picked it up at one company called [inaudible 00:24:19] and then there were about five or six other companies that ended up having the same measure called IC rate. And I kept asking, what is this? It's individual contribution rate. And what these companies are doing or have done is their [inaudible 00:24:39] is 50% thinner than their on premise counterparts. And I heard a really great quote from this one multibillion dollar company where they said, management is a hobby here not a sport. So our goal is to be able to provide individual contributors, have individual contributors inside of the company that spend 20 to 30% of their time managing and mentoring people, as opposed to pure managers for the purpose of management. And they said the reason why we do this is because we don't want really good or what's the fastest way to rise throughout an organisation? It's to get other people underneath you, it's to become the manager, but you might be a really good individual contributor, then all of a sudden you have a very good individual contributor that has to completely learn a brand new mindset, which is management, that maybe they're not actually really good at because they're a really good programmer or customer success rep or sales person, but they may actually be really bad at managing people. So, then you take them into that role and then they get paid more, everyone's happy. But you actually lost a really valuable employee because they're not actually doing anything inside of the organisation and they're now managing people badly. So asynchronous organisations say management is actually much less important inside of these organisations, because the vast majority of management inside of on premise organisations is the measurement of people below you. But when the platform handles that, all you have to do is actually just work people through. The term should be switched from management to leadership or mentorship. That's a much better way to define what these "managers" do inside of asynchronous organisations. And so by implementing that, you can then have a framework where you can say there's this outside number that neither I nor you control, it's a number that's collected every single day, week, month quarter, whatever it might be, and we're able to come up with a plan for you to be able to hit that particular number. And that creates a really good alignment between managers and employees. And more importantly, it's more of an advisory role, mentorship role than a control over someone else. And so it just really boils down to this ego

side of it. I remember I was interviewing this one guy he was taking his people back to the office and he's still in the office, but he's actually right now he's got a bit of an open revolt, he runs a couple of 1000 people in his company. And I kept asking him these questions about, well, why are we going back to the office? Oh, well, it's culture, it's communication. And I started just showing data to him, to every rebuttal, I rebutted every single thing that he stated and he really just came down to the nitty gritty of it, which is I like, and these are my words not his, I like to go into an office and everyone thinks I'm important and I get to tell everyone what to do. And I like that in person perspective of telling people what to do. And I think that that's really toxic to be honest with you. And so that's the kind of stuff that I try to get rid of as quickly as possible. But if you're running a company right now and you will probably not be able to admit this to other people, but you might be able to admit to yourself, that you've got this form of ego and toxicity, it's something that you need to get out of your organisation as quickly as possible and get out of yourself because you will not succeed. And there are other companies that are nipping at your heels right now that are running a much more efficient process where employees are significantly happier running remotely. And it's only a matter of time before you've got to adapt to this new model.

Phil Willcox: Okay. So as you've been speaking I've been capturing additional questions that I want to ask and I think I'm at 13 now, so…

Liam Martin: Okay.

Phil Willcox: But it's okay I can condense them down. One of the things you said then was the data suggests the speed is always the winner. So partly I'm asking this question because one of the things that I like to do for our podcast in particular is to provide links to the evidence or links to the data. So when you say the data shows, I'd love to know where the data comes from so I can put some links in the show notes so the audience can go away and find it.

Liam Martin: Yes, so that data comes from Y Combinator, which is the largest accelerator in the world for tech companies. And whenever you're starting a business, particularly a billion dollar business, they're the ones that have shown definitively that speed outweighs precision every single time. But I can pull up the specific source for you afterwards.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, that'd be lovely, please. That'd be great. I guess part of me wonders there must be some contextual shift with that. So, I can imagine, especially tech wise I can imagine why speed would always be the winner. And I don't know if this is the case and if you don't know then okay then saying you don't know is a good answer, but I think about one of my clients that I'm working with at the minute who's a construction client, and in that context and in that setting they're really struggling with synchronous and asynchronous work, because you've got the people that are actually building the building, they have to be there, they have no choice but to be at that place. So where they're building a building or laying a road or digging up an area to set some foundations, you've got those that physically have to be there because their job is to do that thing. And then you've got others who might be say doing the design of the building, who could work in a hybrid way or they could work remotely because designing it, being an architect and saying how I want it to look in the end and designing it, so this is how it needs to come together to a certain degree, if there's a problem on site you need to fix that, build me what I've designed. And there, I guess, there's two

different things. So I want to make sure I don't ask you two questions in one. So partly there's the, it needs to be precise because if we're not precise we might build something that could fall over or fall apart. And also when we're communicating from some that are on premises and some that are remote, then the precision and the communication then can become tricky. But I suppose in a way that should be covered off or that could be covered off if you had that radical transparency of availability of information, because then nothing is squirrelled away. So let's keep on the when there's that potential, I guess, conflict, I suppose between those that might be on premise and those that might be remote and how have you found organisations grapple with that?

