Introduction

A successful learning analytics program relies on the ability to collect data. The higher the response rates for your training surveys, the more confidence you can have in the accuracy of the data. We hope you find this to be a valuable guide to training industry best practices for increasing survey response rates.

If you have any questions about this document or implementing these programs, please contact us for support and consultation.

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Measuring Response Rates and Setting Goals

In order to improve response rates, the first step is to understand the percentage of students who are submitting surveys. When measuring response rates, divide the data into categories of survey type (Post Event, Follow Up, Manager) and delivery method (Paper, Online, Email). Determine what your response rates have been historically for each of these categories and how they are trending. Establish monthly checkpoints to measure and analyze response rates. After instituting any new programs to boost response rates, perform this measurement and analysis weekly.

In Metrics that Matter®, you can run reports to track response rates by clicking Aggregate Tools > Activity Analytics > Response Rates. Note that for this report to be meaningful, you must store class enrollment data in MTM. If you have integrated your Learning Management System with MTM, this is likely being done automatically. If you manually set up classes in MTM, you can start to track enrollments by completing the # Enrolled field on the Class Add page.

After gathering the data through the measurement, it is important to set goals for response rates. You will certainly set different goals by survey type and delivery method. You might also set separate goals for your recurring learning events versus your strategic, visible, or costly programs. In setting your goals, ask the following questions:

- What response rate do we feel is needed for reasonable conclusions to be drawn for day-to-day learning measurement?
- What response rate do we feel is needed for a more in-depth measurement exercise?
- How much money and how many resources are we willing to commit to increasing response rates?
- Does management or our management experts require minimum response rates?

The table below shows KnowledgeAdvisors research for average response rates for each evaluation type and collection method:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Type</th>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Event</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows KnowledgeAdvisors research for response rates desired by organizations for meaningful analysis and decision making:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Type</th>
<th>Recurring Learning Events</th>
<th>Strategic/Visible/Costly Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Event</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Increasing Survey Response Rates

Developing Survey Content

When looking to increase response rates, the primary goal for the content of your survey should be to make it as easy as possible for respondents to access it and complete it. To achieve this goal, consider the following approaches:

- Streamline your surveys by removing questions that realistically will not be used in reporting. For help with this, consult with your KnowledgeAdvisors account team.
- For shorter training events, use an abridged version of your primary survey that asks only the essential questions.
- Review each of the questions on the survey to ensure that they are clear, concise, and easy for a student to respond to.
- Provide the surveys in the primary languages of all your learners.
- Accept anonymous evaluation submissions for surveys. Note that this could provide a negative impact for Follow Up surveys, if email addresses are not collected for the anonymous submissions.

Accessing the Survey for Instructor Led and Online Facilitated Training

The most effective way to boost response rates of Post Event evaluations is to provide time for the students to access the evaluations in class. In classrooms with computers and Internet connectivity, MTM provides a number of ways to access the survey (see below).

For classrooms where no Internet access is available, the two options are 1) to collect paper evaluations or 2) send invitations to students via email to complete the evaluation. Since the paper evaluation collection method is done in class, the response rates will be higher, but the downsides are increased costs and delayed data availability in reports.

Accessing the Survey During Class

Instructors should notify students on the first day of class that they will be asked to complete evaluations. On the last day of class, the instructor should communicate the importance of completing the evaluations before providing students with the URL or paper evaluations (see Appendix B: Sample Instructor Script). Additionally, instructors can hand out a brief information sheet regarding the evaluation (Appendix A: Sample Training Evaluation Notice).

