VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

BTN interviewed Paul Matthews in 2018

The Business Transformation Network interviewed Paul Matthews in 2018 and created four videos. This is video #2 which focusses using performance consultancy to save L&D budget.

TRANSCRIPT

Question: What is performance consultancy?

Performance consultancy is where you approach a performance problem without any presuppositions of what's causing the problem. In other words, you go in with an open mind and you're thinking, okay, we've got a performance issue. For some reason we're not getting the results we want, what's going wrong? Where are the barriers to that performance?

And then ultimately, once you start looking for, in effect, the levers within that performance system, you can start saying, once we have found those levers, which levers we can pull and which ones are not worth pulling, and which ones cost a lot to pull? So that's where we're going with it. And what I should stress here is that particularly for learning and development people, there's often this confusion between performance consultancy and learning consultancy. So they're not the same thing. They're absolutely not.

Learning consultancy comes from the premise that, in order to solve the problem in front of us, we have some kind of learning solution required. In other words, there's a presupposition that there will be a learning solution that will come out of the process that we can then apply to solve the problem. When you're doing performance consultancy, you're going in with an open mind. You are not sure if a learning solution's going to be appropriate or not. And there's a huge difference between those two.

Question: Why do we need performance consultancy?

Performance consultancy is something you need in order to find out what's going on, either right now because there's a current extant performance problem you need to deal with, or you anticipate one coming up. So it could be that you've got a new system going live in six months' time, and you're thinking, when that new system goes in, we're going to have some performance problems. So you can also, in effect, hallucinate what might happen in the future and do your consultancy work on that future scenario. It's a little more difficult, but it's entirely possible.

Another really core reason why L and D needs to get involved with performance consultancy is to find out if a learning solution is a viable way to solve the problem, because there's no point in building and designing and spending money on a learning solution, whether that's a formal training or e-learning or coaching or action learning sets or anything like that. There's just no point in doing it until we're absolutely certain that it is one of perhaps a suite of viable solutions to the problem that's in front of us.

And what you'll find is usually, there's more than one solution. There will be a number of things that you can do within the performance system. So what we're looking at is, we're looking at performance as a system with some inputs and some outputs and we're looking inside the system to unpick it, to find out where are the levers we can pull, that will allow us to change that system, and make sure it makes best use of the inputs, and then produces the outputs that we want.

Within the system there are a whole bunch of levers, some of which are related to formal learning, but to be honest, most of them are not. And what we want to do is stop doing this knee jerk reaction to deliver training where there's a performance problem, because then you're automatedly thinking the problem's got to be with the people. The people doing the performing are in some way deficient. So we need to train them in order to fix the problem. But of course, if it's not the people that's the problem, it's the environment they're working within, then we're not going to fix the problem by training the people. And that's something that very often happens.

Okay, there are a couple of really strong reasons why in L&D you will need to be doing performance consultancy. One is to give you an audit trail of the process you've gone through so that you can request the budget you need. The other one is to make sure that you have in place the kind of measures that you need to have in order to understand whether what you're going to do is successful.
So it's making sure that you know what the outcome is before you start. And that's all part of a good performance consultancy process, is getting those things out at the end which will help you with budget requests and measures.

Question: What is the process for performance consultancy?

One of the advantages of doing performance consultancy for L&D is that they connect as a filter which sits around that. Just imagine for a moment that learning and development is in a cell within a larger, multicellular organism that is the organization. And the requests come to the cell wall surrounding L&D for training requests, for learning interventions, for some e-learning, for some new package, and what you have to do is to be able to filter those requests, to only let inside

the cell through the cell wall, to let inside the learning and development cell, requests that are genuine and will have a beneficial result.

Too often what happens is L&D just accepts the order without any, in effect, verify whether it's really going to be an order that will make a difference. And they end up doing masses of work that actually they shouldn't be doing because it's never going to have a business impact.

So performance consultancy is the filter that you have around the outside of L&D to make sure that you are not doing work inside of L&D that shouldn't be done. Also, once it's through that filter, then you know for sure that there is some kind of learning solution that may almost certainly help the solving of that problem. That's when you can start doing your learning consultancy with your learning specialists inside the L&D area.

What I've seen working with quite a few companies is that when they start putting that filter in place, the amount of work they have to do with an L&D starts to shrink, because they are starting to push requests back to the managers when they're coming in and looking for training. What that means is L&D actually is no longer flat out spinning its wheels, doing reactive work. It can start getting proactive about going into the organization and seeking out where it can help the most.

And this is really important when you start looking for a learning organization, as opposed to one that's just a delivering training type organization. And those are fundamental cultural shifts that all the best companies are making right now.

Question: Who needs to know the process?

Well, typically, the whole process starts with an unhappy manager. And a manager who is unhappy is unhappy because they are not getting the performance they want from their team, and the typical knee jerk response is they ask for some training. So, this is where your performance consultancy starts, is working with that manager to help them understand there are probably a far larger number of possible solutions to their problem than what they think.

And so that's running them through a performance consultancy process, which will drive out the kind of information you need to find the levers inside their performance system, and some of their levers might well be training or e-learning or some other formal training. But in my experience and in research I've seen, something like 70 to 80% of the reasons that people fail to do their job or fail to perform, is because of the environment they're operating within, not because of the fact they don't know what to do.

Just think back on the past few weeks of your own life, how many times have you failed to do something that you set out to do or were delegated to do, and how many of those times it was that because he didn't know what to do, and how many of those times was it because the things around you stopped you from doing it?

So at the point of work, then there are a couple of things that need to be brought together to make this work. One is the competence of the individual, and the other one is if you'd like to call it this way, the competence of the environment within which they're operating. So you can see in the diagram also showing on screen, you can see this put together where the competence of the individual is made up the knowledge, skills, attitude and so on.

So these are the components of competence. Is the individual performer competent and ready to perform at the point of work? Likewise, on the other side of that chart you can see, is the environment also ready and competent to perform, if you like, at the point of work? We do a lot of work on competency frameworks for the people. We very seldom do that, if ever, on the competency of the environment that surrounds them while they're trying to do their job. And if the environment stops them doing their job, for example, a mechanic without a spare part can't fix the car. They are perfectly competent within themselves, but in the moment they're rendered incapable and therefore unable to perform, because they don't have the spare part. So there's a very big difference between competence and capability.

Now you can also see on screen a picture of a donkey hoisted into the air by his cart. What we have there is a perfectly competent donkey. Yeah, trust me, Dennis can pull that cart. He knows what he's doing. So training Dennis, even though right now he can't perform adequately, is not going to help him perform any better. He knows what to do. The problem really is he's got a really bad manager who has loaded his cart wrong. So in the moment in that photograph, Dennis is perfectly competent, but rendered incapable. And this is how you need to be looking at these two different things.

Very, very often what's happening is that managers come assuming people are incompetent, and they haven't done the diagnostics to find out, are they just being rendered incapable because of environmental conditions? So in the initial stages, the responsibility for this is going to lie with L&D, if only to protect itself from managers with, if you like, vexatious requests for training.

What you do need to do though, is as you are working through this process with managers, is you help train them on how to do it, and you push this skill wider into the organization. In fact, what you need to do is add it to every management training you've got, and managers really are the point of responsibility for managing performance.

GET IN TOUCH

Paul Matthews is a renowned authority in the Learning and Development space. Whether you want to call on his knowledge and expertise as a skilled keynote speaker, as a consultant or to run a workshop, he'd love to hear from you.

To book Paul for your forthcoming event, enquire about his availability or arrange an informal chat about any of his services, get in touch today.

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