

BREAK OUT OF YOUR L&D BOX: A CONVERSATION WITH CHARLES JENNINGS

For the third time in a row, we are organising inspiring summer days to dive into burning L&D topics. This year, on July 3rd, we have the pleasure to welcome Charles Jennings to address the challenges of using 70:20:10. We thought this was a good enough reason to have a conversation with the 'father' of 70:20:10 himself.

How would you describe yourself?

I have spent the last 40 years of my life helping people to do their jobs better. From the start, I was focused on outputs : how can people achieve their objectives? Performance has always been my real passion. Learning is obviously a part of that, but learning is only a means to the end. The real goal must always be performance, whether that is individual, team or organisational performance. Also, I realised very early on that learning is not about demonstrating short time memory retention. It is about demonstrating behaviour change. My core message is that we should look at all the various ways we can learn and improve, not only the formal, structured ways. And with this I am not saying that the traditional structured form of learning doesn't have its rightful place, but it is certainly not the only, or necessarily the best, way to improve performance.



That brings me to the famous model : 70-20-10...

When I talk about 70:20:10 I explain that it is a reference model for improving performance. It shows you how to change the focus from learning (which is an input) to performance (which is an output). It also helps extend beyond formal training to learning from work and from other people. As far as the 70:20:10 reference model goes, I keep telling people to please not get hung up on the percentages. The key is a change in mindset and in practices. In essence, the model is a reflection that in the workplace most of our learning happens through experience (for instance, through challenging assignments and practice), secondly from developmental relationships (for instance a coach, a top performer or a mentor) and only in part from coursework and training. Most learning happens in the workplace. We learn a lot by doing, and adult work-based learning is a world away from the schooling we have all been through.

So where do you use which part of the model?

As a general principle, if you are new in a role or new in an organisation, it really helps to have some structured form of learning and support. That helps us get started, understand what is expected of us and how our performance will be measured, and who to turn to when we encounter problems. But we should not neglect the fact that we learn from working, from partners, from reflection, and from other people. Good performance also relies on receiving clear feedback, and for you to act upon this feedback. How do you overcome problems when they occur? It's about being surrounded by the right people who understand you. It is also about using the right processes and practises and trying things out and learning from mistakes.

I don't think anyone could dispute the importance of learning from others. I also see a risk : we all know managers who think they are god's gift to management but in reality are simply terrible role models. How do you deal with that in your model?

I'm glad you ask ! With the work that we do in the 70:20:10 Institute, we have a 70 -20-10 Roadmap that includes three phases : the "inspire phase", the "implement phase" and the "improve phase". During the inspire phase, you need to ensure you have managers and leaders onboard and that they understand their roles in driving performance and helping others to do their jobs better. During this phase you also need to develop a strategic vision and plan, understand your current situation and where you need to be (we have a set of tools to help with this) and you need to plan inspiration sessions and stakeholder sessions to develop a performance way of thinking and acting. When you come to the implementation phase you need to define a clear action plan using a 70:20:10 methodology which is focused on identifying

the critical tasks that high performers execute and then creating robust 70:20:10 solutions that help the entire organisation work in the same way.. The focus remains on how to deliver results as fast as possible. And after the implementation stage, it is all about maintaining a cycle of continuous improvement (the improve stage). It is impossible to keep improving without reflecting on what is going well and what is not, and without running improvement projects and, possibly, re-structuring your HR/Learning function so the focus is on delivering business results, not on individual learning. We offer the tools to enable this to happen. That is where the answer to your question lies.

You mentioned that the model is partly about “mindset”. As we all know, this growth mindset is not necessarily a given to all people. Have you experienced this obstacle and how did you overcome it?

I can certainly tell of a personal experience where I didn't have the mindset and where I didn't overcome the challenge. In the early 1990s I worked at a university in Hungary every summer for four years. But I was never very good at learning languages. I grew up in the Outback of Australia and the truth is that I didn't have the mindset of learning different languages there. There was little need to do so. So, despite the fact that I spent plenty of time in Hungary, I didn't really learn any Hungarian, whereas my colleague actually mastered the language. In truth, he also took some formal training when he was back in the UK, but the main difference between us was his deep desire to learn and to communicate. He was always asking people on how he could improve. He was focused and had a clear performance objective.

You see the same thing happening in organisations : the most difficult times I have experienced are when working with organisations that demonstrate a mindset where people aren't open and where there is not an appetite for doing things differently. Often in these organisations, people use their industry as an excuse. This is especially the case in highly regulated environments like banks or pharmaceutical companies. Of course, structured training is an imperative in those environments, but there are banks and pharmaceutical companies using the 70:20:10 model with excellent impact. It works in any industry. All you need is an openness to a wider range thinking about how to build and maintain high performance and the best ways to get there. I certainly

have nothing against structured training, but I see it is often used when more effective solutions will be better. In these cases organisations end up spending a lot of money for little or no result. L&D people and their stakeholders need to understand that structured development is really important but it's not the only answer.

It is clear that managers are a big key to success in this model. Do you have any tips on how to engage them?

