Since it was first developed in the 1950s, the Kirkpatrick Model has helped learning practitioners understand and measure the impact of their workforce development initiatives. And as times have changed, so has the model.

The Kirkpatrick Model: Past, Present and Future

BY JIM AND WENDY KIRKPATRICK

I n 1954, Don Kirkpatrick was at the University of Wisconsin working on his Ph.D. dissertation on the topic of evaluating the effectiveness of a supervisory management program he developed. Being a practical man, he decided on four simple words — reaction, learning, behavior and results — to describe how training would lead to learning, which would lead to on-the-job application, in turn leading to desired results.

After earning his doctorate, Kirkpatrick didn't give those four simple words another thought until Bob Craig contacted him in 1959 and asked him to write an article for the ASTD journal. He accepted, but said that instead of one article, he would write four. Thus were born the Kirkpatrick Four Levels. (See Figure 1.) Kirkpatrick didn't actually use the word "levels," nor did he name his work a model. And at that point, he had no idea the impact these articles would have on the world of corporate learning and development.

After those four articles were published in 1959, related articles began surfacing with questions about the application of the four levels, largely from academic circles and primarily on Levels 1 and 2. At the request of Nancy Olsen at ASTD, Kirkpatrick reviewed the literature and wrote summative editorials on evaluation in 1965, 1975 and 1985.

In the 1970s, Kirkpatrick's awareness of the widespread use of the model grew and he found that his four levels were being used worldwide as a standard for training evaluation. As technology progressed, Kirkpatrick began using an overhead projector and transparencies when presenting the applications. And, while most would consider this technology archaic and cumbersome, he continues to use it today, to the amusement and amazement of audiences.

Throughout the 1980s, many organizations developed Level 1 and Level 2 methods and tools, and Kirkpatrick began collecting case studies of these practices, believing them to be an important way to educate and encourage others. However, there was still a concentrated focus on Levels 1 and 2. Even with newer technology, which made it easy to implement electronic surveys, most organizations remained focused on measuring only those two levels.

The Continued Development of Kirkpatrick

At the suggestion of a friend, Kirkpatrick published a book in 1993, *Evaluating Training Programs: The*

Four Levels, featuring the case studies that he collected over the years. Meanwhile, Kirkpatrick's son, Jim, was working as a career consultant, using the Kirkpatrick Model as a framework for helping clients and employees identify career goals and a path to achieving them. He then became the training director at First Indiana Bank, where he was able to use the Kirkpatrick Model in the traditional training sense.

FIGURE 1: THE KIRKPATRICK FOUR LEVELS

Level 1: Reaction	To what degree participants react favorably to the learning event.
Level 2: Learning	To what degree participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills and attitudes based on their participation in the learning event.
Level 3: Behavior	To what degree participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job.
Level 4: Results	To what degree targeted outcomes occur as a result of the learning event and subsequent reinforcement.

FIGURE 2: LINKING THE LEVELS TOGETHER

Chain of Evidence

| Level 1 Reaction | Level 2 Learning | Level 3 Behavior | Level 4 Results |
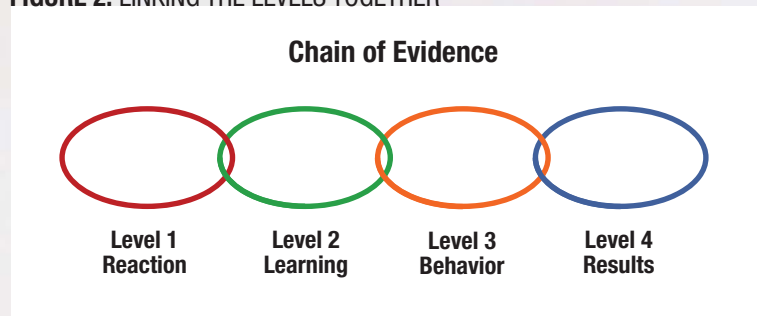
In 2005, Don and Jim Kirkpatrick released their first co-authored book, *Transferring Learning to Behavior,* focused on Level 3 behavior. This transfer of learning to behavior continues to be one of the biggest goals and challenges of many training organizations.

