# M&E OF TRAINING

Training can take different forms. It can be carried out as a one-off exercise, or can be combined with other types of support, such as coaching or mentoring. The most well-known model for monitoring and evaluating training is the Kirkpatrick model, developed in the 1950s. A number of other models are also used by CSOs. Most of these are variants of the Kirkpatrick model.

This paper deals with the monitoring and evaluation of training, as distinct from capacity strengthening more generally. Training can take different forms.

- ***One-off intensive training course***: This is a structured event held in a specific venue, or sometimes online. It is usually designed around a series of learning objectives, and often consists of multiple sessions with clear objectives and course materials.
- ***Modular training course:*** This is a series of structured events held over a pre-defined period of time. Participants are frequently asked to do an exercise on a topic or topics between each module, or put the content of modules into practice in their workplace.
- ***Facilitated workshop:*** This is an event designed around specific learning objectives, and often includes the sharing of ideas, knowledge and practice. Workshops may also be designed to produce a specific output, such as a strategy or an action plan.

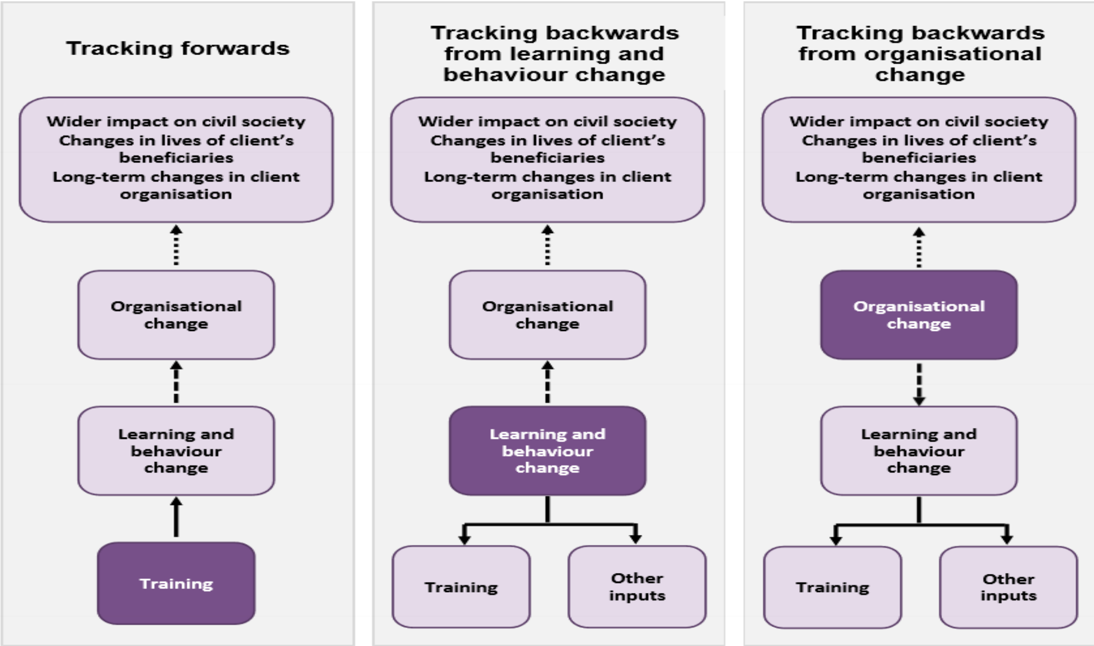
Training may be carried out on its own, or it can be combined with other kinds of support methods, such as coaching or mentoring. Sometimes, support is provided by facilitators or trainers in between modules. For example, training on financial management is often reinforced through technical assistance in the workplace.

## *Challenges*

When monitoring and evaluating training, several challenges need to be recognised if they are to be managed. These include the following.

