Episode 32 – Emotion at Work in Community Management
Chatting with Ady Howes (@adyhowes)

Ady: Can I press the button and start the music?

Phil: (Laughs) go on then.

Ady: Is it this one? (Intro music).

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition and if you haven't guessed already today's guest is with me live and it's going to make for a fun conversation today. So we are talking about emotion at work in community management. We are looking at it from a couple of different perspectives, partly looking at what emotions do we think are present in online communities but also what does that then mean for the role of a community manager within that space. So enough about me, let's get our guest on air, although technically he has sneakily been on the air already, so let's welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast Mr Ady Howes.

Ady: Good morning, ey up.

Phil: Ey up, now just for your listeners, I don't know if Ady knows this, he's stored in my phone as Ady the Man Howes, because he is the man.

Ady: Very nice (laughs).

Phil: When it comes to anything digital community based, sorry Mike, anything digital and community based then Ady is the man, so yeah. Welcome Ady the Man.

Ady: Thank you very much. Lovely to be here.

Phil: I'm pleased to have you here. So as always with the Emotion at Work podcast we open with an iniquitous yet unexpected question and this one has been prompted by a conversation I had with Sukh Pabial last Friday where he was talking about his trip to America and we were talking about the cost of things and one thing he mentioned was tips. So my question this week is what makes you tip?

Ady: Good question. I like tipping.

Phil: You like tipping?

Ady: I like tipping and I don't think we do that enough certainly in the UK and of course there has been lots of press around how tips are distributed. Whether the companies take their slice of that and it's now nice to see that working in the workers favour. What makes me tip? I think just the expected level of service is good to have because I think it's fair to say, sadly that's lacking in lots of

places. Just to have that expected service and just for people to be attentive and just noticing the stuff. So we went out for a meal last Friday and the people there were lovely and they weren't in your face as in checking everything is okay when you have a mouthful of food but they were really attentive.

Phil: Do you reckon they time that purposely though?

Ady: I think they do.

Phil: If we have any waiting staff listening to the podcast can you let me know do you deliberately time it that when you ask people if their meal is okay, do you think they are just about to put in a mouthful of food, now is the time to arrive.

Ady: Maybe that's how they avoid complaints.

Phil: Genuinely that has crossed my mind because so often it happens that just as I'm putting a mouthful of food I get asked, "How's everything with the burger". (Mumbled) yes it's lovely. Whilst sort of doing a thumbs up and nodding my head because it reduces the chances of me saying anything but yes.

Ady: I suppose if you're eating it's a good sign.

Phil: Yeah that's true.

Ady: If you sat there not eating then you clearly know somethings wrong and perhaps avoid you.

Phil: I broke one of my rules because I interrupted you then. You were saying they were attentive, but not in your face asking how your food was all the time.

Ady: That's it yeah. I'm easily pleased. These guys and girls work incredibly hard so just the basic level of service, curtesy, just being right with you, being a good human being. That's enough for me.

Phil: Does the quality of the food matter or does the tip just relate to the service?

Ady: So I tip in relation to the service but I think if food is crap then that would have an impact. Yeah. I actually tip the waiting staff, you never tip the chef do you?

Phil: No.

Ady: Or the people that are working in the kitchen. You never get a chance to say thank you to them, the unsung heroes.

Phil: I am similar in that I don't need to be wowed to tip and I think part of that is about often waiting staff are minimum wage or there or there abouts which may be an unfair thing to guess but that would be my guess and because it's me and I always think about this stuff, the amount of

emotional labour that the waiting staff have to do is extraordinary. For example having a grumpy waiter or waitress or grumpy member of the waiting team often would mean that people are less likely to tip I would wager. Now if you knew why they were grumpy or if they were grumpy about something that you were also grumpy about then maybe, but generally they have to put on a very positive, happy, supportive listening, attentive demeanour even though that may not be in any way, shape or form how they are feeling. The chef might have shouted at them, they might be rushed off their feet, but they can't show that. The amount of work they have got to do to give you that experience which is in-line with what you would expect.

Ady: Yeah they are on stage.

Phil: Yeah, absolutely. So because they have to work hard in that way, so not only have they got the physical exertions of walking, being on their feet all of the service shift carrying the food. Carrying the empty plates away, the embarrassment of dropping something on the floor and everybody going r-*a-a-a-a*-ay and all of that stuff, they've also got all the emotional labour bit to do as well. Similar to you it doesn't take much for me to say yeah, you know what, we'll give them a tip. The speaking to the chef bit, that is something I do and it quite annoys my wife. I annoy my wife in two ways when we go out to eat, so one is I'll ask the waiting staff what they think I should eat and that annoys the shit out of her. So she is like Phil, they don't know you, they've never met you before, they don't know what you like and I'm like no, but they know their food better than I do. So they could either ask me a few questions to try and work out what I like and then I can try and narrow it down for them and they could recommend and it might be that the chef is saying to them, push this dish or they might just have something that they really enjoy and I want to know what they think of the food that they serve. They serve it every day so they know it better than I do.

