Learning Contract Item 3a: Lesson 2 - Compare Two Evaluation Approaches

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In order to recommend an evaluation model, two popular models will be compared. First, introduced in 1959, is the 4-step Kirkpatrick model. The purpose of the Kirkpatrick model is to focus on measuring outcomes. Kirkpatrick's model employs a four level system to evaluate reactions, learning, behavior and results. This model is arguably the most popular method of evaluation. Kirkpatrick's wide use is attributed to its simplicity and understandability (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). The 4 step model has a list of detractors; foremost is the inability of most practitioners to reach a level 3 or 4 evaluation. Combs and Falletta (2000) also point out that Kirkpatrick's levels are not "flexible or meaningful" enough to evaluate human performance. However, in a climate where evaluation is seen as an afterthought and is rarely planned for, any evaluation model that will encourage participation is a benefit.

Second in our comparison is the Targeted Evaluation Process (TEP) introduced by Combs and Falletta. The purpose of this model is to "provide a flexible and meaningful approach to evaluation" (Combs & Falletta, 2000, p11). This flexibility and meaning is introduced by including stakeholders and context in the evaluation model. The model has six steps, (1) Partner with Stakeholders, (2) Understanding Context, (3) Target Evaluation and Questions, (4) Design tools and techniques, (5) Gather and Analyze data, (6) Report Results.

Both models require a plan to evaluate to be successful. The design of an evaluation is directly reliant on the formation of instructional objectives. While it is fair to compare these two models on the surface, solely as evaluation models, that is where comparison ends. The Kirkpatrick model and the TEP model are apples and oranges. Kirkpatrick is a method to evaluate outcomes and the TEP takes a more formative

approach. The TEP seems to be more explicit in its targeting and design of evaluation. Kirkpatrick, while some would say it is assumed, does not account for the input of stakeholders and understanding context.   Kirkpatrick seems to be a loose framework to design and think about summative evaluation where the TEP seems to be is more of a step by step instruction manual on how to perform evaluation.

My organization is focused on business solutions for the legal profession. My division is responsible for a library of software products, specifically their development, marketing, customer support and customer training. My department is focused on training end users in the use of software products for the legal profession. This includes Relationship Management software, eBilling software and Legal Matter Management software. Performance based training is our bread and butter. Personally, I would suggest the use TEP model. I would do this for several reasons. First the TEP model encourages partnering with stakeholders. One of our companies core stated values is "boundarylessness" (LexisNexis, n.d.), encouraging employees to reach across business units to develop positive relationships. Partnering with other business units like product development and customer support can provide real evaluative data for my training programs and meet my organizations core values.

Second, the TEP model considers context. It is essential in performance based training to understand how new behaviors will be applied in the workspace. This also provides more opportunity to interact with stakeholders as they are the ones to provide the contextual information. The nature of software training is that it is a constantly changing product. Customers are changing the reasons and manner in which they use the products. It is essential to understand the context behind the use of our products.

Another important point when understanding context is that it may provide cues to understand the motivation to participate in performance based training. Aziz and Ahmad (2011) cite training motivation as the most important factor when measuring training effectiveness.

Lastly, I appreciate the more formative approach to evaluation. With an ongoing training cycle and constant upgrades and improvements in our products, the need to look inward is the key. Summative evaluation and the performance improvement of our learners is important and addressed by the TEP model. However, the more important evaluation is the constant re-evaluation of our own methods to meet the rapidly changing technology and needs of our learners.

References

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