

The Kirkpatrick Model: How to improve training

Por: Amedirh

We interviewed Dr. James Kirkpatrick about the current status of training and the value it has in organizations around the world. In fact, he considers that “training and development is in a state of crisis”. Also, he recognizes that “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 a contributor to on-the-job performance”. We share with our readers a summary of this conversation.

CVRH: How is training perceived in organizations at the present time?

JK: There is a 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.

The Kirkpatrick Model offers a step-by-step, practical process for training professionals the world over to demonstrate the value of their efforts and avoid losing funding or their jobs. In simple words, we have four levels:

- **Level 1 - Reaction:** The degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging and relevant to their jobs.
- **Level 2 - Learning:** The degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training.

- **Level 3 - Behavior:** The degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job.
- **Level 4 - Results:** The degree to which targeted program outcomes occur and contribute to the organization’s highest-level result.

CVRH: What is the story behind the Kirkpatrick Model?

JK: The four levels were created by Dr. Don Kirkpatrick (1924-2014) in the 1950s as the subject of his dissertation. At the time, he was a professor at the *University of Wisconsin*. His focus was teaching management and supervisory programs for area businesses as part of a university educational outreach program. He genuinely wished to know if the training programs he conducted were making a difference for participants; hence, the four levels were born. Also, he used the four levels to evaluate his own training programs.

Don wrote a series of four articles, entitled *Reaction, Learning, Behavior and Results*. Training professionals around the world read the four articles and applied the principles in their work. Unbeknownst to Don, these principles were coined the four levels, and the Kirkpatrick Model.

CVRH: What is the model and what are its principles?

JK: The model effectively addresses the three major reasons to evaluate training programs. First, **to improve the program**. Most training professionals are accustomed to evaluating training programs for the purpose of improving it. Using formative (during the program) and summative (after the program) methods, they ask questions related to how participants enjoyed the pro-

gram, 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.

Second, **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.

Third, **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." 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.

Its foundation principles are:

- The end is the beginning.
- Return on expectations (ROE) is the ultimate indicator of value.
- Business partnership is necessary to bring about positive ROE.



Dr. James Kirkpatrick

- Value must be created before it can be demonstrated.
- A compelling chain of evidence demonstrates your bottom-line value.

CVRH: What is Return of Expectations and how can it be used?

JK: The definition of return on expectations is, "What a successful training initiative delivers to key business stakeholders demonstrating the degree to which their expectations have been satisfied." My strongest suggestion is to learn the model and successfully implement a major pilot program to show stakeholders a better way to ensure and demonstrate training's contribution to the bottom line of an organization. ROE can best be implemented by first planning for evaluation. This is done by starting with Level 4, and working backwards through Levels 3, 2 and 1. This means that consideration should first be given to the business needs and criteria for program success, then to on-the-job performance requirements, then finally to targeted pre-training, training, and post training accountability and support. This keeps the focus on what is most important, the program outcome that is accomplished through improved on-the-job performance of training graduates.

For more information, you can register on the website to access the resources library of articles, white papers, webinars, tips and tools for implementing the model. Register for free at www.kirkpatrickpartners.com ▲