

Types of learning and development interventions



This essay will critically assess the key challenges facing organisations in the evaluation of the learning and development interventions process.

Continuous assessment of all training and development is vital for employees and the organisation to measure goals and expectation. This paper will assess the challenges of evaluation through critique of the frequent methods and theorists used in evaluative training.

It can be said that evaluating the effectiveness of training is considered nebulous, yet the importance of demonstrating value added training is crucial to show value for money. Campbell (2006) estimated employer training and development figures in the UK could reach £30 billion a year. Phelps (2002) argues there is no return on investment (ROI) calculation that suggests value from training. Another argument of (Phelps 2002) is whether training breeds success or success breeds training. Evaluation can be very straight forward when measuring a training programme to enhance an employee's ability to produce more parts per hour or a secretary typing speed. For more difficult would be evaluating the success of a management training course or the development of individual's social skills. The fact that it is more difficult should not suggest that it can not be done (Torrington et al 2008).

One familiar method of evaluation is that of a post questionnaire, which are completed by the participants at the end of the course. Arguably these 'happy sheets' are far too general with terms of 'good', 'very good' or 'outstanding'. One such drawback would be that of the 'halo effect' in which the trainee will see the course as a break from their general working day and

reword the questionnaire on these grounds rather than that of the delivery and learning aspects (J Evans 2003).

When considering the efficiencies of the learning and development function, it is crucial to answer whether or not the training courses are supporting and enhancing the organisations efficiency through the selected training interventions. In view of success aspects of internal training, measurement with those of competitors can be adopted (CIPD 2007).

Essentially the evaluation of training, development and learning as a function are measured to ensure accuracy and quality for long term value of training (CIPD 2007).

For over fifty years the work of Kirkpatrick (1959) has been recognised as the foundation of evaluating the training interventions. Kirkpatrick suggested four levels of evaluation: (1) Reaction, this is the response from the delegates regarding their feelings on how they felt about the learning experience. 'Happy sheets', feed back forms or questionnaires are used to gather and analyse findings. (2) Learning, this is the measurement of the increase in knowledge, before and after. Typically assessments before or after the training, also observation and interviews can be used. These measurements are relatively easy to set up with clear-cut for quantifiable skills. This is not as simple for complex learning. (3) Behaviour, is the extent of applied learning back on the job. Observation or interview over time are required to asses change, relevance of change and sustainability of change. Measurement of behaviour change typically requires cooperation and skill of line managers. (4) Results, is the effect on the business or environment by

the trainee. Measures are already in place via normal management systems and reporting the challenge is to relate to the trainee. Individually not difficult unlike whole organisation. Process must attribute clear accountabilities (Kirkpatrick 1996).

A similar framework is that of (Hamblin 1974) who quoted five levels of evaluation: “(1) Evaluating training. (2) Evaluating the learning. (3) Evaluating changes in the job performance. (4) Evaluating changes in organisation performance. (5) Evaluating changes in the wider contribution that the organisation now makes” (Torrington et al 2008).

Bramley’s (1986) model is frequently used to highlight development inefficiencies. There are four major categories for measuring effectiveness and development requirements. “(1) achieving organisational goals, (2) increasing resourcefulness, being more effective (3) satisfying the clients and customers requirement and (4) improving internal processes”.

Performance appraisals and reviews are used to measure the outcomes of the interventions with employee improvement being plotted and constructive feedback given.

There are nine outcomes, which can be used as evaluation criteria, to discover whether training intervention has been successful (Morrow, C et al 1997). They are;

Attitude shift; has the participants attitude or their opinions changed?

Behavioural change; has the employee’s application and methods of completing tasks changed?

Results; has the training had an effect on the organisation's effectiveness?

Return on investment; has the training given back to the organisation more than it cost?

Psychological capital; has the training improved the organisation's external and internal image?

Reaction to training; this is their immediate reaction after completing the training, for example was the training good? Did the trainer deliver the content well?

Satisfaction; this again is the immediate reaction on the logistics, for example venue, facilities, and catering

Knowledge acquisition; what and how much did they learn?

Skills improvement; can the employee do something new, different and improved?

The evaluation of training commences when a gap in skills is identified as a requirement, through the business need, and that the required skill is lacking in a department or function. Therefore, they are not functioning as efficiently as they could be, and the training intervention objective, is to reduce the skills gap. One model that will assist with this process is the "training needs analysis" (TNA), the training courses, needs and the training assessment is an integral part of the process, when all stages are complete, the loop is continuous (Morrow, C et al 1997).

A TNA identifies new attitudes, skills and knowledge that employee's to reach their own and the organisation's development requirements. To reach the level of appropriate training, there needs to be sufficient content connecting the training plan to the organisation's mission and values (Black, A & Garee E 2009). The mission must be visibly part of the training plan, with a focus on the organisation's goals and objectives, supporting the business needs (Anderson, V 2007).

Over fifty years ago, it was argued that the training intervention should be evaluated. This process is still not visible in all organisations. Kirkpatrick (1959) offered a "four levels of impact" model. (1) The first level is "Reaction"; this is evaluated through using end of course assessment forms, to find out the initial reaction from the employees to the training. (2) The second level is "Learning", this is the measure (through testing or evaluation) of both before and after the training, the affect of the learning (Kirkpatrick, D (1959) cited in Alliger, G & Janak E 1989: 332).

The next level of evaluation "Behaviour" (3) this stage monitors any changes in the employee behaviour can be assessed three to six months after the training. This can be achieved through questionnaires; their line manager can assess the changes to the employee's behaviours. The final stage is (4) "Results", although not easy to establish, this stage searches for evidence that the training has had a positive effect on the organisation's results (Kirkpatrick, D (1959) cited in Alliger, G & Janak E 1989: 332).

