

Episode 80

Emotion at Work in Building Better Managers with Ross Garner & Anna Barnett

Lizzi Philokyprou

Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we dive into the people, the processes and the places of work. Today we're going to be focusing on both the people and the process aspects of emotions at work by delving into the topic of managers. And I'm joined today by two wonderful guests who are the best and brightest minds in the L&D space. So we've got on with us today Mind Tools very own Anna Barnett and Ross Garner. And they're going to be sharing with us their opinions and insights on the illuminating and in some ways quite shocking research that Mind Tools have recently published, focusing on the impact and the key to good management practices. So without further ado, let's say hi. Hi, Ross. Hi, Anna.

Anna Barnett

Hi, Lizzi. I thought that was a very generous introduction to myself and Ross.

Ross Garner

Extraordinary. Extraordinarily generous. Not just that we are some of the brightest minds, but the very brightest of all minds in the L&D space. We are sure now to disappoint [laughs].

Lizzi Philokyprou

Sorry, guys. I really set you up there for high expectations [laughs].

Anna Barnett

It's all right, very nice to be here for it.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yeah, it's so nice to have you guys both on the show and I'm just really excited to talk about this topic. I think I've listened, this is going to sound very stalkerish, but I've listened to quite a few of the episodes you've done on the Mind Tools podcast on the research, and I just always come away with more questions. So, yeah, I've been really looking forward to this. So as I think we just discussed this, Ross will know because he has actually been on this podcast before, we always start the podcast with an innocuous question. And today's innocuous question, obviously very random, if you could wear just one colour for the rest of your life, what would that colour be?

Anna Barnett

Good one. Well, I think for me, I actually already opt for a lot of like white colours, like lighter greens, whites, that kind of thing. Not for any other reason, except I have a Samoyed as a dog, which is a really big, white fluffy cloud essentially, and he moults all the time. And so I actually can't wear dark colours without looking sort of really unkept. So, yeah, I think given that I will have my Samoyed in my life for certainly another, hopefully, you know, eight to ten years and would continue to have Samoyeds in the future, I think I'd have to say white for me.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Are Samoyed, are they like small dogs?

Anna Barnett

No. Oh, no. They're like huskies, they're very fluffy and quite wolf like, I guess in appearance, but like big, friendly giants essentially. They're lovely. They're really nice dogs. They're just very loud. So I've had to lock him away for today because he would just talk the entire time we were doing this. So, yes, they are great in some ways, but in other ways they're hard work.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Oh bless. Ross, what about you?

Ross Garner

So I have vowed never to wear just a single colour again, I'm having a flashback to when I was 12 and I'd just seen the Matrix and I just wore black constantly, like black shirt and shoes.

Lizzi Philokyprou

A strong look.

Ross Garner

I looked more like a waiter than I did like Neo from the Matrix. But I remember we were doing this like trip round London, my family and another family, and the other family had a couple of teenage girls and I was a 12 year old boy, and so obviously I was like I look so cool dressed all in black. And I remember one of them at one point just turned to me and went, so you just wear black, right? And I just absolutely died inside. [Laughs] So I've always avoided uniform colour schemes ever since. I tend to pick blue. I was going to go red, I'm quite a fan of red tops, but red top and red trousers sounds super weird, so I'll just go blue.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Nice. Sorry, Ross, we've made you relive some teenage trauma there.

Ross Garner

Yes. So apologies about that. Yeah, no, both white and blue are solid choices. I was going to go red just because I'm wearing red today, and I was like, oh, I do like this, but I think, yeah, like red chinos, it feels like quite an intense flashback to the 2010s fashion, which I don't know if we need to revisit. So I think I might go Matrix and go just all black. Really boring. But with all black you can't...

Anna Barnett

Timeless.

Lizzi Philokyprou

You can't get it wrong.

Anna Barnett

It's timeless, Lizzi.

Lizzi Philokyprou

It's timeless. You're always going to blend in unless...

Ross Garner

Well, I hope you're trying to impress any teenage girls with that, Lizzi, because it won't work [laughs].

Lizzi Philokyprou

It won't work. Honestly, I think teenage girls are the hardest to impress, yeah, 100%. Well, I'm glad we've all got our fashion choices mapped out for the rest of our lives, productive progress has been made so far. First of all, you've written this paper, obviously, Anna, I think you've headed up the research, right?

Anna Barnett
I did, yes.

Lizzi Philokyprou
So I'd love to know where does it come from?

Ross Garner
Just to clarify, I had nothing to do with this paper at all. I. So my role is I work on the product side, creating products based on this research. I have nothing to do with the writing of this paper. So Anna is the expert here and I'm just tagging along

Anna Barnett
Yeah, but you've had lots of conversations, Ross, with me about the research, and so I feel at this point you're as knowledgeable in lots of ways.