Ady: It might be stuff that goes out of date tomorrow.

Phil: Absolutely but if it needs to be used up and the chefs is saying push this dish because we've got a load of it in the kitchen, I don't mind why they are pushing the dish and if I don't want it, then I won't order it but I want to know what they think. The second thing I do, I will often either ask the waiting staff to pass on my thanks to the chef or I will ask to speak to the chef and that gets an interesting reaction because sometimes the default response, maybe that is not fair, but more often than not, the response is concern. It's anxiety or worry about the fact that I want to speak to the chef and invariably it is because I want to thank them for some amazing food, but I find it interesting that, it's like when you ask to speak to a manager in a call centre or in a store the default is, there is something wrong because you wouldn't ask to speak to the manager if something was going right. I like to make an effort where the food has been particularly good, I like to make an effort to thank and appreciate the chef for the work that they have been doing, because like you said their behind the scenes. Not necessarily known or interacting with the customers that often.

Ady: Yeah that's it. We are suitably hungry.

Phil: That's a good point.

Ady: You did this with Jo the other week didn't you, you were talking about toast (laughs).

Phil: (Laughs) I did, I did. Shameless plug for episode 30 I think?

Ady: It was yeah.

Phil: 30.

Ady: Jo Wainwright, lovely, lovely lady.

Phil: Yes we did talk about toast. We did.

Ady: The foodie emotion at work podcast (laughs).

Phil: So also fair listener if you run an eating establishment I am always available for… you now have a basic requirement for getting tips. Get in touch, let me know, invite me and Ady along to your eating establishment and you know that if you just do enough you are going to get a tip.

Ady: (Laughs) easily pleased.

Phil: Alright, so we are talking about emotion at work in communities and I suppose in a shameless plug / openness and honesty aspect I've just launched a hub, or what I am calling a hub because I didn't want to call it a community and we're doing well. We are up to 62 people that are in The Hub and they are clearly accessing content because I can see from the snooping, Google Analytics stuff, I can see what pages people have been on and I can see people are accessing and there's certainly some value in the content that they are finding but what I am also finding is even though I have prompted on different ways and different channels for people to take part in the discussion forum that is proving a more challenging task to achieve and as somebody who has run a number of communities is that something that is common or should I just be worried that people aren't engaging in the forum that I've created?

Ady: I think it is common probably, you know we talk about communities as an online thing but there's communities off-line and have been for thousands of years, so I think there is a couple of things really, I think firstly there's the time issue so there's lots of communities out there. Nothing obviously as good as The Hub, the Emotion at work thing.

Phil: (Laughs) or the DPG thing.

Ady: (Laughs) or the DPG community. Crikey, yeah. Very quickly get that one in as well. I mean these are two wonderful communities and there are lots of communities out there and I love the DPG community, it's big, it's vibrant, it's long-standing and there's a lot of people on there but you are still competing for time. That set aside I think there is some emotion around getting involved in communities. If we think first of all your online communities, if you're in a room with a bunch of people there are going to be people within that room that are going to lack confidence or worry about how they come across, what they say and that sort of stuff. That online is the same but probably a bit more in that when you contribute to an online community, if you write something

down, there's a permanent record of that or I'd love to see people sharing videos on community more but that's a whole different level of confidence, you've not only got your words but you got your face, your identity all that stuff so there's something within that. I think fear is the word, which is a big word, because at its lowest level it's not really fear, it's just…

Phil: Nervousness or anxiety.

Ady: Yeah that's it, but I do wonder whether at the opposite end of the scale there are people that fear contributing online as much as they would do spiders or public speaking would be a better example.

Phil: I think, either of those are good…one of my favourite words I learnt a few years ago was ephemeral and I love it because it sounds amazing, it's got a lovely tone with it but it's the idea that in speech, not what we're doing because we're recording it but in everyday speech your words are ephemeral, what that means is they disappear. You talked about it earlier on, they disappear. You can say something and unless it is actually recorded there can always be some wiggle room as to what you actually said. Somebody might have said, you said this Ady and you might say well I didn't actually say that, I said this which is slightly similar and then we get into memory and accuracy and all that sort of stuff and we won't go there today. If you want that by the way listeners then you need to go back to the Sukh Pabial and Nick Shakleton Jones episode, but anyway that is a whole other story. The making it permanent bit I think is really relevant because you can take it away and then go back and delete it, you can also edit it in most forums but what I find interesting and maybe it's not a fair comparison but we are talking about closed communities. Communities where you are registering, or you're signing up to be part of it but as you said there are also other communities that exist. For example Twitter is a very vibrant community and ammonisation on there in a way reduces the filters that people apply to words they make permanent. There's so many stories of celebrities who have five years ago, seven years ago, however many years ago tweeted particular things or views on topics that is permanent and then gets pulled back out and played back and then it's stuck with them.

