



Praxis Paper 30

# Monitoring and Evaluating Training

Challenges, opportunities and  
recommendations

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INTRAC

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The workshop was attended by 25 training providers from across Europe and the USA, as well as a handful of representatives from International NGOs.

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<sup>1</sup> People In Aid is merging with HAP International to form the CHS Alliance - [www.chsalliance.org](http://www.chsalliance.org)

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# Introduction

Do training courses really make any difference to people's ability to do their jobs or to the quality of their work? How can we know? Can the process of monitoring and evaluating these courses improve training effectiveness? Does pressure from donors help or hinder the process? These are challenging but important questions for training providers, civil society organisations and donors alike.

In January 2015, INTRAC, RedR UK, People in Aid, Bioforce, IECAH, Mango and Groupe URD led a workshop on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of training as part of their involvement in the Training Provider's Forum. The workshop highlighted some of the main challenges and questions that practitioners have been grappling with for many years when commissioning, managing and evaluating training programmes and assessing their impact.

Written from the perspective of the training provider, the first part of this paper compiles the major challenges and identifies four key questions we need to ask ourselves before deciding how (and whether) to monitor and evaluate training interventions. It then explores the what, when and why to evaluate, as well as who to involve, before moving on to offering a critical overview of commonly used approaches and frameworks for M&E of training.

The final part of the paper then suggests a newly developed set of steps for approaching each stage of the process in ensuring training impact, including:

- planning training effectively;
- designing appropriate M&E for the training;
- training design, delivery and monitoring; and
- evaluating training and learning for future improvement.

Drawing from both theoretical and practical perspectives of well-respected training providers, researchers and organisations working in this area, this Praxis Paper aims to support those involved in commissioning, managing and evaluating training.

We hope this paper will contribute to the ongoing debate and we welcome your comments, feedback and any further case studies, which can be sent to [training@intrac.org](mailto:training@intrac.org).

## Training Provider's Forum

We are an informal group of likeminded training providers who like to work together. The [Forum](#) aims to improve access to, and the quality of, training in the international development and humanitarian sector through greater collaboration between training providers; sharing learning and good practice; and advocating the importance of training in the sector. The forum is currently attended by INTRAC, Mango, RedR UK, Bioforce, People In Aid, Bond, IECAH, Groupe URD, Save the Children Academy and Save the Children UK.

# Challenges with M&E of training

## 1. Learning cannot be predicted or controlled

Many of us involved in commissioning, managing, delivering or evaluating training continue to hold the assumption that learning can be achieved in neat, measurable parts and thus can be predicted and controlled.<sup>2</sup> In other words, if we train on X, then Y learning will happen, and Z change will arise, rather like programming a machine. However, in reality change through learning is often outside of our control; it is highly personal, shaped by our emotions, attitudes, previous experience, and context. Change is also often a gradual process, which happens while we are getting on with our 'real' work of meeting deadlines and achieving targets.

When planning for learning, it is often the unspoken factors that have the greatest effect: power, relationships, culture – the 'dark matter'. Accepting this means accepting risk and uncertainty in planning, reducing the power of the planner and training provider, and locating us in the more modest position as facilitators for the right environment and support for learning to take place. Shifting our perspective in this way means we can position M&E where it arguably has greatest effect – helping us distinguish between what is supporting and what is hindering learning, and then changing our approach accordingly.

## 2. Defining what success looks like and how to get there

It is important to have a clear sense of the change that a 'learning intervention' is aiming to bring about. For example, can you answer the question, 'what does success look like'? Learning interventions often need to be broader than training courses alone in order to result in significant, lasting change. Without a theory of how change will happen, expectations tend to expand far beyond what is feasible given the time and budget available. For example, one-, two- or three-day courses are unlikely to improve the quality of work, change attitudes or build skills unless they are part of a broader capacity building process.

Diversity, in terms of background, organisational role, and context is also a factor to consider - while some organisations feel obliged to send as many people as possible on 'in-house' bespoke training to get value for money, this often forfeits the ability to provide an experiential and in depth process that would help a particular group to build knowledge, skills and change attitudes.

Furthermore, involving those who are expected to create or support change in defining what success will look like, will lead to a more realistic training plan. As Peter Senge notes: "*people don't resist change, they resist being changed*".<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Learning is gradual and informal

Learning and behaviour change is often an incremental process which takes time. For most people, it involves trial and error, with gradual adjustments until people become more competent. It usually involves feedback, encouragement and support from others to reinforce what we are doing well, and guide us when we are off track. While it is difficult to pin-point what led to a learning outcome, studies consistently show that the majority of learning occurs outside of formal learning

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<sup>2</sup> See Rick James' INTRAC blog series on capacity building. <http://intrac.org/blog.php/64/strategic-funerals-in-capacity-building>

<sup>3</sup> Barefoot Collective (2015), pg. 23.

events. For example, Dr Brent Peterson at Columbia University conducted a study in 2004 which showed that the proportion of time spent by organisations developing training activities was 10% on pre-course work, 85% on the learning event and 5% on follow-up. What is interesting is that it also suggested that the percentage contribution to learning effectiveness were: 26% due to pre-course work; 24% due to the learning event; and 50% due to follow up. Here we can see that most learning took place in the areas least invested-in.<sup>4</sup>

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) is a useful case study to understand the importance of training follow-up.