Ross Garner
I see my focus is what do we do with Anna's findings to help managers get better at their jobs?
That's kind of my...

Lizzi Philokyprou
So you're sort of the practical applications of the research?

Ross Garner
With a lot of guidance from Anna, yes.

Lizzi Philokyprou
Nice. And so like thinking about the research in its infancy, Anna, where did it start? How did you come up with the idea for the paper in the first place?

Anna Barnett
Sure. So I think well, at Mind Tools, we've been doing research for more than 20 years. So I haven't been there for more than 20 years, but I have been there for three years. And every year we do a research project or multiple research projects. And usually we pick like a population within the business that cares about learning. So sometimes we will look at the learners specifically, so the real end users of the things that we create. Other times we will look at managers, sometimes leaders, and then L&D teams as well, actually. So we kind of give this sort of 360 perspective of what does learning and development look like in the business at any given moment? And so this year, naturally it was the manager's turn. We decided that, you know, were ready to start focusing on that population again. And so we spent some time at the very end of 2023 having some interviews. So speaking to managers directly and just trying to understand a little bit about what are their challenges, what are they dealing with, what does the job look like today? How do they define good management? And a lot of questions came out of that. Some expected, some unexpected. And it led us to two key areas. One was that we don't really fully understand what good management is. And that was from both the perspective of managers themselves, but also from our own reviews of the literature and research that's already available to us. And so we thought that's a challenge for the year, is we have to define good management for this year, for this modern business context. The second challenge was about managers not knowing how to assess and evaluate their own skills, so they can't quite identify what skills that they have against a reliable framework. So that was our second challenge of the year, was to try and also find a way of helping managers to identify their own strengths and weaknesses essentially. So that's where the research started in its very infancy.

And then from there went on to work in partnership with YouGov and collect data directly from managers across, I think 12 different industries, to try and get really into the detail of all the things that we would care about as businesses and specifically as L&D teams when we're thinking about the managers as a population.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Brilliant. Yeah, I think definitely from reading the paper, it's clear from the start that there's like a discrepancy between, I guess the managers having a hard time explaining what good management is, but then I think there was the stat that like 86% of managers felt that they know what skills they need to be good managers. And it feels like there's a discrepancy there between people's, I guess, maybe like self-perception and then actual behaviours.

Anna Barnett

Yeah.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Was that something...?

Anna Barnett

We see this...

Lizzi Philokyprou

Oh, yeah, sorry, Anna.

Anna Barnett

Yeah, well, we see this a lot, Lizzi. And it's actually a challenge across all types of research in all different industries. And having done research with humans for as long as I have, you see this across the board and it's why we are such passionate researchers about mixed method type designs. Because you can gather so much more when you do both what we would say, qualitative research and actually talk to managers and get the really rich understanding of how they're doing, and what they're thinking, and their habits and their behaviours. And then you've got the quantitative side where you start to put some numbers to it. And as you say, if you only do one of these approaches, you might go away thinking that, oh, managers are very confident in the sorts of skills that they need because more than 80% said that they know what they are. But actually, when you speak to the manager, they had a really tricky time trying to define that and talk about it. And so there's this huge gap. And we are humans, we are flawed, but it's gaps like that makes this research project at the depth in which we tackled it so important really.

Ross Garner

I think as well if you think about the role of the manager, like why is that person a manager in the first place? Well, it's probably because they were one of the highest performing individual contributors or team members, or whatever you want to call them. So they are really good at their job and they have been promoted to lead a team on account of being good at that job. But it's actually a very different skill in a lot of sectors. So you have a lot of people who have been told that they're great, so probably feel very confident, and then oftentimes they're just left to it just to go and work out, as if the skills that got them to where they are now are the skills that they need going forward. And I think it's one of the reasons where if you have a product like Mind Tools or LinkedIn Learning or one of the aggregators like the Go1, Cornerstone, all these things, and you have a big content library and you say to managers, you've got all this stuff, just go and look at the things that you need to help do your jobs. They often don't get used very well if you don't have some kind of guidance mechanism or some sort of like scaffolding or flagging the kind of things that people should

be spending their time on. Because the things that managers need to do are super varied. And as Anna just said, they often have a hard time identifying what they need to perform.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. I think it comes down to that thing of, and I think you guys mentioned it in another podcast that you did on this topic, there's no handbook for managers. I don't feel like there's a cross industry, like, general acceptance of what, like you guys say, a good manager is. I think the role of management, it feels like it varies between industries quite a lot, but actually, I think the fundamentals of what make a good manager don't.