In 2006, the third edition of *Evaluating Training Programs* was published to broaden the application of the four levels beyond training programs, to topics like managing and driving organizational change and demonstrating the value of entire learning functions. The new edition placed an emphasis on Level 4 results, making the case that the best way to use the model is to start with Level 4 results and work backward so that training efforts are focused

After eight years of instructional design, course development and teaching for NCR's customer and support education function, I had been promoted into the role of director of course development and evaluation for the corporation. It was a newly created position with two major responsibilities: refine and hone the company's course development worldwide and establish and implement a training evaluation system. Course development I could do — but evaluation? I had never heard of the concept, let alone implemented a system. Fortunately, I had a great boss who said, "That's OK. Give it your best shot." So off I went.

I decided to see what existed and who was doing what with the hope of something pointing me in the right direction. I read articles, purchased books and kept detailed notes of my findings. At that time, there wasn't a lot of information available, and there were few corporate implementations. Then I ran across Don Kirkpatrick's four evaluation levels and immediately knew that it was right for NCR. So I began, as I believe most people do, at Level 1 and worked forward. We standardized our Level 1 form, implemented Level 2 (pre- and post-testing) in selected courses, conducted 15 Level 3 studies and performed one Level 4 comprehensive analysis.

During this time, I called Don Kirkpatrick, who gave me encouragement and suggestions for implementation. As a result, NCR received some attention and published a few articles on its corporate process for evaluation. Soon I was hosting benchmarking visits by other companies that wanted to know how NCR had implemented the four levels.

Fast forward to 2001. Motorola University, led by Bill Wiggenhorn, was the premier corporate training organization in the world at the time. In response to Motorola's Six Sigma quality initiative, Wiggenhorn formed a quality department with an evaluation function. I was lucky enough to be hired to lead that team and brought Kirkpatrick's four levels with me.

During the next five years, we implemented a standardized Level 1 system in more than a dozen locations worldwide and used the Motorola customer satisfaction approach to implement Level 2 and Level 3 processes globally. We trained hundreds of Motorola learning professionals in the corporation on not only the processes, but also the skills and techniques necessary to implement them successfully. CLO

— David J. Basarab

Well, here we go again, building another corporate university from the ground up. As I sat in my empty office that first day at Georgia-Pacific, I pulled out my well-worn project plan. Step one is development of the vision, mission and goals of the university.

Next, I need to work on the message from the president regarding the development of the university's advisory board members. The president already has the names of the senior leaders he would like to sit on the board, those who are committed to improving the business by building the capabilities of their people. Of course, I also had to hire a staff, develop needs assessment, build a portal to lay over the LMS, develop a marketing strategy, contact external training partners and begin to design our measurement and evaluation strategy.

It's funny what an empty office without any staff did for my morning reflection time those first few weeks. I would think about what had gone well on past projects and what I would do differently on this assignment. I kept hearing the voices of Jim and Donald Kirkpatrick in my head, saying things like:

• How do you know you have senior leadership support?
• Are your university's vision, mission and goals aligned with those of the organization?
• Has your senior sponsor signed off on your plan?
• Is every member of your advisory board fully behind you and your university's vision, mission and goals?
• Is your measurement and evaluation strategy aligned with the organization's goals and strategies?

If there is one thing for which I will always be grateful to the Kirkpatricks, it is their constant reminder to make sure that the measurement and evaluation strategy is fully aligned with the organization's goals and strategies. Having that alignment all the way up the organization makes executing the four levels almost effortless.

And the groundwork for that execution comes from reversing the order of the levels and focusing on the critical behaviors and drivers that will leverage the training toward the fulfillment of the stakeholders' targeted results. When your measurement and evaluation strategy is in alignment with the business strategy, chances of being questioned on the validity of your results should drop dramatically. To remain viable, training organizations must have that validity in the eyes of their business stakeholders. CLO

— Michael Woodard

David Basarab is the founder of V.A.L.E. Consulting LLC. Michael Woodard is the director of the Georgia-Pacific University. They can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.

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on the desired business results, providing support for the necessary behaviors to achieve them.

The Kirkpatricks made the case for a chain of evidence with the publication of their third collaborative book, *Implementing the Four Levels,* in 2007. The chain of evidence provides a framework for learning professionals to create and present evidence to business executives showing how business partnership efforts impact the bottom line. (See Figure 2, page 21.)

The chain of evidence is used to show how the model can be used from the inception of an initiative all the way to measuring the final impact, as opposed to measuring the effectiveness of what has already been done. The concept is designed to demonstrate that the intended results must be considered before training begins, and key metrics should be identified and measurement methods planned from the start.