### **MSF: getting the most out of training**

MSF's focus is on ensuring that training is well thought through by assessing needs and commitment to learning, and ensuring support is built in. They know from experience that:

1. staff qualifications need to be reviewed prior to training since not all qualifications require the same level of knowledge and skills. For example, different countries have different standards that may not be comparable;
2. if a manager does not provide the appropriate support and mentoring following the training then there is not likely to be any improvement in the quality of work;
3. staff need to consider training as integral to project implementation and not a 'nice-to-have' or unnecessary distraction from their work;
4. training cannot cover everything so learning objectives need to be prioritised.

When training medics (who are not paediatrics) to treat children, MSF observes participants in the field, as part of the learning process, to identify what further support they need. In this way, learning and behaviour change is not assessed as a retrospective activity but is continually monitored throughout. Trainees receive the follow-up support they need to put their new knowledge and skills into practice.

## **4. Personal factors matter**

An individual's motivation and willingness to change; their confidence and tenacity to push beyond their limits, all influence learning. Jenny Pearson argues that building competencies must involve enhancing self-awareness and personal mastery, without which any significant change is unlikely.<sup>5</sup> Learning is affected by emotional factors such as resistance, fear and the discomfort of 'not being good enough'. A trainee's level of metacognition (their knowledge of what they know / don't know and how they best learn) may also need to be factored into the learning experience.

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<sup>4</sup> Kirkpatrick, J., and Kirkpatrick, W. K. (2009), pg. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Pearson, J. (2010).

Training therefore needs to consider the personal incentives to change, as shown by MSF in Niger.

### **MSF: unexpected training outcomes**

Six months after an MSF training in Niger, 40% of the trainees had resigned. They had got better jobs. This didn't mean that they were necessarily doing anything better, but having done the training meant that their career opportunities had improved. What does this say about the impact of the course?

## **5. Context counts**

An important consideration in the effectiveness of training is the extent to which a trainee is able to implement learning once back in their workplace. For example, if the training was not linked to any organisational analysis, or internal change process, a trainee may not have the opportunity to apply learning.

Bruce Britton writes about the importance of “motive” (the desire to learn and develop); the “means” (the mechanisms for learning, for example training) and the “opportunities” (putting learning into practice) which may be beyond the individual's control.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, when training is within a culture where future funding is reliant on training programmes going well, honest reporting of learning outcomes may be hindered. After all, curbing our freedom to fail curbs our freedom to learn.

## **6. Assessing contribution**

Monitoring and evaluating the outputs of training activities such as the number of people trained and satisfaction levels is relatively easy. But this does not allow us to capture levels of learning; nor whether the training led to changes in behaviour or benefits to the organisation. Indeed, training could have had a detrimental effect, for example when a trainee tries to apply a new approach that they have learnt which derails project implementation.

To answer these questions, we need to go beyond outputs and also assess outcomes related to learning, behaviour change and organisational results. However, these sorts of changes can take time to manifest and there are challenges in assessing attribution since a multitude of factors influence change in the workplace.

## **7. The definition of impact changes**

Often donors define impact at the level of beneficiaries in the community or context we are working in. For an organisation, impact may mean changes in organisational effectiveness, while a training provider may be looking for learning and behaviour change at the individual level.

Different stakeholders may have conflicting ideas about the degree to which training alone can achieve learning and change, and the extent to which any change can be measured. It is therefore important to be clear about expectations around impact from the outset.

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<sup>6</sup> Britton, B. (2005).

## 8. Learning from the results

Once M&E data on a training course has been collected and analysed, the results must be applied. This would appear obvious but often evaluations are carried out shortly after the training course and decisions are made about how to move forward before any behaviour change has had time to come about. It may also be the case that evaluation commissioners do not really want to know answers to fundamental questions such as: Was it the right training course? Was it the right capacity building approach?

### The core questions

Given these challenges and considerations, before deciding how to monitor and evaluate a training intervention, it is worth exploring some central questions: Is it worth doing? Why are we doing it? Who is driving it? What type of training programme are we evaluating?

#### 1. Is it worth doing?

M&E should be integrated into the fabric of responsible management rather than being an 'add-on'. For example, when it comes to short training courses, it may not be necessary or cost effective to invest in developing indicators and extensive reporting. M&E thus needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the size and scale of the training investment.

INTRAC associate Nigel Simister suggests that whether it is worthwhile investing in measuring impact will depend on the following factors:

- size of change expected;
- degree to which training is expected to contribute to change;
- degree to which change is measurable;
- level of resources invested in the training programme and available for the evaluation;
- degree to which people will feel able / willing to be honest about level of change;
- degree of importance of the results of the evaluation.<sup>7</sup>

#### 2. Why are we doing it?

Different stakeholders and motivations may create a desire to monitor and evaluate a training course and it is important to prioritise these drivers. It is worth asking therefore, if M&E is being driven by a need to:

- identify what is enhancing and inhibiting learning at an organisational level and cultivate a culture of learning;
- assess the quality of learning materials / trainers and whether investing in them is worth it;
- evaluate the extent to which the intervention has supported learning and behaviour change and whether to continue the investment;
- compare the effectiveness of different learning interventions;
- evaluate the overall impact of the programme at a broader organisational or societal level.

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<sup>7</sup> Discussed at the M&E of Training workshop, January, 2015.

The further along the results chain we attempt to go (from inputs and outputs to outcomes and impact), the more time consuming, expensive and unreliable the results become. Furthermore, the evaluations often attempt to answer too many questions, thereby losing their focus and taking too much time. Rather, data needs to be collected that will actually be used to inform our work and help us plan and make decisions.

### **3. Who is driving it?**

The driver of M&E - be it a donor, organisation or training provider - will influence the process and investment considerably.