Anna Barnett

Yeah. And that's why we set out to do that this year. So as part of this project, our aim was to create that framework that would sit across different industries and be able to help define good management, regardless, I suppose, in some ways, depending on context. But what we've done is we've created the skills framework that has say 12 skills within it, and depending on say the industry or the business that you work in, or even the team size that you manage, you may need to flex skills in slightly different ways, but essentially were trying to get to the foundations really, of what it is to be a good manager in this year. I think that's important, and I talk a lot about moments of time because the role of management has evolved over time, and I think it's important that we have a skills framework that can reflect that and to evolve alongside managers. Because if we were to do this research during Covid time, we may have come to different conclusions. I'm sure we would have lots of similar outcomes, but also there will have been differences, because we needed different things from our managers then than we do today. Covid is quite an extreme example, but if we compare what managers were like maybe 20 years ago to managers of today, I think we would see very different things. So this project is the start of a longitudinal research project for us, one that we will continue to revisit and keep alive, I think is the keyword for that.

Ross Garner

I think as well we've validated the original framework already since doing this, because Anna and her colleague Kent started a further research project into managers in healthcare to find out the challenges that they face and the kind of skills that they need to perform in their roles. And they were the exact same skills. There was no difference from the foundation level framework. But the extent to which they needed those skills was greater than in some other sectors. So, for example, some of the skills are empathy, self-regulation and social sensitivity. And you need that whether you work in healthcare or finance or tech or whatever it might be. But if you're working with a load of software engineers, you don't need the same level of empathy and social sensitivity as you do if you work in healthcare. You do need it, it's going to help you, but the extent to which you need to lean on it is slightly less. So it's more a case of taking the capabilities and dialling them up and down, than there being radically different skills across each sector.

Anna Barnett

Yeah, I think what's really interesting is Ross's example of empathy I think is a good one, because we actually went into that research project working with managers within a healthcare setting, almost expecting them to say that because they've already gone through some training about person centred training, which is part of their degrees and the way in which they've gone through their own formal sort of training, we expected them to already have empathy as a skill. I think I just assumed that they would know how to do it and how to be empathetic.

Ross Garner

[inaudible]

Anna Barnett

Well, Ross, maybe the ones I've met are lovely, but I was really surprised because they ended up telling us that they almost see those skills as separate. So, yes, empathy is a foundational skill that you would apply in different contexts. But they were saying that they would use or flex, say, empathy in a very different way with their patients, as they would with the people that they manage. So actually what it meant for us was that they do really want access to, say, resources that are going to help them improve empathy when they're managing other people, even though they've already gone through a very rigorous formal kind of education about how to be empathetic with the patients that they care for. So it really surprised me. I didn't expect that, which I always like it when research surprises me. But it was a hypothesis that, yeah, didn't ring true from my perspective. And I thought that was a really interesting point.

Ross Garner

So just because we talked about how do we turn that then into something that's practical for the managers at the end point? So based on that finding that Anna just talked about, we've launched a healthcare version of our content library. So we have a suite of resources for leaders and managers with three thousand pieces of content, articles and videos, and podcasts, and all sorts of different things. And in the healthcare product, some of those resources that we've developed are about, if you work in healthcare how do you modify your communication style based on who you're interacting with? Because if you're a clinician and you're speaking to another clinician, you can use very technical language because it's a shared understanding and technical language is a shortcut to getting things quite quickly. But if you're speaking to a patient, you need to avoid technical language. And if you're speaking to a non-clinical colleague, you don't need the same level of compassion or empathy as you would with a patient, but you can't use the same level of technical language that you would use with another clinician. So it's about how do you be empathetic to the other person's needs and then respond to those across a range of different contexts, which you're bouncing in and out of sometimes every ten minutes throughout your working day? So then that's one of the ways that we can look at is how do we support managers based on their context but based on this research?

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. It's a lot as well to think you've got to be switching, dialling up those levels of empathy, like you said, within like ten minutes, chopping and changing. I think often it's underestimated the amount of work managers have to do to manage, and then they've got their own core role on top of that. And one thing we've definitely found in our research was that, and it speaks to your point, Ross, about you found that with the Mind Tools content library, often managers don't use the resources unless there's a framework. And I do sometimes think that could potentially come down to like time and capacity.

Ross Garner

No one has time.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yeah, no one has time. We found that over half of managers agreed that stuff regularly gets in the way of them doing their OG jobs. And so I just wondered from the research that you guys have done, what key takeaways have you found? Like what should organisations be doing to support managers and support their development of those key skills?