Another well-trusted model for evaluation is Easterby-Smith (2000); this is a four level framework for assessing the success of the training intervention.

The first is proving, did the training have the predicted impact on the employee's work. The next level is controlling, this level includes the use of resources for example the time needed for training. It also includes compliance of the training to the plan and consistency in the delivery of the intervention (Easterby-Smith, M et al 2000: 785).

The first two levels are collective, from the information gathered there is a financial answer, to assist with the costing of the training. As a result, the levels are reliant on quantitative data, which frequently has to be reviewed prior to the training intervention. This includes the opportunities from the training and the support from the line manager to utilise the learning to improve performance. The target for the collective evaluation more often than not is finance and the budget holders, who will assess the cost of training from the quantitative data (CIPD 2009a).

The third level is improving; this can be from the content of the course, the skill of the trainer or the logistics. The final level of is Easterby-Smith (2000) framework is reinforcing; this is the process of using evaluation as a contribution to the knowledge transfer (Easterby-Smith, M et al 2000: 785). These final two levels are decisive; they search for clarity and understanding of the training and learning processes. The qualitative data use is to assist decisions in the future for any potential and/or planned training and development opportunities. This qualitative data includes the affect of factors that are not numeric, for example, the stakeholders' expectations, or the raised responsibilities for the employee post training. The target for this decisive evaluation, will include the employees and the line managers who

use the training intervention, and the course developers, who require discerning information (CIPD 2009a)

There is an abundance of theoretical models that indicate the value of evaluation at each stage, although one of the problems with evaluating training is with the long-term evidence, ascertaining the value of the training intervention is difficult hard to pin down. This is more than the compilation of instantaneous proof, which supports the manager's trust in promoting the development for further learning (Black, A & Garee E 2009). An example of this, some systematically carried out collective evaluations of training, they have determined on an extremely small amount of correlation between the training intervention and the required outcomes. These decisive evaluations are a multifaceted realism, this includes the affect of a variety of causative factors on an individual's learning, and some of these factors are beyond the control of the organisation (CIPD 2009a).

Whilst it is complex and difficult, constructing systematic evidence that training employees will improve performance. The majority of line managers and other sponsors within the organisation will accept well-presented evidence of the success of the training intervention (Black, A & Garee E 2009). The individuals that deliver the training should get the sponsors in agreement of the outcomes, and how this will be presented, prior to the delivery of the training. This agreement will include which of the nine outcomes they will recognise as the verification that the training intervention is successful (Phillips, P 2006).

In 2007 the CIPD value of learning survey results, this report was compiled from data from learning, training and development (LTD) practitioners and senior managers in the UK. The findings suggested that the majority of organisations have a long way to go with the evaluation and assessment of the training intervention. The key areas that need to increase in efficiency are the training competence measures, performance indicators, and how these are benchmark, and the return on investment measures (CIPD 2007).

As discussed with the TNA the evaluation of training commences with the planning of the intervention, and the first feedback is from the employees' reaction to the training, this is frequently assessed with the use of a questionnaire. This method assesses the delivery of the training and the logistics, both of which can affect the outcome (Anderson, V 2007).

Theoretical reviews of training outcomes, has identified when employees possess no "strong feelings" for the organisation, then a negative outcome from the intervention, is the polluting of training, by giving negative feedback (Black, A & Garee E 2009).

From the initial feedback, it is important to assess the employee's reaction to the training and level of satisfaction with the organisation (Morrow, C et al 1997). Although it is important not to evaluate the training too quick, the assessment should be based on all the areas previously discussed, then moderated, setting an expected standard for future training. Different types of training courses tend to obtain consistently higher or lower feedback for example, technical skills tend to be more intense and the employee finds them more demanding than a soft skills course (Phillips, P 2006).

People as individuals have preferred methods of learning, and this is vital to consider at the design stage of the intervention. Honey & Mumford (1995) "Learning Style Questionnaire" is a simpler adaptation of Kolb's (1984) cyclical model. From the results from the questionnaire, the answers are scored into their percentiles, and matched against the norms. For example a score of 16 out of 20 for activist, indicates that the individual "enjoy the here and now and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. This category is open-minded, not sceptical and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new. This group succeeds on the challenge of fresh experiences, but are uninterested in the longer-term consolidation (Honey & Mumford (1995) cited in Mullins, L. 2005: 394).

Another effective method of learning is "Action Learning" this theory offers, there is no learning without action (implementation) and for this learning, it is vital practise the new knowledge. Action learning supports the resourceful integration of judgment and action. The employee increases in self-assurance, achieved through discussion with colleagues and peers. The negative aspect of this theory is a number of employees, who do not have the self-confidence to add value to the discussion. Therefore, these employees should be identified and offered confidence building training (Beardwell I et al 2004).

Not all environments are conducive to critical questioning, and those leading can invoke corrective measures to lead the participants. Empowerment as an action, is complex, when it does not sit within the core values, and employees then face constraints to their actions. Gee et al. (1996) discussed "employees are usually quite constrained in terms of the actions they could

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take, the decisions they could make, and the influence they could have, despite organisational resolves for empowered, self-directed teams and a thinking workforce” (Gee et al. (1996) cited in Fenwick, T 2005: 231).

The organisational culture should one of a “ learning culture”, not resisting the changes in the employee’s behaviour from the training intervention (Phillips, P 2006). The structure of the organisation, and the processes, should support the training. Therefore, organisations can reduce the hierarchical structures, and this will emphasise and promote an open learning culture. Therefore, it is vital whilst carrying out TNA to identify key organisational priorities and performance goals, which can be achieved through training (Anderson, V 2007).