Ady: And then it is stuck with them.

Phil: Absolutely, but you also have others that are anonymous online who chuck out some of the most horrible stuff in terms of abuse, or threats of abuse or threats of violence or insults, all sorts of stuff which is done and that record is permanent but it is not attributed to that individual because there is an anonymous identity that sits behind it. There is a fake avatar and a fake name and whilst Twitter could find out who's behind it because you have got to give your details when you login, actually the only thing that needs to be genuinely linked to something is an email address and you can then hide that through other means as well if you needed to. So if you wanted to be anonymous online you kind of can really. So I don't quite know where I am going but I guess what I am trying to pull apart is even online you can have two extremes where somebody maybe that anxious of contributing because they don't want, they are worried about, could my written imprinted forever contribution come back and bite me in the arse at some point in the future and then you have the complete other end of the spectrum where there is no censorship at all with what somebody is

contributing and actually it could be construed as potentially a hate crime and I find that contrast within online a fascinating area.

Ady: Yeah, certainly and I watched your video in Iceland the country rather than the shop (laughs).

Phil: Otherwise they'd get a deep fried prawn ring.

Ady: So your strategy for being heard in a safe space and allowing people to move on. That safe space is really important I think within a community and I don't think you create rules, I don't think you have a rule book, but you do as a community manager influence a culture where it is okay to contribute and it was Mike Collins who set up the DPG communities as you know, good friend of ours and I remember joining that community and having stuff that I didn't believe was of any interest to anybody.

Phil: As in stuff that you wanted to say?

Ady: Stuff that I didn't necessarily want to say, stuff that I wasn't bothered about saying because I didn't think it was of interest and I can remember a conversation with Mike and we were talking about storyboarding. I was working with an e-learning company, they do real cool animations like Pixar quality animations and a lot of that involved storyboarding and he was saying to me this is really interesting stuff and more and more people are getting into this idea of storyboarding either for a video or a learning event and things like that and I just didn't... it didn't compute with me that that would have been of interest to people. So creating that culture around it's good to share, it's okay to share and actually the stuff that you are working on is helpful to others was enough for me to start getting involved. So the DPG communities centred around the CIPD programmes that we do and of course the CIPD profession map has those behaviours, one of which is courage to challenge so it's actually okay to go out with stuff that isn't correct because there is some challenge that you can have around that and it's okay to challenge others and it's okay to be challenged. You don't go round with threats or the bullying or the harassment and actually you wouldn't want to be part of that sort community anyway. So I think what you do as a Community Manager and the way that you behave and the way that you listen to people and you pick up on these stories and you say to people, wow, that's really interesting, I'd love to hear more about that, is the sort of stuff that I think helps people to contribute. There's that old thing that if you build it people might not come so your Hub Emotion at Work community is quite new and there's that need to generate momentum and things like that but that never stops. With the DPG Community, I've had to give it, I've been up early this morning, given it some love, getting the community update ready and just joining in some of the conversations because I've been out the business for a few days, so just being away, it already feels a bit neglected and sometimes you need to get back in there and respond to people because there's nothing worse than writing something, or commenting on something and then not having anything back. That doesn't help people, their confidence at all.

Phil: And is that because it is interpreted as, that was irrelevant or it wasn't useful or it wasn't good because people didn't engage with it.

Ady: Yeah, potentially. The mind works wonders on reading into why that could be.

Phil: So if we think about feelings and emotion, it's about when we perceive a threat of harm. Now that threat of harm is as much to our physiological self and our self of identify and of who we are as it is about our physical self. So that is one thing, so in terms of trigger for fear then, what the research would suggest is that when we have analysed what people describe as reasons that they get scared it's because they perceived a threat of harm in some way, whether that be to their physical self or their physiological self. What that links in with then is that emotions can be triggered by stuff that is real. So actually things that are physically happening in the world around you but they can also be triggered by stuff that is imagined, but they can also be triggered by stuff that is relived. And what potentially we are talking about there is the second one of those three which is the about the imagined stuff, that if the narrative is, I've posted this, nobody has replied, therefore I look stupid because I posted something that nobody is engaging with, so again, at the risk of being a shameless plug and that's not my intent, my intent is to share it as an example, so when I first put The Hub online I immediately started a discussion around what emotions are okay to show in the workplace and of the 62 amazing people that are on The Hub, one has replied and within me then, there was a whoa, well that was a really useful topic then, wasn't it. That went down well. Trying to rationalise away my concerns about whether I chose the right topic, have I made myself look stupid, did I try to make a point that actually is irrelevant and nobody is interested in. I can then do more self-talk to rationalise a way that actually that is all alright, but it doesn't stop the thoughts running about why has nobody engaged with that? Have I made myself look stupid? Have I made myself look daft? Have I done something wrong?