- Learning cannot easily be predicted or controlled. Some CSOs assume that enhanced knowledge or skills can be treated as an output (deliverable) of training. In reality, learning is often outside a trainer's control, and is shaped by peoples' emotions, attitudes, previous experience, and context. The same training experience can lead to very different changes in different people's skills or knowledge.
- Behaviour change resulting from training can be a gradual process, which happens alongside people's normal day-to-day work. For many people, it involves trial and error, with gradual adjustments until people become more competent. This makes it important to consider *when* the longer-term results of training should be evaluated.
- It is vital to have a clear sense of the change that training aims to bring about. In other words, it is important to answer the question, *'what would success look like?'* Without knowing what change to expect beforehand, it is difficult to know where to look for it.
- When evaluating the effectiveness of training, it is important to understand the extent to which a trainee is able to implement learning once back in their workplace. Trainees may have increased their knowledge or understanding of a subject, but unless they have the opportunity to apply the learning in their work situations there may be no perceptible behavioural change.
- Different stakeholders may have conflicting ideas about the desired impact of training. For example, trainers may define success as people enhancing knowledge or understanding. But for a CSO commissioning training, impact may mean changes in organisational effectiveness. And donors often define impact at the level of targeted populations in the community. It is important to be clear about expectations around impact from the outset.
- Training evaluations are often carried out shortly after a training course, and decisions about how to move forward are made before any behaviour change has had time to happen. This means that there is often a weak connection between longer-term monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and decision-making. This in turn can reduce the desire of managers to spend resources on M&E once training has been completed.
- It is important to agree who is responsible for carrying out M&E, and at what level. This may differ according to the nature of the training. For example, in academic courses with accreditation, training providers are likely to take the responsibility for measuring learning (through exams or assessment). In other kinds of courses, the commissioners of training may take more responsibility for assessing whether or not learning objectives have been met. Training providers may have their own M&E processes for assessing immediate reactions to training, but may not be so interested in tracking longer-term change. It is important, therefore, to establish responsibilities at an early stage.

**Options for the direction of M&E**




## *The direction of M&E*

In training, as with capacity strengthening more broadly, it is important to understand the direction of M&E. There are three main options, which are shown in the diagram above. The first, and by far the most common, is to assess the training intervention itself, such as how well a course was received, the quality of delivery, etc., and then to track forwards to assess trainees' learning and behaviour change, organisational change, and eventually wider change.

The big advantage of this approach is that contribution is easier to assess, because M&E is focused on the results arising from a specific training course. Another advantage is that the quality of the training intervention is always assessed. Starting from the training also increases the likelihood of contact being maintained with trainees over a longer period of time. For example, when training is conducted, trainees can be asked if they are willing to be interviewed at a later date.

However, tracking forwards is less useful for evaluating the cumulative effects of different types of capacity strengthening exercises over time. This means that when training is conducted as part of a wider support programme the approach may not be so useful.

An alternative is first to seek to assess learning or behavioural change, and then track backwards to identify what led to that change, as well as forwards to see what organisational change has resulted. This approach may be more suitable when training is undertaken alongside other capacity strengthening mechanisms such as webinars, coaching or mentoring. A potential disadvantage, however, is that there is no guarantee a particular training course will be mentioned as a contributory factor to any change. In addition, this approach does not explicitly focus on the quality of the training delivery.

The third approach is to start from changes at organisational level or beyond, and then to track back (downwards) to consider all of the factors that contributed to those changes. This approach is most appropriate when a CSO has identified that change has occurred, but is uncertain what contributed to that change. Again, there is a risk that the training may not be mentioned as a factor contributing to change, and there may be little or no examination of the quality of specific training activities.

