MEASURING AND EVALUATING THE RESULTS

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When you make your workshop available, how do you know it will be successful? This is a concern for the learning professional and for those sponsoring the learning initiative. When measuring success you need to ask, “Did the learners’ behavior change as a result of participating in the learning experience?”

Create a Measurement Plan

Creating a plan to gather measurement metrics is integral to any learning experience, and evaluating the results of a Cafeteria Learning workshop is not all that different from evaluating other learning methods. Planning allows you to identify the data to collect so you can validate that the learning outcome has been achieved. With Cafeteria Learning, you can start your measurement plan by asking questions such as:

Were the learning objectives met?

Did learners enjoy the learning experience?

Did they learn something?

Are they applying what they learned?

What impact did their learning have on the organization?

Were there unintentional outcomes of the learning experience for the organization?

Without a measurement plan, you’ll miss out on the opportunity to understand whether your workshop achieved the desired results, so it’s critically important to think about what you want to measure in the early stages of creating a learning experience. When considering your measurement metrics, the best place to start is usually by examining both your desired learning outcome and your stated learning objectives.

For a Cafeteria Learning workshop, the measurement plan can be simple: Using the learning objectives, you can survey the learners before and after the workshop to evaluate, on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being highest, the effectiveness of the learning. On the day of the workshop, before getting started, you or the facilitator can ask each learner to complete a quick survey with questions aligned to the learning objectives and again, at the end of the workshop. For a workshop on training your sales team, you might ask, “Are you able to identify the basic components of the sales process?”

Unintended Outcomes

Sometimes, no matter how much you plan, the learning may result in unintended outcomes. In other words, there may be outcomes not directly related to the intended outcomes or objectives, but that may nevertheless arise as a result of the learning initiative. We have yet to find a formula to officially plan and prepare for these occurrences, but we found if we are open to them, they may just present themselves.

One good example of an unintended outcome in Cafeteria Learning is that learners will often form new business relationships with coworkers due to the social and interactive nature of the methodology. Although this may not be one of the primary objectives or intended outcomes, it is a beneficial side effect that’s worth measuring. Our measurement metric in this case might be the number of learners who formed new business relationships with colleagues. Some other unintended outcomes as a result of a Cafeteria Learning experience may be:

Learners are highly engaged, contributing to an increased ability to retain content.

Learning is experiential, which has a higher translation to action and application.

Learners experience a high degree of interaction and exchange of ideas, which clearly honors others’ perspectives and adds depth and perspective to their own.

Learners learn through opportunities to teach and share with others.

Learners practice their active listening skills.

Learners are able to characterize what they have gained from the learning experience, even without explicitly stating the course objectives.

Implementing a Measurement Plan

Now that you have an idea of what you want to measure, consider how you want to measure your stated metrics. For example, how might you evaluate your learners’ ability to explain three strategies to implement brain-based learning principles? There is no one way to measure a metric; numerous methods exist for capturing and evaluating data. For this example, let’s use the Kirkpatrick Partners method of evaluation, which is based on four levels of evaluation.

Level 1 Reaction: (Measure immediately at the end of the workshop). How did learners react to the learning immediately after completing it? Level 1 is the most basic of the four levels, and it doesn’t on its own help you evaluate whether the learning objectives or intended outcome were met. When used in combination with other levels of measurement, it can be a useful tool for gauging participants’ levels of engagement and enjoyment, which is valuable in its own right. Some common methods for Level 1 include:

asking learners questions about their reactions to the learning experience

asking learners to complete comment cards

observing engagement levels during the workshop

receiving spontaneous feedback.

Level 2 Learning: (Measure before, during, or immediately at the end of the workshop).How much did the learners learn? Level 2 evaluates the skills or knowledge that learners have acquired as a result of the learning. In other words, have the learning objectives been met? Some common methods for Level 2 include:

immediately evaluate the knowledge the learners have at the end of the workshop

implementing a pre-test/post-test to determine how skills and knowledge have increased as a result of the learning

asking participants what they’ve learned and documenting their feedback.

Level 3 Behavior: (Measure 30 to 90 days after the end of the workshop). How have learners changed their behavior? Level 3 seeks to determine whether learners are actually applying what they’ve learned in their day-to-day work at least 30 days after the workshop. You will want to make sure to provide enough time for learners to synthesize and apply the learning. Some common methods for Level 3 include:

surveying the manager of an employee to assess whether the employee’s behavior has changed

asking learners to describe how or if they are applying the learning

observing learners in their day-to-day working environment.

Level 4 Results: (Measure at least 90 days after the end of the workshop). What are the results to the organization? Is there a change in the business as a result of learners applying what they’ve learned? Has the desired business outcome been achieved? When learners are provided with tools to apply what they learned and using them results in a clear business impact, a correlation between learning and results can be made. Methods for evaluating Level 4 results will differ depending on the intended business outcomes, but often come in the form of hard metrics such as:

monitoring key performance Indicators, such as sales volume or generation of new business (when the targeted outcome is increased sales volume)

capturing employee turnover rates (when the targeted outcome is decreased turnover)

asking customers their level of satisfaction (when the targeted outcome is increased customer satisfaction rates).

With Level 4 evaluation being the most challenging to measure but worth the effort, consider these broad guidelines: establish reliable points of reference, allow enough time for change to occur, and continue to measure results at specific points after the workshop. And remember that Level 4 might not be appropriate for all learning efforts, a cost-benefit analysis can help save you from wasted resources when a simpler level of evaluation may have been more appropriate.

Using Baseline Metrics

Another important piece of the measurement and evaluation process involves capturing baseline metrics. After all, the relevance of the data captured during this process can only become clear when compared to a baseline metric. For example, capturing a business unit’s sales volume tells you little unless you can compare it to sales volume in the periods preceding your sales training. Did sales volume increase or decrease from the baseline metric?

When establishing baseline metrics, consider sources of existing data and pre-program questions you might want to ask. Look at the organization or business unit that you are creating the learning experience for and identify existing data they are already capturing. You might be able to use this data as a baseline metric for a measurement plan.

If you were to design a Cafeteria Learning workshop for performance reviews, for example, you could consult with HR to identify the information they are already tracking. With the outcome being to increase managers’ ability to set clear expectations for employees and hold them accountable for results, data around the number of performance improvement plans could be captured. Because HR has years of data on this metric, it can become one of the baseline metrics to help evaluate whether the desired outcome was being met as a result of the learning. An increase in performance improvement plans would be evidence that the managers were applying the skills they developed around setting clear expectations and holding employees accountable.

Chapter Summary

Measuring and evaluating may provide proof that the desired learning outcome and objectives were met, the learning experience investment was worthwhile, and the learning effort had a positive impact on the business. Careful evaluation can ultimately help you demonstrate the value that progressive learning models such as Cafeteria Learning can hold for your organization.