Ady: There's a lot of work and effort as an author in writing stuff, putting stuff out there, thinking about what people are interested in and things like that. It's like when you see somebody speaking on a stage at a conference, I think sometimes we take for granted what incredible work goes into that and the roller coaster of things that are going on in the speakers mind and it's the same on communities. People put a lot of effort in. We see a lot of our CIPD participants that have obviously sat down for a good chunk of time to think about and write about something, so it's okay to lurk and it's okay to consume this stuff but I think actually we just need to step out and get involved as well. Even if that's just tipping the author if you like, just by saying thank you or I really appreciate this or I love this about it.

Phil: Nice link, I like that.

Ady: We should have had more tips.

Phil: We should tip more often.

Ady: And we are not just doing the average stuff, we are going over and above.

Phil: We are not just doing the basic requests. As a community manager what strategies or what techniques do you use to encourage that contribution? What do you do to try and get that? You describe how the DPG community is vibrant yet still needs attention. How do you continue that vibrancy?

Ady: The first thing I do when somebody joins the community is I connect with them as in, send them a personal email and say hi, I'm Ady, welcome and that sort of stuff. I'd love to say I've got the commitment to do that manually but that is an automated process and I don't mind admitting that and the reason I don't mind admitting that is, so that is triggered automatically but that's where it stops. The minute somebody replies to that, they are replying to me personally. I don't hide behind a community email address or anything like that. I use my own email address so that people get that automated message and of course I couldn't keep up with hundreds of people joining, doing that manually but what's lovely is people reply to that and straight away you've got a conversation going and I'm genuinely interested in why people are joining that community. Are they on a programme or have they just stumbled across the community. Anybody can join it, it's free, it's publically available. Have they just stumbled across it. Are they thinking about their next steps of development? Are they already on a journey? I genuinely want to find out about people and I get some really interesting stories as well. I was talking to a guy recently who is leaving the armed forces and as part of his resettlement is moving into the field of L&D. I had to think there because there is another person that is going into the field of HR and I find that stuff interesting. So straight away they've got a connection and then what I try and do is link in what they tell me to some tips around how to get the most out of stuff. So if they are into the field of HR then I will point them in the HR Zone. Some people might tell me that they are working on a particular project and there's always a blog or a video or a discussion that is there to help them with that. For some people it's like right, we have never come across that on the community, why don't we get a discussion going. Some of that is about the tech, so how do we actually do that. What buttons do we click on, what do I type in, how do I get a discussion going? But a lot of that is the stuff around culture. Actually letting people know that that is something that they should do, that is how it works around here. When we design communities we'd put immense amounts of thought into the tech, the platform, the design, the functionality, the user experience but I think we often miss the idea of putting thought into just the people stuff. How do you drive those behaviours? What behaviours are you looking for and how do you drive those? If you are looking for people to contribute then that's what you want to be influencing.

Phil: And just to continue with that if I may, what kind of behaviours do you try and encourage through the DPG community then?

Ady: So we want conversation and I love conversation. In terms of content I'm never really short of content. If there is no conversation on there and there have been weeks, if you take summer holidays for example there is no content on there, people are on holiday. There's not much conversation. There's always content within the HR and L&D world, a new piece of research, a new video, an event whatever it is but I'd much, much rather send out the community updates that are summarising conversations that are happening. That is the behaviour, it's you want people to convert, you want people to discuss. So when, for example, I write an article, at the bottom of that article it's, what do you think about this? What's your experience? How does this work in your organisation and get people to have a dialogue and it doesn't matter how many that is. If I get one reply and one person talking about something then that's the boxed ticked. I am happy with that. If you get a few people piling in or twenty, thirty people joining a discussion, then even better, you know you're then into a point perhaps you build a group around that topic, if there's that many.

