



## **Episode 68 – Emotion at Work In The Masked Employee – Part 1**

### **Chatting with Hanne Vincent**

Phil Wilcox: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition and today's topic is going to be one that we're going to be discussing over three special edition episodes and it's something that we talked about on the podcast before, so we talked about it in the past with Amanda Arrowsmith and then most recently on Episode 50, where we talked about imposter phenomenon. And my guest today is fascinated by the topic and has got some really, really interesting practical tips and ideas to share, and that's why I think it's really important that we have this episode, because what my guests and I going to talk about is both exploring what imposter phenomenon is and also looking at it from a particular lens with also, like I said, that practical element alongside it. So, let's get our guest on the air, so I'd love to welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast Hanne Vincent. Hello Hanne.

Hanne Vincent: Hi, good afternoon.

Phil Wilcox: Good afternoon. How are you?

Hanne Vincent: Very good. How are you?

Phil Wilcox: Yeah, really well, thank you. Yeah, really well. It's been a long week and I'm excited to end it with our recording today, so, yeah, doing really well thank you.

Hanne Vincent: Absolutely. I'm really excited and I'm really curious doing this with you and I'm looking forward to the results and hopefully we can share some interesting facts and tips to the audience, I'm really looking forward to sharing.

Phil Wilcox: Good, me too. And I think that practical element I think is going to be really helpful. So, when you sent across to me your original document, the thinking that you sent across, I thought I really like how practical it so, so I'm really excited about that side of things. Now before we get there though, as always with the Emotion at Work podcast, we need to open with our unexpected yet innocuous question. So my unexpected yet innocuous question for you then, Hanne, is what flower or flowers have meaning for you?

Hanne Vincent: Oh. Interesting one. There's quite a lot of them and my native language is not English, so I'll have to pick one that I know the word in English. Let's see, I think it's probably, how do you call them? I don't even know how to call them, I need to Google it. It's those little white and yellow flowers that are all over the grass in spring, where young girls make little necklaces of them and little crowns.

Phil Wilcox: So I would call them daisies.

Hanne Vincent: Daisy, that's probably right, it's a daisy. That's probably a flower that brings me a lot of joy when I start seeing them pop up and it really reminds me of just being a little girl and making necklaces, and putting them in my hair, and it evokes a lot of warm memories let's say. So, yeah, daisies and thank you for the word.



Phil Wilcox: Oh, you're welcome. So what would it be in your native tongue?

Hanne Vincent: Melliferous.

Phil Wilcox: Melliferous.

Hanne Vincent: Excellent, yes.

Phil Wilcox: Wonderful.

Hanne Vincent: You're a natural, yeah.

Phil Wilcox: Wow, I know now what daisy is, so that's good, no, that's wonderful, that's fabulous.

Hanne Vincent: Yes, same for me, I needed a bit of a reminder, but yeah. So, I lived in the UK for three years, I consider my English to be fairly well, but these kind of specific words are always a challenge. I'll do my best on this podcast, but it might be at some point I will be hesitating and searching for words sometimes so bear with me.

Phil Wilcox: Oh, that's absolutely fine, and that's the joy of show notes as well, so what I'll make sure we do in the notes that accompany the show is we'll put the translations as well, so we'll make sure we put the melliferous, is that right?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, melliferous, so you'll go and say here's what she actually was trying to say.

Phil Wilcox: [Laughs] Definitely. So, I think for me it's the tulip, and if I'm honest I've probably stolen that from my wife, I was never really into flowers when I was younger, I did used to make daisy chains but I would normally make daisy chains for a girl that I liked at the time. So, I'd make the daisy chain as like a gift or a way to strike up a conversation. But, yeah, I love...

Hanne Vincent: How successful was that?

Phil Wilcox: Mixed results I would say, yeah, mixed results. So, sometimes I'd try and rush it and then make it too small and then it was like I didn't put enough effort in to make it long enough to fit around the wrist or around the neck.

Hanne Vincent: Or they'd break just at a crucial moment.

Phil Wilcox: Or they'd break, yeah, exactly.

Hanne Vincent: Very recognisable.

Phil Wilcox: And also the more often you do it, the more the girls realise that it wasn't something that was unique and special to them...



Hanne Vincent: Oh, you went too far?