Time to complete the evaluations should be provided midway through the last day of class, rather than at the very end of class. The instructor should leave the room for about 10 minutes to allow the students to submit candid evaluations. If collecting evaluations on paper, a student should be designated to collect the evaluations. Paper evaluations are a good backup plan for those organizations that collect evaluations online, so that technical problems do not prevent collection of any surveys for an event.
Increasing Survey Response Rates

If completing the evaluations online in Metrics that Matter®, students can reach the survey through a few different URLs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL Type</th>
<th>Sample URL</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization Alias</td>
<td><a href="http://www.metricsthatmatter.com/acme">www.metricsthatmatter.com/acme</a></td>
<td>Simple. Can be provided verbally.</td>
<td>Students must choose from list of classes; not practical for organizations with large volume of training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Alias</td>
<td><a href="http://www.metricsthatmatter.com/acme/newyork">www.metricsthatmatter.com/acme/newyork</a></td>
<td>Simple. Can be provided verbally. Limit class list to a single location.</td>
<td>Students must choose from list of classes; not practical for locations with large volume of training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Summary Link</td>
<td><a href="http://www.metricsthatmatter.com/s.asp?e=854056&amp;s=2066438">http://www.metricsthatmatter.com/s.asp?e=854056&amp;s=2066438</a></td>
<td>Links directly to survey for class; no need for students to select class.</td>
<td>Difficult to provide verbally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accessing the Survey via Post-Class Survey Invitation Emails

Instructors should notify students on the first day of class that they will be asked to complete evaluations. On the last day of class, the instructor should communicate the importance of completing the evaluations (see Appendix B: Sample Instructor Script).

Work with your KnowledgeAdvisors account team to customize the subject and body of the MTM survey email message to make it unique to your organization. Communicate the importance of the students’ feedback in the message and provide the details of any positive or negative reinforcement (see Appendix C: Sample Emails).

KnowledgeAdvisors can also set up one or more reminder emails to be delivered to students who do not complete the evaluation within a set number of days. While students may ignore the first email, they are less likely to take no action after receiving two or three.

Accessing the Survey for Self-Paced Web-Based Training

For Self-Paced Web-Based Training, the two most common delivery methods for the survey are:

1. Send survey invitation emails to the students.
2. Embed a link to the survey in the eLearning content.

Response rates for eLearning tend to be lower than traditional classroom training. The approaches to increasing response rates for each of the survey delivery methods are discussed below.

Accessing the Survey via Survey Invitation Emails

Since many students do not typically complete eLearning tutorials, it’s best to send surveys to all students who enroll in the training, as opposed to surveying only completions. The ideal logic to establish for this is to send out emails to all students who complete the training and all students who enrolled for the training a set number of days ago, but have not yet completed. The number of days will be dependent on the typical time to complete the tutorial.
Work with your KnowledgeAdvisors account team to customize the subject and body of the MTM survey email message to make it unique to your organization. Communicate the importance of the students’ feedback in the message and provide the details of any positive or negative reinforcement (see Appendix C: Sample Emails).

KnowledgeAdvisors can also set up one or more reminder emails to be delivered to students who do not complete the evaluation within a set number of days. While students may ignore the first email, they are less likely to take no action after receiving two or three.

**Accessing the Survey via Embedded Link**

When embedding a link in eLearning content, it’s important to consider the following:

1. The link should be available to the learner at any time. Since many learners do not complete the entire tutorial, they should have the option to fill out the survey from any point in the tutorial.
2. The link should be prominently presented at logical points for the learner to complete the survey. For example, when the learner quits or completes the tutorial, the link should appear.
3. When presenting the link, provide explanation as to the importance of completing the survey (for ideas, see Appendix A: Sample Training Evaluation Notice). Additionally, if you have any incentives for completing the survey, provide details on those incentives.
4. If possible, use a re-direct web page to bring the learner directly to the survey upon completion of the tutorial.
5. If displaying the link in a pop-up window, be aware the pop-up blocker software built into web browsers and web browser toolbars may prevent the window from appearing.

