So Much to Measure, So Few Resources

By Corinne Miller

Be a control freak.

"You can't control what you don't measure" were famous words by quality guru Edward Deming. Have you ever thought about learning measurement through this lens? What do you need to control, direct, or influence? This is the primary lens I used when I had to make the ever challenging "what will we measure with the available resources" decision.

What types of things was I looking to control, direct, or influence? First and foremost, especially from having come from a line position where I was directly responsible for business outcomes, I was obsessed with how learning is a control lever for our businesses to meet their goals. This wasn't a cool mantra to say or a theoretical declaration. I had actually seen it, lived it, and knew the power of the "learning lever."

## Place most of your efforts on measuring business impact in the language of your business.

Therefore, when I had the opportunity to lead from the learning vantage point at Motorola University, I focused most of the measurement efforts on *Kirkpatrick's Level 4: Results*. Specifically, looking at results the same way the businesses did: *cost, schedule, and performance*. Did we meet the *learning* performance measures we jointly agreed to? Did we meet the agreed *learning* schedule? Did we meet the agreed *learning* cost?
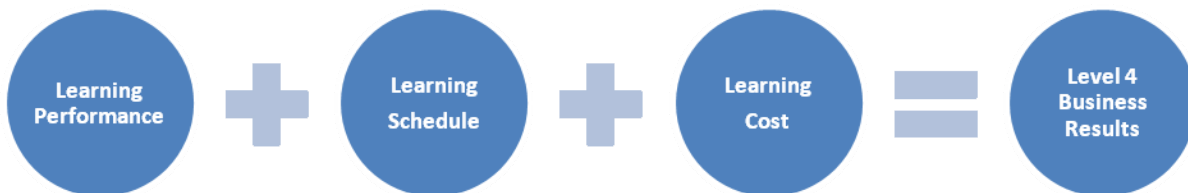
Agree on the business measures before the learning intervention is designed or sourced.

How do you answer the three dimension (cost, schedule, performance) measurement questions? It needs to be a joint agreement between the learning function and the business. The learning professional brings a great deal of expertise on what can be measured, how, and what to expect from an adult education perspective. The business brings expertise on what results are needed, and what measures already exist in the business.

I always sought to use the measures the business already had in place rather than to create new ones that may or may not hold credibility within the business. For example, most general managers I know could care less about Level 1 measures or how many people attended a training session. They want to know "what did it do" for my business, and you, my learning partner, I am
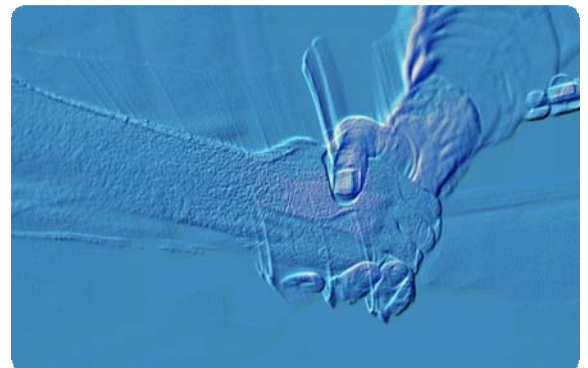
trusting to make it happen. Trust - the key to a successful business relationship no matter who the two parties are. Agreeing on the measures before the intervention is key to building trust. Trust is a lot about doing what you say you will do. Set these measures ahead of time. Make them happen. Do it again. And you have a trusted relationship that will drive learning impact to new heights.

Yes, it can be challenging to determine what contribution learning will have to a business measure when it is not a 100% learning-only measure. In those cases, taking a pulse check at key milestones and course revision times, and then using the Brinkerhoff Success Case method after the fact, can be valuable in quantifying a Level 4 measure.

Use your right and left brain to determine what to measure at Level 4.

So many possible learning interventions to measure, so few resources. How do you decide which business results to measure and which ones not to measure? You need your finger on the pulse of both business and emotional intelligence. I used these two decision factors: impact to the business or corporation, and need to demonstrate the value of learning. Each situation was considered and debated by the team and the business from both angles. Involving the business in the decision sometimes prompted them to dedicate additional resources!

Exactly how did I make these decisions? I struggled between my left brain wanting to go with a purely analytical approach, i.e., create a histogram and pick the tallest bar (highest impact to the business or company by profit potential), and my right brain stepping back and holistically assessing the internal and external visibility of the effort, the political vibe surrounding the effort, or the need for a persuasive "learning win" for either the function overall or to seed a particular learning professional in this part of the business.

Keep your own house in order.

The second thing I wanted to control, direct, or influence was the *operational aspect* of Motorola University. It is a business, in and of itself, having an operational aspect that needs to be efficient and effective so we could deliver on our commitments. This is *where Kirkpatrick's Levels 1 and 2* came into play – but only for internal university use. These types of measures, that is, Reaction and Learning, helped the learning organization control the quality of our deliveries, including material and instructors. If the collection of this information can ultimately be automated, there is really no reason why it shouldn't be collected for all learning events.

It costs money to measure.

Sometimes I think we forget that it costs money to measure things. Whether its people's time or electronic resources, there is a cost to the organization. A few years back now, while on a panel at a CLO conference, I coined the term, "the ROI (Return on Investment) of the ROI", or "the ROI^2". What's the return on investment for measuring the return on investment?

Side note -- Speaking of ROI, I have to disclose that I was never a proponent of measuring learning ROI and I've written about that for a few years now. My experience has taught me that if you are measuring learning in terms of the business results as I have detailed above, i.e., a lever in achieving the business result, part of the business measures, in the language of the business, that's all you need to do. Why? The business has already determined that their goals will have a positive and appropriate ROI for the organization. As a player in helping them to achieve their goals, why do you need to prove it again, and this time for only the learning component? I have never seen any other functions that contributes to the business goals through their own levers be asked to determine their function-level ROI.

It ain't easy.

So much to measure, so few resources. It's a complex decision of what to measure and what not to measure. Further, how do you know even in hindsight that you made the right decisions? It gets back to the beginning of this article. Are you able to control, direct, or influence those things that you believe are right for your learning organization?

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I hope these few minutes we've spent together via this article have offered you some time to perhaps reflect in a new way! Please send your comments on this article to the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Discussion group on LinkedIn. I hope we can start a lively conversation about this important and timely topic.

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Corinne has 30 years of experience across large-scale, cross-functional, global, complex environments spanning learning & development, engineering, new product development, project management, business operations, quality and innovation. She has held leadership positions at Rockwell International, Northrop Defense Systems, TRW and Motorola.

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