

A Training Evaluation Primer

Evaluation includes getting ongoing feedback, e.g., from the learner, trainer and learner's supervisor, to improve the quality of the training and identify if the learner achieved the goals of the training.

Perspective on Evaluating Training

Evaluation is often looked at from four different levels (the "Kirkpatrick levels") listed below. Evaluation levels become more results-oriented the farther down the list.

- Level 1 - Reaction - What does the learner feel about the training?
- Level 2 - Learning - What facts, knowledge, etc., did the learner gain?
- Level 3 - Behaviors - What new skills or information is the learner using on the job?
- Level 4 - Results or effectiveness - What results were achieved in the organization?

Although level 4, evaluating results and effectiveness, is the most desired result from training, it's usually the most difficult to accomplish. Evaluating effectiveness often involves the use of key performance measures -- measures you can see, e.g., faster and more reliable output from the machine after the operator has been trained, higher ratings on employees' job satisfaction questionnaires from the trained supervisor, etc. This is where following sound principles of performance management are of great benefit.

Basic Suggestions for Evaluating Training

Typically, evaluators look for validity, accuracy and reliability in their evaluations. However, these goals may require more time, people and money than the organization has. Evaluators are also looking for evaluation approaches that are practical and relevant.

Training and development activities can be evaluated before, during and after the activities. Consider the following very basic suggestions:

Before Delivering the Training

1. Will the selected training and development methods really result in the employee's learning the knowledge and skills needed to perform the task or carry out the role? Have other employee's used the methods and been successful?
2. Consider applying the methods to a highly skilled employee. Ask the employee of their impressions of the methods.
3. Do the methods conform to the employee's preferences and learning styles? Have the employee briefly review the methods, e.g., documentation, overheads, etc. Does the employee experience any difficulties understanding the methods?

Evaluation During the Training

- Use good questioning methods to ensure understanding. Ask employees how they're doing. Do they understand what's being said?
- Periodically conduct a short test, e.g., have employees explain the main points of what was just described to him, e.g., in the lecture.
- Are employees enthusiastically taking part in the activities? Are they coming late and leaving early? It's surprising how often learners will leave a course or workshop and immediately complain that it was a complete waste of their time.

- Break the class into small groups to complete exercise and report back to group.
- Evaluation efforts should address what is happening in a training program as much as whether it is making any difference. Simply, without good records of what happened during a training program, it is not always clear what needs changing if the outcome evaluation is disappointing. Try to keep a log of the events in the program, how participants responded, and what your own reactions were as well. Or invite others to watch and make observations about the program as it is being experienced.

Post-Training Evaluation

Level 1 – Reaction

- Happy sheets
- Anonymous remarks – write a question on a blank flip-chart sheet or a whiteboard, and ask participants to respond to it during breaks – (on the flipchart, board or blank note cards).
 - What one word describes your reaction to today’s session?
 - What will you remember from today?
 - What was the most important thing you learned today?
- Oral survey
 - “What would you like more of tomorrow?”
 - “What would you like less of?”
 - “What would you like to continue?”
- Informal Interview – casually solicit participant feedback at breaks and at lunch, or schedule an evening rap session to discuss participants’ feelings in a relaxed manner.
 - “Was the last segment helpful?”
 - “Am I relating this material enough to your situation?”
 - “Was anything unclear?”
 - “Are we ready to move on to new material?”
- Advisory Group – meet with a small representative group to obtain reactions. If appropriate, ask group members to interview some participants and report their feedback.

Level 2 – Learning - Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes

- Use pre- and post-training measures.
- Testing, simulation
- Games, reviews, etc.
- Be sure to go beyond testing factual results – see if participants can state the information in their own words, give examples of it, and apply it in a variety of situations
- Ask participants directly about what they have learned and how it will be applied. Follow up a couple months later with these questions, too.
 - “What tools, skills or ideas do you now have that you did not have at the beginning of this program?”
 - “What have you learned that you can put to immediate use?”
 - “What have you already practiced outside of class?”
 - “What intentions or plans do you have as a result of the program?”
 - “What do you want to learn next?”

Level 3 – Behavior Back on the Job

- Observe behavior on the job
- Obtain feedback from employee supervisors
- Use a work statement follow-up form – employees write plan how they intend to apply the training. Send instructions in 3 to 4 weeks for them to evaluate their implementation. At the trainee’s option, the work statement and a supervisor’s follow-up form can be sent to the participant’s supervisor for evaluation.

Level 4 – Organizational Impact - ROI

- Typically level 4 evaluation requires surveys, focus groups, strategic interviews, and observation. Some data that may already exist may include:
 - Employee satisfaction surveys
 - Organizational and team morale scores
 - Number of customer complaints
 - Employee retention; lost time
 - Sales revenue
 - Work flow and efficiency data
 - Awards from outside sources
 - Operating costs
 - Compliance versus violations
 - Accuracy
 - Consistency
 - Product defects