Anna Barnett

I think the healthcare example is a really good one. So when we were having interviews with healthcare managers specifically, we really found them every time we asked, well, how do you

currently learn when you want to develop a new skill or work on an existing skill, what is it that you're using now? Now all managers across all industries overwhelmingly told us that they rely on their managers. So you've got managers speaking to other managers. It's kind of their go-to. If they're dealing with whatever challenge, they will usually consult a manager before they do anything else. So that to one side. Healthcare managers in particular were talking more about podcasts and they were saying, that's the go-to for us, we would go straight for podcasts because we can do it while we're doing other things, whether that is driving your car on your way to work or whether it's actually while you're trying to get on with a bit of work, you can just be listening to something in the background. So I guess from two bits of advice for organisations in terms of facilitating L&D for managers, I guess it would be about meeting them where they're at, so if they want to use podcasts, what can we do to help them, signpost them to the right sorts of podcasts that are actually going to be useful and helpful? Do our own research as L&D teams to ensure that we're recommending the right sorts of things that are going to support them. But then if we think about more generally and managers relying on other managers, I mean, this is great and bad. So it's real collaborative effort within the business, which we love to see. We want people to be working together, that's great, but if you've got managers who are not effectively good or doing the job well, and they're training other managers on how to deal with different challenges, we just have bad habits that are trickling through the business. And I always say, I think the management population is the best way to change an organisation's culture, because I think that they just hold so much power without even realising it. But because managers are relying on other managers, I like to talk to businesses and we've had clients where we've chatted about, how can we actually get around this as an issue and to use it to our benefit? So how do we capitalise on the fact that managers would go to their managers? So are there opportunities to, say, set up little communities of practice within the business? Are there opportunities to bring managers together, but in a way that's supported by someone say in an L&D team or even in a different team, but someone who perhaps can signpost them to have the right sorts of conversations, can recommend the right sorts of topics or the right resources around those conversations that can, I don't know, almost help them during that process? I think that could be a really nice way to just give managers, you know, you're meeting them where they're at, they're already doing it, so let's lean on that a little bit and then support them to do it effectively.

Lizzi Philokyprou
Definitely.

Ross Garner

So I'm going to give what I think is going to sound like quite a sales pitchy kind of answer to that. But the reason for that is that our research informs our products. So if you're asking like, how do you help managers get better at their jobs? That is what Mind Tools focuses on and it's one of the reasons that we do this research. It's not just out of the goodness of our hearts. We're wanting to really understand our target population and then develop products that actually help achieve that goal. So it's difficult to answer this without touching on our products, but I hope listeners will forgive me if it's done. I'll try and make it as generic as possible and then they can, by all means, apply for Mind Tools or shop elsewhere. So the first thing is we know that one of the problems is that managers think they know the skills they need, but they actually don't. So we have a manager skills assessment that will rate them against the 12 capabilities that are identified in the report and then give them a score for that. And then to your point, Lizzi, about how short on time managers are, that skills assessment is a way of setting aside the things where they are already good and only focusing on those that they actually need to improve on. So, for example, when I did it for myself, I scored relatively low for delegation and transparent communication. So that's a really useful insight for me because now I know that with the limited time that I have for getting better at my job, those are the two areas that I should be focusing on. We then offer workshops that managers can sign up to if

they want. So we do a workshop on empathy, for example, they might want to sign up and do that, and then that's quite a short intervention. And we're also developing a suite of what's called adaptive courses. So in theory it's 18 hours of self-paced content that if you go through it, you'll learn all 12 of these skills or you'll certainly get a good foundation in all 12 of these skills. But because it's adaptive, it recognises what you already know and then shortcuts through the courses as you go. It's a very tailored, personalised experience. So for me, for example, I would probably get more stuff on delegation and transparent communication than I would on those other areas where I actually already have existing capability. So it's potentially 18 hours, but probably if you're quite good, you could go through it a lot faster than that. And I think what's nice about that is it's like a scalable, on demand, highly personalised management development program. And we know that stuff works, it's in the report as well that when we measure the capability of managers and then find out whether they got any support when they became a manager, the 50% who did receive support when they became managers are better managers later on, not just in terms of their ability, but also they're more likely to have more people reporting to them, which suggests they have more responsibility, they've been promoted more frequently, they've got more seniority within the organisation. So I think the diagnostic piece they're like, where do you need to focus? Is a good way of optimising time. And then adaptive courses are a good way again of optimising time for managers and making sure they're getting targeted content. And then we look at once you've got this kind of foundation in place of basic capability across these 12 areas, well then, how do you support managers going forward? And I already talked about this, but we did a report in, I think, 2016, The Secret Lives of Managers it was called. And it looked at the what do managers do when they have a challenge at work? Well, they probably ask someone or they Google it. So the way that Mind Tools tries to inject ourselves into that dynamic, to Anna's point about meeting them where they are, is we have our content library. So that's the version of Googling it, so you can find solutions to the kind of typical management challenges that we see. And we do all sorts of research into what those might be. Things like having difficult conversations or setting goals or that kind of stuff. And then to the asking someone else but maybe not getting the best answer, if you're asking someone who doesn't know and just gives you a super confident but wrong answer, that we're developing an AI chat product that basically is a way of asking our content library questions. And it'll give you a highly contextualised, a dialogue, kind of like ChatGPT, you'll get a very good response and it'll suggest something. But it'll suggest something based on our research and our content.