**Utilizing Communication**

To boost survey response rates across an organization, the main idea that needs to be impressed upon the learners is that it is important for them to complete the training surveys. There are a few different approaches to this that should be used in conjunction with one another:

- When students are in class, the instructor should communicate at the start, middle, and end of class that they will be receiving an evaluation. The instructor should explain how it will be delivered and why it is vital that the students complete it. See Appendix B: Sample Instructor Script for a sample instructor script.
- Provide another in-class communication in the form of a handout that details the information regarding the training surveys. See Appendix A: Sample Training Evaluation Notice for an example.
- Following training, the instructors can personally follow up with all class attendees or specifically target those who have not submitted evaluations.
- If surveys are being accessed through automated email messages, customize the email messages to make them unique to your organization and communicate your message for why the learners should complete the survey. Use and customize automated reminder emails to go to learners who ignore the first survey invitation email. See Appendix C: Sample Emails for examples of the default emails.
- Share the results of the data collected back to learners, so that they understand that the minutes they take to complete the survey is time well spent. When sharing the survey data with learners, be sure to tie it back to job impact and business results. Ideally, you can show the improvement over time in these areas and give the learners credit for helping you make those improvements.
- Gain buy-in and support from leadership. If learners are being told to complete the surveys not just by the training organization, but also by their managers, response rates are likely to increase.
- Spur competition among instructors or business units by publishing comparison response rates and rewarding top performers. Instructors are more likely to communicate the importance of completing the survey, if they know that they are accountable for the class response rate. Leaders of business units can be motivated by viewing their group’s ranking among the others.
Implementing Positive and Negative Reinforcement

Positive Reinforcement (Incentives)

To provide an incentive for completing the survey, some organizations present prizes to individuals who submit surveys. There are a few different approaches to this:

- Provide small prizes to all students who submit surveys.
- Provide a prize to a randomly selected student from each class.
- Provide a prize to a randomly selected student for a period of time, typically one per month or quarter.

Using a combination of these approaches can be effective. Your organization might put in place a monthly drawing, but for classes in which high response rates are required, providing prizes to all students might be worth the extra cost.

Prizes that might be appropriate as giveaways include:

- Books (relevant to the subject matter of training)
- Gift certificates (coffee houses, restaurants, stores, online shopping)
- Electronics (digital music players, travel alarm clocks, flash drives)
- Bonus vacation days (for corporate universities with management support)
- Discounts on future training (for commercial learning providers)

Giving away prizes will only boost response rates if the students are aware of them. Ensure that all your communications regarding surveys (instructors, handouts, and survey emails) advertise this incentive. Additionally, you can publish the details of the giveaway in a monthly newsletter.

Negative Reinforcement (Penalties)

An effective means of increasing response rates can be instituting negative consequences for those who do not complete evaluations. Some learning organizations will not mark a student as having completed a course until an evaluation is submitted. Another approach used in corporate university settings is to inform the managers of student who have not submitted evaluations. This approach requires management buy-in.

Apply negative reinforcement carefully. If students resent being forced to submit evaluations, the quality of the comments and potentially even the scale-based answers could suffer. One way to mitigate this risk is to take a carrot-and-stick approach by instituting one or more positive reinforcement programs.
Appendix A: Sample Training Evaluation Notice

Ensure your organization customizes the notice to be consistent with your process for collecting training evaluations. If you have any positive or negative reinforcement techniques associated with your evaluation process, be sure to include those in this notice. Ensure the final notice is visible in each student’s courseware materials. All instructors should be aware of the notice in the materials and reference the importance of completing the evaluation and the process by which students will receive the evaluation.

Training Evaluation Notice

Thank you for attending training. Your candid and objective feedback is important to us. We use this information to improve the training and ensure it is effective on your job. Below is some information on the evaluation process.

Why?
Because your feedback is extremely important and because we run training like a business and this provides critical operational feedback. We need this information not only to improve our processes but to have a meaningful discussion with your management on the value of the training to your business and job function.

What?
The evaluation is taken very seriously by our organization. It has elements of your satisfaction. In addition it collects your opinion on learning effectiveness. Most importantly, it provides your management and ours information on the impact it will have on the job and business results.

When?
An electronic evaluation will be emailed to you following this training. It will take no more than 2 minutes to complete and it will help us in understanding your satisfaction and the training’s perceived value if you complete it within 48 hours of receiving it.

