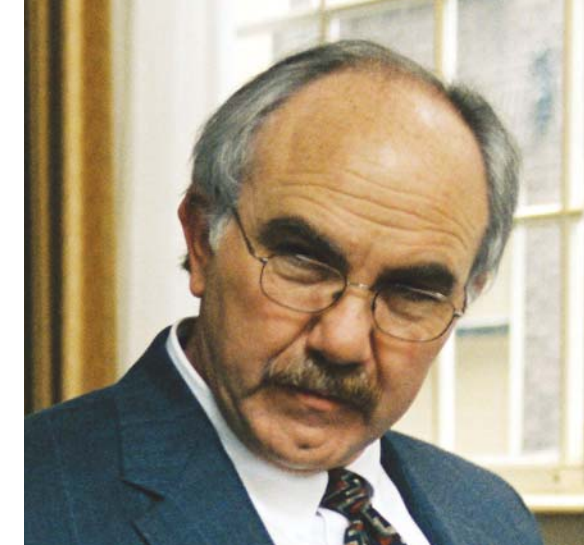




Donald Kirkpatrick



Jack Phillips

The Evaluation Heavyweight Match

Interview by Diederick Stoel

Donald Kirkpatrick and Jack Phillips, renowned for their work and contributions in the evaluation arena, sparred at the ASTD ROI Network Conference in Amsterdam, organized by the ASTD ROI Network in cooperation with ProfitWise. The champions' mutual respect was apparent, yet controversy wasn't avoided. In fact, an old score was settled.

This online article has been modified since the print version.

To get straight to the point: People all over the world have used the Kirkpatrick four-level framework. Why has that framework been so successful?

Kirkpatrick Before I came up with the four levels in 1959, evaluation was a general thing, an all-encompassing thing. People talked about evaluation in an elusive way. The main thing I contributed was breaking down the subject of evaluation into meaningful terms. So now when we talk about evaluation, everybody's talking about the same thing: reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

Phillips In the late fifties, evaluation was like rocket science. You knew you had to be accountable for training, but no one really understood how you did that. Don brought structure to it. That's why he's highly recognized. He's in the HRD Hall of Fame, and he has been recognized by ASTD for his work, which is a major contribution to our field. He gave us all a clear roadmap to evaluation.

Yet, Kirkpatrick's four-level framework has been widely criticized. The fiercest criticism came from Ed Holton in 1996, which stated that the four levels are flawed—that it's not a model because there's no causal relationship between the various levels.

Phillips I see no value-added from research that shows correlations between the four levels. It adds little insight into learning and development. Don has been criticized by many academics, and I think it's jealousy.

Kirkpatrick When I read [Holton's] article, I thought: I don't think I ever called it a model. I just called it the four levels. So someone criticized me and said, "It's not a model; it's a taxonomy." I thought to myself: So what? I don't care if it's a taxonomy or a model. It's four levels, and people find it helpful.

The four-level framework set the standard almost 40 years ago and inspired many people. The framework of Jack Phillips's ROI model is based on the original framework. We ask Phillips when he used the model for the first time.

Phillips Our first ROI study wasn't as thorough as our current studies. It was pretty rough. But, we started. I've been using Kirkpatrick's framework right from the start, and it has been very helpful to me all these years. We added a fifth level. More importantly, we created a process model to collect and analyze data. We brought standards to the process and tackled the tough implementation issues.

Why did you add a fifth level?

Phillips I know Don doesn't agree with me on this. He puts ROI in Level 4. I

did too for a while. But improvement in a Level 4 measure may have a negative ROI. For example, absenteeism could be reduced after a solution. But if you spend too much money on the solution, you can end up with a negative ROI. We found that confusing, because we have success and lack of success on the same level.

So, we said, "Maybe we can look at this as a different level." The fifth level requires you to always bring in the costs.

Kirkpatrick Yes, I think a good example is a sales training program. You can have a sales increase, but what was the cost of increasing the sales? So, ROI is certainly an addition to my model.

Many people see evaluation as something to be done after training. But the art is to arrange your training in such a way that success is guaranteed. We launch a series of questions to see whether we can build a chain of impact up front: How can we make sure people learn? How do we ensure

people use their newly acquired skills on the job? How do we know that the application of these skills returns the desired effect?