Lizzi Philokyprou
Yeah.

Ross Garner
So then you know you can trust it. So I realise that's a very producty answer, but I'm hoping that you can see how each of those products is based on the insights that we have from Anna's research.

Anna Barnett
You make the point of saying that managers will either speak to someone or they'll Google it. What was really interesting is this year when we asked managers, we gave them a defined list of all the things that they could do when they're dealing with a different challenge at work. And we split our challenges into different areas because we appreciate every challenge looks different and your approach to dealing with that challenge may also differ. Overwhelmingly it didn't. Most of the time, managers did the same thing, which was speak to a manager or a coach or a mentor, just talk to somebody else. But from the Googling perspective, what I thought was really interesting is that we had in there, well, do you tap into a platform like Mind Tools or LinkedIn Learning or whatever, or Google is an option as well. And actually for all the challenges, it was as likely to use something like Mind Tools as they were to go on Google. Which really surprised me...

Ross Garner

There you go. Just proves it works.

Anna Barnett

It was. And one of them actually I think the use of a platform like Mind Tools had actually trumped Google for one of the challenges. So there's almost been a shift, almost as if to say that people are aware that it actually is important to pay for the quality version of the advice and the learning, as opposed to just going on Google and seeing what you get. And I don't know if that's interesting in this year because perhaps of AI and people are feeling a little bit concerned about how reliable is it that we get. And we now see on our Google that you have that little AI built in that gives you a summary of the findings, and for a snapshot it's okay but in reality these are managers who are dealing with very real challenges and they want to know that the advice and the learning that they're getting access to is valid and reliable. And I think that, I'm only speculating, but I assume it's had something to do with that. But I just thought it was interesting because maybe one day we'll be saying that managers will either go to other people or they'll go to Mind Tools. That'd be a nice thing to say.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yes, no, definitely.

Ross Garner

I think the difficulty is that the management industry is absolutely awash with bollocks as well. I think that's part of the difficulty with it. There's a lot of half-baked ideas and so what we're almost trying to do is filter those out. Visit mindtools.com if you want to see more about that.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. I think what I find, as you were saying, Anna, and I think you both mentioned it, but the extent to which managers rely on other managers to help them with problems. From your own experiences, what are the worst inherited management sort of traits or habits that almost get passed down? Because I'm sure there must be some. But, yeah, I don't know if you've seen any in action.

Anna Barnett

Good question. I think delegation and recognition are two of the areas that I would say I probably see this happening more frequently. I think because we get used to a certain level of being delegated to from our managers, and then when someone comes in that you are then responsible for, I think it's quite easy to just slip into, okay, this is what I'm used to and this is the level that I've been working at for however long. And therefore this is what I should expect of my people. So it's not so much that the manager above that manager is necessarily telling them this is how you should do things, but they've kind of shown them in a way. And I think the same applies for recognition. So again, if you are a manager who hasn't received a huge amount of recognition, you may then not realise that you're also not doing that as a form for your people. I guess in some ways it could be one or the other with recognition, because I think I've also spoken to managers who have said, my manager never recognised me and I really wish they had, and therefore I make a real effort to recognise my people. So I think it depends on who you are as a manager as well a little bit in terms of how much you value recognition. But, yeah, I think from a learning from others perspective, I think those two are quite affected by that as a skill. I don't know, what do you think, Ross?

Ross Garner

So I actually wrote about this sort of in my newsletter, well, I'll send you a link, Lizzi, if you want to put it in the show notes.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Oh, I think I'm already subscribed.

Ross Garner

Excellent. I read a thing at the weekend about the impact of CEO personality on organisational culture. And so the researchers had done this thing, they took earnings calls recordings from hundreds of different CEOs, and then put them through some sort of linguistic analysis tool basically to categorise the CEOs in terms of agreeableness, which is one of the big five personality traits. Kind of like how kind you are? How do you get on with others? And then they looked for a relationship between CEO agreeableness with organisational culture as rated by employees on Glassdoor. So Glassdoor is the business rating site, you can rate your employer against a range of things, and job candidates would use it to go and look and see they want to work at this place. And they found that more agreeable CEOs had cultures that were more innovative and more collaborative. I think I'd kind of thought, and maybe this is naïve, the CEO is just one person, like how much of an impact can they actually have? But I think it was interesting the way that you asked it, Lizzi, about the bad practices being passed on, because I think from the CEO it probably cascades. Like if you have a CEO who's demonstrating bad behaviour, then that probably puts pressure on senior leadership to demonstrate that bad behaviour to their direct reports and so on, and it just keeps cascading down the organisation. So they actually do have a massive impact. Managers are not in the ideal context, they're always in this super messy context to try and not pass on that bad behaviour, to try and push back against it where possible or at least protect their teams.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Definitely. I knew within the research you did do I think there was a bit on, I guess, like the different age groups and how they view management. And I just wondered if obviously thinking about a lot of people that currently hold those seniors position, CEO, main manager positions are of quite a different generation to the generation that's coming into the workforce. And I just wondered if that came through in the research at all?

