

Based on the Groundbreaking Work of Donald L. Kirkpatrick

KIRKPATRICK'S

FOUR LEVELS of TRAINING EVALUATION



RESULTS



BEHAVIOR



LEARNING



REACTION

JAMES D. and WENDY KAYSER
KIRKPATRICK

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FOUR LEVELS

of TRAINING

EVALUATION

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KIRKPATRICK

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Foreword by Don Kirkpatrick

(as expressed to Jim Kirkpatrick)

Dear Reader,

The foreword you are about to read is the last that we will have from my dear dad, Don Kirkpatrick. I wrote his words as he dictated them to me during his final days. I hope that you will take to heart his last wishes for the training industry, which he asked me to share with you.

*Sincerely,
Jim Kirkpatrick*

Greetings,

I am pleased that my original book, *Evaluating Training Programs*, first published in 1993, is being replaced by an updated work. Jim and Wendy, my oldest son and daughter-in-law, are writing it. They have taken the model to depths I never dreamed of, calling it the New World Kirkpatrick Model. They explained to me many of the updates that you will learn about in this book: the end is the beginning, required drivers, business partnerships, and leading indicators.

I would like to say some things about training evaluation and my model. First, the legacy I leave will be the four levels, not me. I am glad that I got to meet many of you, and some of you enjoyed the way I taught the four levels (with my overhead projector and Packer song). My wish for you is that you find ways to use the model to better train people, that it improves the way they do their work, and that it ultimately contributes to the goals of your organization.

I also hope you acknowledge and remember the power of genuine person-to-person interaction in training and evaluation. Surveys and technology are fine, but the bridges that you build with your trainees and their managers, and the conversations you have with them, will add humanness to training content and evaluation data.

I am tired, my precious wife, Fern, has passed away, and I have given all I have to give. I am so very thankful for Wendy and Jim and the rest of my family, and for all of you who use my four levels.

I leave you with the last stanza of a poem that I think will encourage you:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

(ROBERT FROST, 1916)

Don Kirkpatrick
1924–2014

Foreword by Elaine Biech

It was 1954, and Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick was completing his dissertation. To hear him tell the story of the creation of the four levels, listeners could be lulled into believing that it wasn't a big deal. But it was a big deal—a really big deal.

Little did Don know the impact he would create with those four functional words:

- Reaction
- Learning
- Behavior
- Results

The four levels are pragmatic and straightforward. The simplicity of the Kirkpatrick Model has stood the test of time. Its practicality provides the profession with a logical approach to driving and evaluating the results of training and development.

The four levels and I go way back. Don Kirkpatrick and I both lived in Wisconsin, and we Wisconsinites are generally proud of our heritage. Don and I cheered for the Packers and the Badgers together. We ate thick, juicy burgers from the grill and gabbed about fishing on his boat. Since we both worked in the field of training and development (T&D), conversation always came around to evaluation. Don was adamant that the four levels were simply inevitable. He didn't like much attention and scoffed at being called a legend. He believed, in his unassuming way, that what he did was simply a matter of necessity; he created a method so the profession could evaluate the results of training and development.

Years later, Don, his son Jim, and daughter-in-law Wendy worked together to leverage Don's original work. Their meaningful, ground-breaking discussions led to the creation of the New World Kirkpatrick Model. Let's explore how the three Kirkpatricks expanded the model and why evaluation is critical to you and the future of the training industry.

ADDIE and Evaluation

Evaluation has always taken a back seat to training. It's the last thing most of us think about. Let's examine ADDIE, the instructional systems design (ISD) model that most of us use. A-D-D-I-E. There it is. E. Evaluate. Right at the end of the most important T&D acronym. Most of us know that a critical part of our job is to be able to *evaluate* our results. If you are effective, you evaluate, but you will be less effective if you wait until the end of ADDIE to consider what you will evaluate.

