

Alison Jones: It's a funny one this because in a sense it's changed everything in another sense it's changed absolutely nothing. So, of course, there's a sort of infrastructural change, and people work remotely much more than they ever did, you've got teams that are split across continents and across time zones, and, you know, I, myself, have managed people remotely; it's not easy but it can easily be done.

And you've got marvellous tools like video-conferencing where you can actually get people together and see their reactions and note the blank looks and go back and explain your point again, which, of course, you could never do on a phone conference. So it's opened up massive possibilities, and certainly the, sort of, social media type infrastructure that people put in as well is really helpful for, I think, building relationships, particularly across different sites.

But, at the end of the day, we're still the humans that we always were, evolution hasn't caught up that quickly and there can be a danger, I think, in expecting the technology to do the job of the human connection where it just can't. So in my experience building an initial relationship face to face is the best foundation for then continuing the working relationship using the technologies that are in place. And when technology gets in the way, when the person next door to you is emailing you to ask you a question, then that can be problematic too.

But there is still a big element of communication that is non-verbal, it's not as big as many people quote, you know, that famous thing that only 7% of communication is verbal, which is complete tosh. But there is, nevertheless, a very high proportion of what we pick up from somebody's message that is not communicated in simply the words that they say, that it is the body language, the tone of voice, and it's also about the engagement, so if I'm talking to you face to face there's a to and fro that's going on, there's a shared understanding, or if there's not a shared understanding there's a very clear sense that there isn't a shared understanding, which can then be addressed, that just isn't there in emailed or written communication, or a broadcast, or a webcast.

So it's a varied landscape now which is fantastic but it just means that you have to put so much more thought into deciding which is the right channel for any particular message, and also how the different channels work together to reinforce a message. So, for example, if I'm delivering training within an organisation, or workshopping, I do have organisations with whom I work remotely, so in America, I do Skype calls and so on, but I always try and get at least one, and ideally the first, session face to face, just so that you build the trust. Trust is such a precious commodity and it's very, very hard to do remotely. Trust is the thing that is so intangible, it's so linked into all those non-verbal cues, it's about rapport, it's about all the stuff

that the technological channels of communication actually do really badly, and the face to face human stuff still, I think, trumps them all.