Kirkpatrick That's very simple. Let me give an example. At Intel, they said, "Let's take your four levels, start with the last one, and work backwards. What results are we looking for? What behaviors are needed to accomplish those results? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do people need in order to behave in that way? And how can we do it in such a way that they'll react favorably?" Answering those questions in that order is at least one less headache.

Phillips We see more people shifting to a proactive posture regarding evaluation, instead of evaluating because someone's asking for it. Try to understand what your training program might add to the business by starting to think about results and ROI up front.

Kirkpatrick Now there's one thing I'm concerned about, Jack. It's the constant emphasis on ROI. People start looking for a simple answer and kind of bypass the other ones. Let me tell you a story:

I did a program for a client that publishes canned programs. The client asked, Don, tell us, how do you measure results? We want anybody that buys our package programs to be able to measure the results. I said, "It isn't that simple. Let me go through the different processes."

I was scheduled there from 9 a.m. to 12 and from 1 till 2 p.m. At about 11:30, I'd gone through the knowledge needed to do the evaluation. So, now let's talk about how we can apply this knowledge, I said. The client stopped me right there and said, "You can go now. We'll have a debriefing meeting." So, I went out into the hall and waited for her to come out and tell me how to proceed. But she never did. So I just took off.

Phillips (laughing) I recognize that quest for a magic answer. People are attracted to



ROI because they think it's the answer to all accountability issues. Let's put it into perspective: When you think of an impact study for a program, with 75 pages, there may be three pages on ROI. ROI is only one measure of six—the four levels, ROI, and the intangibles. So, we have to keep reminding people that ROI is only one measure that demonstrates the value of training. Don't overreact to it or overuse it.

Kirkpatrick has been known to announce in his presentation that he's going to sue Phillips because he altered his model. Phillips not only added a fifth level, but he also changed behavior into application (Level 3) and results into business impact (Level 4).

What's the story?

Kirkpatrick (turning to Phillips) Why didn't you like *behavior*?

Phillips (smiling) I'm glad you brought that up.

Kirkpatrick and Phillips have known each other for many years, but this particular matter has never been brought up before. Their appearance together in Amsterdam was only the second time on stage together. Phillips takes up the gauntlet.

Phillips It's simple. The concept of the four levels doesn't only work in training; it works in many other settings. We used it in technology groups, and they love the four-level framework. But they relate better to application than to behavior, for Level 3.

Kirkpatrick	Phillips
Level 1: Reaction	Level 1: Reaction, Satisfaction, Planned Action
Level 2: Learning	Level 2: Learning
Level 3: Behavior	Level 3: Application
Level 4: Results	Level 4: Business Impact
	Level 5: ROI



Kirkpatrick I understand. In their culture, the word *application* is more meaningful than *behavior*.

Phillips The same is true for results. *Business impact* means more to them than *results*. So, I just stepped back and said, "We need some words here that can fit quality, technology, Six Sigma, marketing, even policy changes. I tried to be more generic."

We ask Kirkpatrick if he's still thinking of suing Jack.

Kirkpatrick (grinning) No, I guess I'd probably lose.

What does it take to become an effective evaluator?

Kirkpatrick Start to develop a simple reaction sheet on Level 1. Try to get the

most information in the shortest period of time. That's difficult enough as it is. If you look at the reaction sheet of the hotel here, see how detailed and how much time it would take? You'd need to have a PhD to answer those questions.

Phillips I agree. You don't have to be a statistician to be a good evaluator. Preferably not. If we make evaluation too instrumental and technical, we become isolated. Be involved as much as you can, and make sure you know the practical ends. Statistics aren't that important; communication is. We need good communication skills—both spoken and written. Because whatever we do, we're going to present it to different stakeholders. If we're capable of doing that, we really

demonstrate our value-add.

How do the two men see their futures?

Phillips will continue to educate through his workshops, conferences, and publications. "Publish, consult, teach," he says. Kirkpatrick just formed a partnership with his daughter Sue and son Jim, called Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick & Associates. He'll continue communicating the four levels, with the help of his overhead sheets. He doesn't use PowerPoint or attachments, even though he admits his son Ted has tried to show him how to 100 times. Kirkpatrick prefers to type what he has to say directly in his email. "I always say that if it ain't broke, don't fix it." **TD**

Diederick Stoel is CEO and president of ProfitWise, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Its mission is to make training and development human resource management programs a rewarding enterprise.