Anna Barnett

Yeah, generations are an interesting conversation. So last year, towards the end of 2023, we published a report looking at mega trends and where will L&D be in the future and what should we be thinking about? And we included things like climate change, digitalisation, all the things you'd expect to see. And I also did a piece on generational differences in research as well and what we should be paying attention to. Now that whole report I worked closely with an incredible thought leader, Michelle Ockers who's over in Australia. And she really challenged me to think about whether generational differences even exist. It was a really interesting discussion because we talk about them so frequently and we see memes even about the differences of different generations within businesses and what that looks like. And so that whole piece of research was fascinating. This time we didn't so much focus on generations, as so much as we did split people into different age groups and looked at managers across different ages. And of course generations will fall into that just naturally anyway, that we focus more on ages and more on talking about managers who are new or aspiring, and those that are maybe more mature and perhaps even thinking about leaving the business at some point in the not too distant future. And from the work that I did with Michelle last year, and the research that we did when we did look at generations, we talked about how much we unfortunately as businesses we don't leverage these differences enough. So there are many, many ways that we can harness the knowledge that is about to leave a business, because these people have been managing for a long time and they've gained a lot of experience through that process, and how do we not lose that information because it's so valuable? But then what is it about these new and aspiring managers that are coming in, that generally have a hunger for learning or are

more eager to do more because it's new, it's exciting and they're at the start perhaps of a career? And so how do we inject some of that into a population that is perhaps a little bit more mature and a bit more ready to coast, maybe starting to coast a little bit? And I think that's what we sometimes see. But we're also seeing differences in the skills in terms of what they prioritise as well. So we are seeing changes, subtle changes, but they do exist. So our more, what I call mature managers, perhaps they've been doing it for a lot longer. And as management role has evolved from being more transactional to being a lot more focused on people and almost managers behave a lot more like leaders than they did do say 10, 20 years ago. We're seeing a shift in terms of the skills that are being prioritised. So more mature managers are still prioritising the more transactional skills like being able to set goals, to delegate, to communicate well. Younger, I say younger, but newer managers into role are prioritising more of the emotional intelligence type skills. They care more about empathy, their own self-awareness. So there's been a shift and I do wonder I think it's because we're all talking more about the importance of emotional intelligence as an example nowadays. So it's easier for newer managers to be thinking about that naturally. But they value it, they see the importance of it already. Which is great because I think for a long time it's been difficult for some organisations to get some managers to be prioritising these types of skills. And now we're seeing that actually aspiring new managers are the ones that are saying, no, this is a really important thing for us to be able to do. So there are differences, I think those are the more obvious ones in the skill space.

Ross Garner

Anna's the expert on that, so I'll just leave that answer to her.

Lizzi Philokyprou

It was a pretty perfect answer.

Ross Garner

Yeah, well that's Anna's shtick, that's what she's known for. I think this isn't really answer to your question, but I think it's just like a point that is worth making, is when I was presented with the 12 capabilities, first of all, that Anna again came up with, it might be worth even saying how you came up with those 12, Anna. Well, why don't you say, how did you come up with the 12 and then I'll tell you what my response was?

Anna Barnett

Yeah. So, of course, as I said, we set ourselves the challenge of creating a framework that managers can use that's going to be reliable to understand what skills do they actually need? And so we thought about how we would tackle this. I am a huge advocate for reading other people's research and getting as much out of it as you possibly can. And my background is academic, so I will always go to academic literature and I really value it. And I will share some resources, Lizzi, with you to put on the show notes, because I think they're really great academic examples of research we can use. But we decided that we would go into that. So we said in order to identify the skills that are essential for managers, we would go into the academic literature. And what we would do is we would focus on impact. So we would look at all the sorts of skills that managers could have, and there are hundreds of them, as I'm sure you can imagine. And we would essentially work out which skills are having the greatest impact on the business in multiple ways? So it could be on the people of the business. It could be on increasing the performance of your staff. It could be about turnover. It could be about retention of people. It could be about well-being. So there's all sorts of things that are affected when we focus on people. We also have all the skills that are having the greatest impact on the business. So from a profitability perspective, from a productivity perspective. So again, the things probably our leaders care the most about. And then also we have the skills that are having the biggest impact on the manager themselves. So which skills make managers better at problem-solving or make them

better at decision-making or things that managers need to be able to do in their job? So having done all of that work, we then were able to collapse it down into these 12 skills that really just continuously over and over again came out as, I guess, the foundational skills that we should be talking about. So in the report that we've been mentioning there's a whole graph in that report that shows you those 12 capabilities. But at the very end, for those that are very geeky like me, I've broken down some of those key papers, those research papers, so people can go away and actually read around them as a topic as well, because there's some really good stuff in it.

