

## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

**Paul Matthews was interviewed by My Learning Hub as part of a series of interviews with L&D experts.**

The interview took place in December 2019 and covered a wide range of topics.

## TRANSCRIPT

Paul Matthews: (Teaser comments)

So should you train everybody? Absolutely not.

That's a funny question.

Get a haircut.

There's a lot of people out there putting out articles that are quite self-serving.

Am I bored? No, not at all.

Paul Matthews: My name is Paul Matthews and I've been in the learning and development game for well, 20 years directly. I've written three books on L&D. I speak at conferences all over the world. I do consultancy stuff, which is great fun. I love doing that.

Interviewer: Please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you ended up in the learning and development space.

Paul Matthews: I was working in a large multinational IT company at director level, and so I was a customer of L&D. I chose to leave there and move on to other things and as part of that, I ended up getting involved with a training course for managers. And I started looking at what was happening in that area and sort of came at it like an engineer, because that's my background, and I thought, "Hang on, this training course isn't getting great results. If I was an engineer and created a product with that low level of result or high failure rate, I'd be killing people on a regular basis, so there's got to be something different." And that's kind of what attracted me into L&D, is how can we get it working better than what it currently is? And that was over 20 years ago, so I've been on that sort of L&D quest ever since.

Interviewer: So you've written three books on L&D and learning transfer, so can you just give us a brief introduction to this?

Paul Matthews: I sometimes call them the three elephants because, when I was writing the third book on learning transfer, I started describing it as the elephant in the room; the thing that L&D is not paying attention to that it should be. Or if they are, they're aware of the elephant, "Oh yes elephant, hi." Then they move by and they kind of ignore this thing. And that was how I started

to sort of market the idea of learning transfer being something they should be paying attention to. But actually, if you look at how they're doing their training, they're doing very little with it, if anything.

Paul Matthews: And then I realized the previous two books I'd written were also about other elephants. So I'd been writing about elephants for years and never knew it. So I see them as three areas that L&D should be focusing on but isn't.

Interviewer: Three elephants, right? Are there any other elephants?

Paul Matthews: Yes, there's a sneaky one and I call it a sneaky elephant because I don't want to write a book on it because three books are enough of any trilogy. The sneaky one I talk about is the brand of L&D, or the reputation. Brand and reputation are slightly different but you can push them together for all intents and purposes in this context. So it's what does the company think of L&D? And of course, if L&D has an ineffective or low-grade brand or reputation in the organization, then it will be very difficult for L&D to be effective. So I always recommend that people put all four elephants into their learning and development strategy. And there's other things they're going to have in there like a learning experience platforms like you guys have. There's going to be social, there's going to be what training course we're doing, all the other strategic things that are normally in an L&D strategy, but I always think that a strategy is missing some really critical things if it's missing any of those four elephants.

Paul Matthews: They need to be saying, "How are we going to manage and work with informal learning in the organization? How are we going to do our performance diagnostics and consultancy effectively? How are we going to do learning transfer effectively if we have done our consultancy and then proven we need to put people in the classroom, and then overall how are we going to move our brand of L&D onwards in the organization?" And then the other one we talked about earlier in this interview was the culture of L&D. How are we going to move our culture forward a step so that in 12 months' time we have a more effective learning culture in the organization than we have today?

Interviewer: From my experience so far, I saw that there are two types of companies, companies that find learning and development as an investment, and companies that find it and see it as a cost. How do you change the perception with the senior management?

Paul Matthews: There's actually more companies than that, there aren't those just two as a split. There are also companies that just keep doing it because they feel it's the right thing to do because it's the way we've always done it, so there's that kind of inertia. And one thing you will find is a lovely phrase I heard once is that, "Scarcity is the mother of inertia." Which basically means if I'm scarce

on resources, time, money, effort, things like that; I will not have the time or the energy to try and do something new, so therefore change is outside of something I can cope with. So therefore, inertia carries on, things just keep going as they are.

