

CREATING A POST-TRAINING EVALUATION PLAN

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Many training and development professionals stay in the comfortable world of Kirkpatrick Level 1 and Level 2 evaluations. Their reasons for avoiding on-the-job behaviour and organisational results often include "It's too expensive," "It's too difficult," "It's not part of our job" or "We don't have access to training participants after they leave training". But reaching Kirkpatrick Level 3 or Level 4 is not as difficult, time-consuming, or expensive as many believe.

A cautionary tale

What's at stake by working strictly on the learning side of the equation? Perhaps your job. Consider the following scenario. Three years ago, we presented a one-hour lunch-and-learn to approximately 100 training professionals at a large corporation. Our message was clear: It is no longer sufficient to develop and deliver training solutions. Instead, professionals in our field need to reinvent themselves into true, strategic business partners. The

likely consequence of not doing so is to be replaced by technology that can inexpensively deliver training content.

One person in the rather disengaged group retorted, "Well, with all due respect, we are exceptions to that trend. This beautiful facility was constructed for us within the past year because our company executives know that training is valuable to our business." Six months later, we found out that 75 of those attendees were made redundant.

The bottom line is that training and development professionals cannot afford to concern themselves only with learning—and assume that performance and results are someone else's responsibility. Here are practical, tips to help you create a powerful post-training implementation and evaluation plan.

Begin with the end in mind

At the beginning of any learning initiative, consider the highest level result our organisation is charged with accomplishing. Use this sort of Level 4 result as your target. If you cannot describe how the intended learning solution will positively affect the overall target result, you are not on the right track or the initiative is not truly mission critical. Next, think about the specific actions or Level 3 behaviours the training participants must perform to contribute to that result. Make sure that expected behaviours can be observed and measured. This is particularly important for soft skills programs such as leadership development. A good critical behaviour for leadership development is, "Touch base weekly with all direct reports."

The goal of training would be to provide a model for leaders to effectively touch base with colleagues. When you begin your needs analysis and program design with the end in mind, you are setting the stage to create and demonstrate the value of your program. Once you clarify what you want people to do and how it will contribute to organisational results, you can move to developing the learning objectives and designing training.

Build post-training activities during program design

Research by Robert O. Brinkerhoff shows that only 15 percent of what is learned during training will be applied on the job if it is not reinforced and monitored. Creating a post-training support structure as part of the initial training design and development process increases the likelihood that resources will produce a measurable increase in performance.

Effective reinforcement activities and tools ask "Is training working?" instead of "Did training work?" When developed in this way, issues can be identified and remedied before they decrease the effectiveness of learning and overall business results. Here are three actions to follow:

- Work with the managers before designing the solution to determine critical behaviours that training participants will need to perform on the job. Discuss their roles in supporting good on-the-job performance, and outline any tools and assistance they will need to do their part.
- Write learning objectives as statements of how a training initiative will prepare participants to perform critical behaviours on the job. For example, "After this program, learners will be able to accurately enter an order into the system."
- Design post-training follow-up while you design the training materials. Think of the training program not as an event, but as an ongoing process with multiple components. Be sure to create job aids, refreshers, and reminders that reinforce learning.

Explain performance expectations to learners

The purpose of training is to prepare participants to perform certain tasks effectively on the job. This basic objective is often lost in a misguided focus on Level 1 reaction and Level 2 learning evaluations.

Here are some practical ideas for preparing participants for on-the-job

Kirkpatrick Model

Level 4: Results

To what degree targeted outcomes occur as a result of the learning event(s) and subsequent reinforcement

Level 3: Behaviour

To what degree participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job

Level 2: Learning

To what degree participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills and attitude based on their participation in the learning event

Level 1: Reaction

To what degree participants react favorably to the learning event

Source: Kirkpatrick Partners

implementation during the training program:

- Introduce all job aids during the training session, and have participants practice using them during activities.
- Perform occasional pulse checks by asking, "How do you think you might use this information on the job?"
- Describe thoroughly any follow-up activities so participants can prepare for them.
- Discuss participants' confidence and commitment to apply what they learned near the end of the program. Allow plenty of time for concerns to surface and for participants to reflect and support one another.

Use technology for support activities

Most training and development professionals are so busy that it's difficult to be systematic about good program design and execution. But if you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?

Take advantage of technology to schedule and automate refresher messages that you can draft during program design and development. Use web-based meetings to follow up and

share progress; record these for those who are unable to attend or for those who want them as a reminder later.

Ask participants to share examples of how they are implementing what they learned, and if they need any additional resources to be successful. In addition, automate reminder emails to reach out to managers of program participants.

Monitor findings and make adjustments

Numerous factors influence on-the-job performance. Failing to identify, monitor, and correct these factors allows them to negatively affect performance and reduce the impact that training can have on overall business results.

As you gather preliminary information about performance, make adjustments to follow-up and future programs. Changes are normal and to be expected. Equally important to using evaluation data to modify training and reinforcement is keeping stakeholders, managers, and training participants informed of overall progress. Ask stakeholders at the beginning of the initiative how they would like to receive progress reports (for example, written presentation, dashboard, or debriefing).

Once training participants have started to perform critical behaviours, make regular reports. Don't wait for final numbers and big changes; report incremental steps in the right direction to keep everyone motivated and confident. To be sure, stakeholders are demanding more tangible results from training initiatives, often on a reduced budget. Training and development professionals who can establish themselves as business partners and demonstrate on-the-job application of knowledge will be valued as key contributors to achieving core business results.

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