#### **Donors**

While a donor-driven process can ensure that M&E is embedded within programmes strategically from the outset, the drive to be accountable to a donor can risk influencing the training topic. For example, compliance-related courses such as proposal development, reporting and budget management may end up being prioritised over courses where the results are harder to measure, such as leadership or the ability to collaborate, even though they can have a transformative effect on the organisation.<sup>8</sup>

Testing learning will be easier on topics where there are clear guidelines or processes to follow - for example, financial reporting - hence their appeal to donors. However, prioritising what can be easily measured over what will result in transformative change risks reducing the effectiveness of building capacity within organisations.

When donor accountability is the main driver, timeframes may not be conducive to assess more complex issues like learning, behaviour change and organisational change. Furthermore, the focus tends to be on assessing what has been funded, rather than providing the scope to measure other changes which may not have been planned for but have had a significant effect on the programme. Similarly, the evaluation may be geared towards justifying the money spent, rather than looking at where the programme failed, or could be improved in the future.

#### **Organisations**

If the organisation itself is the driver of M&E then there may be more opportunities to develop longer term capacity building unconstrained by donor agendas. Investment can be made in outcomes that are harder to measure but can contribute to organisational effectiveness, such as team building, succession planning and coaching and mentoring.

Furthermore, the organisation is often best positioned to carry out M&E since they have a close relationship with all stakeholders (donor, training provider, beneficiaries of the training course and managers). Also existing performance management mechanisms (including competency frameworks) can be leveraged to support M&E of learning and behaviour change.

However, the risk is that without the donor driving accountability, the organisation may not prioritise M&E.

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<sup>8</sup> James, R. (2014).

## **Save the Children: M&E for open training**

The Humanitarian Operations Programme offered by Save the Children and accredited at Masters level with Oxford Brookes University, is available to staff from humanitarian agencies (both national and international) as well as individuals interested in a career in humanitarian work. It consists of two modules: a one-week residential course followed by four months of distance learning; and a two-week residential course. Individuals are mentored and assessed against the START Network Humanitarian Core Competencies.<sup>9</sup>

The course is 'pass or fail' and is monitored and evaluated through:

- pre-event surveys;
- post-survey feedback;
- coursework;
- post-training interviews with individuals and line managers;
- impact reviews; and
- a self-assessment.

M&E is carried out for many reasons including:

- ensuring the course is appropriate for learners;
- ensuring all competencies are assessed;
- improving quality of the training experience;
- influencing the investment in capacity building; and
- reporting to both Save the Children and donors on the success of the course.

The data has resulted in the course being expanded into new geographical locations and has helped to improve the content to meet new expectations of learners such as personal wellbeing, stress, gender-based violence and general protection elements.

## **Training providers**

Sometimes, the training provider itself will promote M&E, particularly for tailor-made courses. It may seek to understand its specific contribution or ensure that its activities are being sufficiently supported at an organisational level.

The degree to which the training provider can support evaluation depends on its ability to access and communicate with stakeholders. Where the training provider is given the responsibility for undertaking M&E, they also need to be consulted at the planning stage. In this way, the long term change objectives can be agreed and both parties (commissioner and training provider) can invest time and effort in ensuring that the intervention contributes to the desired result. This can be through advice on supporting staff and integrating new ways of working post-training, or through direct coaching and mentoring. In this context, the training provider becomes a trusted advisor.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.start-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Core-Competencies-Framework.pdf>

## 4. What type of programme are we evaluating?

As discussed, there is no 'one size fits all' M&E approach; it will depend on the training topic and how to apply learning. For example, when training in soft skills, learners may need to tailor their approach according to the context, people, and political environment.

The length and type of course also affects the level of evaluation that is feasible. If it is an open course that is accredited (e.g. an academic qualification) then the training provider is likely to take more responsibility for measuring learning. If not, then the responsibility for setting learning objectives, success criteria and the bulk of the evaluation process needs to stay with the commissioner. The training provider (in-house or external) may have built-in M&E processes but these are not likely to track the results of each individual beyond the reaction or learning stage.

### **Centre International d'Etudes pour le Développement Local (CIEDEL): understanding attitude and behaviour**

CIEDEL is a training centre based in Lyon running training courses in local development. It trains 30-40 professionals a year, from NGOs to local government. Topics covered include: needs assessment, project management, policy implementation and financial economic development.

Recently they evaluated their 12-month Masters degree in development to identify and understand:

- the effects on participants at a personal level - for example, engagement in social issues or politics post-training;
- the changes within participant's organisations.

Students following CIEDEL's four-week evaluation course were responsible for carrying out the interviews with 100 students, representing 10% of CIEDEL's students. CIEDEL focused on identifying the main areas of change expected including:

- capacities built – what skills were learnt which improved performance?
- changes in attitude and values – how did these change as a result of the course?
- views and vision of development – did the course help to broaden their view of development?
- employability – did they find jobs after the course? What type of job? For what type of organisation?
- capacity of the organisation – were changes made in how they sought funding, ran projects, influenced decision making?

Although the programme is continually adjusted each year, this evaluation brought new findings, particularly in terms of shifts in values and attitudes about development and how to work in multi-cultural groups. Students also reported achieving a better salary and recognition with this qualification.