Let's review the ADDIE model to see how evaluation plays a valuable role in every ADDIE phase.

A—Analysis

This is the phase during which designers clarify the expectation—exactly what business result does the organization need to accomplish? What is the expected new behavior? What will it take to make those behaviors occur? How will we measure these things? To help define the design, you identify targeted business objectives, evaluate job performance, existing courses, task functions, learner characteristics, the timeline, learning constraints, and a host of other inputs to ensure you are on the right path.

To be truly effective, you must begin the *evaluation* process in the Analysis phase. The New World Kirkpatrick Model emphasizes identifying results (Level 4) up front. Identifying the *return on stakeholder expectations* provides indicators of value from a program or initiative. To identify specific measures, T&D professionals must ask questions to clarify and refine the expectations of key business stakeholders.

Questions include: What skills do your employees require? What should employees be doing on the job? What will cause them to perform those behaviors? What desired outcomes will your organization experience if these things occur?

These questions lead to observable, measurable business or mission outcomes and, of course, practical Levels 3 and 4 measures. When you think about it, this is the only way that makes sense! As Stephen Covey would say, “Plan with the end in mind.”

D—Design

In this phase, designers write objectives, create evaluation tools, develop assessment instruments, determine media selection, and address other delivery details. Focusing on the shared requirements of the training department, supervisors and senior leaders ensure that the program will accomplish the desired return on stakeholder expectations.

For an effective design, you need to continue with the *evaluation* process in the design phase.

It is the best time to design your overall training strategy—planning what will occur before, during, and after training events. Evaluation is no exception to this rule. Determine what questions will be effective to measure Level 1 Reaction. What tests are needed to measure Level 2 Learning? What surveys or supervisory follow-up will effectively measure Level 3 Behavior change? Additionally, what methods of accountability and support will be designed for use after the training, and how will implementation be ensured? Finally, what tools will be best for gathering data to measure Level 4 Results? The answers to each of these questions supply data to determine whether the effort meets expectations.

D—Development

This is the phase during which learning and performance activities and materials are developed and instruction defined. Technology is also developed or integrated. Everything comes together in the development phase. Evaluation tools should be developed alongside the program materials.

The formative evaluation that occurs during this phase of instructional design helps to ensure that learners will reach the organization's performance and business objectives. This phase gives the designer an opportunity to validate and evaluate the instructional plans to ensure that the focus remains on the learner and the design leads to performance and results. This validation is often achieved by evaluating small-group trials. Evaluation in the development phase is directly related to the ultimate success of the training effort and determines whether it achieves the final expectations.

I—Implement

This phase includes the actual delivery of the learning and development, whether in an instructor-led virtual or traditional session, or in an asynchronous session. The learners have an opportunity to evaluate their experience using Level 1 Reaction and Level 2 Learning evaluations. Often these evaluations occur at the end of the class, but why wait until the end to evaluate?

You can obtain feedback and data on an ongoing basis so that you can make adjustments before it is too late. Even observing participants' behavior gives you clues about their satisfaction. Do they smile? Are they interested? Involved? Do they ask questions? Behavioral cues are good barometers; however, they give you incomplete feedback. Verify your impressions with an evaluation. To supplement an official Level 1 at the end of a section or a day, I like to give each participant an index card and ask them to rate the experience on a 1–7 scale, providing one reason they rated it as they did. Or you could ask them to complete a sentence, “I still need more information about . . .”

In a deeper, more strategic sense, implementation also includes follow-up after training. This broader view of implementation including Levels 1–3 drives performance instead of simply confirming readiness.

It's easy to connect *evaluation* with the implement phase. Remember, though, that you do not need to wait until the end.

E—Evaluate

This phase occurs continuously throughout the first four phases. If you've done your job all the way through the ADDIE model, evaluation becomes a placeholder at this point. It serves to remind you that it's not over until you can demonstrate that the effort meets expectations. That means that you must stay involved by connecting with supervisors and monitoring progress.

