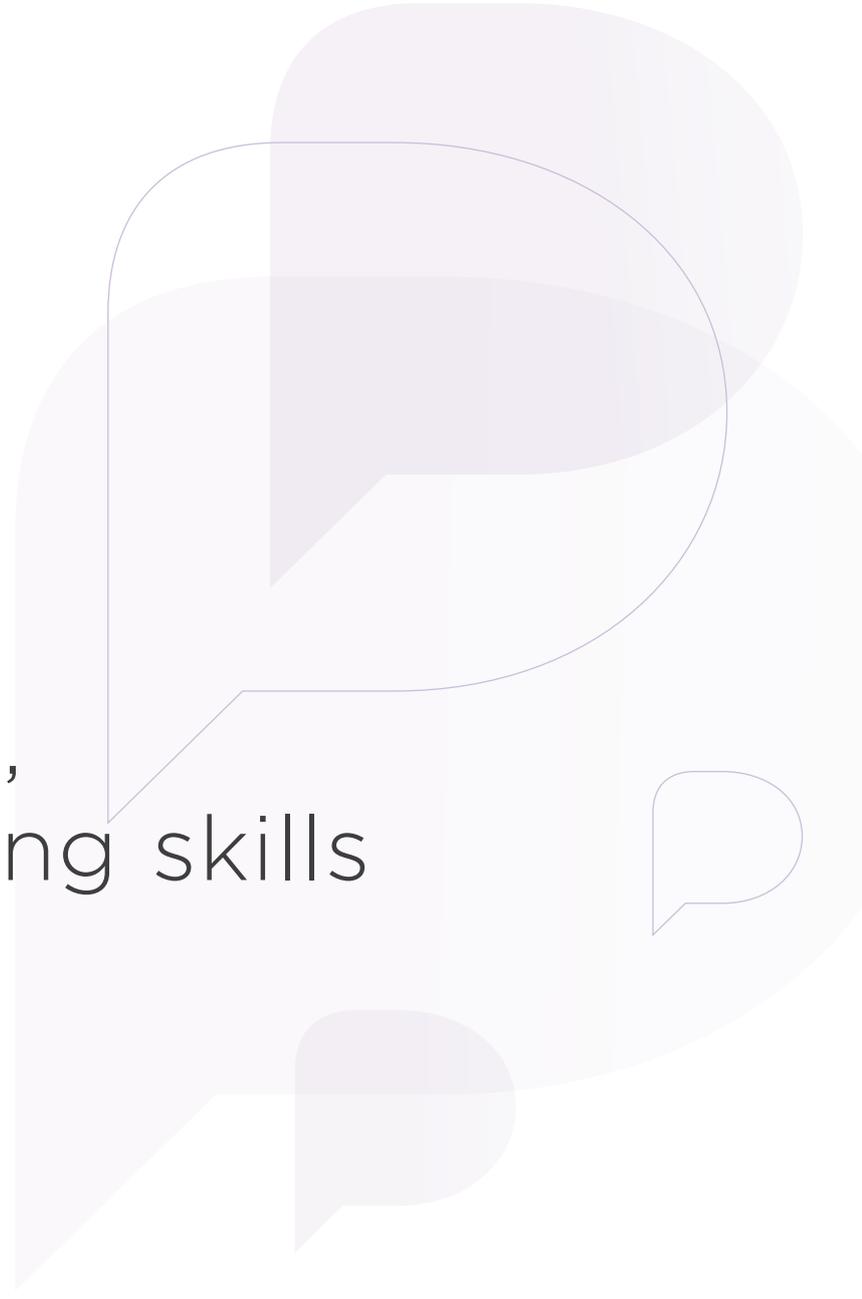# Case study – Mattel

April 2015

L&D:
Evolving roles, enhancing skills

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 135,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

