

# Measuring the Learning Experience

**BIGGEST CHALLENGE: GETTING LEARNERS TO COMPLETE THE ASSESSMENTS AND CONTENT**

**BY NICHOLAS IGNERI**

Over the past 18 months or so, the American Management Association (AMA) has been actively expanding its ability to measure the effectiveness of its learning solutions. The AMA used the widely known and accepted Kirkpatrick model as the foundation of its approach. As a result, it can now offer clients the option to measure the effectiveness of the learning solution on the individual and organization. This was somewhat tricky, because the AMA provides both public seminar solutions and corporate, customized solutions — the former presenting more of a challenge than the latter.

The AMA has traditionally measured Level I successfully. Level I evaluation measures the learner's reactions of the learning event. AMA gathers data from learners on their perceptions of the facilitator, learning design, materials, facility, hotel accommodations and registration process. We want data from customers on the whole learning experience so we can analyze customer perceptions and take specific actions. Over the many years, the AMA has been collecting Level I data so we can identify trends and see where customers' needs are strongest.

## **ON TO HIGHER LEVELS**

Newer to the AMA measurement push is a solution for Level II evaluation, which is focused on determining learning transfer. Tackling Level II measurement meant that we needed new systems, content and processes, including:

>> valid and reliable assessment tools

- >> Web-based content
- >> a delivery mechanism (LMS and LCMS technology)
- >> reporting capabilities
- >> a refined marketing and customer communication process

Our level II evaluation approach did offer one break: we did not need to develop separate solutions for our public seminar and corporate businesses. Learning is learning — it does not really matter if that learning was delivered in a public seminar room or a corporate training facility.

Level II is about creating a baseline measurement before any learning takes place and then assessing what was learned after the learning experience. So that's what we did: we created assessments, continuously measured assessment reliability and validity, delivered the assessments through LMS technology, distributed post-seminar assessments, and reported data to communicate learning transfer. We also took the next logical step: identifying learning gaps and then delivering targeted Web-based content to close those gaps.

AMA was determined not to simply report on learning transfer, but to also report on learning gaps identified by

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assessment responses, communicate learning gaps to learners and deliver targeted “tune-up” content designed to close identified gaps. The immediate and targeted distribution of tune-up content clearly has a positive effect on learning transfer data.

Level III evaluation, focused on measuring behavior change back at work, required a slightly different solution for our public seminar and corporate businesses.

In our public seminar business, we normally do not have direct access to the organization to effectively measure Level III. We can ask learners — through surveys, for example — how they think they are bringing the learning back to the office. Our goal is to strengthen Level III evaluation in a public seminar environment by connecting with the learner’s manager and asking questions to determine the level of behavior change.

Level II evaluation for our corporate solutions is much easier to measure. We have access to the organization, so we can determine with our clients how we’ll approach Level II evaluation. Once the methodology is finalized, we can deliver content in the modality that meets the client’s expectations.

#### RETURN ON EXPECTATIONS


The AMA identifies Level IV evaluation using the most recent definition, which is focused on measuring return on expectations. You might be concerned if you were asked to provide return on investment data (the formerly accepted definition of Level IV) after a training intervention. Rightfully so, many outside variables can affect how a team performs. Was it the training? Was it a recent bonus? Was it acknowledgement from the CEO? It is a monumental task to “prove” the change resulted solely from training.

Return on expectations is a much more manageable and effective definition. For corporate clients, we can certainly identify key expectations before the intervention begins. We can agree on how we’ll measure success and how we’ll identify success.

Level IV is not used for our public seminar clients. In a public seminar setting, the learning experience is focused on the individuals’ development. We certainly identify expectations for the learner at many points in the learning experience but the collec-

tive, organizational data is not available.

The biggest challenge in creating and delivering a solid measurement approach is not the creation of assessments, validating assessments, building and tuning up content, implementing a LCMS and LMS or designing reports; it is getting learners to complete the assessments and content. Measurement requires that the learners, managers and leaders take ownership and responsibility for each level of evaluation.

Learners and managers must complete pre- and post-learning surveys and assessments. Leaders must clearly identify expectations, success and evaluate the data to determine what worked and what needs more focus and attention. 

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