Evaluation is often viewed as a final step, but in actuality, what I'm stressing is that it starts the ADDIE process and plays a role in every phase along the way. The E doesn't belong just at the end; it belongs in every phase. Perhaps ADDIE should be A_e D_e D_e I_e E to demonstrate that evaluation is a critical sub-step in each phase.

Whether you use the ADDIE model as prescribed or some other ISD version, you will be more effective and efficient if you evaluate within every phase. Evaluation is a critical step that should not be relegated to the end of the ADDIE process.

Embrace Evaluation

Finally, why should you care? What is the big deal about evaluation? Well, it is the one way that you can ensure that your organization sits up and takes notice of you and your department. When you focus on Level 4 Results, you determine organizational needs and identify performance gaps that may prevent the achievement of the results your organization requires. Conducting an organizational needs analysis and deciding what behavior at Level 3 is required to achieve the results is your road to success. Accelerate your results by using effective measures that drive and evaluate the performance and results and show that you have achieved a return on stakeholders' expectations. Demonstrating a return on the investment of training through evaluation is your route toward a true business partnership within your organization.

Embrace evaluation. It is training and development's bottom line.

Yes, the four levels have stood the test of time, becoming the most widely used training evaluation model in the world over the last 60-plus years. When I facilitate train-the-trainer sessions, I love the evaluation section. Why? Because when I ask the participants how many have heard of Kirkpatrick's four levels, almost all raise their hands. And when I ask them to recite the four levels, over half can state them

accurately. Unfortunately, how they implement the four levels may vary widely—often not as effectively as the model could be implemented. Although Don died in 2014, the impact of his four words—Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results—and the spirit of his work lives on through Jim and Wendy as they share the New World Kirkpatrick Model with all of us.

Don, Jim, and Wendy expanded the original model to create a powerful methodology—one that melds people with the metrics. Whenever I work with the Kirkpatricks their extensive knowledge about and their deep passion for our profession astounds me. They truly understand that evaluation is not just about analytics and metrics. It is more about the human spirit behind the measures and the need for consistent human interface along the way. The four levels are better than ever!

This book presents the most effective and logical evaluation approach. Jim and Wendy show you how to achieve the most from your evaluation practices. They address some of the Kirkpatrick myths. Most important, they present you with a clear plan to create and demonstrate training's value to your organization. Jim and Wendy present a pragmatic, as well as contemporary, approach to evaluating training. I will be surprised if you do not learn something new as you read about the realistic New World Kirkpatrick Model.

Elaine Biech
Norfolk, VA
April 2016

Preface

It is a humbling honor and a challenge to attempt to fill the shoes of our late father and father-in-law, Dr. Don Kirkpatrick. Don created what is now known as the Kirkpatrick Model, or the four levels, as the basis of his PhD dissertation at the University of Wisconsin in the 1950s. He was subsequently asked to describe these techniques for evaluating training programs in a series of four articles in 1959, which appeared in the *Journal of the American Society of Training Directors*.

From there, thousands of training professionals around the world read the articles and implemented the principles in their work. Because Don never established a business entity or actively promoted his model, use grew organically. It is quite a testament to the model that without sales, marketing, products, or any fanfare, it became the most widely used training evaluation model in the world.

The content in this book has been in the making for nearly 60 years. Over the course of those decades, Don's oldest son, Jim, was using and experimenting with the model in his own work as a training director and later as a consultant. Through this application and in using his expertise in education and psychology, it became clear that the model was not being implemented in a way that would maximize on-the-job application and subsequent business results. Several misassumptions and faulty practices were the culprits. Since the model was left to morph and be interpreted by each individual user for several decades, suffice it to say there are numerous variations as well as misconceptions about its application that are readily available on the Internet, in books, and in presentations around the world.