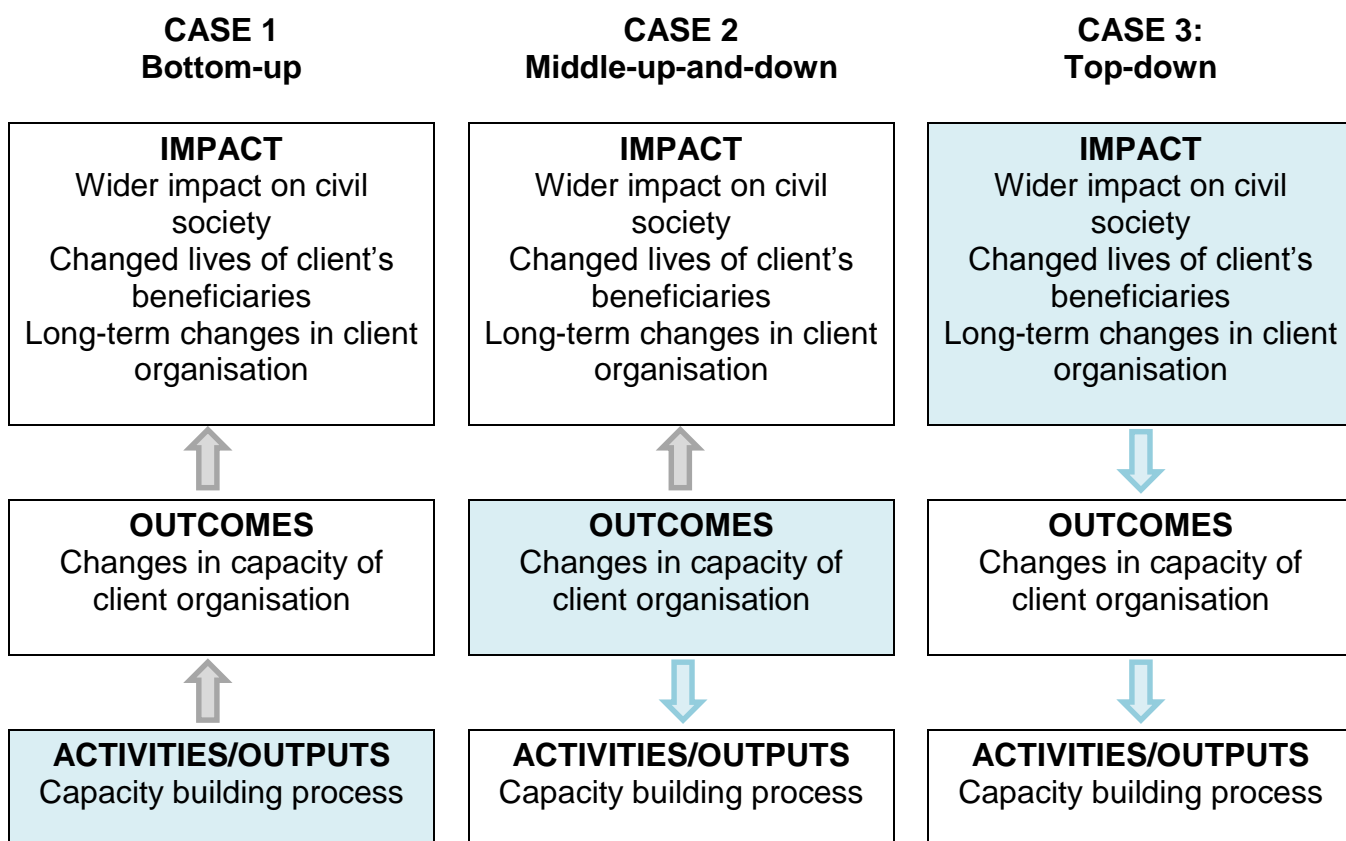
For tailor-made courses provided by in house or external suppliers, there is usually more scope to build in M&E – particularly in the planning stages. The provider can work with the organisation from the outset to understand what success looks like and to carry out a needs assessment or benchmarking process prior to the intervention. If the agreement is to build in post-training capacity building activities, then the provider can also monitor progress on an ongoing basis.

In a longer-term capacity building programme, M&E can be built into the programme from the start and here there is often more opportunity to adequately fund, carry out training and use evaluation results. Some factors may already have been decided such as the indicators of success, but if not, the organisation and the provider can work on this together. One way to start is to explore what the dimensions of change are in relation to the topics and, from that point, decide on the interventions.

Once this is clear, both parties can develop an assessment and rating process, preferably facilitated by the organisation. This can be done by identifying specific dimensions and descriptors of change that can be rated before and after the training.

## Approaches to assessing impact of capacity building

Before moving on to explore frameworks for evaluating and measuring the impact of training, it is worth reviewing theoretical approaches to consider impact. Nigel Simister’s paper [M&E of Capacity Building – Is it really that difficult](#)<sup>10</sup> outlines three approaches adapted for a training intervention:



<sup>10</sup> Simister, N. (2010).

## **1. Bottom-up**

The first option is to assess the training intervention at output level (quality of delivery, materials, how well the course was received, etc.), then to continue to trace the changes forward (upward) in terms of the trainees' learning and behaviour change, and finally to trace any changes that have taken place at an organisational level (or beyond) as a result of those changes in learning and behaviour.

Any form of evaluation that traces change forward has the advantage that contribution is easier to assess. The evaluation is focused on the results arising from a specific training course and so donors often prefer this approach. Another advantage is that the quality of the intervention is included in the evaluation. It is easier to conduct when contact can be maintained with the learners over a longer period of time, for example if the organisation manages the evaluation with their staff.

However, the approach may miss exploring unintended changes. This approach is also less useful for evaluating the cumulative effects of different types of capacity building over time. Since this approach only focuses on those who received training, it is not suitable for measuring change in the overall capacity of an organisation.

## **2. Middle-up-and-down**

The middle-up-and-down approach to evaluating capacity building (in this case training) is to start at the level of learning and behaviour change and then trace forward (upward) to assess what impact that may have had at organisational level and also trace back (downward) to try to identify what led to that learning and behaviour change.

