

PAUL MATTHEWS

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Paul Matthews interview on Learning Now TV 2015

This was the first time Paul was interviewed on the Learning Now TV channel.

TRANSCRIPT

- Colin Steed: Paul, let's start off by finding out from you, what do we mean by informal learning?
- Paul Matthews: What do we mean? That's interesting. We probably mean something quite different to what most people mean. Informal learning to me is the learning that happens unscheduled, unsupervised, not planned. And actually, I sometimes refer to it as a side effect of life. It's the stuff that you learn just as you're going through life.
- Paul Matthews: In fact, a chap called Rogers had an interesting continuum where he said that learning varies from what he called learning conscious learning through to task conscious learning. And what he meant by that is, sometimes when you go into an activity, your outcome is to learn. That's what he calls learning conscious learning. And you might consider that formal, because you've got a formal outcome of wanting to learn from the activity.
- Paul Matthews: On the other side of that spectrum is the task conscious learning, and this is the kind of learning that happens just by default when you're doing things, like whoever actually went to a classroom to learn how to manage a household, for example, it just happens. Because you are paying attention to what you're doing, you're task conscious and because you are noticing the results you get, the next time you do it, you may do it differently, but you're not conscious that you're actually learning. It's like a side effect.
- Colin Steed: So, it's something that you cannot prescribe to people. It's the sort of thing that they will learn themselves if they've got a motive to learn something?
- Paul Matthews: It's interesting, it's more about... The things you learn when you're learning informally just happen. You can't necessarily prescribe how they're going to learn or what they're going to learn, but you can set up circumstances where they will learn the kind of stuff you want them to learn.
- Paul Matthews: So you can actually manage informal learning. It's almost like a strange way to think about things. And in the old days, I used to say you could not manage informal learning. I was

wrong. You actually can manage it. And in order to do that, there's a three-step process.

Paul Matthews: Like any learning you want to do, your first step is clearly at some kind of level, control the outcomes that you're looking to get. So you have to figure out as a first step, well what are my learning outcomes from whatever we're going to do?

Paul Matthews: The next step is to send people into situations or experiences or social interactions where they will do things, activities, tasks that you've set them, and by doing them they'll end up learning stuff. Hopefully, it's the stuff that you've planned on them learning as a result of them doing those activities. So if you design those activities carefully, you will end up with them learning the kind of things that you want them to learn in the context that they are doing those activities.

Paul Matthews: And then the third step of that process is to bring them back and say, okay, debrief them on the activities and understand, have they learned what you hoped they'd learn? If not, correct it. If not, add to it. Or you may even send them back to do the activities all over again, but with a slightly better or different briefing. So it's a three step process of controlling, and then letting go of control and then re-controlling.

Paul Matthews: But while they're actually out there doing the activities, learning, you must be completely hands off. And that's where it needs to stay informal. So while they're away, they're doing their activities, you've got to be completely hands off.

Paul Matthews: What a lot of organizations and people do is they try and control the activities, and that's where they ruin the informality, by trying to control all three steps. Or the other thing they do is they send them off to do some activities, but then they don't bring the control back in to verify what's been learned. They let control go, and it just goes. And there's no further step. So that's how most people get it wrong when they're trying to "implement" informal learning.

Colin Steed: Right, I understand. So this model that we've heard about, this 70:20:10. I think I'm right in saying that people think it's a formula. So 10% must be done formally, 20% must be done this way, and 70% must be done informally. Is that incorrect?

Paul Matthews: Well, it's definitely not a formula. It's not a recipe. You're not going to bake the learning cake by using that recipe effectively. Sometimes it'll work, most of the time it won't. And I think 70:20:10's funny thing, as I love it and I hate it.

Paul Matthews: And the reason I love it is because it's focusing learning and development people on the learning that's happening outside of the classroom. That in and of itself is a wonderful thing, because that learning outside of the classroom has always

gone on, it's always been there. It's been there ever since, as cave men, we were watching our uncle put a piece of flint on the end of the stick. That's informal learning, observational learning, experiential, and so on. Then when you start throwing the stick, you learn different things.

Paul Matthews: So that's why I like it, is it's helping people focus on the out of classroom stuff, which is vitally important to any organization. Every organization would fail completely if the only things people learned, they learned in a classroom. Every organization without question would fail totally. So they are reliant on non-classroom learning, and that's a fact.

Paul Matthews: Now the reason I hate the model is what you've just alluded to is people start thinking it's a recipe. And that's the worst way... And it's not just people who should know better. I saw on a blog recently, on a very large learning management system supplier, a blog which actually said, the perfect way to learn, and this 70:20:10 in that ratio. I was horrified to see that coming across on a large system supplier. Absolutely horrified.

Paul Matthews: So, somebody on their blog writing team has clearly got things very wrong. It is not a recipe and a moment's thought would clearly help you understand it absolutely can't be a recipe. If someone's fairly new in role, you are going to have to give them a lot more formal stuff to get them going to provide the skeleton, and then they can go and operationalize that. And as they operationalize it, they'll learn more things.

Paul Matthews: So, it's definitely not a recipe. And that's one of the reasons I hate it, is people try and use it as a recipe. Or what they do is they dress up formal learning, in another coat of clothes, and they call it informal. Because what they do is they take the content they would normally deliver formerly in a classroom, they divide it up a little bit, and deliver some of that content via some different methods. And I think in doing so, they're now satisfying some kind of 70:20:10 strategy.