Liam Martin: There was a data set that I believe was Deloitte that ended up creating this, which showed that at full salinity for digital work, for remote work, most digital work can be remote work. The 100% salinity point is 86% of the workforce in the United States. So, the other 14% absolutely must work on a premise, they are nurses, they are doctors, they work at McDonald's. So that percentage of the population will never be dislodged. In reality actually, I think as we're moving forward into the new vision of work, I actually think that percentage is going to go up, because you're going to have a workforce that will be distributed throughout a lot of different interesting areas. I think right now buy up as much land as you can around small cities that have a university and an airport, because those will be the places that end up just absolutely growing. Boulder, Colorado is a perfect example of that, they have a university and an airport and that you can fly to a major hub, but you have a fantastic lifestyle because you have the university students that give a young energy and a very active downtown core throughout the organisation. But your question was precision with regards to decision making, and when you have an asynchronous organisation, you're absolutely right, you need to be able to have all that information available to everyone. So if I communicate that information to you through, and let's say I'm building a building, because that's actually a perfect example here, I'm an architect and I'm building a building and maybe I need to send that information to the engineer for them to be able to approve it. The architect builds the plans and then those plans will sit in some type of project management system until the engineer is prepared to be able to sit down and consume that information. So asynchronous is really information is available for when the worker can best consume it. So not when they're the most stressed out or they're overworked or they've been in seven or eight zoom calls all day long and they do that ninth where they're not available, they can go to sleep, they can play with their kids, they can wake up the next morning and they can consume that information the next morning. So really it just goes down to are those feedback loops placed and have you set up the right KPIs where the architect knows what the engineer needs, which the engineer should have communicated to the architect before the architect built the plans. And then when the architect submits those plans to the engineer, does the engineer have all the information available to him or her to be able to sign off on those particular plans? I'm actually going through this process right now because I'm having the extension inside of my house put on top of my house. And we do it all asynchronously. We did one call where we ended up having the architect where we did a collaborative call to really discuss the design ethic of what we were looking at and what we wanted to accomplish artistically. And then outside of that, it has been completely hands off just through email and through project management and it works relatively easily. Also too I would mention I'm quite biased on that one because, yes, it works very easily, but I'm very accustomed to that way of working, and there are lots of people that I bring into the organisation, particularly agencies that have a little bit of difficulty adapting to this way of working like, what do you mean I can't just jump on a call with you? Well, I'm doing eight podcasts

today, you can't jump on a call with me at all, you need to communicate with me asynchronously, you need to send me an email or you need to update a project management system or whatever it might be. But then once they figure out that it's really not so much on communicating information, but making sure that all of the dependencies inside of the organisation are handled, that's where they're like, this is the best way to work that I could possibly think of. Because it's not about communicating information, it's about providing all of the information for other people in the organisation to consume. So it's very much like it's an egotistical thing or it's a self-representative thing to say I need my aspect of this project accelerated, so I need to jump on a call with Phil right now to be able to work this out, at the cost of Phil's productivity. From an organisational perspective that ends up becoming much, much slower, but individuals end up moving faster. And what we've recognised inside of asynchronous organisations is it's the speed of the organisation that's the most important, not the individual. And so synchronous speeds up the individual, slows down the organisation, asynchronous speeds up the organisation and in some cases slows down the individual.

Phil Willcox: Okay, yeah, that makes sense. Do people report being lonely?