About Towards Maturity

Towards Maturity is a benchmarking research company that provides independent expert advice and support to help organisations modernise learning in order to accelerate business performance. It leverages the data of its in-depth Benchmark Study, the largest learning benchmark in Europe. Since 2003 over 3,500 organisations and 17,000 learners have contributed to Towards Maturity's leading benchmarks. Thanks to the support of Towards Maturity's Ambassadors (27 learning organisations), annual benchmarking findings, case studies and resources are available to download for free at **www.towardsmaturity.org**

Acknowledgements

This report was written by **Ruth Stuart**, Research Adviser at the CIPD, and **Laura Overton**, Founder of Towards Maturity. We are indebted to all of the case study organisations who took part in the research; we specifically would like to thank:

- **Katharine Bollon** – Head of Workforce and Organisation Development, Barnardo's
- **Rob Carder** – Organisational Development Manager, Europe, Mattel International
- **Anita Esser** – Head of Wider Healthcare Teams Education, University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust

- **Kerry Georgiou** – Global Digital Learning Administrator, PwC
- **Colonel Garry Hearn** – Programme Manager, Training Business Change, Ministry of Defence (DCTT)
- **Lisa Johnson** – Assistant Director, Information Services, Learning and Communications, Barnardo's
- **Sarah Lindsell** – Director, Global & UK Learning Technology & Transformation, PwC
- **Sue Rawson** – Trainer, Information Services, Learning and Communications, Barnardo's
- **Mark Reilly** – Head of Corporate Training, McDonald's UK

- **Deborah Rudge** – Training Consultant, McDonald's UK
- **James Thorne** – HR Consultant, McDonald's UK
- **Simon Watt** – Director of Organisational Development, Mattel International
- members of the University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust HR and Training and Development (T&D) team.

We also thank the many learning practitioners who have completed the Towards Maturity benchmark since 2003 and in doing so have confidentially contributed to this research report.

Mattel case study

'The two most important things in structuring the team were being really clear on the scope of the roles, and getting proactive buy-in.'

Organisation summary

Mattel is a global kids' company, founded in 1945 with headquarters in California. The organisation employs 30,000 people across 40 countries worldwide, and sells toys in more than 150 countries. Mattel aims to achieve its vision, 'creating the future of play', through the development of kids' brands such as Barbie, HotWheels, Fisher Price, Monster High, Thomas and MEGA.

A changing context

As a kids' brand business, Mattel has been impacted by a number of external trends in recent years. Increasing globalisation has meant that brands can be leveraged across the world, while local consumer understanding is still critical to sales and marketing. For example, a marketing slogan that works in the US may not be effective in Mexico. As Simon Watt, Director of Organisational Development, describes, this creates a challenging dynamic:

'The dilemma there is how you make sure you maintain that cultural sensitivity while leveraging scale in regional cultural groups.'

As consumer habits have shifted, Mattel has also had to adapt. One simple example from Simon is that *'kids are getting older, younger'.* This means that children grow out of play patterns much faster than they did 15 years ago, driving the need for greater agility and product innovation. The organisation has focused on building an enabling culture to support this shift. For example, promoting the idea of 'failing fast' or 'low-level prototyping' involving testing out ideas at an early stage to determine real-world suitability. This cultural shift has involved a new way of looking at leadership:

'It is what leaders actually do at that crunch moment. Not what they do 99% of the time, but that 1% when somebody takes on an unexpected risk. If we imagine that the leaders have long been viewed as the traffic lights – with employees looking to them to see if they should proceed or not with their idea. Fostering the right culture doesn't mean that they should show "green" more often, it's about generating a fundamentally different relationship where the leader is seen as a traffic roundabout. Here, we trust that people will take a good look around and if it's safe to proceed, they will – and if it's too risky, they will wait and find a safe way to move forward. This shifts the innovation bottlenecks away from the leader and puts real accountability where it belongs.' **Simon**

Across the industry there is also a need to gain greater brand loyalty, to ensure sustainability. This means engaging both the child (the player), and the parent or relative (the shopper) in the toy brand:

'You don't just have to grow the brand and loyalty with the child, you have to work hard to understand the shopper and the gift-giver as well. That creates the need for a clear and frequent communication and collaboration across all the commercial functions.' **Simon**

Building scalable organisation development

All of these trends have in turn impacted learning and development in the organisation, and have necessitated increased investment in organisation development resource. Mattel has a small central corporate team, with HR generalists in each country. The business decided to introduce an international centre of excellence for organisation development (with a remit covering learning and development, talent and organisational structure). Simon's role was introduced, and in 2012 regional OD leads for Europe, Latin America and Asia were recruited. These roles were designed to work with the country teams and generalists to build capability, facilitate connections and drive change.

Simon explains how implementation of the new structure was carefully thought through:

'The two most important things in structuring the team were being really clear on the scope of the roles, and getting proactive buy-in. Not only from the leaders, the general managers and the functional leads, but also from the existing generalists. Supportive and collaborative relationships with the HR directors have been a crucial enabler.'

The skillset of those recruited was also very important to get right:

'I was crystal clear about the profile of these people. … Without the right individuals in those roles it wouldn't have succeeded.'

Simon used a simple model to target recruitment (Figure 9):

'I used that model when I was positioning this with my customers (for the managers and functional leads). I said, "We are not just interested in OD people. I am only looking at the best and within that I will only hire those that can fluently, confidently and convincingly speak the commercial language of our business."' **Simon**

Crucially, members of the HR generalist team were involved throughout the recruitment process. Initially they were asked what they wanted the role to deliver:

*'Answering that question was important, because we started off with quite a diverse response, and it was critical to get alignment on that before we even started to search for candidates. Then effectively **they** were* doing the hiring, **they** were fulfilling their needs rather than me.' **Simon**

Technical knowledge (such as succession planning or organisation design) was viewed as a given of the OD population in the outer circle. An assessment day was created to identify the best (the middle circle), and individuals in the centre circle demonstrated advanced communication, listening, consultancy and collaboration skills.
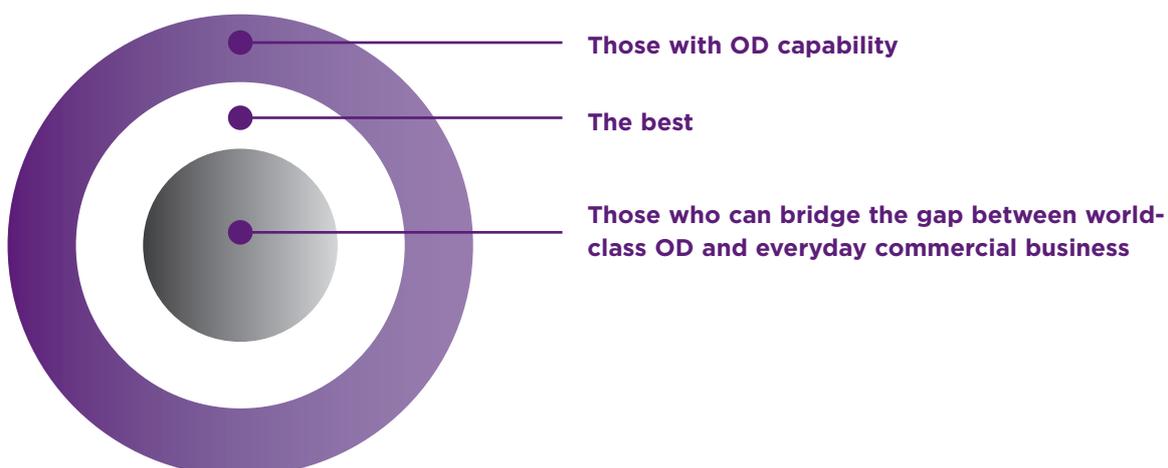
A range of stakeholders was involved in the assessment process, including the local HR team. A key piece of data used in the selection process was *'how much can I learn from this person?'* This approach helped build engagement in the new roles, before the individuals joined the team:

'I will never know how things would have turned out without this approach, but my guess is we wouldn't have been half as successful, and it would have taken twice as long.' **Simon**

A changing ethos

The team has made a number of changes alongside implementing the new structure, most importantly to focus on targeted interventions. This aligns with the company's overall focus on *'fewer, bigger, better'* (**Simon**).