Phil Wilcox: Went too far, yeah, Phil's done his trick again, yeah, that one. Yeah. But, yeah, I love tulips, we've got quite a lot of them in the garden, so similar to what you were saying earlier on, that kind of significance of spring and the tulips coming up, and the bulbs growing is lovely.

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, tulips are beautiful as well, love them.

Phil Wilcox: Yeah, definitely. Okay, so when we first contacted each other, I guess, or we first spoke then, you sent me your book called *The Masked Employee*, and I was really interested in that title for a couple of different reasons. So one as regular listeners of the podcast will know, I've talked about the idea of face work and impression management, and behavioural masks in the past. I was particularly interested in it and then when I read it to work out it was much more about imposter phenomenon. Again, I was interested in both the metaphor and the subject itself. So, what got you interested in imposter phenomenon and/or this notion of masking?

Hanne Vincent: So the book is indeed about the Imposter phenomenon, but it's specifically about as a manager, so it's really mostly from the perspective of the manager and how to get the best out of people struggling with imposter feelings. And it's a subject that has been breeding in my head for quite a while. I work as a freelance consultant now since over five years, but before that I was working in a big multinational company, climbing the promotional ladder and changing roles every two or three years. And at one point I had quite a large team and the business units I was working in was being sold so we were going through this fusion with another company, and it was lots of changes and the team really depended on me. And it was going well, I was doing well, getting lots of positive feedback from the team, from my boss. So, on the outside there was nothing wrong, but what no one saw was that inside I was terrified constantly of being discovered, of being found out that I was not good at managing this, and that I was definitely not the right person. So, that really drained my energy, I wasn't sleeping well, I really felt like I was constantly putting up a show and that's really, really exhausting. And so at one point I actually decided to hand in my resignation, that's about five years now and the official version was distance, because part of the fusion was that we had to move offices. So, that was my official reason but actually the real reason was just the burden of this mask, the weight of having to carry this mask was just too heavy for me. It's something I never admitted to my colleagues at that time, but after that I did a lot of self-reflection and I was really trying to understand where these feelings were coming from. I knew about imposter phenomenon at that moment and so on, and I read a lot about it, and one of the things that I read and that really surprised me is how widespread this feeling is, how many people struggle with this. So, I started wondering why. I worked for so long in big, multinational companies that praise themselves with having really, really great leadership courses, personal development courses, and I just wondered why did I never hear of this, if so many people struggle with it? And I also wondered, what if I had been approached differently? What if my manager had awareness about the topic, had knowledge on how to approach it? I'm pretty sure I would still be there. And by all means I love my life as it is, I love the choices I've made, I'm very happy. So, I really don't want to come across as a victim but it is something that I started wondering, like I don't think it's so difficult to make an impact as a manager, but there's very little that is written about it. If you go on the internet it's all about self-help, it's all about tips and tricks, how to overcome your



own feelings and struggles, which is which is useful, well it's sometimes useful, sometimes not so much. But very rarely is it about as a manager, probably several of your team members struggle with it, what do you do? And so that's how I got into writing this little book, which isn't actually a book, it's more like a script or something or an audio book that I'm working on. But, yeah, so that's how I got into it.

Phil Wilcox: I want to make sure we come back and we focus on what you were referring to there about, I wonder how it might have been different if my manager had known about it, and if my manager had maybe been able to help me, and that will bring us back to the practical suggestions and things. Before I do that though, would it be okay if I ask you just a couple more questions about your experience of it? Would that be okay?

Hanne Vincent: Absolutely, yeah.

Phil Wilcox: So, you mentioned that it was the weight of the mask that got you to that point where you said, you know what I can't do it anymore, I'm going to hand in my resignation, did that mask get heavier over time or was it just that you'd been holding that wait for so long you just couldn't hold it anymore, if I stick with the metaphor?

Hanne Vincent: I think for me the mask was heaviest at the beginning of my career and I'll get to that a bit later, but I think in general over time it gets better with experience, with time, with knowledge of what you're able to do, what your capabilities are. But it also peaks at certain moments and it peaks at moments of transition when you enter a new role, when you start leading a new team, those are typically when the weight of the mask gets really heavy. And it also really depends on who is your manager at that time and if it's something you're able to discuss with them, if you're able to show your struggles or if you have to carry that on your own. And that for me was also a big one because I didn't have that at that moment and I panicked, it was a fight or flight reaction. And again, it was a good choice at that moment for me, I don't regret it, but I think it could have gone differently, very differently.