Ross Garner

So I do exactly same, Anna, the appendix of the report, I just sit with it open all day because I talk about it constantly. It basically takes these 12 capabilities and says why do they matter? So these are the 12 because we keep referring to them. So under the banner of setting expectations, we've got delegation, goal setting and transparent communication. Okay, fine. Typical management skills, I can see how you would need them to manage people. Then there's a banner, developing people. So you've got coaching guidance, which is telling people what to do, to an extent, and active listening. So, okay, fair enough, that makes sense. Motivating people, recognition, totally, saying a job well done. Inclusive leadership and trust, I started to twitch slightly, I was like, interesting. And then under emotional intelligence, which is like a foundation to all nine of the other capabilities, we've got social sensitivity, self-awareness and self-regulation and empathy. And I don't want to get all political, but I was looking at this list and going, Anna, this is woke as hell. Like this feels like we're pushing an ideological agenda here about what we think a good manager should do. This can't possibly be what the research says. Which is why I recommend going to the appendix of the report, because if you look at it, like if we just take empathy for example, managers who lack empathy their teams are 34% less innovative. Lacking empathy has a negative effect on organisational performance in terms of profit and growth. And their employees experience more physical ailments. So they're literally making their teams sick. Which is not like a fluffy finding at all. Empathy is not like a nice to have, it actually has this massive effect on a whole range of issues that managers and organisations, and senior leadership do care about. So I agree that empathy is important as like we should all be understanding one another and trying to be nice to each other, but there's also like the hard boiled business reason for encouraging this in your managers as well.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yeah, definitely. I love that you guys have drilled down not only into the people based reasons managers should be doing these things, but actually the real business impacts and effects it has. Because people being happy at work it's not just like a nice to have, it really does affect the health and growth of the business. And it's great to see that more people are recognising that and becoming aware of that. Because I think it's like a statistic or something, but your manager has a greater impact on your health, and not just like your mental health but your physical health as well, compared to your doctor, they have a greater impact. And it's just, yeah, pretty shocking. But it's great that you've put this together and it compiles all the research into a really compelling set of skills.

Ross Garner

Yeah. And I think just on the happiness point, and I'd be interested actually in what Anna thinks about this, it's talked about quite a lot recently for some reason, it keeps coming up, to what extent is an employer responsible for ensuring that their people are happy at work? I might argue that's actually not their responsibility, they do have a role, I think, in motivating and communicating a vision and making sure people feel listened to, and understand their sense of purpose and working towards a collective goal. All of these things can be quite motivating, but where it can be quite hard, a lot of contexts it is hard, and it may be unrealistic to be happy all the time. So I think your

employer has a duty of care, not necessarily a duty to make sure that you are happy. What do you think, Anna?

Anna Barnett

Yeah, I agree. I think the problem is, this is my own perception I suppose, so speaking on my behalf, but I work with a lot of L&D teams in different businesses, and for a long time, and right up until today, they talk about the challenges of measuring impact and knowing how people feel about the learning programmes they're going through. So I'm using this as an example. And until now, and continues today, a lot of L&D teams, a lot of businesses focus on the satisfaction of their people. But they talk about it really negatively, like as if that's not real impact, that's not good enough, we have to be doing more. If our people are happy with the learning that they've been through, then that's not telling us enough, that's not telling us very much. And whilst I appreciate that position, I agree that there are other ways that we can look at impact particularly, and we can think about whether something has worked and hasn't worked, and what that means for the business. This report has really unpacked this happiness piece, this satisfaction piece, because what we've seen is that actually if people are satisfied, and we've used managers as our example, but if people are satisfied with what they're doing at work, and learning as an example of something that they might be doing at work, then they are going to better in the longer term. They're going to have the right sorts of skills, they're going to be more effective in their roles, they're more productive. They're more focused as well from a real self-driven perspective, which we see a lot of. Those managers who are the most satisfied by say the learning and development that they've had, are the ones that are more likely to go away and do more off the back of that, more likely to be more, like I say, self-directed in that approach. And so the knock on effect from happiness is huge. So as Ross says, it might not be written down that that's what business are responsible for and that they need focus on, but I think almost everything almost links into it. If you can keep your people happy in all sorts of ways, then essentially the impact of that is huge. And I think that's what we shouldn't lose sight of. So I don't want us to talk about satisfaction surveys and things like that as sort of a dirty word and that we shouldn't be doing them anymore. We definitely should. They have such an important part to play because they tell us more than I think people realise, it's just you have to go a little bit beyond to unpack the wider impact of satisfaction. But there's a lot of it.