Paul Matthews: But I tend to think that learning and development should be seen as an investment rather than just as a cost. Because if it's a cost then it's the thing that they can cut. Whereas if it's an investment, they start thinking what are our returns on it? But I think not many people in L&D are focusing on the business benefits of learning and development and so, therefore, they aren't getting through to the senior executive teams that it is an investment and that it's going to helping the company.

Paul Matthews: You asked how to make that shift, I think it's part of working with the senior team and talk about strategy execution because the only reason you going to do any L&D at all is to get effective execution of the strategy that's in place. If the strategy isn't getting executed, the corporate strategy, then clearly the company is not going to get to the end of the journey it's trying to get to, given the vision it's got.

Paul Matthews: So when I talk about that journey; is the vehicle, the company, fit for the journey that is being asked of it? And if it is, then you don't need to do any L&D because everybody's already capable of doing what they need to do when they need to do it to execute the strategy to go on the journey. But that's most unlikely because most journeys are to somewhere new, that's what vision's about. Somewhere new, somewhere better.

Paul Matthews: So that's what you have to work with the senior team is focus them on that journey and how the vehicle, the company needs to be capable and that's made up of people. So the people need to be competent and their competence has to come to the point of work and then the organization also has to be competent at the point of work in order for those two things to come together and create capability and therefore strategy execution.

Interviewer: Do you think there could be a problem that companies do not really understand how to measure the effectiveness?

Paul Matthews: I think that's often the case. Although I think there is a problem with the way that many L&D people approach measuring L&D. They tend to start saying, "I've got to have ROI. I've got to prove that the training or the learning or the L&D interventions I'm doing, I have to prove those are working in order to justify my salary and my paycheck." I think it's much more appropriate to start thinking, "How are we doing what we're doing and how can we improve it?" Let's measure stuff to get better at what we're doing.

Interviewer: Is it actually necessary to train everyone within the company?

Paul Matthews: If you are thinking we need to train everybody the same because if you have two people on a team that are doing effectively the same work, Sally can do it, but John cannot. You might make the assumption that we have to train John to get to be as good as Sally so he can do the same work that Sally is doing in the same environment. But what you may well find actually is that Sally is overcoming problems in the environment in which they're behaving, that John hasn't learned to deal with yet. But actually it's quicker and cheaper often to fix the environment to train John and all the other Johns to be as good as Sally. And sometimes you can't even train them that well because Sally, it's an extra five years or 10 years of experience that's actually allowing her to function effectively.

Paul Matthews: So should you train everybody? Absolutely not. You should be saying, "Where do we have our gaps?" And that's a performance diagnostics process that needs to happen. And the issue you find if you don't do the performance diagnostics first is that what you then end up training will often be irrelevant to at least some of the participants and that irrelevancy will stop dead in its tracks any potential for learning transfer, so you've wasted your money.

Interviewer: There might also be a problem that a lot of companies, they just buy content off the shelf rather than try and create something which is job-specific and try and engage their own staff in creating that content.

Paul Matthews: I think, well there's two different ways. I mean in the early days of someone putting digital LMSs, learning experience platforms, all those kinds of things in, there's certainly a case to be made for buying off the shelf content because you can get going faster and to some extent cheaper. And also the issue there is the culture of the organization. They are at that point probably more used to being spoon-fed content rather than generating their own and things like that. But of course, none of that stuff off the shelf will ever usually be specifically perfect for that company and particularly in its own realm of operations. So you can buy some generic stuff on money laundering, or health and safety, or handling sharps, or food hygiene, all that kind of stuff, you can usually buy that off the shelf and it's good enough to pass the tick boxes for the regulatory bodies, et cetera, et cetera. But even then, it's not always, as you say, specific for that industry, for that particular company in that industry. So there's a case for both parts of that.

Interviewer: How can you tell that L&D process within the company go wrong? What are the symptoms?