How?
You complete the survey electronically as it will be sent via email. Simply click on the link and begin to complete the information we request. Again, this is critical to our understanding the impact the training will have on your job.

Follow Up Evaluation
Approximately two months after the end date of a class, you may receive a Follow Up Evaluation. This brief survey will focus on if and when you applied the training to your job. This evaluation is critical to understanding the effect of the training in practice. We would appreciate a few minutes of your time in completing it as well.

Thank you again for your time in attending the training and your consideration in completing this important evaluation.

Learning & Development Team
Appendix B: Sample Instructor Script

Instructors should take time at the beginning and near the end of class to explain the evaluation process and how important it is for the learners to complete evaluations. Below, there are two sample scripts that instructors can read from in class. These should be customized to reflect your organization’s evaluation process and any positive or negative reinforcement associated with completing the evaluations.

At the beginning of class:

“At the end of class, you will be asked to submit brief evaluations regarding this training. These evaluations will not only measure how satisfied you were with the instruction and courseware, but also how relevant the class will be to your job. This feedback is vital to our training organization as we are constantly striving to improve the quality and impact of the classes that you attend.”

On the last day of class, when students are completing evaluations in class:

“Please take the next 5-10 minutes to complete the evaluations. Your feedback is extremely important, because we run training like a business and the evaluations provides critical operational feedback. We need this information not only to improve our processes but to have a meaningful discussion with your management on the value of the training to your business and job function.”

“About two months from today, you may receive a Follow Up Evaluation. This brief survey will focus on if and when you applied the training to your job. This evaluation is critical to understanding the effect of the training in practice. We would appreciate it if you spent a few minutes of your time to complete that evaluation, so that we can make future training sessions have greater impact on your jobs.”

On the last day of class, when students will complete evaluations via email links:

“Very soon, you will receive an email inviting you to take a survey regarding this class. It will not take more than 5 minutes to complete the survey. You should complete the survey shortly after receiving the email, because your thoughts on the training will be fresh and you won’t receive any reminder emails a few days later asking you to complete the survey.”

“Your feedback is extremely important, because we run training like a business and the evaluations provides critical operational feedback. We need this information not only to improve our processes but to have a meaningful discussion with your management on the value of the training to your business and job function.”

“About two months from today, you may receive a Follow Up Evaluation. This brief survey will focus on if and when you applied the training to your job. This evaluation is critical to understanding the effect of the training in practice. We would appreciate it if you spent a few minutes of your time to complete that evaluation, so that we can make future training sessions have greater impact on your jobs.”
Appendix C: Sample Emails

This is the text that will appear in any email automatically generated from the Metrics that Matter system. Work with your KnowledgeAdvisors account team to customize the subject and body of the MTM survey email message to make it unique to your organization. Communicate the importance of the students’ feedback in the message and provide the details of any positive or negative reinforcement.

Post Event Email

From: Company Name  
Subject: Please provide feedback about training you attended

Recently, you attended the class, [Coursename]. We would appreciate it if you could provide feedback related to this course. Please follow the link below to complete the evaluation.

Click here to begin the survey

Follow Up Email

From: Company Name  
Subject: Please provide additional feedback about training you attended

A couple of months ago, you submitted an evaluation to Metrics That Matter for a training course, [Coursename]. Please click the link below to fill out a brief follow up evaluation on that class to help us continuously improve.

Thank you in advance.

Click here to begin the survey

Manager Email

From: Company Name  
Subject: Manager 60 Day Follow Up

Dear [Manager Name]:

Several months ago your employee, [Student Email], completed a training program entitled [Coursename].

In order to measure the effectiveness of this training program in developing your employee, please click on the link below and complete a brief survey.

Click here to begin the survey
Reminder Email

From: Company Name
Subject: Reminder Email

Several days ago you received a solicitation to complete a brief survey regarding the class, [Coursename]. To date, we have not received your response.

In order to continuously enhance the value and effectiveness of the courses offered, your thoughtful and timely feedback is essential.

Please click on the link below and complete this brief survey. Your input is appreciated.

Click here to begin the survey