We have observed that many training professionals say they are “using Kirkpatrick,” yet are following dated practices that are failing to create and demonstrate organizational value with their training. We tried to finesse these recommendations over the years, but three years ago decided to help put these changes on the fast track. We felt it was time to set the record straight by writing a book with a more complete description of the model and how to properly apply it in today's work environment. Thus, we introduce you to the New World Kirkpatrick Model. For

those of you who have struggled with “getting to Levels 3 and 4,” the concepts, principles, and techniques found in this book will now allow you to do so without breaking the budget.

The good news about Jim’s decades of application and Wendy’s more recent efforts is that they also uncovered and developed practical new truths and processes that maintain the four levels as the most popular evaluation model in the world. While the original four levels live on, the manner in which they are implemented is significantly different than what was outlined in earlier editions. This book is a necessary update to every training professional’s library.

We are so grateful for the wonderful support we have received from the training industry in general as we carry on Don’s work and show the timeless relevance of the simple and elegant principles he introduced more than 60 years ago. In particular, we would like to thank ATD Press for partnering with us on this.

We would also like to thank the contributors to this book. It takes a lot of time, and it also takes bravery to step up and share personal experiences in a way that puts them out there for others to analyze and critique. Without these examples, the principles just don’t mean as much.

We also want to give special thanks to the editorial team, both within Kirkpatrick Partners and at ATD Press. Early in our marriage, when we were writing our first book together, Wendy said, “I won a writing contest in 7th grade.” Jim said, “I got an F+ in English. The professor knew I tried really hard, so that was why he added the plus.” Suffice it to say, writing a book with one’s spouse is not the easiest of endeavors.

Finally, we want to thank those of you who have helped us uncover, develop, and fine-tune these concepts and principles into real-world successes. The New World Kirkpatrick Model came primarily from our working with L&D practitioners from the real world of work rather than from the privacy and comforts of our offices in Georgia. Those who have climbed the mountain before you now light the way for all to benefit.

We sincerely hope you find this book practical and applicable to your work. We also love to hear from you! Please tell us how you are using it, and perhaps you will be featured in a future piece.

Jim and Wendy Kirkpatrick
Newnan, GA
April 2016

PART 1

Basics of Evaluation

Part 1 explains the urgent need to evaluate training programs to maximize and demonstrate their value to the organization. In this section the four levels are introduced. Created in the 1950s by the late Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick, they form the most-used training evaluation model in the world.

The New World Kirkpatrick Model, introduced in 2009, builds on and modernizes the four levels to maximize their effectiveness in today's business world. The model, which forms the basis of the advice offered in this book, is outlined in chapter 2.

Before training can be evaluated, however, it is important that it is designed well from the start, so that there is some value to evaluate and report. Chapters 3 and 4 provide practical guidance for creating an effective evaluation strategy for any program or initiative. Even those who are educated in classic training evaluation principles are surprised by the modern, practical approach of the New World Kirkpatrick Model.

CHAPTER 1

Reasons for Evaluating

Maxine, a training specialist with a major corporation for seven years, could not believe her eyes as she read the letter that the human resources representative had just handed to her:

The Training Specialist position has been eliminated as part of a necessary reduction in force to align company resources with business needs. Your last day of employment is today . . .

Maxine liked her job in the training department. She really felt that she had helped the business by creating good training programs and was particularly surprised to receive the notice because she had never said no to any training request sent her way. She thought she was a great team player.

How did Maxine get blindsided in this way? The reasons for evaluating training can shed some light on what happened.

The Urgent Need to Create and Demonstrate Training Value

Around the world, training and development is in a state of crisis. Training budgets are among the first to be cut when economic times get tough, and it's no wonder—training departments often see training as an end unto itself, rather than something that is simply a contributor to on-the-job performance. This lack of connection to performance and accomplishing key organizational results puts training into the “nice to have” category, instead of something that is required for organizational

success. Failure to make a strong business case for training as something that is required to enhance performance and to measurably contribute to the most important organizational outcomes has left training in a precarious position.