Yes ! A lot of managers focus only on delivering operational excellence, yet a manager needs to put equal focus on developing their people and on reaching their objectives. Objectives are relatively short term, organisations usually set annual objectives, but developing people is a strategic imperative. They say that people join organisations but leave managers, and that is borne out in the figures. I have read research reports that indicate if a manager is not effective at developing their people, that can have up to 40% higher turnover. That is costly, and makes it harder to deliver operational excellence. My advice is that managers can't see the world in either delivering or developing. If you are a manager you need to focus on both delivering and developing or you will lose your best people and you will lose a lot of money in hiring new people. So this thinking is where you need to guide your managers towards. there are three actions leaders and managers can take that have the deepest impact : creating a vision and making sure that people know their objectives and how they will be measured against those objectives; giving people opportunities to stretch themselves through challenging projects; and, making sure that your people have an opportunity to reflect on the work that they have done, what went well, what didn't, what they learned and how will they do it next time around. They will need to learn the techniques how to do this but they also need the heart and the mindset to do this as well.

It seems to me that the top management needs to be behind this. Very often what you see is that the operational objectives and developing your team are in contradiction : deliver this highly important project by X time but as a manager, you know that without the key performers you won't get the results you are asked to deliver. As a consequence, great people often don't get the experience they need



Jos Arets, Vivian Heijnen and Charles Jennings – the three founders of the 70:20:10 Institute

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to develop further. So, you need to approach the problem on different levels, because if you don't do that, you will bounce into walls.

Absolutely ! That is precisely why at the 70:20:10 Institute we included an entire component in the inspire phase of our 70:20:10 Roadmap focused on engaging and educating key stakeholders. We help managers understand the need for this way of thinking. It's not enough to send people on a great course. Magic can occasionally happen there but it's not enough. Managers need to understand that they also have to model the right behaviours. To help managers at all levels, we have designed some practical cards with specific questions so that managers can support reflective learning. As an example, we designed cards for individual 1-to-1 and team meetings with three questions : (a) Describe a recent challenge that you had and what worked well / what didn't work well. (b) How would you do this differently next time? (c) What is the learning that you take away from that? These simple questions can help people learn to teach other. Reflective practice is one of the best ways learning happens.

What important changes in learning do you see in the decade ahead?

People will come to see learning as a route to performance rather than an end itself. We will see a lot of changes and in the way we support performance, including all the technological developments. Artificial Intelligence will have an impact without doubt, even if there is a long way to go still. Technology will help us move from "store and remember approach and facts" to a "find and integrate" approach. Technology will continue to help us build beyond formal learning. We will increasingly move from push to pull in learning. Actions will be more important than showing that you can retain knowledge because within five minutes you can find almost any knowledge anyway. I, for one, turn to my mobile phone all the time when I need to 'remember' something. It is my external brain!

This push to pull change is being adopted by many organisations. We have been working with Citigroup, the global bank, on this. Of course they still have some formal courses but they have managed to switch their learning approach from a total focus on formal courses to a focus on campaigns and social learning where they help people improve through daily workplace challenges to undertake and reflect on and share.

You are coming to Belgium on the 2nd and 3rd July to teach about the 70-20-10 model. Who do you think should come and why should they attend?

Obviously L&D people should come. But also HR business partners. HR business partners are critical in our methodology because they can sometimes put up barriers if they simply take orders from their management teams and pass them to the L&D team. Others who the workshop will be useful for are organisational development people, those who are involved in Lean and Agile, people who might be project managers and also anyone who has responsibility for leading and managing people.

Why: This model will help them expand their horizons on what can be done, and how to do it.

What do you consider your most significant accomplishment?

I hope that in some way I have helped people move from the idea that learning is something that is "packaged up and delivered" to some-

thing that helps performance. I've always felt that in the right context nothing beats a great training programme but far too often training programmes don't have any impact because there was no analysis about whether they were the best solution in the right context. I am certainly not an anti-training person. I just want to make sure that formal training is used when it is going to be effective. And the 70:20:10 methodology and approach helps organisations make the right decisions about this, and helps to make changes last.

Cherry on the cake : which question have you never been asked and you keep wishing that they would ask you.

I've always expected to be asked about where my passion for learning beyond the formal course and the power of informal learning came from. Was it a bad experience with a formal course? The answer to that question is very practical, and no, it wasn't from a bad experience with a formal course.

It came from my childhood. I grew up on a sheep station in the Australian 'bush', a long way from any large town or city. As a child and then a teenager I noticed everyone around me had to be very creative developing solutions to everyday problems. Most of the people I spent time with when I was young only had very basic schooling. Many, if they had been to school at all, had left school at 12 or 14 years-of-age. Their key 'survival strategies' were learning from experience, trying things out, seeing if they worked, trying again, reflecting on successes and failures, and relying on others to help out. There were no opportunities to attend a course on how to shear a sheep, build a 10-mile fence, or fight a bushfire. You just got on and did it. When you had problems, you tried to figure out how to solve them, or asked someone who was more experienced. It's the way humans have learned for millennia. Even at a young age I realised that this type of 'informal' learning was extremely important and can quickly lead to high performance. Learning by doing. And it was done without any concern for instructional design or a curriculum. Then, when I was first teaching at a university I realised that, although formal, structured learning can help, without a 'can do' attitude, a dedication to continuous improvement, and plenty of experiences to drive learning, it is almost impossible to reach the higher levels of performance.

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Thank you, Charles. We hope you will enjoy your stay with us in Belgium. ■



As co-founder of Indra Partners, **Katrien Van Eetvelde** develops and delivers learning experiences around leadership, high performing teams, customer centricity and D&I, making use of multiple learning approaches. Indra Partners also accompanies organisations through impactful change initiatives. If you are curious, look at www.indra-partners.com.