Liam Martin: There has been one employee that has quit because he was lonely and I remember this very clearly, and we actually changed some of our policies based off of the feedback that we got from this particular worker. This worker was an engineer for us and he was working from home with his girlfriend of five years and his girlfriend broke up with him. But six months later, he came out and he said I'm quitting because I'm joining this office environment because I'm essentially lonely working from home. And the way that we solved for that is I love when people think about offices and most people that work inside of offices their social network is also connected to that office. But we don't have arranged marriage in the west and it seems like we have arranged friendships, right? It's just like these people that you happen to work with end up becoming your social network. Well, in reality, I'm actually looking out the window right now to my neighbours Francesco and Roberto that are out right now, they're a lovely Italian couple, they're my neighbours and I really like spending time with them. And I'll usually go out and have coffee with them once a week, either they come over to our house or we go over to their house for lunch. And I have a co-working space that I go to, actually, I have two to three that I actually end up going to where I can chat with people. I choose who I want to socialise with and it really requires a lot more effort on your part to be able to make those types of connections because you're not automatically just placed inside of those connections, inside of a work environment, but it's absolutely possible. And there's a really good Freakonomics piece on the amount that people socialise throughout their lives and their loneliest periods throughout their lives are their forties and fifties, when they're at the end of their careers or they're mid to end of their careers. And then after they retire they end up having to force themselves out of that rut and socialise with people. So their socialisation actually goes up, it hockey sticks in their sixties once they retire because they start to relearn that muscle. My daughter is three years old right now and she's really learning that muscle right now, she's going out, she's making friends, she's chatting with people and people really forget about that. Basically post university your social network degrades consistently until your fifties and then in your sixties you end up reactivating it. Well, I'm saying, don't wait, go out and do it today and that's how you're going to stop the loneliness that you will have connected to your work if you do have it.

Phil Willcox: So, we've got Francesca and…?

Liam Martin: Roberto.

Phil Willcox: Roberto across the way and then we've got the coworking spaces that you use. And I guess you're the founder so it's easy, but who would…?

Liam Martin: I've also got my wife at the other side of the house, she has an office on the other side of the house. So we meet for lunch and we usually end up chatting about what's happened throughout the day, but continue on, and pick up the tab for what?

Phil Willcox: So, I was wondering if I imagine then there's, I don't know less hours in that asynchronous company with 10, 20, 30 40 people and I'm advocating for them to combat or to address that loneliness, find your network. So find a network around you that you like whether that be your neighbours, your spouse, your partner, your family, find those locations that allow you to do the work that you need to do in the way that you want to do it. And I could hear some employers saying, well, who's going to pay for that then, who's going to pay for me to go and sit in that coworking space and who's going to pay for me to go and, I don't know, socialise with Roberto and Francesca across the way if that's something that you're asking me to do? And maybe the socialising with neighbours isn't the best example, but I guess there's that element of if I'm going to go into town to where the co-worker spaces are from where my house is, I've got either the petrol and the parking or I've got the public transport fare and those kinds of things. So, I suppose, yeah, I'll come back to my question of who picks up the tab for that then?

Liam Martin: The employer. So the employer should really be setting up those types of funds and whether it's a co-working space, we have a fund for that, that we subsidise, so we don't pay for all of it, but we pay for a component of it. We do company retreats every year, so once a year everyone flies into one particular location, we pick up the tab for that, we do team retreats. So instead of the entire company, a particular department will go and chat, and we pick up for that. And so those are the general things that we do. Even more than that, one of the things that I've experimented with is I go to a, it's a CrossFit like exercise programme, and one of the things that we've experimented with is identifying whether or not doing exercise, group exercise actually improves overall output and productivity. And so far the data is mixed, but that's something as well that if I can show that you taking an hour off per day of your work week, so you're no longer working eight hours a day, but you're working seven hours per day, but your overall output is actually higher during those seven hours than it was to spending eight, I'm happy to pay for that too. Because for me all I'm looking for is outcomes, right? How can you produce more money for me? And the company actually more specifically, we want to be able to create more money for the company, we want the company to be able to grow. So how do we do that? What's the fastest feedback loop to be able to make that happen? And let's just not be biased about whether or not that ends up you have some nice extra perks for people. But that's, again, that's an ego based conversation that a lot of people are having with themselves where they're like, well, they shouldn't be allowed to be able to go to the gym an hour a week, they're not doing their work. Well, let's look at the data. Did they actually produce the outcome that you were looking for? In comparison the 20 support reps that are doing that versus the 20 support reps that aren't, what's the outcome? What's the information, what's the pre and

post measurement? Most people don't actually measure that kind of stuff and it's very frustrating because they're just doing it from their gut feel as opposed to having data in front of them.

Phil Willcox: And is that what the software that your company, is that what it creates for?

Liam Martin: Absolutely.

Phil Willcox: Yeah.

Liam Martin: Yeah, so we can measure time against outcomes and so that's what we really measure, we integrate with [connection breaks up 00:46:44] different project management systems. So, if you're using a [inaudible 00:46:58] as an example, how many widgets [inaudible 00:47:01] to someone else inside of your organisation? And what differences do you do in terms of your workflow to be able to produce a more productive output in comparison to your peers?

Phil Willcox: Okay. So many questions. One of the things that I trailed in the intro was the research that we talked about in our pre call conversation, which is the Brian Elliott research and data set, and I think because I trialled it in the intro I feel like I must make sure we talk about it. So, tell us more about that particular research.

