

Assessment, training and the human brain.

In corporations today, training departments are increasingly concerned about doing high quality assessment. To effectively evaluate training for level 2 of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, or any pretest-post test model - fair, valid, and reliable pretests and posttests are required.

High-quality assessment

High-quality assessment goes beyond simply asking questions. It includes asking questions, in carefully selected sets that target specific content and assess learning at specific levels of mental processing. The set of questions selected for an assessment must work well together and consistently produce reliable results. Taken as a group, the set of questions that comprise an assessment must produce scores that are fair to the test takers.

In a well-designed assessment, if the purpose includes reinforcing learning, questions are purposefully sequenced to strengthen the conceptual threads and logic -- ways of thinking about the subject that the trainer endeavored to impart during instruction. At the end of such an assessment, adult learners usually know more than they did before they started taking the assessment; and, they can feel it!

Another significant benefit of well-designed assessments is that trainers obtain scores that are more accurate measures of what learners know and can do. Thus, they are able to make more valid decisions for the benefit of the learners – they know when mastery has occurred and are able to make plans for future learning that connect well and can build upon what is currently known. Accurate assessment also facilitates more open, honest communication about the effectiveness of training.

Outstanding Trainers

Outstanding trainers do many things well. Trainers know how to translate learning objectives into lesson plans. They also have a wide repertoire of learning activities and are constantly on the lookout for more interesting activities to engage the attention of their participants and optimize learning. They know about the role of assessment and can generate questions, on the fly, to check for understanding while each individual is involved in the learning process. Outstanding trainers also know that questions used to check for understanding are qualitatively different from those questions used to stimulate prior knowledge and also qualitatively different from questions used to evaluate whether the new material has been consolidated and saved in long-term storage centers in the brain. They are adept at designing questions with their learning purposes in mind, and use the answers to these questions as feedback to choose new learning activities, modify the instructional approach and increase learning.

To be outstanding, corporate trainers must understand how the human brain processes information, how to assess each adult learner's relevant prior knowledge, and how to help learners facilitate connections between the new information and what the learners already know.

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