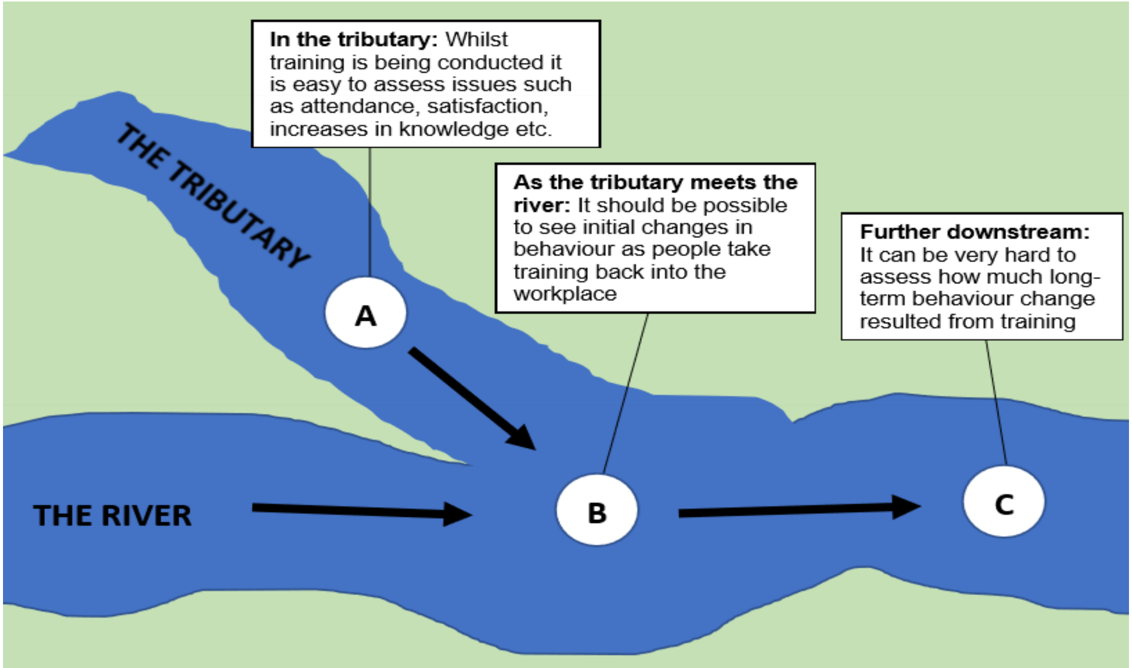
Of course, these three approaches are not mutually exclusive. For example, an organisation could carry out a training evaluation immediately after a training course, and follow this up with a survey after six months to look at participants' behaviour change. It could then track backwards to try and identify other contributory factors to the behaviour change.

## *How far to track change*

A key decision to make when monitoring and evaluating training is how far to attempt to track change. This can be illustrated by using the analogy of a tributary flowing into a river (see diagram on following page). The tributary is like the training. It is possible to directly measure the flow, speed and quality of water in a tributary. Likewise, it is possible to measure the quality of training, satisfaction rates, what has been learned etc., and be very confident of the findings.

As the water from the tributary enters the main river, things may get a bit more complicated. You would expect the main flow of the river to be affected by the tributary, and should be able to measure some change in water flow or quality. However, it might not be possible to say with any conviction which parts of the water came from the tributary and which from the main river. Likewise, it should be possible to assess some changes in behaviour as people

**Training: The River Analogy**




take the learning from training back into their work environments, and attribute this to the training.

Eventually, however, as one travels downstream, there comes a point where it is virtually impossible to tell the source of the water – whether it came from the tributary, another tributary, or the main river itself. This may be sooner or later depending on the size of the tributary compared to the river. Likewise, when monitoring and evaluating the longer-term effects of training, it eventually becomes pointless to try and assess change and trace it back to an individual training course.

It is important to recognise that the further you go down the river (and the further in time away from the training) the harder, more time consuming, expensive and unreliable the results of M&E become. How far it is worth trying to assess the longer-term effects of training depends on a number of factors, such as:

- the size of the expected change;
- how easy it will be to measure that change;
- the level of resources invested in the training programme;
- how much money is available for M&E work;
- the degree to which people may feel able or willing to be honest about the degree of change; and
- how any M&E findings will be used (i.e. the value they will have to the organisation conducting the M&E).

Thus if training was relatively cheap and short, or was only a small part of a wider capacity strengthening initiative, it may not be worth tracking the results of training very far. But if the training was considered particularly important, and had clear, measurable learning objectives, then it may be worth investing considerable time and effort into identifying its longer-term effects.

## *The Kirkpatrick model*

The most well-known model for monitoring and evaluating training is the Kirkpatrick model, developed by Donald Kirkpatrick in the 1950s (see diagram on following page, based on Kirkpatrick Partners (2020)). The version people are most familiar with consists of four levels of evaluation to demonstrate a link between training and change. The levels align with the tracking forwards approach outlined in the diagram on the previous page, and are shown below. (Note that the word *'evaluation'* here has a different meaning from the type of independent evaluations often conducted in the social development sector.)

- ***Level 1: Reaction evaluation*** measures how participants react to a particular training course. It provides feedback to trainers about the relevance of the training, the design of the training event, the content and delivery. Reaction is often assessed through written forms at the end of training. In its own training sessions, INTRAC also uses focus group discussions at the end of each day to assess how the training has gone, and make suggestions for subsequent days. Measuring reaction is relatively easy to do. Almost all trainers do it to some degree or other.
- ***Level 2: Learning evaluation*** goes further and looks at whether the training objectives were achieved in the short-term. Learning evaluation assess changes in participants' skills, knowledge and attitudes. It often requires a comparison between the participant's skills, knowledge and attitudes before and after training. It is frequently carried out at the end of a training event, but might also be done afterwards, when participants have had time to reflect on and assimilate the training.