Phil: Yeah so that is one of the reasons, well I am going to link that to one of the reasons that I set up The Hub in that I guess I struggle with some communities, is they are not niche enough for me. If you go into an L&D community, if I pick on one that we are both familiar with, so if I think about the DPG community, because it is broadly about learning and development and HR, if I want to find something about a particular topic whilst I know content is tagged and so on, actually if I really want to take a deep dive into something in particular, once there might be some sub-groups set up so I know you have got a Kirkpatrick group for people that are interested in evaluation and you have got the HR Zone and the Learning Zone and stuff like that but for the topic that I am interested in and I think a lot of practitioners are interested in which is the role of emotion in the workplace because there is such a strong call to action within the profession about being more people centred, about putting humans back in the workplace and all that sort of stuff. The reason I put The Hub together is because I thought there is nowhere to go for that. Right now if you want to do that you've got to go to a big broad community and try and find it and you got to go and do the searching and what I wanted to do was put something together that had done a lot of that stuff for you. So it was a community that was really specific and niche about what we then talk about in it. Now I would argue that emotion is actually, I nearly dropped the f-bomb then…is a really massive topic so actually you could still have multiple sub-groups or sub-communities within the topic of emotion but I think it is one of those is the funnel is massive in learning or HR so I am trying to make it more specific in emotion and then it could be even more niche again. So I think that making the conversations about a really specific topic is where I wanted to go I think.

Ady: Yeah it is, like you say on the DPG community is massive, a lot of corners. If you take just HR as the topic that is massive. So chunking things down, signposting things, having some good search features and that sort of stuff is a key thing to do but you find sub-pockets of a community so forget about the online stuff, if you think about just a village community…

Phil: Yeah absolutely.

Ady: Within that you've got people that have a connection because the kids are at the same school. You have people that have a connection that are interested in the football team or people that use a particular pub, or the business people in the area so there is all these sub-communities. Sometimes they overlap and sometimes they're independent. So I'm less involved in the football community and probably more involved in the pub community as an example so you're right to divide things up a bit. So if I took the eight and a half thousand people on the DPG community, that's massive but then within that there is pockets of people that are interested in different stuff. People that work with charities, people that work with technology, people that are interested in recruitment so you can form these little pockets of communities within a community.

Phil: There was a book that was recommended to me by Jo Cook who goes by @lightbulbjo on Twitter and I'm looking over my bookshelf, so it's called buzzing communities by Richard Millington and as always I will put a link in the show notes and it is really interesting reading about the evolution of communities from being mainly broad to being more niche or the way the conversation evolves overtime or the way the conversation changes overtime and then how as the community manager do you bring people with you on that? How do you bring your community members? How do you bring them with you because the level of engagement or participation may change over time.

Ady: Well yeah, because we have spoken about building a community and getting people involved and creating that snowball but I'm also saying that's a continuous effort but when you start a community for the first time it's worth having a look at something called the diffusion of innovation theory.

Phil: I will add that to the show notes as well.

Ady: So what you have got in there is typical Bell Curve where you introduce a piece of innovation and you get the early adopters. So these are the people that grab hold of the idea and they just run with it. They are first to get involved, they are very excited, they want to try it and they want to experiment all of that sort of stuff and they are in the minority, they come along initially and probably get involved in the community and then later on you will start to get the masses twigging on and you'll start to get the rest of the population. You get those that click on as soon as something happens and then the early majority that follows from that and then you get a few more that join the party and then right at the very end of that you've got the last to join the party which is the laggards. Now these, I need to be careful there that I don't stereotype these people because there's many, many reasons why people would leave something and be the last one to come along and take a look. We mentioned time before and competing with time. That might be the reason and dare I say there is some laggards out there that just stick their heals in the ground and they are just resistant to change. They are not interested. Why have we got this thing, why do we need it? We are doing okay as we are. Why have you built an online community, why can't we just talk to each other face to face or pop for a brew and have a chat and there's different emotions at those ends of the scale. At one end of the scale you have got the excited individuals that are really keen and they can see it and they get it and they see the big picture but then at the other end of the scale you have got those that are perhaps not interested, don't see the point. What a waste of time, what a waste of money all that sort of stuff. You've got competing emotions there.

Phil: I guess even though for somebody like and again, risking stereotyping, if those in the early adopters camp, by the time you get to the point where the laggards are coming to play actually you may have lost the innovators or the early adopters to something else or something new or something different, so that energy and enthusiasm that they might have brought in the beginning, it might be there for the early majority or the late majority still, so they might still have the energy and the enthusiasm might be there but actually you might have lost the innovators and the early adopters off to something new and something different by then.

Ady: Yeah potentially. They've certainly left a big mark so there is thinking about how you keep hold of those people and maybe that is a about the level of involvement they've got. Maybe that's thinking, almost like getting them to think like a community manager.

Phil: And that is something that Richard Millington talks about in his book. He talks about the importance of the role of volunteers in maintaining that snowball type effect in terms of…and I have been involved in different guises in different organisations in my time when they are trying to create different online communities. Actually no that is a lie, sorry. I have been involved in different guises at different times where organisations are trying to create communities. They could be online, they

could be physical and they might be called brand champions or ambassadors or other titles they are given…

Ady: Raving fans (laughs).