Paul Matthews: And actually, that's not the case. And the reason primarily is the stuff that people learn informally is different to the stuff that they learn formally. It's like if you can give someone some theory, they can say, oh yes, here's, I don't know, the four primary steps to negotiation or something. Until they go and actually do those steps in a real situation, they've not learned all the little bits around those steps.

Paul Matthews: So the stuff they learn informally by experience or by talking to others and hearing stories, is the extra bits that wrap around the formal models and frameworks and theory and stuff that you can learn in a classroom. So both are absolutely

essential. I'm not for a minute ever going to say we don't need the formal stuff. We do absolutely need it. But that ratio... So love informal learning. I like the model, but as soon as you start talking about the model, ditch the numbers.

Colin Steed: Yeah, it's the prescriptive, you must do 70, you must be 20, you must be 10, or else you're not doing it right. That's what I wanted to get. Yeah.

Paul Matthews: Where the model really helps is when you're talking to senior executives, because if you say to anybody, particularly someone who's been in post a long time, they probably have not done much formal training for a long time. So chances are when you say to them, "We need to focus on informal learning," they'll say, "Well, what's that all about?" And it's about trying to get that on the agenda of the executive board, because you obviously want to get some budget to do some stuff.

Paul Matthews: You can say to them, "Well actually, how much of what you know in order to do your job, did you learn in a classroom, and how much did you learn some place else?" And those 70:20:10 figures, when they reflect on that, will say, "Yeah, that probably feels about right for me." And so therefore, the model's very easy for them to get their heads around. So that's what's quite nice about it.

Colin Steed: Yeah. I mean, the first time I heard the term informal learning was not that long ago, funnily enough. And it was at one of the LPI conferences where we had Charles Jennings who then worked at Reuters. And he put up a slide and said... Well, he was introducing this model, or really, it's not a model, is it? It's an approach.

Paul Matthews: Yes. It's a philosophy. I'd like to call it a philosophy rather than a model. Yeah.

Colin Steed: And he put the numbers up, and he said, "10% of your learning is probably formal, and yet, you spend all your budget on that." And that's the first time I thought, tell me more. And that's when I first... It wasn't that long ago, I don't know how many years ago, but... So really, all of this is just learning, really, isn't it?

Paul Matthews: Yes.

Colin Steed: And some people might say, "Why are we trying to compartmentalize all of this?" But what would we suggest would be a good way for an organization, who at the moment, are doing everything formally? How can we encourage them to look at what's being done informally, and to promote that, and to change the way they're doing their learning and their training?

Paul Matthews: I think in order to do that it's got to get onto the executive agenda, effectively. Because until it's there, the learning and development department, no matter how much they proselytize about it, are going to struggle because people eventually have to sign off the budget. So it does depend on how the brand of L&D within that particular organization...

Paul Matthews: So it's always a bit difficult to give a recipe on how to go about doing that. But there's a very simple little story I heard once from someone, a senior L&D guy in a large pharmaceutical company actually, and he'd just been telling me about a project he'd done on the risk assessment of a restructure they were considering. And the biggest risk that was identified was the knowledge walking out the door when they offered all the various packages.

Paul Matthews: And he said, "I knew that was going to happen. We all know that's the biggest risk, in particularly in an industry like ours, there are a lot of long serving people. And when they walk, a huge amount goes out the door." And then he asked me the question, "How can I get informal learning onto..." He'd just read my book so that he was really fired up about that. And, "How can I get it onto the agenda of the senior team?" And I said, "Well, you've just given me the answer." And he said, "What do you mean?" And I said, "Well, you've just told me that your risk assessment is about knowledge walking out the door. Now, if you knew what that knowledge was, therefore you could train it. You could set some training courses up and deliver it to the people who were still staying behind, and you would not have a problem."

Paul Matthews: So in effect, by saying that the knowledge walking out the door is the biggest risk, you're tacitly saying you don't know what that knowledge is, and you can't train it. So how did those people learn that stuff? They learned it through experience. So the senior team calls informal learning, experience. They don't call it informal learning. So when you talk to the senior team, talk about experience, don't talk about informal learning. You see, there's a difference.

Paul Matthews: So the way you speak to them. And as soon as they say it's experience that matters, they automatically know that without that experience spread across the organization, the organization's dead in the water. It's like that guy from HP once said, "if only we knew what HP knows..."

Colin Steed: Yes. Yeah. Thank you very much, Paul. Just one thing for the viewers, have you got some information, that if they want to explore this more, where they could find that?

Paul Matthews: Well, I'm continuously writing blogs and articles for magazines and other blogs, and there's some other material they can download from our website, just free. So they can get it from there.

Colin Steed: Excellent. And of course, I couldn't let the time pass without talking about your book. I know you're very shy about it, but it is one of the best books I've ever read. So that's the book that I would suggest that you had a look at. It's on Kindle as well.

Paul Matthews: It's on Kindle, yeah.

Colin Steed: I've got it on the Kindle as well. So, it's about three pound on Kindle. Fantastic book by Paul. Thank you very much for your time, Paul. And thank you for explaining informal learning to us.

Paul Matthews: Oh, you're very welcome. It's good to be here.

Colin Steed: Thank you very much.

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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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