Liam Martin: Sure. Brian is a great friend of mine and he has run the largest data set in the world on remote work. He has been running a longitudinal data set for, I believe, almost five years now and it is called Future Forum underneath Slack. Slack was recently acquired by Salesforce and they're unfortunately thinning down this data, but the data is very clear just in terms of understanding the details of remote work. As an example, 81% of people want more flexibility where they work. And 93% of people want more flexibility when they work. So people want more flexibility when they work than where they work. And that data actually shows very clearly that the difference between time flexibility and location flexibility actually produces a much better return for people. So, if you're an employer right now, and you're really thinking to yourself, what can I do to be able to, I don't want people going back to the office as an example or I want people going back to the office at least in some context. Giving them location flexibility actually only increases their output by 18%, I believe, if I'm referencing it correctly and time flexibility increased their productivity by 32%. So, when you think about time flexibility, that's what's more important to the vast majority of workers. But then even as well, he looks at sense of belonging, sense of DEIB, I can't remember what the heck that stands for.

Phil Willcox: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging.

Liam Martin: That's it, yes. So, the sense of belonging for black respondents that work inside of remote organisations, they had a 43% increase in sense of belonging. Hispanic respondents had a 21% increase in sense of belonging. But white and Asian respondents had a 2% increase in sense of belonging. Now, why would there be such a huge increase in sense of belonging for black and Hispanic respondents? Well, the reality is that their race is less overt in remote organisations. And the data supports this, that minorities, racial minorities rise up throughout remote organisations faster than on premise environments, because their race is less overt. And this goes the same for

your sex or your gender. The numbers are a little bit different for sex and gender, but for racial minorities, it's a huge advantage. And so when you look at this data, you can see that their race essentially disappears and it's the work that's only really left and that's why there's such a huge boost. If anyone's interested in increasing their sense of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, remote is one of the best things that you can possibly do to increase sense of belonging for those racial groups.

Phil Willcox: And again, I, I'd love to have a link to that if that's okay?

Liam Martin: Yeah.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, I guess it struck me when we spoke about it before and it strikes me again now how such a small change can make such a big difference for people.

Liam Martin: Mm. Well, so I have a theory on that and I don't even have to hear what people are saying, if I go in and see one of those glass boxes where everyone has meetings, in these like offices they have like a glass box in the middle of the office where everyone jumps in and has a meeting. Let's say there's eight or nine people in there, I could guarantee you I know whose ideas will get adopted the most. It is the 6 ft five white guy that looks like Captain America. That is the person whose ideas will be adopted the most definitively. Why? Well, because number one, he looks like Captain America, so everyone trusts him. So, the black and Latina and Latin people aren't really interested or aren't willing to actually jump in and fight with his ideas. And then also too, that individual is very charismatic, so there's a charisma complex that also works into this as well. The vast majority of people that are higher up inside of organisations, at least in terms of the on premise 20th century model have gotten there not because their ideas are necessarily better, although their ideas are probably quite good, but it's more importantly it's because they're actually able to communicate those ideas effectively, so they're much more charismatic than other people inside of the organisation. And this creates a big problem. [Connection breaks up 00:53:26] quality of ideas. And so instead of asynchronous organisations, it's the ideas that are the most important, it's what's written down in this documentation. If I'm pitching my idea to you in person versus doing it through text, I would much rather do it through text because I have a much higher chance of my idea being adopted, because my ideas on average are better than the average, as I said, 6 ft five NBA guy that looks like Captain America. So, there's a lot of those factors that work into this as well that I think are important, not just connected to race, but connected to gender and sex and religious background. If you have a female worker who's Muslim, I've had this happen to me quite a bit with a lot of coworkers that I've worked with that I've seen in person, shaking a man's hand is Haram, right? It's not appropriate. But when you look at Western 20th century business practices, that's a pretty central part of the way that you do business. And so those women are left out of that entire process because they feel othered because of their religious background and their religious following. So by going asynchronous, we don't have to deal with a lot of those issues, a lot of those issues just fall away. And so that's my belief as to why racial minorities are seeing such a huge increase in sense of belonging in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts.

Phil Willcox: Okay. I'm going to start to bring us together and wrap us up if that's all right, Liam?

Liam Martin: Sure.

Phil Willcox: When you think, and I guess I'll let you decide how far back in time you want to go, when you think back over what you've learned on synchronous/asynchronous work/on premise work/remote work, what surprised you?