Phil: Raving fans, that's a good one. That's what I mean, you've got people whose job isn't to make this happen but because of their passion and their involvement and their engagement in it you ask them to take on an additional role for want of a better phrase as someone who champions and ambassadors and is a raving fan about whatever that community is whether it is online or physical.

Ady: I suppose, thinking about my experience that really works. So thinking back many years ago I was a customer of DPG and a user of the community and as I said Mike Collins was really helpful in just getting me over the hurdle of getting started, getting involved and that sort of stuff and I was probably one of those early adopters and innovators and then it was a few years ago that DPG Kyle took me to a conference. It was the CIPDs L&D show which next year is called the Festival of Work.

Phil: Is it really?

Ady: It is, yeah.

Phil: I did not know that.

Ady: So it's the same date, the same place, same pub across the road, but yeah, the festival of work. So back in the days it was the L&D show, DPG Kyle took me down and gave me a conference ticket which was lovely. Got me into some of the sessions in exchange for writing some blogs and some articles and covering the event. Ticks both boxes, I got immense value from that. That's kind of where I got to meet the Twitter crew and the wider L&D circle and in turn for the community we got some good content on there. In getting that sort of stuff done is important and I think the early adopters are, if you think peer to peer influence, your innovators, early adopters are the people that can share their story with the people at the opposite end of the Bell Curve, laggards, so if you can get testimonies from people and it needs to be a bit more than how great the Emotion at Work Hub is. It needs to be practically, how has this impacted on your professional life.

Phil: So we are talking the communities that are the topics of what we are discussing so far have both been work related, but not work place specific and I'm wondering / guessing that our listeners will be, not all of them universally, but they'll be working in organisations where they might be wanting to create communities within those organisations. Again they could be virtual or physical communities and in my experience of being in the workplace that is a notoriously tricky thing to do because it comes with different identity aspects to it. Now we all know as regular listeners to the podcast will know, we know I am fascinated with identity, we know I am fascinated with face and face work, so that is my starting point, we know that. If I'm working in organisation A and I'm part of the DPG community or the Emotion at Work Hub, there may be other people from my organisation in it, but if they are they are likely to be from the similar HR, learning, organisational development type team, but if I am part of a community within my organisation then I am exposing myself to people that know me intimately, but I don't know that is the right word but I couldn't think of a

different one so I have gone with that, but I wonder if the identity risks are higher within a workplace community because if you did post something that people could interpret in a way that could make you look like a brown nose, it could make you look like a keener, (in a Bristolian accent), "Keener" then we will go with it, or could make you look disenfranchised or whatever, but I wonder if in the workplace is it even trickier. I don't know the answer to that question. I feel like the answer is yes but I don't know.

Ady: That is a good question. I mean in a similar vein I have come across at a very senior level fears, genuine fears around online communities.

Phil: Okay tell me more about that.

Ady: So I have worked with organisations that want to move forward in the way that organisational learning happens, knowledge sharing collaborating, communication all that sort of stuff and thinking about one particular organisation that was spread geographically up and down the UK and beyond an online community made sense but from a very senior level, HR Director level, I'm worried about what people are going to say, how people are going to interact. What if they say the wrong thing to each other? What if they share bad practise and it's quite interesting really, when you've got that view because my response to that is if you forget about online, forget about digital, communities already exist.

Phil: Absolutely.

Ady: So if we pretend there is no such thing as the internet, computers were never invented, communities already exist, there are pockets of people within smoking shelters, cafes, at the side of the water cooler, in the pub after work and then already talking about stuff, so if they are going to share the wrong stuff they are already doing that anyway. The benefit of having a community, certainly an online community is you have got visibility of that and that shouldn't be used in a policeman approach, you shouldn't then chastise people because you wouldn't do that in the other settings anyway, but you can use that as an opportunity to influence a conversation in the right way. If people are talking about a process that isn't correct then there's a chance there to re-educate them whereas unless you appear in the smoking shelter every time people go for a fag or actually put some rules in that prevent them from having those conversation that doesn't happen does it.