This approach is suitable when the training is followed up with other capacity building mechanisms such as webinars, coaching or mentoring but where the extent and timing of this additional support is not known at the start of the programme. Alternatively, it is suitable if training is part of a broader capacity building programme for the organisation. A potential disadvantage is that the training course may not be mentioned by respondents during the evaluation, making it less suitable for the purpose of being accountable to donors.

## **3. Top-down**

The third approach is to start with assessing changes that have happened at the level where the impact was expected to occur (either at the organisational level or at the societal level) and then to trace back (downward) to assess all of the factors that contributed to this change.

The 'top-down' approach is more appropriate when there are a number of interventions being implemented and the intention is to understand which intervention contributed most to any observed change. This will obviously be easier when the desired change of the training intervention is clear from the start, for example, if there is a strong theory of change. Therefore, it may be easier to use when evaluating technical training courses, rather than for general capacity building interventions where any number of changes can occur at organisational or societal level.

Disadvantages of this approach are that, as for the Middle-up-and-down approach, the training intervention itself may not be mentioned as a factor contributing to change in the evaluation and that it may not adequately examine the quality of the specific training activities.

Simister argues that these three approaches are not mutually exclusive. For example, a training provider could carry out an evaluation starting with an examination of the outputs (the reaction level) of the course, and follow this with a survey with the learners after six months to look at learning and behaviour change. Likewise, an organisation could evaluate change and then trace this backwards and forwards. In cases where there is a clear theory of change of the desired impact that a training course is intended to have, then a donor or organisation could fund an impact evaluation.<sup>11</sup>

## Frameworks and tools

This section provides a critical overview of one of the best known models for monitoring and evaluating training, the Kirkpatrick Model, and compares it to similar models. It also suggests an alternative model, the Brinkerhoff Success Case Method, which challenges the standard approaches and argues for organisations to be evaluated instead of the training itself. These frameworks are useful to draw upon when designing tools and considering what, when and why to evaluate, as well as who to involve.

### 1. The Kirkpatrick Model

The version of the Kirkpatrick Model (developed by Donald Kirkpatrick in the 1950s) that people are often most familiar with consists of four levels of evaluation to demonstrate a link between training and change.<sup>12</sup> These are:

- **Level 1: reaction** of learners to the training programme – relevance, quality of trainer / materials, pace, level, etc.
- **Level 2: learning** - changes in knowledge, skills and attitude.
- **Level 3: behaviour change** – whether / how the learning is applied as part of working practices.
- **Level 4: organisational results** - changes to the team / organisation as a result of the changes in behaviour.

Although this model is most widely cited, it has also come under much criticism. Due to cost, time and capacity limitations, many who use the framework only use it partially - evaluating up to level 2 only.<sup>13</sup> Even then, one study shows that self-assessment of course satisfaction (level 1) is only moderately related to learning (level 2).<sup>14</sup> Others challenge the link between learning (level 2) and behaviour change (level 3)<sup>15</sup>, suggesting that delivering a good course alone, does not necessarily help transfer learning to behaviour change without deliberate and consistent reinforcement. Similarly, the model comes under fire for not sufficiently addressing the evidence that it is not the course itself which results in training failing but what happens after the course.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Simister, N. (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Available online at: <http://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/OurPhilosophy/TheKirkpatrickModel/tabid/302/Default.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> According to Jenny Pearson (2011), evaluating behaviour (level 3) and organisational change (level 4) tends not to be done due to cost and time factors and the challenges of attribution.

<sup>14</sup> Sitzmann (2008) carried out a meta-study of 68,245 trainees and 354 research reports, asking whether satisfied learners learn more than dissatisfied ones.

<sup>15</sup> Bates (2004) citing two meta-analyses of training evaluations using Kirkpatrick (Alliger & Janak (1989); Alliger, Tannenbaum, Benett, Traver, & Shotland (1997).

<sup>16</sup> According to a study by the American Society for Talent Development in 2006 course failure is largely due to what happens (or doesn't happen) after the course (70%), with lack of preparation and readiness accounting for just 20% and the learning intervention itself; only 10%.

In response to these criticisms, Kirkpatrick argue that these issues were considered in the original model but were lost in its interpretation and application.<sup>17</sup> Their paper “The Kirkpatrick Four Levels: A Fresh Look at 50 Years 1959-2009” highlights the components of the original theory which are often missed, and presents a revised model, the Kirkpatrick Business Partnership Model, which includes:

1. identifying the business need and agreeing to form a partnership between all stakeholders (business and training provider) to work on the learning intervention;
2. understanding the desired result and the behaviours that would accomplish this in order to be able to work out the knowledge, skills and attitude needed to bring about this behaviour change;
3. formulating a programme that fulfils each level and is a collective effort amongst many stakeholders, particularly for reinforcing learning;
4. designing and delivering the training programme and measuring reaction and learning;
5. providing reinforcement of learning through various additional activities; and
6. measuring behaviour change and organisational result (including return on expectation).

## 2. Variations on Kirkpatrick

Three similar models have attempted to address the criticisms and challenges of evaluating training.