Liam Martin: How few managers there are inside of asynchronous organisations, that was something that completely surprised me when I did the survey data, it was a 50% reduction in management. And when you think about it from a business model perspective, it makes perfect sense. I now have 50% less managers inside of my company, which means I have 50% more people doing work as opposed to managing work, which creates a much more effective organisation. And that for me was a huge aha when I did the initial research and I needed to delve into asynchronous work in a much deeper way, because I realised this was a business model that was not just going to change remote work but was going to change work in general.

Phil Willcox: Okay. And if there was something that you haven't advocated for or said yet that you think the listener would really benefit in hearing what would that something be?

Liam Martin: Remote work is not going away. The data right now shows that we're sitting between 26 and 34% of the US workforce working remotely, depending upon the data set that you take a look at, and the thing that's even scarier is that number has either flatlined or is going back up. And I'm projecting based off the data we'll probably be back up to 50% of the US workforce working remotely by 2040. So if you think that this is something that's a fad that's going to go away, you're wrong and you need to be able to prepare for that and recognise that, that very well might be something that needs to be a central part of your management philosophy and learning how to manage those workers is going to be critical for your future career path.

Phil Willcox: And my final question then, what three tips would, so, actually, no, before I ask the question, well, I've given you a cue as to where the question is going to be going, so a lot of our listeners are working in what I would call the people profession, so they're working in maybe people development, talent development, HR, looking at organisational development maybe as a whole, and so if I put myself in the listener's shoes then I'm thinking, right, what three tips would you give our listeners to take away with them?

Liam Martin: So, three tips specifically for HR professionals?

Phil Willcox: I think so, yeah.

Liam Martin: Okay. Let me think about that. They probably need to be quite actionable. So, the three tips I think I would give your average HR professional right now is recognise number one remote work is not going away, so you need to be able to adapt as quickly as possible and recognise that it's going to be a percentage of your workforce moving forward. Inside of that, you need to be able to practice deliberate overcommunication. So, things shouldn't just be easy to understand, they should be impossible to misunderstand. And it's a very small switch in your mindset but once things become impossible to misunderstand, then it becomes much easier to be able to proliferate information

because everyone knows what the heck is going on inside of the company. Second is you need to have democratised work flows. So as I've mentioned before, radical transparency inside of the organisation, everyone needs to have the same informational advantage as the CEO of the company. And the main way that we do that is building out process documentation. So everything is written down, all the meetings are recorded, everything is available to everyone. So, I can go back five years and Phil, you can say, why did we initially end up letting Liam be on this podcast? And I could go back into your documentation and I could very specifically identify why you chose to have me on your podcast, and maybe that was a good or a bad idea. And then the third tip is detailed metrics. So, inside of remote organisations, everyone needs to be measured, and the more that you measure, the more successful your organisation will be. This is a trend that I've seen with all remote first organisations that were built before the pandemic, and the ones that were built after the pandemic are very quickly realising that this is the only way that we need to be able to move forward in order for you to be able to have the accountability to measure that workforce effectively and understand where they're faltering and how to make sure that they succeed.

Phil Willcox: Okay, wonderful, fantastic and very actionable as well. So, yeah, that was great, thank you so much. So, if you'd be willing to send me over the links to the different pieces of research that we talked about that would be amazing. I'll make sure that in the show notes we put links to your website, LinkedIn and so on. I guess is there something else that you're thinking, feeling or would like to say before we close?

Liam Martin: I don't think so. Well, I think probably just give everyone the spiel of where everyone can get in contact with me. So if you want to learn more about Running Remote, just go to runningremote.com. The book is on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, everywhere where books are sold. If you want to learn more about the content that we have and a really great free resource is youtube.com/runningremote, where all of our talks are up for free. Our mission as a company is we're trying to empower the world's transition towards remote work. So, it would be pretty disingenuous for us to be able to gate that through some type of email or a paywall, so all that information is available for everyone that wants to be able to consume that content for free.

Phil Willcox: Wonderful, fabulous. In which case, then I will say Liam Martin, thank you so much for being on the Emotion at Work podcast, I've had a wonderful time thinking with you today and talking with you today. And so thank you so much for sharing your insights, your experiences, and, yeah, it's just been great to have you on. Thank you so much.

Liam Martin: Thanks for having me, Phil, I really appreciate it.

You've been listening to the Emotion at Work podcast and if you've got this far you must be interested in the role emotions have in the workplace either within individuals, between people, in teams or in organisations as a whole, so head over to the Emotion at Work hub which you can find at https://community.emotionatwork.co.uk/groups. Thanks for listening.