Paul Matthews: That's a funny question because you're presupposing there's a right and a wrong way to do it and then I don't think that's the case. There's a continuum of less effective to more effective. So you've got to be starting to look at, how can you start checking whether the learning and development that is taking place is effective or not. And do we need more of it to get better results or more results, or even are we doing too much of it or too much of the wrong thing? So it's not that it's wrong and there's no silver recipe of how one should do it because it depends on the organization, depends on the maturity of the culture in terms of its ability to learn. It depends on the existing skillsets of the people that are actually operating and executing strategy. So there's all these different questions.

Paul Matthews: And then you can also have in an organization some learning and development that's doing really well. And then they put in another programme which fails miserably because they haven't done the diagnostics and pre-work and all the other stuff that's required. So there isn't really a blanket way to look at that, in my opinion.

Interviewer: What do you think could be done digitally these days to improve it?

Paul Matthews: There's several things that you can use digital for in a learning environment and that cuts across the different types of tools, whether that's the social tools, the content tools, like an LMS, some of the learning transfer type platforms that are about and things like that.

Paul Matthews: But you've also got to start thinking about, how do we need to use digital to get people what they need when they need it at the point of work, when perhaps it's the most useful to them. And you can start looking at Con Gottfredson's Five Moments of Learning Need model for example. If you don't know about that, there's lots of stuff online for that. And also performance support, where does that come in? So there's this idea of you've got to know it or you need to find it. So do I need to know it, so I've got it available here all the time and it's available at recall? And for some compliance stuff, you need to have that for some of the common frequent jobs you need to have it. But other times I don't need to know it I need to be able to find it quickly.

Paul Matthews: So think of driving a car, I don't need to know the tire pressures in order to drive safely and effectively. I need to be able to find them when I need to fill the tires up. But I do need to know on recall what the different road signs mean. So you'll get that difference. And so you'll start saying, "Well if at a digital level, how can I help users, people in the workflow, either know something well enough and keep it memorized so they can then recall it when needed. Or how can I assist them with content in the moment in the workflow with bite-sized content, other bits?" In other words, electronic performance

support. And of course, the way you would formulate information will be different for those two different users because your form is going to follow your function, so you'd look at the function.

Paul Matthews: So when you say, "How do we apply digital?" It's kind of, well what's there at a diagnostics level, what are the limiting factors and barriers getting in the way of someone doing what they need to do and then how can we use some digital to overcome some of those barriers? So it's more about looking at that consultancy diagnostics process first and then saying how can we bring digital into the frame to help.

Interviewer: But I think there is also a need for a change in the format of eLearning. I don't think this eLearning courses, they no longer allow to get the same sort of training at the point of need when you need it. When you look at it, the majority of courses are 15 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, and some of them even longer than that, which I think is highly ineffective. And many businesses that we met, they actually have quite a lot of useful internal training content, but it's not really organized and it's about the format of that content, which I think just doesn't work.

Paul Matthews: Well, that's what I said before, form follows function. So you've got to say, "How is someone going to use this content? And then given that use case, how do we need to format the content?" So what you may need is the same information formatted in two, three, even four or five different ways, depending on how it's going to get consumed and at what time someone's going to be consuming it because they're new to the information so they need it laid out a certain way and they're going to be going through quite a lot of it, or just because they need that one or two sentences of information or that one picture to help them in the moment when they're actually doing their job at their desk. So that's the difference is form has got to follow function. So I totally agree that most of the more traditional eLearning, let's call it that, to be kind, is not that effective.

Interviewer: So in other words, staff who work on the factory floor and staff who work in the HR marketing and sales department can be trained and consume that content in different ways and they can learn differently.

Paul Matthews: What they won't be doing is sitting there saying, "I must learn about this." They will be sitting there saying, "I have this job to do. So my goal is achieving success in this job. What do I need to find out in order to enable me to do this job? There's some stuff I'm kind of missing currently because I'm not able to do it. So what do I need to find out to enable me to do it? And then how am I going to find that out? Do I ask a colleague, do I go online? Is the company intranet worth visiting? Is there some eLearning available? Is there something?"