### **Context Input Reaction Outcome (CIRO)**

The CIRO model also involves evaluating four levels but more explicitly addresses the need to evaluate the context, the learning needs and the logic of the training plan and the organisational input before the training course takes place. Post training, the ‘reaction’ can then be evaluated, followed by the outcome (at either individual, team or organisational level).<sup>18</sup>

### **Context Input Process Products (CIPP)**

The CIPP model, originally developed in the 1960s, also emphasises the need to evaluate planning and goes further in addressing a key problem with evaluations - getting the results used. Their model, therefore, focuses on helping decision makers to make decisions. Their levels evaluate: planning decisions (what should we do?); structuring decisions (how should we do it?); implementing decisions (are we doing things as we planned?) and recycling decisions (did the programme work?). This model addresses the utility of the data captured, but is criticised for being administrative and managerial rather than involving a range of stakeholders in a participatory way.<sup>19</sup>

### **Kauffmann’s 5 levels**

Kaufmann’s 5 levels also include the need to evaluate input in terms of human and financial resources, as well as ‘reaction’ of learners to the course.<sup>20</sup> They propose that acquisition and application of learning can be measured at either learner, or small group level. Finally, they suggest evaluating beyond payoff at organisational level and evaluating “*societal contribution*”.

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<sup>17</sup> Kirkpatrick, D. L. et al. (2009).

<sup>18</sup> Warr, P. et al. (1970).

<sup>19</sup> Stufflebeam, D. L. et al. (2006).

<sup>20</sup> Kaufman, R. (1994).

### 3. Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method

While the models presented so far offer logical and pragmatic ways of evaluating learning and change at an individual or small group level, a more radical alternative is provided by Brinkerhoff.<sup>21</sup> He argues that “*performance results cannot be achieved by training alone; therefore training should not be the object of the evaluation*”. He stresses that it is the system that should be the object of the evaluation and not the training course alone.

The Success Case Method combines various methodologies such as storytelling, case studies and naturalistic inquiry to answer the following key questions:

- How well is an organisation using learning to improve performance?
- What organisational processes / resources are in place to support performance improvement? What needs to be improved?
- What organisational barriers stand in the way of performance improvement?
- What groups have been successful in applying a learning opportunity to achieve a business result? Why have they been successful?
- What groups have been unsuccessful? Why have they been unsuccessful?

There are a number of steps involved in using this model. Firstly, as per the other models, an **impact model** is developed which identifies the goals of the learning opportunity and how these are connected to the business model. Next, a purposive **learners' survey** is conducted to identify the best / worst cases in terms of how learners have applied learning in such a way that led to the business result. Then **corroborating evidence** is obtained using interviews, document reviews etc. and the data is analysed. Finally, the **findings** related to what organisational resources have supported or blocked successes are shared in order to encourage change in the organisation's learning culture.

The advantage of Brinkerhoff's method is that it shifts the focus from the training to the organisation itself, highlighting the forces of 'dark matter' discussed earlier. The model brings issues to the surface around organisational culture, power, resource allocation, skills to support, communicate and cultivate trust and honesty. It is more illustrative, using real examples and stories, and allows for emergent factors which were not foreseen at the start, including unexpected business results (both positive and negative).

The disadvantages are that it may take longer to develop stories that are backed up by corroborating evidence and there may be biases in the surveys, since the samples are purposeful rather than random.

Nevertheless, there is a strong argument across all of the models that organisational effort and commitment is vital to transform learning into improved skills and behaviour change. The Success Case Method focuses on the heart of this issue by identifying the organisation's successes and failures in using learning to improve performance.

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<sup>21</sup> Brinkerhoff, R. (2005).

## **InsideNGO: Adapting the Brinkerhoff Model to a Training Provider**

InsideNGO is a global membership association of peers from more than 320 international relief and development organisations that delivers almost 150 open workshops each year. Recently, InsideNGO initiated a new programme to address two shortfalls of traditional training:

- 1) the lack of effective post-workshop learning support, which hinders knowledge recall and the likelihood that participants will apply new knowledge and skills in the workplace;
- 2) the inability to evaluate the effectiveness of training interventions.

The first issue is addressed through weekly emails to workshop participants soon after workshop completion. These include a thought-provoking scenario-based question that builds on workshop learning points and discussions. After answering the question, participants receive additional feedback and learning support, including links to external resources or opportunities to join listserv discussions. The questions are delivered on a weekly basis for approximately 8 weeks. A final question asks participants to describe how they have integrated new knowledge and skills into the workplace.

The second issue is tackled by identifying participants who are most engaged in the weekly emails and who provide evidence that they have incorporated new knowledge or skills from the workshop into the workplace. Based on a modified version of Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method to suit a training provider, a short interview is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What new knowledge and skills are being used?
2. What results or outcomes did the new capacities help achieve?
3. What is the value or importance of these results?
4. What suggestions do you have to improve the workshop?

Each interview that yields useful and verifiable information is developed into a Success Case Story that helps InsideNGO understand the effectiveness of the training and identify areas of strength to build upon as well as areas for improvement.

## **Applying the learning**

So far, this paper has outlined some of the challenges, approaches and frameworks for monitoring and evaluating training. This final section draws together the learning and provides a practical, four stage process for improving the effectiveness of training. The process incorporates a road map of steps to consider when designing M&E:

1. Planning learning interventions effectively (Steps 1-6)
2. Designing M&E for the learning intervention (Steps 7-10)
3. Design, delivery and monitoring (Steps 11-12)
4. Evaluating and learning (Steps 13-15)

This process is more likely to suit the evaluation of a larger training programme where the effort is worth the investment. However, as discussed at the beginning of this paper, a key part of having an impact through any training programme is about planning effectively, and steps 1-6 alone will contribute to this, even if the ambition around evaluation is limited by time and resources.

## Planning learning interventions effectively: steps 1-6

1. **Be clear on the organisational result** (change) based on the need identified. Consider which stakeholders will need to be involved in driving and / or supporting change.

*Tip:* Ultimate change usually requires combined initiatives and the commitment and effort of a collective. Explore what success looks like with all those involved including the learners themselves, and their managers. This investment pays off in the long run.

