



14.1 | Apply: Kirkpatrick's Levels to Evaluate eLearning

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) devote an entire chapter of their book, *Evaluating Training Programs*, to the topic of **evaluating eLearning**. They stress that a Level 1 (Learner Reaction) evaluation can serve to monitor the emotional acceptance of eLearning which, for some learners, is a new experience. To gauge learner reaction to eLearning, they suggest:

- Have learners rate the eLearning design.
- Ask them to comment on their eLearning experiences in a discussion or blog post.
- Collect learner feedback in a chat-based focus group.
- Automatically record access and participation statistics through the delivery system.
- Embed several short (one or two question) evaluations periodically throughout the eLearning instruction.

An evaluation of Level 2 (Learning) for an online course should address the quality, quantity, and thoroughness of the assessment involved (Garrison, 2011). Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) stress that Level 2 evaluations are much easier to collect for eLearning since you can automate assessment administration, scoring, recording, and reporting. Some systems also allow you to immediately compare assessment results to required standards and competencies, and to use the results of those comparisons as the basis for suggested remediation and enrichment.

For Level 3 (Behavior/Transfer), Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) suggest sending electronic questionnaires to the supervisors of those who have been trained. If you consider this measure early in the process, you can have the supervisors compare trained and untrained employees before and after the training to document any improvements and more directly link those improvements to the training. The same systems and questionnaires you use to evaluate the success of the training can also be used to evaluate an individual's job performance (thus optimizing your efforts and associating the costs of the Level 3 evaluation to a function that is necessary for, and may then be paid for by, the operations department). You can also utilize the systems that employees work with to measure whether they are applying the information and skills they learned in the instruction. For example, if you taught them how to use certain reference materials or job aids that are available online, you can track whether and how often they access those aids.

Such practices can also contribute to a Level 4 (Results/Impact) evaluation by enabling you to quantify things like productivity before and after instruction. In general, an effective Level 4 evaluation requires a clear picture of the strategic intent of the eLearning program (Garrison, 2011) so that you have a goal for your evaluation and comparisons. Metrics for evaluating results and impact for eLearning are much the same as those used for other types of instruction, with the exception of the use of social media and networks.

For example, how would you determine the impact, ROI, or value produced by a Community of Practice (CoP)? The "father" of CoP, Etienne Wenger-Trayner and colleagues (2019) identified five levels of value created by learning in a social context like a community of practice or a network. They refer to these levels



as “cycles.” The first four cycles are an adaptation of Kirkpatrick’s four-level model, and the fifth cycle is their addition made specifically for the work of communities.

- **Cycle 1: Immediate value:** The activities and interactions between members have value in and of themselves.
- **Cycle 2: Potential value:** The activities and interactions of cycle 1 may not be realized immediately but rather may be saved up as knowledge capital whose value is in its potential to be realized later.
- **Cycle 3: Applied value:** Knowledge capital may or may not be put into use. Leveraging capital requires adapting and applying it to a specific situation.
- **Cycle 4: Realized value:** Even applied new practices or tools are not enough. A change in practice does not necessarily lead to improved performance, so it is important to find out what effects the application of knowledge capital is having on the achievement of what matters to stakeholders.
- **Cycle 5: Reframing value:** (*a.k.a., Transformative*) This happens when learning causes a reconsideration of how success is defined. It includes reframing strategies, goals, and values (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019).

If this sounds like something you’d like to pursue, you can refer to their work as a model for Level 4 evaluations of the social media strategies you use in your instructional designs. You may also want to check out Nancy White’s blog post and video on evaluating communities, where she explains the overall concept and provides examples for each of the five cycles from Wenger-Trayner and colleagues’ model (White, 2011a; White, 2011b).

References:

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