Paul Matthews: So, of course, you need to help them understand where they've got to go in that moment of need to find what they need to know and present it to them in a format, typically a pyramidal type format. So at the very top is, here's the most common answer that people need when they're in this particular situation. And if that's not enough, drill down, here's a bigger answer or several sentences. Here's more, here's the whole manual and by the way, here's the subject matter expert to go to. So it's looking at that performance support, but again it's about what are the different scenarios where they're going to need the information.

Interviewer: I think we can do a lot of improvements on that front. If we had some sort of artificial intelligence assistant, some sort of chat box that comes up and you can just ask it a question and then it could just point to in the right direction, where can you find those resources? How much time do you have? I think that would be quite helpful.

Paul Matthews: And most people would say, "I don't have much time so... But I agree that some assistance would be helpful." And you can also do that effectively with a decent navigational topology within your software and within a diagnostic tree. And that's almost what the chatbot is doing is enabling a diagnostic tree. But of course, it can be rather more comprehensive perhaps and have a better overview of the content because the chatbot kind of knows what's there, whereas the user doesn't necessarily know what's available.

Interviewer: Should we now talk a little bit about the ways of measuring the L&D effectiveness?

Paul Matthews: I'm glad you used the word effectiveness to start with because a lot of L&D people tend to get hung up on how efficient their learning and development interventions are rather than how effective they are. And they start looking at cost for bums on seats. They start looking at how much the budget is and how many people they can push through programmes and they can do more with less, et cetera, et cetera.

Paul Matthews: So I think they need to be focusing on both. But effectiveness at a business level is really important. And so as soon as you start saying, how effective it is from a business perspective, that means you've got to start bringing business measures into the mix, pure L&D type measures really aren't enough. And of course, we've got Kirkpatrick, we've got has behaviour changed? Well, there's levels 1 and 2, which are useful but not that useful. Certainly not useful to the business in terms of convincing them that it's all useful to do and not that useful in terms of really improving that much on the overall effectiveness longer term of a programme.

Paul Matthews: You can certainly do a Kirkpatrick level three type evaluation and that that can be done relatively easily with some very simple kind of 180 or 360 type questionnaires at the beginning of a program. In other words, how does the delegate think they behaved against these behavioural outcomes you're seeking and that's assuming they've done the correct diagnostics upfront, by the way, to understand what the behaviours are that we're seeking. So I've made that assumption here. And then doing the same thing four or six months later and saying, "Well, what are the behaviours then later in terms of the change and what's the Delta or the change in those behaviours and is that worth the money we spent on the programme?"

Paul Matthews: So Kirkpatrick level three's relatively straightforward to do. Going to level four is a lot more difficult in the sense that you've then got to start saying, "Well, are those results for the company..." Whether they're financial or otherwise. "Are they all down to the training?" And usually, it's hard to isolate training, especially over longer periods of time because there'll be other factors involved with that.

Paul Matthews: But you do have to start looking at getting the business data. And of course, you've got to say to the company, as I mentioned earlier, "What is the strategy and execution, what are our goals and how will we know that strategy is being executed effectively." So that we'll start giving you some measures that you need to be using to see whether we're helping the company execute it strategy or not. Much easier in things like sales or call centres because you got lots of data and less easy in some other parts of the company.

Interviewer: In terms of trying to build a learning culture, could you... Because I mean, you've met so many companies out there, have you seen some good and bad examples of how do you build a true learning culture within your company? How can you apply gamification, really get yourself, get your staff involved and engaged in the process?

Paul Matthews: Learning culture's an interesting one, it's a new phrase... Well, it's not that new, but it's being bandied about around a lot more now than it has been in the past and it's kind of fallen out of that learning ecosystem. I used to call it a learnscape, which I used that term in one of my books years and years ago. But really you're talking about how mature is the organization in terms of its approach to learning, perhaps that might be one way to define it. And the place I would go for data on that is the Towards Maturity reports and look at their transformation curve model, which they introduced in January 2018. So grab that report and then the one in early 2019, no doubt there'll be a new one coming up soon after, we've taken this video in February 2020.