Phil Wilcox: And you also mentioned earlier on that it was widespread. So are there any estimates in terms of...?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, the number that often comes back is 70%. So, it's estimated that about 70% of the people at one point will experience these fraudulent feelings, which is huge. I mean 70% that lots of people around you feel it and if you're not feeling it at least many of your colleagues do. But of course what I want to emphasise it that not all 70% will experience this as problematic in the long term. And I would even say it's perfectly normal to, from time to time, have these feelings. It's even maybe healthy because it nudges you into self-reflection, it shows that you're capable of being self-critical, critical of trying to work on yourself. So it's not at all a negative thing, it's maybe even the opposite of arrogance, but of course if this is an issue in the long term, like it was with me, and if these thoughts are actually impacting your performance and your well-being at work, and if they do so over a long period of time, months, years, then it becomes problematic, and it can lead to all kinds. In my case I was just throwing the dice or how do you call it in English? I gave up, I handed in my resignation,



but it could lead to burnout, it could lead to depression, anxiety, etc. So, yes, 70% is the number but not all of those 70% of course will see it as something that's problematic.

Phil Wilcox: And I think the point you made earlier on about how a change in context or a change in situation or differences in situations may make those feelings more or less intense or they may last for more or less time. So, you described about how you're taking on a new role or taking on a new responsibility or maybe a promotion or moving into a new business or a new part of the organisation, those occasions can be when the feelings can be stronger. And I think that's where Pauline Rose Clance and Susanne Imes try and make the distinction between, and I don't think we've used the words impostor syndrome yet, which is what's often used. They very much advocate for the use of phenomenon instead because it can fluctuate and change over time. So, whilst you might feel it for one section of time, whether that could be a few minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, it may then pass and not appear again for...talked about how it's more of a phenomenon than it is a syndrome, because...

Hanne Vincent: Absolutely, I prefer that word as well.

Phil Wilcox: Yeah, definitely.

Hanne Vincent: It sounds a bit medical, it sounds a bit like a disease if you say the syndrome. It's described as, and I quite like the description as a form of intellectual self-doubt, where your inner critic prevents you to believe in the qualities and the achievements that other people attribute to you or associate you with. And so the result is that you constantly have the feeling that you're pretending really, so that's where the mask comes from, you're constantly feeling like you're wearing a mask and you're pretending to be that person that they think you are, which is exhausting.

Phil Wilcox: And I'm happy for you to interpret this question either as a question from your own experience and/or from what the research says in terms of imposter phenomenon. So, what happens for an individual? What are they thinking or what are the stories that they're hearing in their head when that imposter phenomenon is there?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, I see it in the way I described in the book, I think there's primarily two thought mechanisms or thought reflexes that happen inside the brain or the mind of the imposter. I say the imposter, you know what I mean, just because a person is struggling with imposter feelings is a bit long. And those two thought mechanisms I call them the shield and the sponge, and if we start with the shield and I'll use some personal examples as well. The shield is basically a mechanism that deflects any recognition or success that is attributed to the person and makes it very difficult to accept an internalise, absorb really any positive feedback or personal achievements or success. And so what they'll do is when these praises or recognitions, when it comes their way, they'll be very quick to push them aside and write them off as due to external factors, like it was just good luck or I was just lucky with the timing or this or this or this colleague actually contributed just as much. It could be all kinds of excuses but it's very difficult for masked employees to absorb or internalise the praise that they're given. And even worse because they don't feel like they deserve the praise or the award or the promotion even, these kind of recognitions may even end up worsening their impulsive feelings because they just consider them to be the results of their efforts of keeping up appearances, and it