Much has happened during the last 50 years. Don Kirkpatrick has gone from using chalkboards and hook-and-loop boards to overhead projectors, but don't expect him to go any farther. He loves his overhead projector. But on the golden anniversary of the model, the focus shifts from the current status of the Kirkpatrick Model to where it is headed in the next 50 years.

Taking Kirkpatrick to the Next Level

Broadening and deepening the application of the Kirkpatrick Model has been a long, slow process. Many learning professionals are uncomfortable with the idea that their job goes beyond the delivery of training programs. To address this tendency, Jim Kirkpatrick and his wife, Wendy, published the book *Training on Trial,* which discusses how workplace learning professionals need to redefine their role and actively extend their expertise, influence, impact and value beyond the classroom and into the business.

Many learning leaders still try to demonstrate their value to the business by using attendance, Level 1 reaction data and Level 2 testing scores. Unfortunately, this perpetuates the myth that the learning event alone is sufficient to bring about expected Level 4 results. It also shouts to business stakeholders, "Look how much this is costing you!"

The good news is that there are pockets of professionals within the industry who realize the seriousness of this challenge and are making strides in creating and demonstrating real value. Rather than starting with Level 1 and all too often never reaching Levels 3 and 4, they are embracing the concept and the practice that the end is the beginning. Specifically, they are spending time with business leaders before training

FIGURE 3: STARTING WITH THE END AS THE BEGINNING

		Results	Behavior	Learning	Reaction

Identify NECESSITIES For Success

Business need identified → PLEDGE to work together → ADDRESS jury issues → REFINE expectations to define outcomes | TARGET critical behaviors and required drivers | Determine required KSAs, learning objectives | Consider necessary learning environment

Design and build learning program and evaluation tools

Deliver learning program

Measure L2 Learning | Measure L1 Reaction

Initiate ongoing reinforcement and monitoring

Analyze findings, adjust, repeat steps as necessary

Measure L4 Results | Measure L3 Behavior

Prepare chain of evidence to demonstrate ROE

ROE | Present L4 Results findings | Present L3 Behavior findings | Present L2 Learning findings | Present L1 Reaction findings

KIRKPATRICK MODEL

elements are developed to discuss and negotiate what they expect and what success will look like. (See Figure 3.)

Then they discuss which observable and measureable success indicators will be used to determine Level 4 results. This sets the table for return on expectations. These Level 4 metrics then become the cornerstones for which all parties are held accountable and set the stage for implementing the business partnership model, leading to effective execution at Level 3 and maximizing both business and talent management goal achievement at Level 4.

From there, learning professionals can discuss with line managers what critical behaviors (Level 3) are most likely to bring about the targeted outcomes. Then they can begin to design the training events (Levels 1 and 2) that will facilitate the learning and application of the critical behaviors that will lead to the desired results.

Another recent advancement in the application of the Kirkpatrick Model is the recognition of the importance of drivers. Drivers, also known as reinforcers or enablers, are the processes and systems that reinforce actions, monitor procedures and encourage or reward performance of critical behaviors on the job. Drivers partner with Level 3 behaviors to create the key to successful execution. Without this connection, only about 15 percent of what is learned is applied, limiting the amount of value brought to the bottom line.

There is a trend in the use of the four levels to create and present a chain of evidence to corporate partners to show the power of training and evaluation, but also the power of the business partnership model between trainers, line managers and business executives. Along with this is a strong emphasis on Levels 3 and 4, which, instead of sending the message of cost as with Levels 1 and 2, emphasizes impact and value to business executives.

The Kirkpatrick Model is also expanding beyond the boundaries of training. The Kirkpatrick Goal Achievement Model, unveiled earlier this year, aims to help people create a goal achievement plan with actions and measurements on four levels. This process proposes to increase the likelihood of success by considering what success will look like and how model users will know when it has been accomplished (Level 4); what behaviors need to be performed to reach the goal (Level 3); what one needs to learn, or believe, to be willing and able to perform the critical behaviors (Level 2); and what conditions need to be present to support performance of the critical behaviors (Level 1).

Another proposed application of the Kirkpatrick Model in development takes the model to learning products and consulting to give providers the methodology and tools to demonstrate the results their products and services can deliver to clients.

Many professionals continue to perfect the Kirkpatrick Model application, educate others about it and develop new applications for the model, and as the learning industry continues to grow and evolve, the model continues to adapt and serve as a resource. CLO

Jim Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., is the vice president of global training and consulting for SMR USA. Wendy Kirkpatrick is the director of Kirkpatrick Partners LLC. They can be reached at editor@clomedia.com.