2. **Carry out a context analysis and needs assessment** to understand the existing status quo which can be compared to the desired future scenario. This gives an overall understanding of the system and ways of working at the individuals / team / organisation level, as well as highlighting any capacity gaps. There may be other forces which need addressing. Considering your capacity building plans within this broader perspective will help in being realistic about the outcomes you can hope to bring about.

*Tip:* It is important to find ways to carry out the needs assessment which encourage honesty and transparency and help to uncover motivation, fears, resistances and barriers to achieving the organisational result.

### The persona tool: keeping people in mind

The Open University, MSF and various technology companies use a 'persona tool' to help them keep the target audience in mind. This involves describing a fictional but realistic person, and then referring back to them as the activity or product is designed. This ensures that the capacity building activities are designed to fit the learners rather than the other way round.<sup>22</sup>

3. Carry out an **analysis of the tasks**<sup>23</sup> staff need to learn and prioritise which ones will be covered in a formal learning intervention and which ones will be learnt on the job. Whilst this tool is customarily used for e-learning, it is useful for beginning the process of ascertaining exactly what needs to be learnt in order to help bring about the desired change.

*Tip:* Ask how critical it is for the organisation that each task is learnt; how universally the task will be carried out across the organisation; and how feasible it is that the task will be learnt through formal learning.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.ld-grid.org/resources/representations-and-languages/personas> for more information from the Open University on this. A template can be downloaded here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-Fl63RuBlyB1AXKGFxG5sEDVXQ8UqxCeFsEVggZvWhQ/edit?pli=1>

<sup>23</sup> See Jonassen, D. H., Tessmer, M., Hannum, & W. H. Task Analysis Methods for Instructional Design (1999), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, UK – Chapter 2 (used by instructional designers but useful for considering broader capacity building design).

4. **Define the learning objectives.** If the previous steps have been followed, then it will be much easier to isolate the tasks and / or level of knowledge, skills and attitude. Learning objectives can then be written at outcome level.

*Tip:* Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful tool for checking what level of knowledge, skills and attitude change is sought. Understanding the level of change sought in more detail will help inform which learning intervention is most appropriate.<sup>24</sup>

5. Consider **the learning environment** that needs to be in place compared to what is available (this includes location, budget, and time). Decide **which learning intervention(s)** will best meet the objectives, given the resources available.

*Tip:* Challenge assumptions that training is the 'cure all' answer and consider what a blend of initiatives will be required for long term change. Consider upfront how learning will be encouraged, applied and monitored, and how feedback will be given. Adjust expectations around expected change according to the resources that are available.

6. **Carry out an evaluation of the logic** up to this point with various stakeholders including learners, managers, learning specialists, subject matter experts and the budget holder.

*Tip:* Evaluating the plans to determine if the training input matches the expectations can make the difference between success and failure. Set up an environment to encourage feedback about the risks and assumptions of the plan, such as a 'pre-mortem', and be willing to act on it.

#### **Klein's Pre-mortem exercise**

Klein, cited in Kahneman (2011) *Thinking Fast and Slow*, proposes carrying out a pre-mortem on proposed plans to legitimise doubt, overcome groupthink and reduce overconfidence, bias and uncritical optimism. To carry out a pre-mortem, gather a group of individuals who are knowledgeable about the decision being made. Present this scenario: "*Imagine that we are a year into the future. We implemented the plan as it now exists. The outcome was a disaster. Please take 5-10 mins to write a brief history of that disaster*". This helps unleash the knowledge of individuals in the right direction.

#### **Designing M&E for the learning intervention: steps 7-10:**

7. Once there is a strong theory of how change will come about then you can **decide the extent to which you need to monitor and evaluate the intervention and the main / sub questions you are aiming to answer.** Questions to ask include: who is driving the evaluation and what do they need to know? What is the main question that you are trying to answer? What are the sub questions that will help you answer the main question? What level do you need to evaluate up to, to answer those questions? Do you need to assess impact (and if so, do you need to trace forward or backwards)? How realistic is it?

*Tip:* M&E can feel extractive, time consuming and unhelpful. It is important here to get stakeholder buy-in as to how the process of monitoring and evaluation will benefit them. This will help to ensure their motivation and openness to provide information.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.businessballs.com/bloomstaxonomyoflearningdomains.htm>

8. **Decide what indicators will provide the evidence** that will answer the main / sub questions. How often will this data be collected and by whom? Is this realistic?

9. **Decide which tools can be used to collect the data and how the data will be analysed.** For example, do you need a statistical package to do it? How long will it take to analyse? Who will do it?

*Tip:* It is worth doing a pilot in which a small amount of data is collected and analysed. In this way, you can check that you are asking the right questions to get the data you need and that you have chosen the right indicators.

10. Again, at this point, it is worth carrying out a **short review** – this time on the M&E plan itself.

*Tip:* Having too many main questions and indicators and / or too much data, may make the process time consuming and lead to data not being used. The scope of M&E needs to match the time, budget, and buy-in.

## **Design, delivery and monitoring: steps 11-12**

11. Once the M&E plan has been agreed, then you can start to **design the course and the monitoring and evaluation tools.** The stakeholders who will carry out the monitoring can be briefed on how to capture, store, analyse and report on the data. If possible, the materials should be reviewed by key stakeholders to ensure that they meet the original need.

12. **Carry out any pre-tests required and deliver and monitor the course.** Where possible, use the feedback to immediately tailor and improve the course.

*Tip:* Daily monitoring is crucial here and tools such as end of day feedback groups are important to give participants a chance to review what they are learning, identify any gaps and think through how those needs can be met. It is also important to regularly review how the participants are finding the learning environment.

