

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Paul Matthews delivering a webinar for the Institute of Leadership and Management in 2019

The webinar topic was 'How to discover your superpower' and was aimed at managers and their role in managing others.

Rod Jones of the Institute commented afterwards... "Many thanks for presenting such an interesting and thoughtful webinar. We had positive comments and questions coming in throughout the session, and it was clear that everyone was fully engaged."

TRANSCRIPT

Oh, hi everybody. Nice to be here and thank you for that lovely introduction. What do you think of our superheroes on the front page there? I was just saying to Janet and Rod that it's obviously them because it certainly isn't me.

Today, we're just going to race through some stuff to give you some ideas, and in fact primarily two things that you can look at to improve what you're doing as a manager. And sometimes I talk about them as superpowers because like many superheroes in the movies, they end up getting these superpowers and they're really not quite sure that they've got them, and then they start to discover them. Hopefully this is part of that discovery process for you.

I was doing a presentation a while ago on a similar topic and I put that slide up in front of quite a big audience and they had a great discussion about what superpowers they'd like. That's quite intriguing. If you were to have a superpower, what would it be? If you feel like having some fun, you might put a few of those into the chat panel. Maybe it's invisibility, maybe it's reading minds, maybe it's flying, I don't know. What do you think?

But today we're going to look at two things. One is a tool that you can use if you like a superpower weapon, and then the second thing is a way of thinking about how to use that tool. And those two things together, I think actually are one of the biggest things you can do as a manager to improve what you're doing. And this applies to managers right across the board from those first-time supervisors, right through to senior roles. For all the people I've talked with, I don't see there's much difference there in terms of this thinking anyway.

This is a photograph I found on the web a while ago. This is Dennis the donkey and things go wrong. What we're going to be doing is talking about performance and what happens because if you think about it, a manager's primary role is

enabling performance from the people on their team in order to fulfil and execute the corporate strategy. It's all about performance in the pursuit of that strategy. If we think about that, then this is where you start needing your superpowers. If everything's going well, that's great, but so often things are not going so well, or you're anticipating them turning out not so well, or it's just good enough, but actually better is really where you need to be.

This is the first step is thinking things aren't happening quite the way I would want around here. And what we're going to do then is think about, well how do we dig under the bonnet? How do we get under the skin of that and find out, well, what's really happening? What are the root causes? What are the barriers to that performance? What's going on genuinely under the skin? And too often I find managers in organizations I speak to don't look at this diagnostics phase well enough. They tend to think, well those people aren't performing well, so there's clearly something wrong with the people. And a common response is, well, "Let's get them some training. Let's try and fix the people." And actually, there's a lot more going on than just that. This first tool is to really dig into this at a diagnostics level to find out, well what is causing that poor performance? Because then I can find the levers I can pull, and if I can find those levers, that's going to look like a superpower to anybody from outside.

First step is to get an awareness of what's going on. We have what you're in charge of, a system, and it might be a big system with lots of subsystems, or it might be just a smaller one with just you and your team on your own. But there's going to be some inputs coming into that system. You've got your team, and then all the various mechanisms and tools and processes they're doing, and then there's going to be some outputs. And if you're not getting the outputs you want, very clearly, there's something either wrong inside the box, inside the system, or there's something wrong with the inputs. Let's just start digging into that box to get a better look at it.

If you think about what we're looking for here is the outcome we want is performance, and the results that that performance is going to achieve for us in terms of getting the strategy executed efficiently and effectively. For that we need people to be capable at the point of work where they're doing what they're doing, and there's actually two primary components that feed into that capability.

And I'm going to stop there now for a minute because before I continue this diagram, there's something we need to pay attention to is that word capability; because it gets used a little differently by different people. And to help us with that, I've got this guy called Mike here, he's a mechanic. I've got a little story about Mike.

