

Leveraging the Kirkpatrick Model

Validation and Evaluation

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The Kirkpatrick Model is well-known in the training community. It is viewed primarily as a tool for use in evaluating training. However, it can also be used as a tool for use in validating requests for training. This post explains how.

The Kirkpatrick Model – An Evaluation Tool

Recent years have seen increasing pressure to show the business results of training. This is seen as a difficult challenge by some trainers but, by others, it is viewed as a blessing in disguise. Demonstrating the bottom-line and operational payoffs of training can afford trainers an opportunity to break out of the box in which many other organizational denizens have placed them. It can open the door for trainers to legitimately look into issues previously off limits or out of bounds. Some trainers can use it to expand the scope of their efforts and the scale of their impact. And, some can leverage it to advance their own careers and standing in the eyes of their management.

Many trainers rely on the Kirkpatrick Model (see Figure 1) to frame after-the-fact evaluations of training and development activities. As an evaluation tool, it is commonly discussed in terms of “levels” of evaluation, moving up from Trainee Reactions through Learning and Behavior Change, to on-the-job Results as indicated by the arrow in Figure 1.

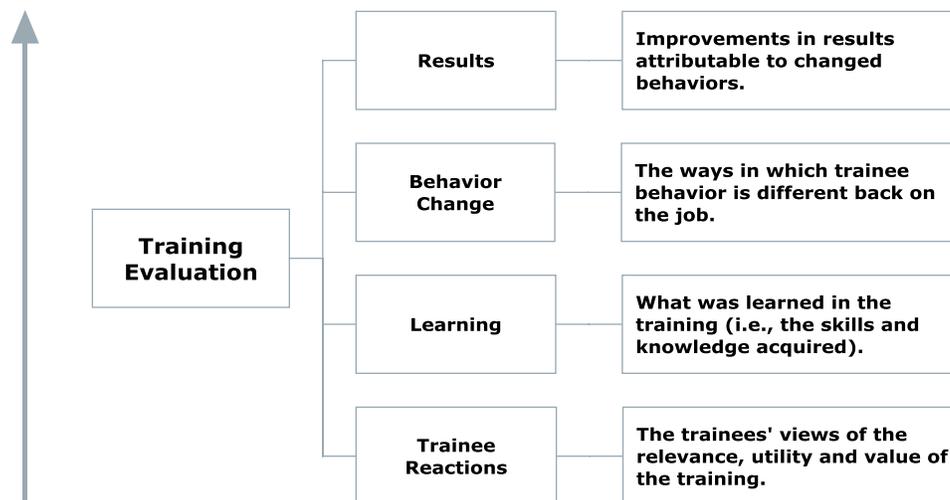


Figure 1 – The Evaluation View of the Kirkpatrick Model

In this post I'd like to propose a way of leveraging the Kirkpatrick Model in ways that provide increased value to trainers and that can also help ensure a favorable evaluation after the fact.

The Kirkpatrick Model – A Validation Tool

The key idea being put forth here is one of moving evaluation from the back end of a training effort to the front end (see Figure 2). This entails reversing the “levels” (i.e., starting with on-the-job results). When a request for training comes in, the response to the request can and should begin with the requirements for the kind of evaluation that will be needed later to determine the value of any training subsequently delivered. The Kirkpatrick Model is a good tool to use for this purpose.