Learning evaluations are commonly carried out through written questionnaires or interviews.

- ***Level 3: Performance evaluation*** goes further, and seeks to assess the behaviour change of trainees. Performance evaluation may involve seeking the views of a third party (perhaps the colleagues or manager of the participant) and can only be done some time after the training event. Within CSOs, it is often conducted through performance appraisal systems.
- ***Level 4:*** The final step is to look at the results in terms of ***organisational change***. This involves attempting to establish what actual benefits an organisation has gained from the training. This can be done by assessing, in the short- to medium-term, what changes have occurred in the way an organisation operates, and, if possible, what effect this has had on an organisations' target groups.

The four levels form a hierarchy, and to some extent each level depends on earlier levels (although it is not always necessary to carry out work at each of the four levels). For example, if participants were not happy with the initial training then there is not much point in following through to see if there were longer-term changes in learning or performance. Likewise, if there is no change in trainees' performance there is little point in trying to assess organisational benefits.

## *Other models*

Although the Kirkpatrick model is the best-known model, a number of other models are used by CSOs. Many of these are variants on a theme, and adapt the Kirkpatrick model in order to offset perceived weaknesses. The ones mentioned below are all defined in more detail in Haddock (2015), and are well covered in freely available online resources.

**Context Input Reaction Outcome (CIRO).** The CIRO model also involves evaluating four levels, but more explicitly addresses the need to assess the context in which the training is being designed, the learning needs, the logic of the training plan and any organisational input before the training course takes place. (Warr et. al. 1970).

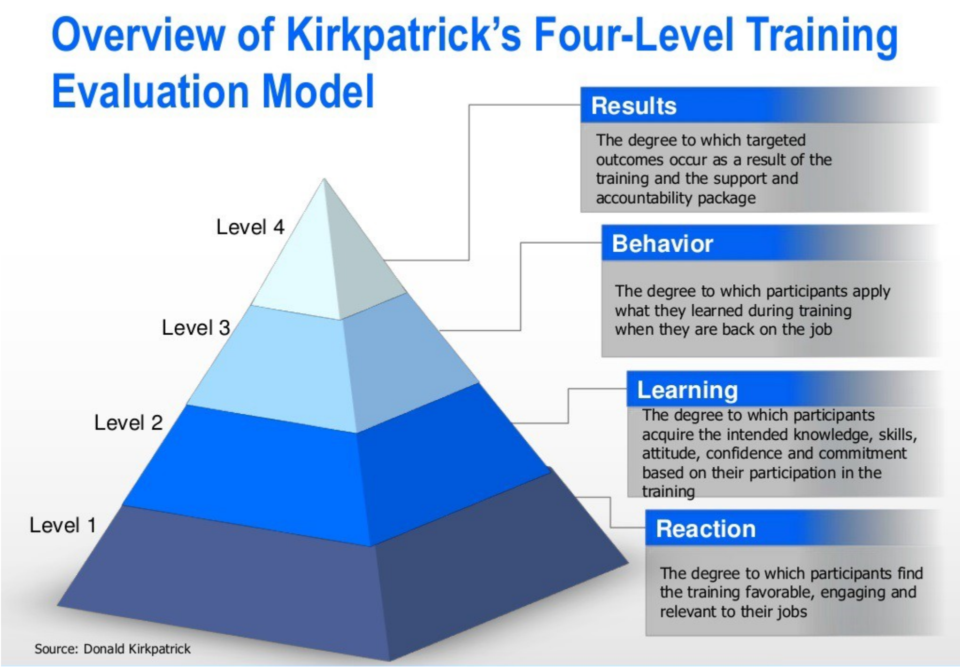
**Context Input Process Products (CIPP).** The CIPP model, originally developed in the 1960s, also emphasises the need to carry out more work at the planning stage, and goes further in addressing a key problem with evaluations – getting the results used (Stufflebeam et. al. 2007). The model focuses on helping decision-makers to make decisions around:

- planning (what training should we do?);
- structuring (how should we do it?);
- implementation (are we doing training as we planned?); and
- recycling (did the training programme work, and how might it be adapted?).