Just imagine for a moment that you've ended up with taxi duty for an eight-year-old boy who's off to football practice, and it might be your son, your neighbour's

son, your nephew, somebody you've ended up with that thing called taxi duty. You're driving out of your home, little Johnny is in the car beside you. It's really excited cause he loves football practice and you hear a strange noise under the bonnet of your car. You're concerned about that because you've not heard that before. You duck around the corner to your local garage where you take your car all the time. And this is Mike having a listen for that noise in your car, just to check on what's going on. And he says, "It's okay, it's common on this model, it happens. We've got a spare part. I'll just go and grab it out of the spare parts department, and I'll put it into the car, and you'll be on your way in a few minutes. And it's okay, little Johnny, you will not be late for football practice because it only takes a short time."

You sit in the waiting room for a couple of minutes and then Mike comes back, a crestfallen look on his face and he says, "I'm really sorry but we don't have that spare part in stock. I can't fix your car right now for you. The other bit of bad news unfortunately is, I really wouldn't recommend you driving your car too much further because if the rest of that piece breaks off, then you could do some serious engine damage. Take your car back home around the corner and I will come and fix it on your driveway tomorrow morning first thing when we get the spare part couriered in. And we'll do it for free because it's our fault. We should've had it, you're a regular customer. I'm really sorry, but take your car home."

You are now driving back home round the block, and little Johnny is close to tears because he's worried about football practice. And my question to you is, as you're driving home, was Mike the mechanic capable of fixing your car? Yes or no?

Just in your mind, think about what would you answer? Where do you want to say yes, he was capable? Or no, he was not capable? I won't do a poll on this because you get up with the answer you get. And I tend to get lots of different answers from different people, and it's an interesting question.

Now, just think about asking a different question. If I was to ask little Johnny, "It's okay Johnny, you can stop crying for a minute. Little Johnny, was Mike capable of fixing our car?" What would Johnny say? And invariably he's going to say, "Well no, of course not because I'm not going to football practice." And you've got to say, "Well actually it's okay, we'll get a taxi, it's all good," so the story ends happily ever after.

But what's really interesting is quite a few people will answer, "Yes, he was capable," and a lot of other people will answer, "No, he was not capable." And I find that quite fascinating. And I also find that word used differently by different people in different contexts.

For those who answered, "Yes, he was capable of fixing the car," I think the real question you're answering is, was he competent? Because competence is different to capability. Just because someone's competent to do a job and Mike, clearly you can see he's a competent mechanic. With a bum like that, he's got to be a very competent mechanic. That doesn't mean in the moment that he's capable of fixing the car if he doesn't have a spare part, or the right tool, or something else. There are things that can stop someone being capable at the point of work where they are perfectly competent to do the job if those other things were available. And so that's just a slightly different definition I'm now putting on the word capability, is can the worker do the job in front of them? Yes or no? If they can, they're capable. If they can't, they're not capable. They might still be competent but not capable because of what's happening around them in their environment.

Let's get back to our diagram again where we started, and we've got this idea of the performer and these are the components of competence. Knowledge and facts that you've got to have to hand in memory, skills and expertise, practice things, the insight and understanding on how to use those knowledge and skills. And by mental state, I mean things like the attitude, current state of motivation, and physical state of course is, some jobs you have to be strong enough or mentally alert enough or have enough manual dexterity or good enough eyesight or whatever in order to do that job. There are potentially in some jobs a physical component to being competent. Is someone competent?

Now, that doesn't mean that they are automatically capable at the same time because you can't really talk about capability until you put them into the environment or onto the stage where they're going to perform. And then all these other things will have an impact on their ability to do the job at the point of work. And what we actually have there is this diagram where both the performer and the stage on which they are performing both need to be competent and both need to be competent at the point of work in order for that performer, the worker, to be capable, at the point of work. And this is slightly different way of looking at things.