Phil: No, no that doesn't at all. So I don't know if it's the same or not but I am linking it together so therefore I am making it the same. So when people are talking to me about Twitter, so why did you get involved in that, why are you on there? There's a whole great big massive conversation happening about stuff to do with what I am interested in and I can either go and be part of it and know about it and engage with it or I cannot and I think about that similar to what you were saying for the workplace and that these conversations are happening anyway. People are moaning about a process or moaning about a change or saying how frustrated they are by X or Y or how they wish that A or B could happen and if that online community was in that safe space, that place that is free from judgement, then as an organisation, if it was my organisation I would want to know about those things because then I could do something about it, otherwise all of these feelings and all of these views and opinions are happening but, I don't know and I can't do anything about it. There's a

classic thing that is being touted around on social media at the minute which I think is a load of bunkum but it seems to be going down well which is, the board know 10% of the organisations problems. The middle management know 30% of the organisations problems and the frontline operators, the employees at the frontline for want of a better phrase they know 100% of the organisations problems and the issue is the sharing of the problems up the chain. Now I think those ratios are probably bunkum but the idea that actually the higher up an organisational hierarchy you go the more insulated you become to the reality of day to day life. That stacks up for me and if then you have a community where people can talk about those everyday issues, those problems and challenges they are facing that then equips you and allows you to do something about that in a way that you wouldn't necessarily do.

Ady: And it's back to that point on the behaviours, wants, drive is we want people to contribute. We want people to discuss so actually the fact that they have taken the time to do that. We should never be picking up on what people have said, or how they have said it. The fact that they have said it is just good enough and actually if we start saying to people, you shouldn't say that or you shouldn't say this, that has a reverse effect of quashing people and then you think I had a go at contributing before but it wasn't good enough so I'm not going to bother anymore. It is very easy to quash things so I think that leadership culture within the organisation. That was a question around is it more difficult in the workplace than it is outside the workplace and the answer to that question is probably, yes it is. That then begs some questions around what's the culture that the leaders of the business need to drive to make sure that's not an issue.

Phil: And I think that though is irrespective of whether there is an online community or not. I remember working with one client who was saying, yeah but if we do this we might hear all these things and I said well if you are not hearing all of those things already then you are creating a culture, whether you have got an online community or not, if you think that these things are being discussed and talked about and you don't know about them already, then you have created a culture where people don't want to share and people are not open and it is not transparent and it's not honest. Whether you have an online community or not isn't going to make any difference. What we need to address is the opportunities or the places or the spaces where people can be heard and talk about stuff in a way that they are not going to be judged or ostracised or demeaned or disciplined as a result and then that allows everybody to then work with that effectively and for want of a better phrase move on.

Ady: Yeah certainly and your then the invited guest to that conversation. If you don't have a way of people talking and sharing this stuff then you are just a never invited guest. The conversation still happens. I think people would be more cautious around what they share online and again that comes down to the trust and your simple strategy of hearing people in a safe space, that fits very much with this.

Phil: So where does that leave the community manager then. If I play with this idea that we are talking about, that actually if we want those communities to be vibrant, if we want people to be talking openly about and sharing, we are…okay, I am going to take a step back and then I will formulate my question. A really good friend of mine, a guy called Aaron Garner says that it's just about, just makes it sound smaller than it is, I don't know if he uses the word just actually, he says

it's about having a genuine interest in another human being and if you can do that you are well on your way to understanding more about you, them, what's happening, what's going on, what they are thinking, what they are feeling and all of those things and I'd really like that as a simple phrase of, if we are going to create a community we need to create one that takes a genuine interest in another human being in that way and I liked what you talked about earlier, it might be an automated first response but then after that it is you taking a genuine interest in that other human being. So I have got that on one thing. So we talked about creating communities where conversation is what happens, part of that I would argue is down to having a genuine interest in another human being and wanting to find out what's happening and going on for them. Find out what they are thinking, what they are feeling, what they are working on, all that stuff. What we are also saying is it's in at least in part reliant on the culture. That could be the culture of the community if we are talking about the DPG community but it could also be about the workplace itself. If we were talking about the workplace based community and now I am building up to my question. So if you're a community manager in an organisation, often if you have that role, you might be working in marketing or internal comms or HR or learning or organisational development. That would be my guess as to where that person would sit or fit. You're not likely to be senior, you're not likely to be on the board or a director even. So with all of those other dependencies on it, where does that leave you as a community manager because is it a bit of a thankless task? No that is me trying to answer it. Let me ask the question and shut up. So where does that leave you as a community manager.

Ady: Where does it leave in terms of not having that senior level?

Phil: Yeah so…

Ady: How do you influence the culture?

Phil: Yeah, absolutely. So if you're working in a mid to junior role within an organisation where you're tasked with building a community and you're looking at these other dependencies around the culture or the leadership or the engagement or the involvement and you are like, shit, (laughs). There's all of a sudden this stuff that is nothing to do with me yet can make or break this community that I am trying to build.

