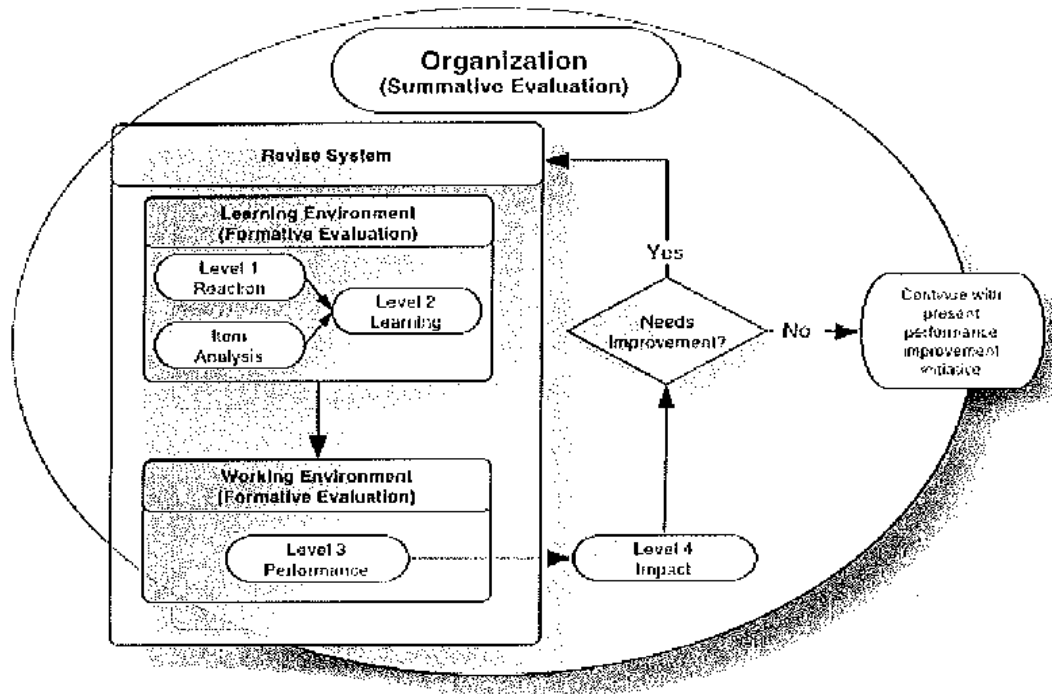


Level One Evaluation: Reaction

In order to have a good discussion about Kirkpatrick's Level One Evaluation it is helpful to see Kirkpatrick's complete model of evaluation. Below is a diagram of Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation Model (1994) of reaction, learning, performance, and impact.

The Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation



Level One:

This is the first step of Kirkpatrick's evaluation process where students are asked to evaluate the training they attended after completing the program. These are sometimes called smile sheets or happy sheets because in their simplest form they measure how well students liked the training. Don't be fooled by the adjectives though, this type of evaluation can reveal useful data if the right questions asked are:

- The relevance of the objectives.
- The ability of the course to maintain interest.
- The amount and appropriateness of interactive exercises.
- The *perceived* value and transferability to the workplace.

The evaluation is generally handed out right at the completion of an instructor led class. With the increase of on-line and web based trainings the evaluations can also be delivered and completed online, and then printed or e-mailed to a training manager.

What is reaction in training evaluation? Simply put, it reports if participants liked or disliked the training. This would resemble a customer satisfaction questionnaire in a retail outlet. At the First Level of evaluation, the goal is to find out the reaction of the trainees to the instructor, course and learning environment. This can be useful for demonstrating that the opinions of those taking part in the training matter. A Level One evaluation is also a vehicle to provide feedback and allows for the quantification of the information received about the trainee's reactions.

The intent of gathering this information is not to measure what the trainee has learned, but whether the delivery method was effective and appreciated. Non-training items may have a deep impact on the training session and need to be considered. These items include, but are not limited to environmental and other conditions surrounding the learner at the time of training. Level One questions might include the following:

- Did the learner feel comfortable in the surroundings?
- Was it too cold or too warm in the room?
- Were there distractions?
- Was the time the training was conducted good for you?
- Was this an easy experience?

In gathering the data for this first step, it is important to do so soon after the training is completed. It is most presented as a form to be filled out by the learner. The following are some methods used to collect the data for Level One:

- Feedback forms – have the trainee relate their personal feelings about the training
- Conduct an *Exit Interview* – get the learner to express their opinions immediately
- Surveys and Questionnaires – gather the information some time after the training is conducted
- Online Evaluations – this might allow for more anonymous submissions and quicker evaluation of data
- On-the-job verbal or written reports – given by managers when trainees are back at work

The benefits of gathering Level One information are far-reaching. For example, the trainer or instructional designer may be misled into believing there is a shortcoming in the material presented, when it may have simply been an environmental issue. The data can be gathered immediately and most trainees participate readily because the information gathered is non-threatening and shows concern for their feelings. The information, in addition to ease of gathering, is not difficult to analyze. Finally, when a current group is relating a positive experience, other potential trainees are more at ease with a decision to learn.

There are those who dislike the Level One Evaluation and scoff at its results being scientific and controlled. Some suggest that just one question need be answered: "Would you recommend this course to a friend or colleague? Why or why not?"

Every training intervention needs some kind of feedback loop, to make sure that within the context of the learning objectives it is relevant, appropriately designed, and competently executed.

At Level I the intention is not to measure if, or to what extent, learning took place (that's Level 2); nor is it intended to examine the learner's ability to transfer the skills or knowledge from the classroom to the workplace (Level 3); nor does it attempt to judge the ultimate impact of the learning on the business (Level 4). Level I of Kirkpatrick's model is intended simply to gauge learner satisfaction.

The concern or disdain of the Level One Evaluation in many cases comes from poorly designed evaluations that may "steer" respondents. Too many close ended questions without room for comment limit attendee's comments. The type of questions asked can limit the areas the student is "allowed" to evaluate. Open ended questions while tedious may provide fuller feedback,

Trainers also need to understand that sound analytical evaluations often require multistage studies. Your end-of-course feedback may indicate a problem area, but will not tell you specifically what the problem is. A follow-up survey, by questionnaire, by informal conversation, or by holding a brief focus group, will tell you a great deal more than you could possibly find out under end-of-course conditions.

The level one evaluation none-the-less is an important first step. We need to remember the word *level one* does indeed imply there are more levels of evaluation. These successive evaluations will help dig deeper into the training experience and assist with identifying that your training programs helped move the organization toward realizing business outcomes. Understanding the objectives/outcomes of any training goal prior to class design will always be the key measure of a successful training program. Without precise and clear objectives the ultimate success of a training program cannot be measured.

The good news about the level one evaluation is that learners are keenly aware of what they need to know to accomplish a task. If the training program fails to satisfy their needs, a thoughtful evaluation will allow the opportunity to determine whether it's the fault of the program design or delivery.

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