Training professionals who think only about training events and not what happens before and particularly after them will become extinct. They are already being replaced by inexpensive off-the-shelf and outsourced training. These will probably be no more effective, but they are less expensive and will likely be equally effective.

Whether you're one of the in-house survivors or a struggling consultant, no training professional can coast indefinitely on lofty notions about continuous learning and employee development. Training professionals should question the purpose behind all training, even if it is requested or budgeted. There should be a conversation about the specific result that the training should support, and what the targeted group will have to do on the job to accomplish it.

You need to provide compelling evidence that training delivers bottom-line results and contributes to mission accomplishment. Training must reinvent itself and transcend the classroom to earn its budget and maintain its existence. Savvy business professionals and enlightened organizations know that training has little value unless what is learned gets applied on the job, and the subsequent on-the-job performance contributes to key organizational outcomes.

This book will explain how to create and implement an effective training evaluation strategy to fit and drive your training and performance initiatives, whether formal or informal, so that you can help to create and demonstrate the organizational value of your work. An effective strategy will ensure that your valuable, limited resources are dedicated to the programs and interventions that will bring about the most impact.

Employing these principles in your work will earn you a seat at the proverbial table with business executives and secure your future as a valuable resource and key partner in accomplishing organizational results. Training evaluation can be intimidating for some training professionals; fortunately, this book will use the Kirkpatrick Model, a straightforward, four-level approach that is elegant in its simplicity, making it equally straightforward to understand and implement. The Kirkpatrick Model is founded on the belief that training professionals can create and demonstrate the organizational value of their training without hiring costly outside consultants. The aim of both the model and this book is to show you how to do it yourself, with whatever resources you possess.

It is also important to note that the use of the word *training* relates to more than traditional classroom training. In the context of this book, it may be used to describe classroom training, e-learning, informal learning, social learning, or any type of modality in which individuals gain knowledge or skills to do their jobs more effectively.

Three Reasons to Evaluate Training Programs

There are three major reasons to evaluate training programs:

1. to improve the program
2. to maximize transfer of learning to behavior and subsequent organizational results
3. to demonstrate the value of training to the organization.

Evaluating to Improve the Program

Most training professionals are accustomed to evaluating training programs for the purpose of improving the program. Using formative (during the program) and summative (after the program) methods, they ask questions related to how participants enjoyed the program, whether they learned key information, and how the program might be improved for future sessions. This type of information is useful to learning and performance professionals to gauge the quality of their training programs, materials, and presenters. If evaluation of the training program shows that the program was well received and key information was learned, then the program can be called effective training.

Effective training: Well-received training that provides relevant knowledge and skills to the participants and the confidence to apply them on the job

Effective training is likely what many training professionals feel they are charged to deliver, and perhaps what is literally included in their job descriptions. However, most organizations are actually expecting more from the training department; they are expecting what is learned in training to be implemented on the job, and the implementation to make a measurable difference in key organizational results.

Returning to Maxine's story will punctuate the importance of going beyond simply providing effective training. About six months prior, Maxine was called to a meeting with Bernie, the sales manager. Bernie said that sales were down, so some product knowledge training should be conducted the following month in an off-site, one-day training event.

Maxine took the bait. She accepted the assignment and returned to her office to begin designing some product training, pulling from existing resources and developing others. After all, her job description was to deliver training to support company goals.

Sound familiar? This type of training order occurs around the globe daily.

The problem was that Maxine had no idea what was causing sales to drop, and she had no idea if lack of product knowledge was part of the cause. She designed and delivered a wonderful, effective training program. She confirmed that each sales rep had good product knowledge before leaving the program, and she reported these findings promptly to Bernie a few days after the event.

Unbeknown to Maxine, sales not only did not increase after training, they actually continued to drop. Bernie knew there were probably multiple causes, but he ultimately viewed the training as part of the problem. Unfortunately, the sales decrease was actually not due to a lack of sales representative product knowledge, so the training was a waste of resources.