Ross Garner

Yeah, and I don't want to come across as like the hard-nosed, you have to be responsible for them being happy. But I think it is a problem if you're people who are consistently unhappy at work.

Anna Barnett

Sure, yeah.

Ross Garner

I can relate to the physical and mental health issues that we've talked about can have an impact in terms of attrition and productivity, and business metrics. I just think there's a difference between teams having a collective sense of purpose through adversity. It's not quite the same as happiness, but they need to have a sense that they're progressing towards something better in the future. Happiness might be an interesting topic for a future report, Anna.

Anna Barnett

I think so. I'll make a note.

Ross Garner

Yeah.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yeah. I think happiness versus satisfaction, versus sense of purpose, because I think they're all, even though sometimes they're used interchangeably, they're all actually quite different things.

Ross Garner

They overlap.

Lizzi Philokyprou

And I think definitely to feel satisfied at work. Yeah, there's overlap, but I think satisfaction, feeling good after a day of work or a week of work or reflecting on a project, I think sometimes the struggles always almost increase that sense of satisfaction at the end, because you actually feel like you've worked through something.

ADVERT

In this episode so far we've talked a lot about just how important emotional intelligence is as a skill for both managers and leaders. But it's not necessarily something we possess organically. In fact, emotional intelligence takes dedicated time, effort and guidance to curate and exercise responsibly. And that's where we come in. We are experts in emotional intelligence and emotional regulation in the workplace. We provide analysis, helping you take action and apply key coaching principles to create an emotionally intelligent workplace where everyone feels safe, confident and optimistic. If you want to find out more about how our training, coaching and consultancy services can help you and your team, head over to our website today.

Lizzi Philokyprou

I think we're kind of at the end of things. I don't know if there's anything else you guys wanted to share with listeners maybe who haven't read your paper but are thinking about it, any closing notes for them?

Anna Barnett

I would just reiterate the point that there's a lot of research that's gone into this report and the work that we do at Mind Tools, and I think the report itself is just a really nice snapshot for someone who if you are an L&D team, you are a business, you are thinking about how do we focus on our management population today, I think it gives you a lot of quite practical advice throughout. So it's a great place to start. I think that's my first thing. And the second is that, that table at the end of that report is just full of just really great insight. And I think I talk about, like I say, reading other research, academic research specifically, and I think the rise of AI tools today allow us and make that a lot easier. You can actually upload research papers into AI tools and play around and ask questions, and have summaries, and it's really nice and easy to interact with. And, yeah, there's so much good stuff out there that I think a lot of us aren't yet tapping into. And I like said, Lizzi, I will share some of those resources with you to share wider.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Yes, brill. We will put all the research papers that have been mentioned and all the resources in the bio to link to this podcast.

Ross Garner

I think for me, I'm quite long in the tooth really in this whole L&D game these days, Anna's been at Mind Tools for three years, I've been here for 12, which is really quite tragic. And I've spent a lot of time with different HR and L&D teams who have come up with capability frameworks and spent quite a lot of time on them. So I think the first thing I would say is problem solved, you can just use

Anna's. The report, it's at the very back, it'll just tell you why these are the 12 capabilities to focus on at this point in time, and you can just lift that and have no further relationship with Mind Tools if you don't want to. I think the next thing though is, how do you know what your current capability levels are across your management population so that you can make targeted choices about where you focus your efforts as an L&D team, and so that managers can make targeted choices around the kind of things that they are looking to develop in? Because to your point, Lizzi, about the motivation of going through an experience that actually feels worthwhile, if you understand your base level capability and where you want to get to, you understand that gap, then you can make those kind of choices. Otherwise you're just guessing and trying a heap of stuff and hoping that it works. Which is often what happens and that's where we see managers struggle to articulate the kind of skills that they need. So if you do want help with any of that, measuring your current state, deploying products and services to make a targeted impact whilst optimising time of managers, then Mind Tools would love to help.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Brill. Thank you so much guys. Yeah, it's been really interesting and I'm sure people that are listening have found it just as interesting as I have. So, yeah, thank you so, so much.

Anna Barnett

Thank you, Lizzi, it was great.

Ross Garner

Thank you. Lovely to see you, Lizzi.

Lizzi Philokyprou

Thanks, bye.