

## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

### Paul Matthews being interviewed at the CIPD show in London in 2017

The question Paul was asked... "Is there a difference between being capable and being competent?" and he told the mechanic story.

## TRANSCRIPT

One of the things that I find that a lot of people get confused about is this competence versus capability conundrum. There's a little simple story I sometimes use to highlight some of those differences between those two things because they are different.

Just imagine for a moment that you were taking an eight-year-old child, a boy, your next-door neighbour's boy, your boy, it doesn't matter, to football practice. This little Johnny is in the back seat behind you and you're off to football practice. Highlight of his week, it's really important for him that he gets there. But as you leave the driveway, you notice there's a noise under the bonnet of your car, so you're a little bit worried about that.

You drive around the corner to your garage. It's your regular garage, the mechanics there know you and you ask them to listen to the noise under the bonnet of your car. It's not a normal noise as you're a bit worried, that's the expensive end of the car under the bonnet. The mechanic has to listen and says, "It's okay. It happens to this model sometimes. There's a little plastic part, it's about that size and there's a crack through it. It's rattling. That's what you can hear. All we need to do is replace it. We've got them in the spare parts department. I'll grab one right now and you'll be on your way in three or four minutes."

For you, this is a win. "It's okay, Johnny. We will get to football practice and you ..." However, the mechanic comes back a couple of minutes later and says, "I'm really, really sorry but the computer says 'no', we don't have those spare parts in stock. We can get them in first thing in the morning. I will come to your house around the corner, nine o'clock tomorrow morning. I'll fit the part completely for free because we should've had it. You're a regular customer. But in the meantime, if the rest of that little part breaks off, you could do some serious damage. So take your car straight home right now and park it up and we'll come and fix it in the morning."

So my question to you... You're driving home, now, not to football practice. You're driving straight home. My question to you is, was the mechanic capable of fixing your car? I get a variety of answers to that. They're either ... A lot of people will

say, "Yes, he's capable, but you didn't have the part." Some people say, "No, he's not capable because you're still driving a broken car." What's really interesting is there's a difference in the way people respond to that. What I typically find is, then, if I asked them, "Well, what if I asked little Johnny in the back seat? Johnny was that mechanic capable of fixing our car?"

Everybody says, "Oh no, Johnny would say no." It's interesting that Johnny would always say no, and yet sometimes the driver might say, "Well, yes, the mechanic was capable." So we've got a bit of a conundrum here in terms of how that word's being used. What I typically find in an organization is that operations people automatically say, "No," almost immediately. "We've got a customer driving a broken car. We were not, as an organization, capable of fixing it. It doesn't really matter why. The car's still broken." L&D people will often say, "Yes, he's capable." But what I think is happening is they're answering a different question to the one I asked. They're answering, was he competent, rather than was he capable? And competence and capability, to me, are two different things.

Competence is about what does the individual bring to that job in terms of skills, knowledge, perhaps motivation. And capability, is he capable of doing the job, depends also, as well as on competence, depends on the environment surrounding that person as they're doing the job. In this case, for the mechanic, the environment thwarted him, he was unable to do it. There was a barrier in the environment that stopped him doing the job. He was competent but not capable.

So there's a difference and it's really important to realize, not that we're trying to redefine what's in the dictionary, but to say that people use these terms sometimes interchangeably and sometimes with very different meanings. It's really important to know when you're having that discussion with someone, that you need to unpack what they mean by that term. So that's the mechanic story.

## 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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