just adds to the pile of the evidence that will come to light when they are finally unmasked or finally discovered. And I really like, I read a quote of Emma Watson who described just that, she said at one point it's almost like the better I do, the more my feeling of inadequacy increases because at one point somebody's going to find out that I'm a total fraud and I don't deserve any of what I've achieved. And that's said by Emma Watson who's a great actress. And I think there was another actress who won an Oscar and she said, winning an Oscar actually made my imposter feelings worse. So, it's this really twisted thought process that is often very difficult to understand for people who never experience this, how can you feel like this? How can you feel like a fraud when you've achieved so much? And for me this shield has always been very powerful. And I'll give you an example, at one point we had these award and recognition sessions, when there was like a big international sales meeting and it was moments where at the end of the meeting they would call people to the stage and hand out an award for an achievement or something. And at one point those moments were just nerve-racking for me because exposure means a risk of being discovered, as an impostor you always want to stay under the radar because they might find out if you actually get any attention. So at one point my name was called out, so worst-case scenario I had to go on the stage and accept an award, and I can still remember vividly by the time I'd gotten off the stage and my colleagues came to me to congratulate me, my defence mechanism basically had kicked in and I had come up with a whole story of it's not actually about my achievement, I was just politically the least sensitive person to get the award because this one would have made it politically awkward and that other person couldn't have been it, so they had to choose me. I constructed this whole narrative about why the award came to me instead of just saying thank you, I appreciate it. It's just a very powerful reflex and if I can give another example, when I was leading, I stepped into a role of team leader at one point, I was leading a team that wasn't in a great shape. The previous manager wasn't very appreciated, there was a bad atmosphere, there wasn't a lot of trust, people didn't feel they were treated fairly, didn't feel that they were granted the opportunities that they should be granted. So it was just a deflated, not very agreeable team atmosphere. And so I made it as one of my priorities to fix this. So, I spent a lot of time talking to all the individuals, going out to lunch with them, talking about their expectations, how they wanted to be treated. I changed some of the team meetings, did some team building, blah, blah, blah. So, I worked really hard and then at one point, I think about six months after I stepped into the role, there was this employee survey that went out every year, where engagement was measured. So they would measure the engagement towards the company, towards the team, towards the manager, and the results came back and they were actually really strong, a huge increase versus the previous year. And my first reaction, which I can still feel, was just sheer panic because I needed to get out of there before the next survey would launch the next year, because by then they would have figured me out and I would have terrible scores and I needed to get away. Which is a strange reaction, right, if you think about it, but that's how powerful this shield is. And by then I knew about the imposter phenomenon and so you would think you would recognise that check, first step, but it doesn't mean that because you know it, doesn't make you feel different. So, that's still another step in your self-management. But, yeah, just to show this shield is a really powerful reflex.

Phil Wilcox: I really like the framing of both the shield and the sponge as a reflex, I think that's a lovely way to frame it.

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, it's unintentional, that's why I like to call it a reflex, it's just something that happens instantly without you having any control over it really.



Phil Wilcox: So, the first is shield, tell me about the sponge then, so what's the sponge reflex?

Hanne Vincent: So, the sponge is the opposite actually, the sponge is constantly on the lookout for proof of your incapability or your inability or proof that you're not right for the job. So, while they will link their accomplishments and their successes to chance, they'll on the contrary take on all the blame for any failures or even minor errors and they will take it as a proof of their lack of intelligence or skill or something. I consider myself an absolute pro in this area, very good at it, magnifying small mistakes and turning well-meant constructive feedback into undeniable proof that I shouldn't be there. And that was especially throughout the start of my career and the slightest hiccup would leave me completely paralysed. Where I saw my more confident colleagues, because I started up in sales, so you have the typical sales profile, which attracts more confident people than average, and I'd look at them and they would just brush off mistakes and say, oh it's no big deal or everybody makes mistakes or even blame someone else, and I would just look at them, how do they manage to do that? That was something that for me was really hard to understand. It's typical for imposters to overestimate and overvalue the qualities of their peers and feel threatened by it, and that's actually one of the things that for me I really regret, because it's it hampers your growth. It shuts you down for growth and it sabotages any open to learn mentality that you should have to start developing. And one of the examples to illustrate that is we had, at my company, we had this often even international, we call it share and reapply sessions, where people showcase a case or show an achievement, and the objective really is learning, so that you learn from one another, so nobody reinvents the wheel and it's supposed to be inspiring and it's supposed to make you want to learn and grow. And for me these sessions were just absolutely daunting because every case that one of my peers would present in another country or within my team, would just show me that I wasn't capable of doing that, even if I had cases myself. But it was just every time this looking up and feeling small that is really paralysing and seeing proof of your inability everywhere, which is just a self-sabotaging mechanism and reflex that really needs a lot of experience to grow out.

Phil Wilcox: I'm sorry I was thinking, sorry my apologies, Hanne, I was thinking.

Hanne Vincent: No worries.

Phil Wilcox: I was trying to take in everything, I say trying, I was taking in everything that you said and thinking wow. So, I was thinking wow, because of the vividness with which you described it and I could feel the feelings that you were describing, as you were describing it, because it was so vivid. And I was then putting myself back in time when I was a manager and thinking, would I have been equipped to help someone who was feeling those feelings, if I make sense?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, uh huh.

