

Measuring the Impact of Training

Training = Behavioural Change

In most situations the purpose of 'soft skills' training is to create a change in the behaviour of the participant. The desired behaviour/s are usually related to taking particular *actions* or *thinking* a certain way, and the scope of change may be incremental or quite considerable.

In a business setting these new behaviours are directed towards results areas such as improving operations, increasing sales, and improving personal and team effectiveness.

Within the Learning and Development field a number of models have been developed in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of training, a popular one being Kirkpatrick's '4 Levels of Learning Evaluation'.¹

Level	Typical Measurement
1. Reaction	Feedback forms
2. Learning	Question & answer / test
3. Application	Behaviour
4. Impact	Measurable outcome

Further to Kirkpatrick's model additional impact concepts include:

- Measuring Return On Investment from training and recognising both tangible and intangible factors (considered as Level 5).²
- Sustaining compounding improvements versus one-off gains (Level 6).³
- Sharing the benefits within the organisation (Level 7).³

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Kirkpatrick

² Dr. J. Phillips, ROI Methodology™

³ Alistair Rylatt <http://www.alastairrylatt.com>

These concepts are based on the premise that the true success of training relies on the participant (a) applying the skills, (b) learning how to improve their performance over time through repeated use, and (c) realising specific benefits as a result.

Training is Where Change Starts

It is readily accepted that knowledge gained from training events must be translated into action for soft skills training to be deemed successful. Therefore the initial knowledge transfer via formal training should be considered as the start of the performance improvement process, not the end.

Mindset

A significant influence on the individual's reaction to training, and their subsequent application of concepts or techniques, is their mindset. Ideally participants will understand and agree with the purpose of the training and be proactive about acting upon the information presented.

On-the-Job

Importantly, on-the-job attention and follow up by managers is critical. As individuals, participants will usually focus on doing what they believe will be measured, what will be noticed by their immediate supervisors, or what will be personally beneficial or satisfying.

If participants do not perceive any expectation of significant changes in their behaviour (via written, verbal or cultural cues), and if they do not see other participants making efforts to change, it is highly unlikely they will alter their own behaviours.

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Coaching

For advanced learners (such as professionals and technical specialists, who may be considered as being relatively more self-directed) an appropriate form of follow up is for their manager to act in a 'coaching' role to prompt, remind, observe, and provoke the participant to use the information and ideas presented during training.

It is important to recognise that 'coaching' is not 'managing'. A training participant being coached is not being told what to do by the coach, and they are not being judged by the coach. The coach acts more as a sounding board and inquisitive observer rather than a traditional manager.

The coaching process should reinforce the content from training and confirm expectations of performance improvement for the participant.



In this way the training and ongoing coaching, combined with the positive mindset of the participant towards the improvement process, come together to encourage and nurture the desired change in behaviour.

With appropriate planning and implementation the entire improvement

process occurs with due regard for the culture and priorities within the organisation.

Using Buddies

In some situations establishing a 'buddy' system that pairs participants and empowers them to coach each other may be a feasible and scalable alternative to the manager-as-coach model.

Other options include using an external coach or a suitable senior colleague.

It is recommended that coaching arrangements are clearly defined in advance with expectations clarified for how the coach/coachee relationship will proceed, including establishing a regular schedule for reviews.

Importantly, if colleagues are acting as coaches a suitable coaching skills training program should be included in the change process.

Impact Measurement Options

Based on experience working across various organisations the author suggests the measures listed below may be suitable for assessing the impact of training. These measures are presented under:

- KPI-Related Measures
- Direct Observation Measures
- Self Reported Measures
- Implied Measures

Bear in mind not every measure listed will be suitable for each organisation or performance improvement initiative.

When deciding which factors are best to measure it must be recognised there is an

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inherent element of subjectivity in selecting the measures that are best suited to monitor the desired behavioural change.

To ensure the process of selecting appropriate measures is inclusive, and to encourage ownership by participants, it may be advisable to involve them in the decision-making process as part of the overall performance improvement initiative.

As with all “before and after” comparisons it is helpful to have an accurate and impartial assessment of the key factors before training is undertaken to act as the benchmark against which future progress can be measured.

KPI-Related Measures

These outcomes are clearly linked to pre-defined Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), usually sourced from the participants Position Description or individual Performance Review.

- Reaching value or volume targets (e.g. sales \$, utilisation rates, client appointments, number of presentations given etc).
- Completing specific tasks.
- Accuracy and timeliness of reports submitted.
- Managing conflicts and troubleshooting.
- Demonstrating increased capability in professional or personal areas.
- Providing leadership or mentoring.

Direct Observation Measures

These outcomes are discernable through on-the-job observation of the individual participant and may also be measured in

combination with other options. With thought, it may be possible to identify specific benchmarks or targets for particular behaviours or actions assigned to individual participants.

- They have used a particular technique or skill.
- They have followed the recommended model, path, or strategy.
- Their behaviours are different to previously, indicating they are applying what was presented at training.
- Compared to pre-training, they are (depending on the purpose of training):
 - More confident or more in control.
 - More accurate.
 - More frequently on-time (e.g. attendance; meeting deadlines).
 - Less stressed, happier, or calmer.
 - Better prepared (e.g. for client meetings, presentations, performance reviews).
 - Communicating more clearly.
 - Influencing others more noticeably.
 - Developing stronger, or broader, relationships.
 - Resolving problems more readily.
 - Acting more autonomously.
 - Taking more responsibility for their own actions.

Self Reported Measures

For self-reported outcomes it is advisable to have some form of commentary/notes provided by the participant (rather than simply a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer) to ensure the activity or behaviour was performed in a sufficiently rigorous manner.