Now, what's fascinating about this is if you think back over the last, I don't know, month or so of your work, how many times were you attempting to do a task, either that you had been delegated by someone else or you'd delegated to yourself? You attempted to do a task but were unable to do it to your satisfaction when you wanted to do it? And of those times when you failed to perform, how many times was it because of something on the left-hand side of this diagram or something on the right-hand side?

And most people I talk to you say, "Well, most times when I can't perform, when I can't do a task I'm trying to do, it's something on the right hand side, I actually know what to do, I'm competent, it's just that something around me gets in the

way. And it may be something completely out of my control, like a train being late, or the IT broadband breaking down or something like that. There could be all sorts of different reasons where I wasn't in control, but nonetheless it is my environment that's stopping me being capable, not the fact that I don't know what to do. I don't know, the research I've done shows this to be something like 70 to 80% of performance is a result of things on the right-hand side. Not being ready, not being competent, if you like.

We have this whole concept where we talk about competence for the performer. We have competency frameworks and so on, but we don't often really talk about the competence of the environment, or the readiness of the environment. Now, what's interesting from a managerial perspective is most of those things on the right-hand side, including actually the management that you're providing to someone, are within your control as a manager, or at least a significant proportion of those things are in your control. Now, there might be some things in there like incentive schemes or pay grades, things like that that aren't. But overall, most of that stuff is localized to your local context of work, and actually is within your power as the manager to do something about. And yet it's very easy, and too often managers end up blaming the people around them for lack of performance rather than thinking about, well, what's going on in the environment? What are the barriers? What's happening?

And very often one of the ways you can identify that as well is looking at this diagram and then you can do this as a bit of a team exercise by the way, but you can also ask the people what's frustrating you on a daily basis? What's causing your frustrations? What's stopping you doing what you want to do? Because most people go to work to do a good job. That's this other side of it is look into these two areas. For those of you who know the Ishikawa diagram or the cause-effect diagram, sometimes called the fishbone diagram. This is a useful tool to dig into this particular model I've got on the screen right now, and one of the PDFs on this webinar is that particular diagram. I'd highly recommend that wherever there's a performance problem going on, that you start looking at it and splitting it out like this.

Now, this is a system, you might call it the performance system. These things are interrelated, and what we're doing is I've pulled it apart a little bit in a fairly artificial way to give a way of looking at the details inside of it. But actually, this is a system, it's all interrelated and you need to be able to pull one lever and then see what happens elsewhere. But effectively what we're doing here is we're showing where the levers are to pull as you drill into this. And there's a lot more about this process by the way in my second book on capability, which is the one with the red cover, if you're interested in looking into that. That's sort of this first diagnostics tool that I think is really useful.

And one way to remember this is if we come back to Dennis... You can think here, Dennis is a very competent donkey. You can see that. He's obviously a very competent donkey, but right now he's incapable of doing this job because he can't, his feet out on the ground. There's no way he can pull that cart. Put his feet on the ground, he's an excellent cart puller, but his environment and then in this case, actually it's a bad manager who's overloaded his cart. How often does that happen where actually the quality of management has a significant direct impact on the ability of people in their team to do their job? I really sympathize with Dennis here.

I asked one seminar when I showed this picture, what can we do to help Dennis? And somebody had the bright suggestion that we put some lead weights on his shoulders to weight him down. It might work I suppose. That's just a picture to remind you of this concept of someone can be perfectly competent but in the moment not capable.

Really what we're doing here is trying to separate needs and wants because very often when things aren't going well performance-wise for a manager in terms of their team or whatever, there are immediate things they want. And as I said, quite often it's training or they want this, or they want that. But actually, in many cases they end up wanting the things that won't really ended up being a solution to their current problem. That diagnostics process or model I was just showing you is a way to drive out and get visibility of the real needs that are going on.