Phil Wilcox: Because I can imagine as the manager I might also think you know what I just rather Hanne would just sort that stuff out for herself, thanks, that would be just a lot easier because then I wouldn't have to worry about it. So what are we advocating for here to say why managers should be interested in this and why this is something that they should care about?





Hanne Vincent: Yeah, very good question, yeah, why should I fix this? And absolutely I'm a huge advocate for self-management, it's important to work on yourself. But I'll give you a couple of reasons why it's also in the best interest of the manager to be involved, first of all, I think research has shown that people suffering with imposter feelings are often very intelligent, high-achieving and very conscientious employees that set the bar very high for themselves. So I think they're definitely very valuable to the organisation but they're the typical so-called insecure overachievers. So, they are very valuable and so getting the maximum out of them will definitely benefit the business and the organisation. But second also is that imposter thoughts can result in behaviour that is actually hampering a successful business outcome. So, for example a very typical type of behaviour is holding back, I've already mentioned flying under the radar, not speaking up during meetings. They're constantly censoring their own thoughts during a meeting because they just don't believe that their ideas or their remarks can be valuable or it might even completely off the mark and imagine that, because that would definitely expose them as being a fraud. So, as a manager you're potentially missing out on some valuable input and preventing you from making the best decisions. So that's one example, but also, like I said it earlier, the anxiety or the stress might drive them into burnout or depression, which is the disease of our time which immediately affects you as a manager. And I think, I'm really convinced that by doing just a couple of things differently and it doesn't take a lot of effort, just makes a huge, huge difference for the person you're managing. And that's why I'm trying to get this out because I knew for me at least it would have made a huge difference with not a whole lot of effort I believe.

Phil Wilcox: So, I mentioned in the intro that this the first of three different episodes all around imposter phenomenon, so as we start to bring this first episode I guess towards a close, we've talked about what the phenomenon is, we've talked about how widespread it might be, we've talked about what might be happening in somebody's mind and you've given those great examples of those reflexes of the shield and the sponge, we've explored what the reasons for why managers would be interested or bothered by it. But I suppose what would also help if I was a manager then, would be to think about if I wanted to unlock the potential of imposters in my team, the first thing I'd need to do would be to identify those people that might be struggling with it. So, is there something practical about how I could do that? How could I recognise those people that might be struggling with imposter phenomenon?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, that's actually a very important first step and not necessarily the easiest one, simply because research has shown that when people are asked to describe these imposter feelings, it's mostly expressed as feelings of shame, and obviously when people feel ashamed, the most common reaction is going to be to not talk about it and hide it. So, I think it's fair to say they won't come knocking on your door saying hey, I've got these feelings, can you please help me? Quite the contrary, so they're usually very good at hiding their feelings. When I had handed in my resignation and I talked to a couple of colleagues afterwards and I confessed to them that I had these fraudulent feelings and how they had really clouded my confidence in my career, their reaction was, they were really surprised and they said, how is this possible when you always seem so calm and composed? I can tell you calm and composed was the opposite of what was going in my mind at that time. So, yes, a lot of people are very good at hiding it, so when it comes to identifying them in our team, you might need to dig a bit deeper and look a bit further than just the facade. But there are a couple of predictors or cues that could help you place the right people on your radar, and there's in particular three





predictors I would say that could be useful. The first is there's a couple of high incidence groups, just groups where the proportion you have a high number of imposters in them. And secondly, we could look at language and what's the typical choice of words that they might use. And then third, we've briefly touched upon it is what type of behaviours could help you recognise them? So if we look at high incidence groups, the first one is a little bit controversial, not everybody agrees, but it's women, and I don't know if you've seen the Barbie film recently?

Phil Wilcox: No, I haven't yet, no, it's on my list to watch, but, no, I haven't managed to get to the cinema yet.

