

A Measure of Success

Is that good feeling you get when you review **training** evaluation forms tempered by a niggling feeling that there is more to evaluating the true benefits of training? Are you only able to get to the second level of Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation for most of your learning initiatives? Unfortunately, you're in good company. Despite a wealth of research and practical experience on measurement, most organizations fall short in their ability to demonstrate the true value of training.

The measurement gap

Organizations report that the factors related to training that are measured most are completions, enrolments and satisfaction¹. Ironically, these factors are some of the least valuable according to those same companies. The most valuable factors to measure are identified as job impact, business impact and business metrics. It's clear that there's a significant gap in our ability to measure what matters when it comes to training.

Most professionals involved in learning and development are familiar with the four levels of evaluation developed by Donald Kirkpatrick²: Level 1 – Reaction; Level 2 – Learning; Level 3 – Behaviour; Level 4 – Results. Despite a clear understanding of the need to measure, organizations continue to struggle with ways to move their learning evaluation efforts past Kirkpatrick's level 2.

The challenge to prove results

The largest stumbling block is often the lack of measured data and strategic **planning** that needs to take place prior to launching a training program. If the "client" says they need the training, that's often all that's required to proceed. Executives and managers alike, however, are starting to challenge the lack of empirical data as they reassess the effectiveness of their training. They want to see training tied to business goals and want to measure **training's effectiveness** in moving the organization closer to achieving those goals.

And that measure doesn't stop with Kirkpatrick's four levels. Although achieving all four levels goes a long way to understanding the impact of training, more organizations are requiring that their learning leaders measure training's return on investment (ROI). In its purest sense, ROI determines how many dollars the organization gets back for every dollar it invests in training. They are also insisting that training initiatives be linked directly to the organization's business goals to ensure that training is aligned to organizational objectives.

If your organization has not already started to talk about better measurement of training, you may want to initiate it. With the business pressures of today, most people involved in learning will find they are involved in measuring results and return on investment soon enough.

¹ Best Practices in Training Measurement, Bersin & Associates, 2006

² Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels, Donald Kirkpatrick, 1994, Berrett-Koehler