Paul Matthews: But what they've looked at is four stages of learning maturity, if you want to call it that way, and you can go and look at how those



stages... What you'll find is that certainly on the 2018 report, on page nine there's a great table where you can look at those four stages and get a sense of what are the indicators in an organization of what stage they're at. So in a learning and development strategy, I'd be looking at saying, how can we move our... Given where we seem to be at on one of those transformation curve stages now, how can we move it on to the next stage? Not how can we move it to the end, because that'll be too big a jump. But how can we move it from where we are a bit further down and that'll help improve the learning culture.

Interviewer: Well what if the company had previously some bad experience with L&D or something didn't work? How do you build that trust amongst your employees?

Paul Matthews: If you're trying to rebuild trust because it's not worked well in the past, again, you've just got a brand that sucks at that point in time. So what is any marketing person do with a brand that has taken a hiding or a beating in the marketplace? You've got to go and start working on the brand and the only place you'll do that... Well, there's two places, you can work on the brand itself and the brand of L&D is, if you like, the promise you're making to your constituents. Our brand is this and this is our promise to you in terms of who we are and what we deliver. Second to that, alongside it, you've got the reputation. As I said that kind of different... The reputation is what people think about L&D as a result of the touchpoints they've been touching you with.

Paul Matthews: And so you would look at all those different touchpoints, when are we touching? During onboarding, during a training course, during the interface to the learning management system, all of those different things. And even some things that L&D don't think that they're involved with like appraisals, they end up getting pulled into because often the output from appraisals is, here's this training need. So you've got to look at all of the touchpoints and say, "How do we fix each and every one of those in order to improve the reputation of L&D?"

Interviewer: You are currently running a company called People Alchemy and you've been running it for 20 years, how come you still like... Are you bored? That's the first question.

Paul Matthews: Sorry, what's that?

Interviewer: Are you bored?

Paul Matthews: Am I bored?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Paul Matthews: No, not at all. This is fun.

Interviewer: How do you not get bored?

Paul Matthews: I leap out of bed... People have asked me that about purpose and stuff before, which is kind of where you're talking about. And it sounds a bit corny, but it's about making the world a better place for me. And I think one of the points of leverage is the way that people are being and operating and being able to be effective in their work. Because most people work, not everybody, but most and certainly adults. And if they're able to be effective at work, if they're valued, all of those kinds of things that'll expand out into their home life and so on, and it's a better world. So I see learning and development as one of the fastest and most powerful levers in an organization to achieve that ability for people to be effective at work.

Paul Matthews: So that's why I kind of see L&D as a place that I can work for that better world thing. I don't know whether I'm explaining that terribly well, but it's one of the things that gets me out of bed in the morning is it's exciting and there's a lot of change available. And certainly, the way the L&D is currently functioning, there's a huge amount of uplift available because the majority of L&D departments I come across have a lot of low hanging fruit they can go for, a lot of elephants hiding they've ceased to notice or are ignoring purposefully, on accident, or whatever.

Interviewer: And you travel quite a lot as well.

Paul Matthews: Yeah, yeah, I've lived in a lot of different parts of the world, so that's all fun.

Interviewer: Do you see some similarities when you travel and see different companies like in the UK, perhaps US?

Paul Matthews: Some similarities but regional things. So for example, in the Gulf it's more command and control in terms of a management process. And also the learning maturity is not as advanced as it is in some of the Western companies, in the West, whether that's in the UK, across Europe, and to some extent in the States. But what I do see is the range of things that L&D has to deal with has expanded dramatically over the past 20 years. So 20 years ago or a bit more, it was learning and development as a few things, they do training mostly, if the department even existed, which it often didn't back then. And even back then there wasn't that much compliance stuff going on, there's a lot more now than what there used to be.

Interviewer: It used to be quite often the head of HR department or someone.