Hanne Vincent: But even if you haven't, if you're on any kind of social media it's all about how women are approached differently still, how they're addressed differently and it is still true, we know from research that women are unfortunately still approached differently even as young girls growing up, they will receive on average less compliments, they will be less stimulated to take risk, to express themselves. And there's one woman who is really an expert in the field of imposter phenomenon, which is Dr. Valerie Young, and she says that women are actually more likely when there's a setback or a failure, they're more likely to blame themselves, blame it on their own actions. While men are more prone to blame outside factors. And another interesting observation is that research shows that on average men and women have a similar comparable IQ, however when women are asked how they would assess their own IQ, they assess it on average 10% lower than average, where men assess it about 10% above average. So, that shows just how women are just more prone to having these feelings, are more, in a way, receptive to the voice of their inner critic. But there is some discussion about it and some research suggests that men experienced equally as much as women, it could also just be that it surfaces more with women because there's more of a stigma with men, they're afraid of being labelled weak or incompetent. But there are men coming forward. I don't know if you've seen the Lewis Capaldi documentary on Netflix at all?

Phil Wilcox: I have, yeah.

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, so he talks about it. He talks about imposter feelings and he even wrote a song about it, I think it's called I'm a Pretender something, nice song. So, women are commonly accepted as being a high incidence group. The second one is minority groups, this one is about people both coming from minority backgrounds or people that suffer from a disability for example. They easily feel like they're an outsider and they don't belong, and so it makes them very vulnerable to these imposter feelings. But I would like to in the case of imposter feelings, I think that the concept of minorities can even be interpreted more broadly rather than just race or gender or sexual orientation. I would argue that actually from the moment people feel like they're an outsider, there is a higher chance of imposter feelings popping up. And if you're for example, even if it's just character, if you're the quiet one in a team of very confident extroverted people and they all get along really well and the manager is also very confident, extroverted people and they all get along really well, and the manager is also very confident and extroverted and they really fit together, you might easily link this connection to a higher appreciation among each other and you feel you're not living up to the same standards. So, it's whenever you feel like you're a minority, it makes you more vulnerable to these feelings. I just wanted to touch also in this context on diversity quota, which is a hot topic in a lot of companies these days, and rightfully so, I'm all for it, but the flip side of that one also, and I've experienced that more than

once and is that they aim to get more women or people of colour in senior positions for example makes sometimes these people feel that they got the promotion or they were hired just because they're a woman or gay or a dark-skinned person. And that combined with remarks that other people make or I don't stand any chance, I'm just a white heterosexual men, often makes them feel like they have to work extra hard to be worthy of it, and it makes them again more vulnerable to these people. So, I don't have the answer to it because I think it's good to have these diversity quotas but there is a flip side to it definitely.

Phil Wilcox: So, the systemic nature of groups and society, and business, and individuals I find absolutely fascinating and I think what you're talking about there within that first area of high incidence groups, is some of the constructive and the destructive aspects of those societal systems or the systems for example, the natural, I say the natural, that's not the right phrase, the commonplace competitive nature of organisations, especially if you're looking in more individualistic cultures, where it's the performance of the individual as compared with others that succeeds, that system of reward in and of itself by definition creates those, that they have to be excluded because at some point if you're going to do a full distribution, which a lot of organisations will do, some people will be at the top and some people will be at the bottom, because we're forcing w a distribution in that way because of the systems that we have in place. And that system in and of itself can emphasise, reinforce or maybe increase the intensity of imposter feelings, which has got nothing to do with the individual and all to do with the system. And I think organisations and managers forget that I think. So, one thing I talked about in Episode 50 was the idea that you as a manager or you as an owner of a business or you as a director in a company may well be creating imposters because of the systems and processes that you have in place. So, you might be creating the situations that allow those that feel impostor phenomenon feelings, you might be creating the conditions that allow those feelings to grow. So it's actually not about the individual and it's not the individual's fault at all, it's actually the fault of the system that you have.

Hanne Vincent: Exactly, yeah, and in these cases you might argue that you don't struggle with imposter feelings, you're made to struggle, you're made to have these imposter feelings because of the environment and all the biases, and all the systemic, how do you say it...?

Phil Wilcox: Yeah.

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, you know what I mean.

Phil Wilcox: I know what you mean, yeah, the systemic components or the systemic overlaps.

Hanne Vincent: Yeah.

Phil Wilcox: Because that's one of the challenges, you described a number of different things within that and you said if you feel like an outsider that can amplify those imposter feelings, and that feeling like an outsider can be created by the system and processes that individual managers or organisations as a whole put into place.



Hanne Vincent: Exactly and so it's really crucial that managers are aware of their own biases and that they're aware of the environment and the atmosphere they're creating, and only when they're aware they will be open to realising how this impacts the people in their team. But this awareness of bias is often a challenge, but that's something that organisations should really work on, that's not something you as an individual can change or can influence.