**Kaufman's 5 levels model.** This model covers the need to evaluate input in terms of human and financial resources, as well as the 'reaction' of learners to training (Kaufman and Keller 1994). It also proposes that both the acquisition and application of learning can be measured at either learner, or small group level. Finally, it suggests going beyond organisational level change, and evaluating the wider societal impact of training.

**Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method.** A more radical alternative is provided by Brinkerhoff (2005). 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?



**Case study: 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. 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 was addressed through weekly emails to workshop participants soon after workshop completion. These included a thought-provoking scenario-based question that built on workshop learning points and discussions. After answering the question, participants received additional feedback and learning support, including links to external resources or opportunities to join online discussions. The questions were delivered on a weekly basis for approximately 8 weeks. A final question asked participants to describe how they had integrated new knowledge and skills into the workplace. The second issue was tackled by identifying participants who were most engaged in the weekly emails, and who provided evidence that they had incorporated new knowledge or skills from the workshop into the workplace. Based on a modified version of Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method, a short interview was conducted to answer the following questions: 1. What new knowledge and skills were being used? 2. What results or outcomes did the new capacities help achieve? 3. What was the value or importance of these results? 4. What suggestions did participants have to improve the workshop?

Each interview that yielded useful and verifiable information was developed into a Success Case Story that helped InsideNGO understand the effectiveness of the training, and identify areas of strength to build on as well as areas for improvement.

**Source: Haddock (2015)**

- What organisational processes / resources are in place to support performance improvement? What needs to be improved in this area?
- What organisational barriers stand in the way of performance improvement?
- What groups have been successful in applying a learning opportunity to achieve a result? Why have they been successful?
- What groups have been unsuccessful? Why have they been unsuccessful?

The advantage of Brinkerhoff's method is that it shifts the focus from the training to the organisation itself. 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 results (both positive and negative).

Whilst all of the models described above acknowledge 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 an organisation's successes and failures in using learning to improve performance. An example of how the Brinkerhoff model has been applied is shown in the case study above.

**Some Do's and Don'ts of Monitoring and Evaluating Training**

| Do... | Don't... |
|---|---|
| • Do be clear on the individual and organisational results you wish to see as a result of the training<br>• Do decide on whether you want to track change forward from the training or work backwards from observed change at a later date<br>• If tracking forward, do consider how far it is worth trying to track change forwards from a single training event<br>• Do pilot any data collection tools or methodologies before you use them – if questions *can* be misunderstood they *will* be misunderstood<br>• Do be clear on who will be responsible for collecting, analysing and using information at different levels<br>• Do make sure that evaluation forms are filled in before people leave a training course – it is the only way to ensure a 100% completion rate<br>• Do have a plan for how you intend to use any data you collect at different levels | • Don't forget to investigate the existing situation if you wish to compare change at a future date<br>• Don't assume that training will operate in isolation – try and design M&E so that it also allows for understanding other contributory factors to desired change<br>• Don't just take other data collection methods designed by other agencies without thinking about how they can be adapted to your particular situation<br>• Don't forget to get trainees' permission if you want to collect information at a later date, after training has been completed, in order to comply with data protection laws<br>• Don't forget to do the simple stuff well. End of day feedback groups are the most valuable form of M&E, as they enable immediate adjustments to be made<br>• Don't assume that if you send out post training questionnaires, and only a few people return them, that those people are providing representative responses |

## *Further reading and resources*

Some of the themes in this paper are similar to the themes in other papers in this section of the M&E Universe that focus on capacity strengthening. These can be accessed by clicking on the links below.

- M&E of capacity strengthening
- M&E systems for capacity strengthening
- M&E of capacity strengthening portfolios
- Tools for M&E of capacity strengthening

This paper is largely based on a paper written by Paula Haddock for INTRAC in 2015. The paper is included in the references below, and can be accessed from the INTRAC website at https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Praxis-Paper-30-Monitoring-and-evaluation-training-Challenges-opportunities-and-recommendations-Paula-Haddock.pdf

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INTRAC is a specialist capacity building institution for organisations involved in international relief and development. Since 1992, INTRAC has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on monitoring and evaluation. Our approach to M&E is practical and founded on core principles. We encourage appropriate M&E, based on understanding what works in different contexts, and we work with people to develop their own M&E approaches and tools, based on their needs.