Figure 9: Targeted model for recruitment

Those with OD capability

The best

Those who can bridge the gap between world-class OD and everyday commercial business

Simon strongly believes that learning and development interventions should be determined through consultative analysis, rather than relying on a training catalogue or menu-driven programme:

'My analogy has been, when you go to see your GP do you say, "Open up your medicine cabinet, show me what you have got and I will pick something that takes my fancy"? Of course you don't, you start off with some probing analysis.'

This approach meant directly focusing on building consultative skills among the HR and OD team, and asking the business-structured questions:

'Number one, what are your business objectives? As a business leader, what do you need to deliver to be paid your bonus? The second question is, what are the people implications of you either achieving or not achieving that?' **Simon**

An example Simon shares is that when the team were helping the organisation build digital skills, they asked questions such as, *'If you look at your ideal team in the future, what sort of things will they be doing that they are not doing today?'* This helped to bring the conversation down to behavioural terms:

'It's not about what knowledge you want them to acquire or what data you want them to access, but it is about what they are going to do with it – what actionable impact, what behavioural change do you want? Any successful development results in a behavioural shift and looking at it that way helps to be specific about the activity – as well as providing a clear way to measure your success.'

Rob Carder, Organisational Development Manager for Europe, agrees that asking the right questions is critical:

'I always try to organise meetings with people to ask them what their problems are. "What's the biggest challenge in your business at the moment?" … There's no better way to understand someone's world than understanding their biggest challenge, and therefore you know that you're going to concentrate on the right thing.'

As a result of this ethos, the team have stopped *'sheep-dipping'* and are focusing on bespoke development that aligns with business needs.

Evaluating learning
Learning evaluation has also shifted, with metrics now based on quality, rather than quantity. This has involved encouraging leaders to *'move away from inputs and to talk about outputs'.* Simon describes the background to the change:

'A few years ago my un-stated objective was that when I ask the business leaders what they think about organisation development, I don't want them to talk about activities such as workshops, projects or development initiatives. I want them to talk about tangible business outcomes made possible by sustainable behaviour change.'

The OD team all went through a Kirkpatrick qualification to support this change. Afterwards the team agreed that that they would *'talk about one outcome and that is changed behaviours. … That probably was the thing that had the biggest impact on our effectiveness'* (**Simon**).

Celebrating success
The team use storytelling techniques to celebrate success and enable good practice to spread through the HR and OD population:

'When someone delivers something great, you make sure that everyone else hears about it.' **Simon**

Simon shares an example which illustrates the changes that have been made. One region went from delivering nine brand marketing programmes in 2013, each with 20 people, to delivering one session in 2014 with 20 people. While from a quantity perspective the numbers were down, the business leaders agree that the quality and effectiveness of the programme increased *'a hundred fold'.* This was because the emphasis was placed on getting leadership buy-in prior to the programme:

'It wasn't about going out and commissioning consultants to create something new but people went into it with complete backing of their boss, and their boss's boss and the people around them. And critically with a very clear understanding of what they should do differently after this session.'

Then, a huge focus was placed on follow-up and measuring behaviour change through feedback mechanisms:

'Now the bottom line is, all that takes a lot of time and I would say we spent as much time on that one cohort as we did the previous year with nine cohorts. But the impact did massively, massively multiply.' **Simon**

And, ultimately, it is business impact that matters.

What comes next?
Regional Centres of Excellence are seen as a resounding success, so the next challenge is to leverage the scale even further. The organisation is now gearing up to provide global support from its El Segundo, California headquarters and the lessons learned over the past couple of years will stand them in good stead for this next exciting step in its evolution.

CIPD