## **Evaluating and learning: steps 13-15**

13. After the course, you can **put in place the evaluation tools** which you have chosen in step 9.

*Tip:* Always do an end of course evaluation form while the participants are in the room to ensure 100% completion rate. Unless there has been a specific task which participants have had to complete to a certain standard, or another form of assessment, then it is challenging to attempt to measure learning at the end of a short course. Feedback from the trainer, the organiser and any other stakeholders involved in the training is also useful to capture at the end of the event.

14. **Collect, analyse and use the data** to answer the key questions which you defined in step 7. Present the findings to the key stakeholders in a way that will support decision making and disseminate the findings to support the development of other programmes. This could be via formal reports, but there may be better ways to communicate depending on the stakeholder.

15. **Make appropriate changes to the programme** or to future programmes based on the learning (this will depend on the question you intended to answer). Review whether the M&E process worked in terms of supporting learning and summarise what worked and what could be improved.

## Applying the learning: a checklist

### Steps 1-6: Planning learning interventions effectively

- 1 → We are **clear on the change** we want to achieve and the **stakeholders that will need to be involved** in both driving and supporting it.
- 2 → We understand the system and ways of working at the individuals/team/organisation level and have identified any capacity gaps (via a **context analysis and needs assessment**).
- 3 → We have done an **analysis of the tasks staff need to learn** to differentiate between those that require formal learning and those that can/will be learnt on the job.
- 4 → We have decided the overall **learning objectives** in terms of expected changes to knowledge, skills and attitude.
- 5 → We have considered the **learning environment** needed to bring about those changes versus the resources/circumstances that are available (location, budget, numbers and time) and chosen the best **learning intervention(s)** accordingly. We have revised the learning objectives to what can realistically be achieved through the chosen intervention.
- 6 → We have done an **evaluation of the logic up to this point** with various stakeholders including learners, managers, learning specialists, subject matter experts and the budget holder.

### Steps 7-10: Designing M&E for the learning intervention

- 7 → We have a strong theory of change and we have decided the main and sub questions that we want to answer – both of these are driving **the extent to which we monitor and evaluate the intervention**.
- 8 → Our **indicators** provide information to help **answer our main/sub questions**. We have considered whether they need to be qualitative and/or quantitative.
- 9 → We have chosen the **monitoring and evaluation tools that will help collect data on the chosen indicators**. We know who will be collecting the data and how often, and **how the data will be analysed and by whom**. Step 8 and 9 have informed each other.
- 10 → We have done a **short review of the M&E plan** itself with the stakeholders involved and we agree that it is realistic (in terms of staff time and resources) and will provide the information we need.

### Steps 11-12: Design, delivery and monitoring

- 11 → Stakeholders know how to capture, analyse and report on the data captured; and the **materials and training methodologies** designed have been checked against the original need.
- 12 → We have **carried-out any pre-tests required**, and where possible, used the feedback to tailor the course. We have run the course and monitored it, adapting the course to the arising needs of individuals and the group and making note of any follow up that might be required.

### Steps 13-15 : Evaluation and Learning

- 13 → The course is over! We have captured any immediate **feedback from relevant stakeholders**, and put in place mechanisms to capture subsequent data according to our plan.
- 14 → The **data** has been **collected, analysed and used** to answer the key questions defined in step 8. It is presented to stakeholders to facilitate learning and decision making.
- 15 → We have made **appropriate changes to the programme** or to future programmes based on the learning, reviewing whether the M&E process supported programme improvement. We have shared lessons learned with our colleagues.

# Conclusion

Learning, behaviour and attitude change are highly complex processes. Extensive research exists around how these processes work but it still remains little-understood terrain. And yet, the more we understand these dynamics, the better we can design and plan learning that is more likely to result in change.

Examples of good practice help. These include thinking through the detail of how change will happen rather than using training as a quick fix; building in ways to support, encourage and review learning; and offering the right environment for trial and error (including management buy-in and engagement).

Taking this on board during the planning stage may be just as helpful as investing time and resources into carrying out M&E to find out what works. M&E needs to add value to the process rather than take away precious time and resources from development or humanitarian work.

There are steps we can follow to ensure that planning, monitoring and evaluation processes contribute to the engagement and empowerment of learners – but these are the steps which are too often skipped over as we work under time pressure. In this way, we miss vital opportunities to learn, adapt and increase the likelihood of making the desired change happen. The M&E process – when done well – helps to deepen communication, trust and understanding between stakeholders on bringing about and sustaining change.

Above all, monitoring and evaluating training helps us to remain humble to the complexity of human learning and behavioural change and to share what we learn across our organisations and within the sector.

## Key messages

- Change through learning is often gradual; it is highly personal, shaped by our emotions, attitudes, previous experience, and context. It is, therefore, challenging to plan, control, predict and measure.
- Planning for training effectiveness is key. Investment here needs as much consideration as investment in post course evaluation and impact assessment.
- Investment in post-training follow up and ensuring opportunities are available for implementing learning is important. Training is most effective if part of a wider, planned capacity building process.
- Before deciding how to monitor and evaluate a training intervention, it is worth asking: is it worth doing? Why are we doing it? Who is driving it? What type of training programme are we evaluating?
- A range of models are available to evaluate change, most famously the Kirkpatrick Model. However, practitioners are increasingly recognising shortfalls to this model. The Brinkerhoff Success Case Method argues for organisations to be evaluated instead of the training.
- M&E needs to add value to the process, and benefit a range of stakeholders, rather than take away precious time and resources.

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