Phil Wilcox: Absolutely. And I think that's a big reason why I wanted to get you on the podcast because I think what can a podcast do, can a podcast change an organisation or change a company or change a 50/60 year old reward and recognition system? No, it probably can't. What can a podcast do? It can support small change in terms of supporting a manager for example who's thinking, yeah, you know what I might have somebody in my team that experiences these feelings and how can I help them? So, that's why when you sent your thinking and your writing through, I really wanted to get you on as a guest.

Hanne Vincent: Wow, thank you.

Phil Wilcox: Oh, you're welcome, thank you for coming on. So, we talked about three then, didn't we, so we said there are three, you didn't use the word categories, three...?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, cues.

Phil Wilcox: Yes, cues, that's it. So, high incidence groups was one, and then we have language and behaviours were the other two. So where do you want to go next, language?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, so language imposters can involuntarily actually reveal themselves through just the type of remarks they make, the choice of their words, how they present certain ideas or suggestions. They might for example express their fear of incompetence or their fear of not being able to do this challenge by comparing themselves for example to their peers and saying, oh he's very clear and good at this, I will never be able to top this result or I don't think I'm your best choice to lead this project, why don't you think of colleague x, y, z they have a lot more expertise in this area? Or you might catch them blowing up their own mistakes or taking responsibility for mistakes that weren't even up to them. So all these kind of things or hesitant phrasing for example, I'm very good at this, where it could be a potential red flag when you hear them say, not that I'm an expert by any means but would you ever even consider or it's probably worthless but it's just a thought, these kind of very hesitant phrasing when they come up with a proposal, because they're just not confident in their own ideas. Or they might deflect whenever you give them a compliment, that's always a good test, oh, that was very good of you. Oh, it's no big deal, I just got lucky or it wasn't really because of me. So, that's always a very good test to see whether these thoughts could be there or not, just be very aware of language.

Phil Wilcox: And behaviours?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, behaviour, so behaviours I quickly touched upon it already, there are a typical number of behavioural patterns that a lot of imposters do to avoid being discovered I'd say. It's either to avoid being discovered or to make up or to compensate for what they think is their lack of



intelligence or competence. Probably the most common one, and I've touched upon it, is holding back, so making themselves invisible. That was my speciality, so during a meeting I would feel something coming up that I wasn't comfortable with or I was sensing that somebody would ask me a question, I'd quickly go to the toilet or you I just wouldn't speak up. They might even have a total different opinion on a certain subject but still follow or even mimic, the views of other people because they are afraid of being criticised or challenged. And one thing that is really a pity is that it's also a hamper to creativity because they simply have no confidence in whatever would come out in the creative flow. So, they're more likely to stick to the beaten track and not come up with alternative solutions or innovative ideas. So, it's really a hamper on their performance in that way and they won't take on a challenge, they might not go for a promotion. So, it's just making themselves as invisible as possible, which is a huge internal barrier to their progress and their success, but also to the business. So that's probably the biggest one. And another one is those that work extra hard, which are often then labelled as workaholics because they compensate, they want to compensate for their inabilities or for their shortcomings, and so they will over-produce, over-prepare, make sure everything's always 100% ready, actually imposter phenomenon and then perfectionism often go hand in hand. So, because they're so afraid to feel, they will over-deliver, work extra hard and so there's an increased risk of being physically exhausted or mentally exhausted which can lead to depression and burnout, which is definitely something you you'd want to avoid as a manager. So, yeah, work extra hard, hold back and I think then the last one I'd love to mention is procrastinate. So procrastination is a very useful tool for imposters if they want to avoid getting feedback, avoid being hurt, they'll just wait until the last minute. It's also the perfect built-in excuse for any possible mistakes, because imagine if you'd worked really, really long and hard on something and the result wasn't very good, that would be so much worse than if you're just throwing something together last minute and, I didn't have a lot of time so I just did this last minute, and then if it's not perfect it makes it a little bit less painful. So, yeah, that would be the third one but this is all relatively negative, so I just want to end with maybe one more positive one that is a positive characteristic or behaviour that can be linked to imposters, which is they're often very good team workers, so they're a good colleague, because they don't necessarily want to stand out individually, they feel really safe working in a team. So, they're recognised as having often better interpersonal skills, being very agreeable to work with, they're good listeners, conscientious workers, they take on board feedback easily even though inside it might eat them up, but they love to work towards common goals. So, they are often very good team players, very good team workers, so that's definitely a positive one to highlight.