This brings us to our next purpose of training evaluation.

Evaluating to Maximize Transfer of Learning to Behavior and Subsequent Organizational Results

More savvy training professionals realize that even the most well-designed and well-received training programs are of little use unless what is learned in training is relevant and gets implemented on the job. This is often called the transfer of learning to behavior. It is here where deliberate implementation of the Kirkpatrick Model will actually help to increase the degree of on-the-job application and, thus, impact to the business or organizational mission. If what was learned translates into improved job performance, then it is possible for better organizational results to be achieved. If training evaluation shows that on-the-job performance increased and results improved, then training effectiveness has occurred.

Training effectiveness: Training and follow-up leading to improved job performance that positively contributes to key organizational results

Returning to our story about Maxine and Bernie's sales training: Maxine could have done a lot more for her organization by having a conversation with Bernie about his sales training request. She could have asked some probing questions about what Bernie thought might be causing the decrease in sales. She could have asked his permission to informally interview a handful of the reps to get their opinions. Ultimately, what she needed to find out was what needed to change in on-the-job performance to improve results; in this case, sales volume.

If Maxine could have gotten this information, she could have made sure prior to investing the time and resources in a training program that training was actually going to help solve the problem. She might have found out that product knowledge was not the issue at all; perhaps a competitor had recently entered the market,

introducing competition that did not previously exist. In that case, training on how the competitor's product compared to the company's product and how to effectively sell the company's product might have been a better use of resources.

When training professionals get out of the training order-taking mode and instead consider training requests as an invitation to a conversation about increasing performance and maximizing results, the stage is set for training value, the situation that training professionals need to have occur.

After training professionals partner with the business and design, develop, deliver, and evaluate training that improves performance and results, the next thing they need to do is to show that value in terms that their stakeholders understand and appreciate.

Evaluating to Demonstrate the Value of Training to the Organization

One of the most common excuses L&D professionals use to refute the possibility of demonstrating value is, "There are just too many variables for us to demonstrate the value of our training." This book will eliminate this excuse going forward, and demonstrate how to turn this negative into a positive. Instead of attempting to isolate one factor in performance and business success (training), this model promotes the practice of demonstrating the *relative value of many components*. This, therefore, requires L&D professionals and functions to involve themselves in as many of those factors as possible. These include activities that occur prior to and after training.

Learning and performance professionals must be able to show the organizational value of their training. Like any other department in an organization, training is not exempt from showing how the resources allocated to them have been put to good use. By gathering data related to effective training and training effectiveness, learning and performance professionals can credibly show the value that training has brought to the organization.

For Maxine's training program to have been considered successful, she would have needed to be able to make the case that the training helped reps to better sell the product in the field, and that sales actually did increase as a result. This information does not magically reveal itself; Maxine would have needed to create and implement a plan to gather data to show the benefit of the training.

Later chapters of this book will outline which information is most relevant to different stakeholder groups, and how to present it to them in terms that are meaningful to each of them. On the surface, demonstrating the value of training to the organization may seem self-serving; however, it is necessary not only for a training department to sustain itself, but also to earn the respect of other departments and the entire organization.

Summary

Training is in a state of crisis. Over-reliance on the training event puts L&D professionals in danger of being replaced by technology. It is already happening to an alarming degree. There exists an urgent need to move beyond the event and become heavily involved in creating and demonstrating business value. Special emphasis must be put into pre- and post-training activities to earn a seat at the table with business executives.

There are three basic reasons to evaluate. First, it is important to ensure that training programs are developed and delivered in such a way as to maximize learning. Second, targeted post-training evaluation can actually help to increase the amount of on-the-job application. Finally, the ultimate intent of good evaluation is to demonstrate business or mission value. This is best done by determining the relative contribution of key success factors rather than isolating one.

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