Paul Matthews: There are still companies doing that now, but there's also companies doing a lot of other stuff. So the range of jobs that L&D is needing to function with is now huge, where it used to be less. And so what you're finding... And that's why there's LPI and CIPD are bringing out these capability maps, is because there's this realization now that L&D needs a much wider skillset. And that's really interesting and that's great talking to teams saying, "Well, what is your skillset and where are the gaps? In order for you to progress and move into new ways of delivering L&D? You're going to have to start polishing up some skills or bringing in people with skill sets you just don't have from process consulting, through to analytics and data, through to social media, curation of content." And these are things that traditionally didn't really sit in L&D very easily.

Interviewer: Where do you think a small company, say a start-up with 20 or 30 people, where do you think they can start if they are sort of playing with that idea of implementing L&D but do not quite know where to start?

Paul Matthews: It's always difficult in start-up companies because it tends to be focused on the product, on what that company is there to provide the product or the service, and it's all hands on the pump. People tend to learn as they go, they learn by doing. There's usually no time to set aside to put procedures and stuff in place, although it can help. Depending on funding, there can often be a lack of funding so they can't get people in. If they're growing fast they can't even hire people fast enough to do what they need to be delivering, let alone taking time out to do L&D. So it's always a difficult one that one. And too, they need to be covering the compliance stuff they have to cover given the sector that they're in and what they're doing.

Paul Matthews: But I'm not sure I'd have any specifics; here's a bit of advice for a start-up other than be aware that you will need to be getting involved with HR and L&D stuff before you get too big because if you leave it too long, you might well get into trouble in all sorts of ways that could be a danger to the company, whether that's an employment tribunal or compliance stuff that's not being done properly. And so just look at not doing L&D and HR as a risk in the growth of the company rather than saying, "Oh, we must be doing that, it's an essential part of what we're doing." Because most start-ups I've seen will hire in people with skill sets they need at the moment because they need to work fast and they haven't got time to train internally.

Interviewer: I think it makes sense just to bring someone in already with that knowledge, but then obviously you have to be careful because that's the kind of culture and the kind of structure that these people will help you build. Is that actually what you want to build yourself?

Paul Matthews: You're quite right, there's a danger in setting a culture precedent that will then stop development. So that's why I was saying, "Keep an eye on it and notice when it becomes a significant risk to the operation of the company and its longevity." And have that on the roadmap rather than end up having to put it on the roadmap because you've hit a bump in the road that was actually pretty serious.

Interviewer: Perhaps some of the people who will be watching this video are thinking about starting their L&D career, so what would your advice be for those people?

Paul Matthews: Find some blogs with people who are talking sense, find some books to read, obviously you want to read my books. But there's also some others that are worth reading in terms of process consulting, in terms of L&D, in terms of the different models. There's lots that I read and in fact, in the back of my green book, there's a few other sort of companion reading type books as well, which I recommend around the same topic.

Paul Matthews: So reading lots is going to be a big thing and don't necessarily believe everything you read on blogs and articles out there. There's a lot of people out there putting out articles that are quite self-serving because of the industry they're in or the product or service they've got to sell. They write a blog, "Oh, this and this..." And it sounds good, but then you realize actually they're just in effect trying to sell their own services, a sort of infomercials. So look for the people who are real thinkers in the industry.

Interviewer: If you saw yourself 15 years ago, what would your advice be?

Paul Matthews: Get a haircut! 15 years ago, what was I doing 15 years ago? One thing that I've been thinking about recently is the achievements that we might think we can do in six months we often overestimate what might be possible in six months, whereas we typically underestimate grossly what we can do in five or 10 years. And the reason for that is the magic of compound interest, little things over time make a massive difference. And of course, six months often isn't enough to really see those little things making a difference. So think about the things you need to start doing now, this is me talking to me 15 years ago, that will make a big difference over 15 years.

Interviewer: Thank you, Paul, for joining us.

Paul Matthews: Yep.

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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.

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