Phil Wilcox: Wonderful, thank you. Okay, so we've got high incidence groups, the language that people might use and the behaviours they might display. So one of the things that's running through my head is if I was a listener it could be easy for me to hear what you've just described and go, ah, right, okay, so if I see somebody overpreparing or I see somebody procrastinating or I see somebody who's a team worker, that means they have imposter phenomenon, which I don't think is what you're saying, is it?

Hanne Vincent: No. So, these are cues, these are just cues to maybe put them on the radar if several boxes check, but then that's where the work starts, and then from there you could as a manager try and talk to the person and see if indeed there are any of those feelings and if indeed it is something that they're struggling with? Yeah.



Phil Wilcox: And I mentioned at the start this episode that I wanted to or we are we wanted to make it really practical, and maybe that's a really good that you've given us then as we pull the podcast to a close or this first episode anyway. So, we talked about those three different areas, high incidence groups, language and behaviours, and how they might be areas to look for and if there's ticks in a few different areas that might be a suggestion that potentially somebody might have who might be experiencing imposter feelings or might struggle with imposter phenomenon.

Hanne Vincent: Exactly.

Phil Wilcox: So, what might be one tip then that you could give a manager to say right, here's something you can do that would help?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, so in my script I discuss about ten practical methods or tips or tools, whatever you want to call it, for managers to use, but maybe just before I go into that, and to close this episode, maybe before we look at ways to manage people with imposter feelings, it might be worth pointing out a natural very well intended, but not always very useful, reflex that managers have when they are interacting with people, with employees that doubt themselves.

Phil Wilcox: So, like a what not to do I suppose then in a way?

Hanne Vincent: A what not to do. That's maybe a bit harsh but because it's so well intended often people go into cheering mood, yes you can, and injecting lots of external energy and lots of positivity, and give out lots of compliments. And compliments are great and by all means don't stop giving them but be mindful of the shield you know, they probably will just say thank, smile and go thinking the exact same way as they were before. And the same goes for good advice, I don't know how many times I've heard, stop comparing yourselves to other people, start believing in yourself and celebrate your successes. And it just goes right over my head and it's all so well intended, and I sometimes like to compare it with when people are worrying and say, oh, don't worry, it's going to be all right. And I'm guilty of that, I've done that as well, so it's not at all a criticism, but it probably won't stop them from worrying. So, injecting all this energy and positivity, and compliments is very nice, but it probably won't make much of a difference, and it's probably much more effective to talk with them about their imposter thoughts rather than addressing their imposter and that's what we will talk about next time.

Phil Wilcox: That sounds like a great place to wrap up this first episode, Hanne, and thank you so much for sharing your own experiences as well as the wider research as well. I don't know, I feel like it would be beneficial before the listener cues up Episode 2 is to just take some time to think about all the different kind of ground that we've covered as we've worked our way through. So, is there something that you would encourage the listener to do before we go on to Episode 2?

Hanne Vincent: What could be useful and what could be a nice challenge or little task, I don't like the word, but it would be good for people to just have a think of who is walking around in the office and who do you think based on all these checkboxes could potentially be struggling with these feelings? Might be good to just give that a thought, do you see them? Yeah.



Phil Wilcox: Would it be okay then if we put say a template or something in the show notes or a link to a document in the show notes that somebody could download then and be able to use if they're thinking that their team that they work with, whether that be virtually or in an office that they've got some of those areas that we've discussed to look at, would that be okay?

Hanne Vincent: Yeah, absolutely, definitely, yeah.

Phil Wilcox: All right, wonderful.

Hanne Vincent: Could I also...?

Phil Wilcox: Please, yes.

Hanne Vincent: So, I'm in the process of writing this audio book or whatever it will be, so I'd welcome any feedback, if people think you missed that or I don't agree with that, any kind of feedback, but also if people have stories to share about how they've been managed successfully or unsuccessfully as an imposter or the other way around, people that had imposters in their team and how they've managed them and what's successful and what's not, that would be really helpful. And I would like to invite them to reach out, to get in touch.

Phil Wilcox: Absolutely, and we'll put your contact details in the show notes for people as well.

Hanne Vincent: All right, wonderful.

Phil Wilcox: All right, in that case then, Hanne, thank you for sharing your thinking so far and fair listener, we look forward to welcoming you back for Episode 2.

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