

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

BTN interviewed Paul Matthews in 2018

The Business Transformation Network interviewed Paul Matthews in 2018 and created four videos. This is video #3 which focusses on Paul's 3 elephant metaphor for things that are ignored by L&D.

TRANSCRIPT

Question: What are the 3 elephants?

Oh, the three elephants. I started with one, and then realized there was more than one in the room. Basically, when L&D people get together and start thinking about learning, there are three elephants in the room with them.

The first elephant is the whole concept of performance diagnostics. Are we putting the right people in the room for a training course when there's a performance issue to be looked at?

The second one is informal learning. Are we paying attention to all the learning that's happening outside of the formal interventions like training or e-learning?

And the third one is learning transfer. If we are going to put them in the room, what are we doing about making sure that learning is actually implemented and activated out there in the workforce.

And, Oh by the way, there's a sneaky fourth one I'll tell you about in a minute.

Question: Why are the elephants ignored?

I think the elephants are ignored, probably the biggest reason is tradition actually, that people have not really looked at them before, and so at a cultural level, and I mean L&D culture within an organization, they are still ignored. In my current book I'm working on, there's actually a dozen different reasons why that is. I think one of the main reasons is that people just don't know what to do. Another one is they just don't see the elephants. Because if you did have an elephant in your room, you've got to know what to do about it.

Actually, there's a really intriguing story. Elephants hate the sound of bees and in Africa, strangely enough, they use loudspeakers with the sounds of swarms of bees and that keeps the elephants away from the crops. Not that we can use audio with bees in it for L&D, but anyway, that's one way you can get rid of elephants.

Another reason the elephants are ignored is that people tend to assume that they're someone else's responsibility, which is fine, but you don't get the results then that really matter. And so that's what's important about paying attention to the elephants is because unless you are paying attention to them, you're not going to get the kinds of results that actually people are hoping to get from learning and development interventions. And if you're not getting the results that people are hoping to get, then people see you as a cost. They see you as a segment of the business that's not really adding that much value. In other words, the brand of L&D suffers badly, if you're not paying attention to the elephants.

Another reason the elephants are ignored is that the senior team is not aware of them, and by that I mean the senior team asks for training when there's a performance problem, when the KPIs are not getting met and learning and development just delivers on that request for a training, they become an order taker. And if they're just taking orders to deliver some training or some e-learning, or perhaps some other L&D intervention, they'll largely ignore the elephants because it's easier to do it that way, to deliver what the senior team has asking for, in the way they're asking for it.

Question: Why is ignoring the elephants a problem?

The issue with ignoring the elephants is they are kind of large. They get pretty pissed off when you ignore them and annoyed elephants and not good to have stampeding around your learning and development arena.

The main reason is that if you do ignore them, you won't get the results that ideally you would like to get in order to serve the business and to improve performance. And if you're not getting the results, then pretty clearly you won't be respected within the business for the kind of things that you can deliver for the business.

Just think about it for a minute. I mentioned those first three elephants. Let's ignore the sneaky one for a minute, and say the first one was about performance diagnostics. If you're not doing that, you will end up putting people in a training room that arguably shouldn't be there. You're wasting your money, and of course there will be zero results if they shouldn't have been in the room in the first place.

The second the elephant was about informal learning. Think about that one. Most learning happens outside of what you do and formal training, or any kind of formal intervention like e-learning, so if you're not paying attention to most of the learning that's happening when people are doing things, when they're out in the workflow, when they are experiencing and experimenting and practicing If you are not paying attention and having some impact and part in that learning, you're missing 80-90% of the learning that's actually going on. Why would learning and

development separate themselves from 80 to 90% of the learning that is actually happening in reality in an organization.

And then the third elephant was learning transfer. Why on earth would you put people into a training room, and then ignore the fact that whatever happened in the training room really had to make some impact back in the business place in the workplace in order for that money to be well invested. So you're effectively wasting a huge amount of money by ignoring the fact that you have to transfer that learning and make sure it gets activated and implemented and has beneficial business results back in the workplace.

Now of course, if you then ignore the elephants and you've got these three elephants not being taken care of, what happens is the brand of L&D suffers. Just think about it. What is the brand of L&D? The brand of L&D is what people say about you and L&D when you're not in the room. It's a definition from Jeff Bezos at Amazon. So what are they saying about L&D? And if you're not paying attention to the elephants they're probably saying things like, well we can send them on a training course but nothing much really changes and so on and so forth.

Now if the brand of L&D is poor, people will not ask you for lots of things that you could deliver but they don't even know that you can. They will expect not a lot from you, which means they won't give you the opportunity to deliver a lot and also you won't get that seat at the top table, which is many people in L&D really say we're not involved in decisions. We want to get to the top table. We want that kind of director level involvement with what we do, but we won't get it. They won't give it to us no matter how hard we bang on the door.

Well, quite frankly, if a second level department that just delivered a service was banging on the door of the boardroom, would you let them in? So what you've got to do is focus on the elephants, and that's what I mean by this sneaky fourth elephant. It's the brand of L&D is the fourth one, and you need to focus too on the brand that L&D develops in order for you to be able to have some kudos and some ability to deliver against that in the organization.

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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