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Evaluating the effectiveness of an online course with the Kirkpatrick model

How to use the four levels of the Kirkpatrick model to assess the effectiveness of continuing education?

The ultimate goal of any online course is to educate participants. But how can we know that we have achieved this goal? In other words, how can we assess the **effectiveness of an online course**?

One of the most popular models for the **evaluation of training**, both classroom and eLearning, is Kirkpatrick.

The **Kirkpatrick model** is based on four levels of evaluation which provide a comprehensive overview of the effects of training.

Level 1 - Reaction

This level measures student satisfaction, **interest and involvement**. How satisfied are they with the course? Did they feel involved?

This assessment can be carried out through surveys and questionnaires to be administered to participants and provides important information on the **quality of the course**. For example, it could include information on the teacher's performance, quality of materials and content, etc.

The Kirkpatrick model suggests the use of an **anonymous questionnaire** that includes both closed and open questions, so as to collect both easily classifiable scalar assessments and personal and articulated suggestions.

If you use an **LMS platform**, you can easily automate the assessment of the **students' reaction level**. How? For example, through post-training surveys and all the course assessment features available in the LMS (comments and feedback, reviews, etc.).

You can then collect these metrics into customisable reports. In addition, depending on the platform used, you will be able to generate **automatic and periodic reports** so that the course evaluation is always active. Finally, with the most advanced LMSs, you can automatically send reports to managers or other interested parties, making it easier for them to evaluate students' reaction.

Level 2 - Learning

This level measures **what knowledge has been passed** on to participants and what skills have been developed.

In this case, the evaluation must be carried out both before and after the course in order to compare the increase in knowledge and assess what changes have taken place. Regarding the methodology, the Kirkpatrick model proposes the use of a (not necessarily anonymous) **test**.

LMSs have many features that will help you assess the **students' learning level**. For example, you could include a test of skills to be administered before and after the course. In addition, you could upload student competence assessments to the LMS and send them periodically to supervisors.

Level 3 - Behaviour

This level serves to determine whether learning has influenced student behaviour and **professional performance**. In other words, it allows you to understand whether students are using the knowledge learned during the course by transforming it into behaviour and skills.

This assessment should therefore be made after a certain period of time after the completion of the course (better if repeated over time) in order to detect changes that occur both in the immediate and medium term.

It can be carried out through the observation of performance or through special surveys to be administered to participants or their superiors.

Assessing the level of behaviour through an SML is apparently more complex. But it is possible to use **job checklists** to allow managers to check the boxes and record the behaviour in the student profile. As with other tools, an LMS will allow you to automate these assessments by automated email.

Level 4 - Results

The level of results aims to understand the **impact of training on company performance**, linking learning to organisational and individual performance. For example, it could measure the impact on sales volume, customer satisfaction, product quality, production time, etc.

This metric is the most complex to analyse. The biggest challenge will be to identify what results are closely linked to training and find an effective way to measure long-term results.

In this case, it will be crucial to devote time to both pre-training and follow-up evaluations. Results will need to be assessed over and over again over time to see whether the new learning affects the long-term business.

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