And then you're asking, hang on, where's the superheroes? Because you've got to have a cute kitten picture in every webinar. There's my obligatory cute kitten picture. What we've just given you there, a very simple tool. It's really easy to implement and you can implement it together with the team looking into specific problems. Put it all up on a whiteboard and start drilling into it. But beyond that, it's also how you implement it. It's the mindset that you have when you're going into it. And what I'm going to talk about now is a mind shift you can make. It's interesting when you think about what management really is and when you ask people about that. And one of the things I often say to people is that management is a service, it's something you do for people, not something you do to people. And I find that really intriguing as a mind shift in a sense. It's how do we serve them? How do we help them do what they need to do?

I ran a couple of surveys years ago now actually and I asked a lot of managers what do managers do in general? Not what do you do as a manager, but what in general do managers do? And I had this huge list of responses. Hundreds and hundreds over the time I ran it, and most of them were genuinely things that managers do. Absolutely correct. However, there was one thing I was looking for on that list that I never saw, and I've asked that question in conference rooms and off the stage a number of times since, and I still have very seldom heard the

answer I was looking for. And that is that what a manager does is do what they can do to help the people on their team perform the best they can perform.

I sometimes talk about this as being, for those of you who are Star Trek aware, you might think about the prime directive. What is the prime directive of a manager? And the way I like to sort of think about that, it is the overriding sort of directive around which you base everything else. And to me that directive is doing whatever I can to help the people on my team be the best they can be at doing what they're doing for the organization. It's all about serving them, helping them, providing them what they need to have. Now, as a manager, you may well be doing some of the doing yourself. That also means you have to separate when I'm doing things and producing or when I'm managing and working with people, and you need to be clear in your mind which is which.

But also, there is a lot of carry over between those because one of the ways that people will respond to you as a manager is taking notice of what you're doing. You've probably heard that old adage that your actions speak louder than your words. When they see how you do things and what you're doing, and the way you approach it, that will actually give them some leaders on what you think is the right way and going about stuff. Just cause you're not directly dealing with a team member doesn't mean you are not at that point in an effect, having a touchpoint with team members who can see what you're doing. This whole concept of doing what I'm doing for them is really, really important. Now, if you tack that together with that initial tool, what does that mean in practice? How do you then start looking at how all that works together?

Come back to that whole purpose of serving people and what you'll find is if you think about, well what am I doing now? Is it a management task? And if so, who am I doing it for? Am I doing it for them, or am I doing it for me, or am I doing it for my boss, or somebody else? And keep coming back to how can I do it for them? Now, what's really interesting about a service is the arbiter of the quality of that service arguably is the person receiving the service. You are the one who gets to decide whether you've had a good haircut, or the dry cleaning's been done well, and so on. In other words, the people receiving your management service are the ones who decide whether it's a good quality service or not, not you, and not somebody else looking from the outside.

If they feel like getting a good management service, then they are. Ultimately of course, you might well be held accountable for certain KPIs from other parts of the organization, your boss and so on, but that feeds into that whole process of you serving those people to go and pull the levers and do what has to be done.

Those are the two things that are really there that I've got together is those two ideas which I've raced through fairly quickly here. One is a performance diagnostics tool and then the other one is a mindset, and kind of a prime directive

of a manager of my primary job as a manager is to serve the people and help them to be the best that they can be at doing what they're doing. That's kind of me done. I'd be delighted to have a few questions if anybody's got some questions, so please put some in the chat. Anything else you want to know about what we just discussed or general questions about management and leadership. Go for it.

Rod Jones:

Thank you very much, Paul. Very thought provoking, particularly around the concepts of competence and capability and this idea of serving people. We do have a couple of people who wanted to have superpowers, Paul. I don't know if you can comment on these. One individual would like the superpower to be more hours in the day, and the other superpower that an individual would like is a photographic memory. Would they be any particular use, do you think with your models, Paul?

