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Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model

(180) ★★★★★

Analyzing Learning Effectiveness

Any time you deliver training to your team, you need to know how effective it's been. Are your people putting their learning into practice? And, is it positively impacting their role and the wider organization?

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model can help you to answer questions like these. You can use it to objectively analyze the impact of training, to work out how well your team members learned, and to improve their learning in the future.

In this article, we'll explore Kirkpatrick's model and how to apply it. We'll also consider situations where it may not be appropriate.

Understanding Kirkpatrick's Four Levels

Donald Kirkpatrick, former Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, first published his model in 1959. He updated it in 1975, and again in 1993, when he published his best-known work, "**Evaluating Training Programs**."

Each successive level of the model represents a more precise measure of the effectiveness of a training program. It was developed further by Donald and his son, James; and then by James and his wife, Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick.

In 2016, James and Wendy revised and clarified the original theory, and introduced the "New World Kirkpatrick Model" in their book, "**Four Levels of Training Evaluation**." One of the main additions is an emphasis on the importance of making training relevant to people's everyday jobs.

The four levels are **Reaction**, **Learning**, **Behavior**, and **Results**. We look at each level in greater detail, and explore how to apply it, below.

Level 1: Reaction

You want people to feel that training is valuable. Measuring how engaged they were, how actively they contributed, and how they reacted to the training helps you to understand how well they received it.

It also enables you to make improvements to future programs, by identifying important topics that might have been missing.

Questions to ask trainees include:

- Did you feel that the training was worth your time?
- Did you think that it was successful?
- What were the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the training?
- Did you like the venue and presentation style?
- Did the training session accommodate your personal **learning styles** 🧩?
- Were the training activities engaging?
- What are the three most important things that you learned from this training?
- From what you learned, what do you plan to apply in your job?
- What support might you need to apply what you learned?

Identify how you want to measure people's reactions. Many people use **employee satisfaction surveys** 🧩 to do this, but you can also watch trainees' **body language** 🧩 during the session, or ask for verbal feedback.

Analyze the feedback, and consider the changes that you could make in response.

Level 2: Learning

Level 2 focuses on measuring what your trainees have and haven't learned. In the New World version of the tool, Level 2 also measures what they think they'll be able to do differently as a result, how confident they are that they can do it, and how motivated they are to make changes.

This demonstrates how training has developed their skills, attitudes and knowledge, as well as their confidence and commitment.

To measure how much your trainees have learned, start by identifying what you want to evaluate. Training sessions should have specific **learning objectives** 📌, so make those your starting point.

You can measure learning in different ways, depending on the objectives. But it's helpful to measure these areas both before and after training.

Before the training begins, test your trainees to determine their knowledge, skill levels and attitudes. Then, when the training is finished, test your trainees a second time to measure what they have learned, or measure their learning with interviews or verbal assessments.

Note:

As a manager, you need to **hold people accountable** 📌 for improving their skills, and to offer them the support they need to do so.

Level 3: Behavior

This level helps you to understand how well people apply their training. It can also reveal where people might need help. But behavior can only change when conditions are favorable.

Imagine that you're assessing your team members after a training session. You can see little change, and you conclude that they learned nothing, and that the training was ineffective.

It's possible, however, that they actually learned a lot, but that the organizational or team culture obstructs behavioral change. Perhaps existing processes mean that there's little scope to apply new thinking, for example.

As a result, your people don't feel confident in applying new knowledge, or see few opportunities to do so. Or, they may not have had enough time to put it into practice.

Be sure to develop processes that encourage, reinforce and reward positive changes in behavior. The New World Kirkpatrick Model calls these processes "required drivers." If a team member uses a new skill effectively, highlight this and praise him or her for it.

Effectively measuring behavior is a longer-term process that should take place over weeks or months following the initial training. Questions to ask include:

- Did the trainees put any of their learning to use?
- Are trainees able to teach their new knowledge, skills or attitudes to other people?
- Are trainees aware that they've changed their behavior?

One of the best ways to measure behavior is to conduct observations and interviews.

people have the chance to demonstrate what they know.

Tip:

Managers need to be closely involved at this stage, assessing and **coaching** ⊕ their team members in making behavior changes.

Level 4: Results

At this level, you analyze the final results of your training. This includes outcomes that you or your organization have decided are good for business and good for your team members, and which demonstrate a good return on investment (ROI). (Some adapted versions of the model actually have a Level 5, dedicated to working out ROI.)

Level 4 will likely be the most costly and time-consuming. Your biggest challenge will be to identify which outcomes, benefits, or final results are most closely linked to the training, and to come up with an effective way to measure these outcomes in the long term.

Modern trainers often **use the Kirkpatrick model backward**, by first stating the results that they want to see, and then developing the training that is most likely to deliver them. This helps to prioritize the goals of the training and make it more effective.

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Here are some outcomes to consider, depending on the objectives of your training:

- Increased employee retention.
- Increased production.
- Higher morale.
- Reduced waste.
- Increased sales.
- Higher quality ratings.
- Increased customer satisfaction.
- Fewer staff complaints.