Ady: I think it is the same old thing of chipping away at the block of getting people to communicate converse and collaborate and that might start at a senior level. That might actually start building a group of the senior leadership team and sharing stuff and talking about stuff and asking questions. Getting conversations going, online and offline as well. So it is a little bit different in DPG in that we have got an external community but we have also got an internal community. If we can't get that bit right there's not a chance that we do have a vibrant external community. So the internal community or me is about letting people know inside the organisation know what is going. There's a really useful conversation here, I've got this idea coming up. These people have joined. Somebody has given us some feedback, whatever that is. Just having that constant flow and that then gets people interested in that internal community to the point that externally they are joining in the conversation. They are commenting, they are sharing, they are liking the post and things like that. So if you take that inside an organisation, maybe the place to start is with that senior leadership

team of getting things right there and letting them know about the stories of the great stuff that is happening.

Phil: I can imagine, I am really worried that I am being Mr Doom and Gloom now but I can imagine though (laughs) should I say this, should I not. If there is a population within an organisation that will use time as a reason or (whispers) excuse, in my experience is that senior population are, I haven't got time for that. I worry that I am speaking out of turn and this is not a universal statement. I know there are some that wouldn't do that, but I guess I am thinking back to my experience of being within organisations and the response I would get from, okay what I am looking for from you is a post, is for when people respond to that post for you to respond to them, even if that's just with a thanks or with a, you might have asked the question and you follow up on it and then when you also contribute to other stuff as well. So it might be half an hour per day, an hour to write the post, half an hour a day, or however long you can give me but be on their regularly and check and so on. Is that something I can get my PA to do? Well yes, but that's not what I'm getting at. If we want authentic interaction between you and other people that are in the organisation we want to create this…if what you want is a place where we can understand what is happening and what people are thinking and feeling about working in our organisation then that needs to be you and really you, not your PA via you, if that makes sense.

Ady: Yeah.

Phil: Again I don't necessarily know what point I am trying to make I don't think.

Ady: It is the barrier of time isn't it from the leaders in the business.

Phil: In my experience I guess. I agree with you that chipping away at the block and getting that engagement and involvement is important. I guess I am bringing an element of reality to it in that my experience that has been notoriously tricky to do.

Ady: Yes. Mike often talks about the five ps of building a community. The first one being purpose and he says that's where you start. You start with a purpose of your community. That has got to be lined into some organisational objective or around culture, engagement, collaboration, knowledge, whatever it might be. I think once you've got that it's then easy to bring the leaders back to that purpose. So we can all use the time excuse. Sometimes I want to empathise with that and sometimes I want to just say, get a grip. We can spend five minutes, somewhere on the settee at home if needs be, just chucking a few thank yous and a few replies onto a community and if the purpose was strong enough then that kind of makes that a no brainer. If this is a really important purpose then time will be found.

Phil: So can you remember the other four ps. Purpose?

Ady: In no particular order, purpose, platform.

Phil: As in choosing the right / appropriate platform?

Ady: That might be a bit of tech or it might be a platform as in venue if it is a real life community. People, this is a real test this is. I feel like I am sitting an exam.

Phil: Mike is sat there tapping his fingers on the desk saying come on Howes.

Ady: (Laughs) he is isn't he and I haven't got time to Google or anything have I? People, platform, purpose, product. So that's positioning, if you like what the community is, what the product is. What the community is about, what it does. That's it. Is that five?

Phil: That's four but we'll go with four or we could press the pause button and you could Google it.

Ady: We could do couldn't we.

Phil: We could edit out this bit and then re-record it with you going, yeah the five ps are…okay.

Ady: Note to self, don't talk about things that aren't stuck firmly in your mind (laughs).

Phil: (Laughs) okay we've talked about some of the emotional aspects that might be happening or going on for individual community members themselves in terms of some of that potential nervousness in posting and sharing and that sort of stuff. We have talked about some of the emotional aspects that might be going on for community managers themselves and then we've also talked about some of the aspects that could or do feature into it from an organisational perspective. We are talking about the senior leadership team in particular. Is there anything else? Talking about emotion at work in managing communities or community management? Anything else that you are thinking or feeling or want to say?

Ady: Other than we can probably fill another hour (laughs).

Phil: You want to come back on the podcast. That was a plug for a second round.

Ady: I am looking at the time now. I can't believe how quickly that hour has gone because there is so much to talk about. It's like you said, that emotion at work piece is massive. It's huge and this is just a part of it but when you dive into the communities there's plenty more to talk about. I think it is one by one, person by person, connecting with people. Building a conversation and the masses will follow. I think that's it.

Phil: Okay, alright, in that case then, Ady the Man Howes, I would like to say thank you so much for…hang on, we need to stop. Can you press the button again so the music comes in?

Ady: Oh yeah, here we go, it's this one isn't it?

Phil: Yes, so thank you very much Ady Howes for being at the Emotion at Work podcast. It has been amazing to have you hear and we look forward to round two.

Ady: Thank you for having me. It's been lovely.