Paul Matthews:

I think the more hours in the day is an amazing idea, but possibly a bit dangerous for us because if we had more hours, we'd probably just end up working harder. It's that old adage of the stuff you've got tends to fill the time you've got to fill it in. A bit like motorways. You build a new motorway and suddenly it's full. So I think the same thing what happened with those more hours. There, I think it's much more a matter of managing what's going on and making sure there are enough people around you and that there's enough efficiency. Really, it's probably a matter of working smarter and this performance diagnostics tool can obviously help with that because if things aren't getting done as quickly as they could, you could look at this performance diagnostics tool and say, "How can we find the barriers or the things that are slowing us down doing what we're trying to achieve?" That would be a way to think about that.

And clearly, if you're going to work with people and for them, it's about getting them collaborating and working with you to help those efficiency improvements. As for a wonderful memory, God yeah, that would be kind of cool actually. Although having said that, I remember seeing a TV program once with someone who had amazing memory like that and they found it quite a burden remembering everything that went on both good and bad, and the bad things had just as much prominence. Perhaps that's a double-edged sword, I don't know. Anyway, that's an interesting idea.

Rod Jones:

Okay. Another question is... I should read this out verbatim. One of my challenges as a manager is people asking for resources and I've actually got no control or I'm unable to help them. Have you any insights on how to tackle this?

Paul Matthews:

I suppose it depends on the resources being asked for. If someone's saying, I've got to have a faster for the PC and the IT department is simply saying, "No," I get that. This isn't always so easy. But also, if enough managers got together and went to the IT department and said, "Listen, everybody's saying the PCs and are not fast enough." Sometimes you might need to get some mass action going between groups of managers if there's a specific thing that is a common lack in the organization that people are saying you're slowing them down. But also saying, "Are there some other workarounds or some other way that we could get around that slowish PC?" Maybe use a different bit of software. Maybe even get a laptop into the system that's fast enough that we can then pass around to different people when they're doing the job that requires that extra horsepower. There's usually a way around that stuff. And I say usually, because I'm not going to say always and I absolutely get this isn't always so simple, but it's a matter of starting that thinking process as much as anything else, and then probably trying to get creative. And not trying to do it on your own. I think that's the other big thing, is brainstorm. Where's the barrier? What exactly is it? And then, how can we think creatively around dealing with that barrier?

Rod Jones:

We have lots of questions coming through, Paul, and the next question is how does this relate to organizational culture? How does it impact on the culture of a team?

Paul Matthews:

That's a huge question and it's a very, very good question because the culture is the soup that we all swim in, if you want to put it that way. The culture is what's going on and how people do things, and it will be culture that will limit your ability to actually do these two things I've got on screen right now. Because the way we typically do things around here is, it becomes just the way we do things and the culture can be a limiting factor there. It's often about thinking outside the culture and eventually that culture will change if enough people do things differently. But yes, culture is a major component of this and to some extent when you're trying to do this, particularly on your own, you might find that you are fighting the existent or current culture a little bit because you're trying to do something a little bit differently.

Rod Jones:

Okay, thank you. Perhaps just time for one more question, Paul. Can the model account for team members who tend to have a poor attitude?

Paul Matthews:

I suppose to some extent it can because that comes back to the competence of the individual on that diagram on the left-hand side and there was a mental state thing there. If someone's attitude is poor, their engagement is low, their motivation is low, yeah. And you've got to figure out, well, why has that

happened? Now, sometimes you've just got to do things that move them on, but ideally of course you really want to say, "Well, what's done that?" And it might be because they are suffering frustrations consistently and [inaudible 00:27:50] work to do their job and they're always up against it, and it's not them, there's other things that are frustrating. What's surrounding them that's stopping them doing what they want to do? Alternatively, of course it might be something that's spilling over from home life, which as a manager you're going to have to deal with to some extent, or at least know about. Very difficult to comment on it other than in more general terms, because of course, people's attitude comes from so many different potential causes, so hard to say more than that.

But if you want to know more and there's more questions, I'd be very happy to answer them by email. Or, get in touch. My LinkedIn profile address is there, so feel free to link up and ask me a question, and I will get back to you. And also, my website at paul-matthews.com.

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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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