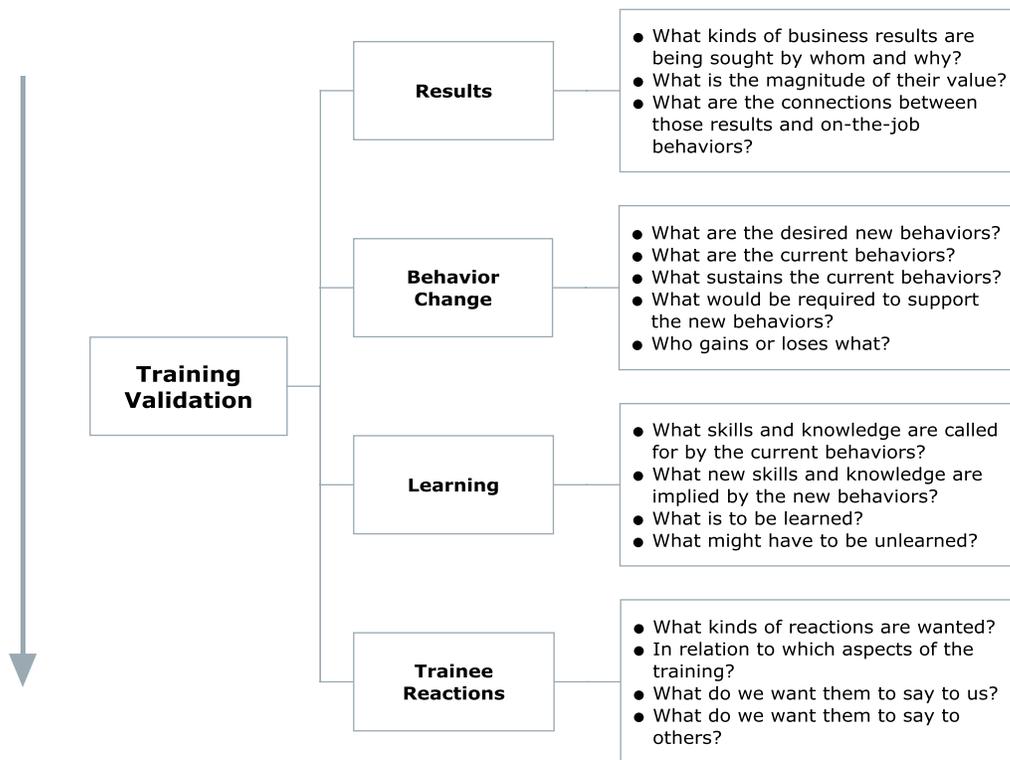


Figure 2 – Validation View of the Kirkpatrick Model

When you go to the first meeting to discuss a request for training, go armed with the validation version of the Kirkpatrick Model shown in Figure 2. (Feel free to add your own questions to the samples shown in the model.) Point out that the model will guide the later evaluation of the training and that it is also useful in framing and focusing training projects. The main difference between now and later is that after-the-fact evaluations typically work their way up the levels from reactions through learning and on-the-job behavior changes to business results. At the outset of a training project, it's best to reverse the order of the levels. Start by asking about the business results to be affected. Next, ask about the kinds of changes in on-the-job behavior necessary to produce those results. Point out that behavior on the job is a function of the individual (e.g., skill, knowledge and ability) and the individual's working environment (e.g., feedback, support, task interference, etc). Also point out that training can address only the skill and knowledge deficiencies. Environmental influences will have to be addressed via other means. Discuss which of the desired changes in on-the-job behavior likely owe to skill and knowledge deficiencies and which likely owe to environmental factors. Inquire as to how any environmental factors affecting on-the-job behavior will be identified and addressed. Encourage the assignment of responsibility to look into the environmental factors and volunteer for that assignment. Use any suspected skill

and knowledge deficiencies to tentatively frame the learning objectives for the training. Finally, for any training that seems warranted, ask the requester what kinds of reactions he or she would like to see from the trainees (e.g., indications of on-the-job situations where it applies, questions and concerns about whether or not it does apply, identification of possible obstacles or barriers to applying it, estimates of the degree of support needed and the degree of support likely to exist, etc). In other words, reframe the reactions level so that it provides more useful information.

Summary

In summary, use the Kirkpatrick Model not just as a back-end evaluation framework but also as a front-end validation framework. Use it to clarify, analyze, verify and validate requests for training. On the back end, the logic of the Kirkpatrick Model flows from trainee reactions through learning and on-the-job behavior change to results. On the front end, at a project's outset, reverse that flow; start with the expected business results and work your way backward from results through behavior change and learning to trainee reactions. Leverage the Kirkpatrick Model to your advantage. Doing so can help ensure favorable evaluations later on.

About the Author

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