

Building a Culture of Evaluation

**The New Kirkpatrick
Model for Performance
and Innovation**

Vanessa Milara Alzate

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To the Kirkpatrick Community

This book is for you. From the Kirkpatricks to our facilitators, partners, and network of champions, I am deeply grateful for your encouragement, guidance, and grace as you've walked alongside me on this journey to evolve the model and the brand. Your willingness to share experiences, offer honest feedback, and embrace change has made this work possible. Thank you for joining me as I dare to pursue this bold, audacious vision, and for believing in the power of evaluation to shape the future we are building together.

To my daughters, Giselle and Gianna

I took on this new frontier with the Kirkpatrick Model with you in my mind and my heart. As you grow, I hope you see that I didn't simply create something new—I set out to modernize and shape a legacy I believed in so it could continue making a difference in the world you're stepping into. My wish for you is that you always find hope, courage, and your own spark to lead and uplift others. And always remember: "Make good choices." This book was one of mine—just like you.

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Foreword

Decades have passed and training is still on trial, accused of failing to deliver value in line with the resources invested in it. This reality is tragic because the tools to create and demonstrate the value have existed for decades but have not been fully and effectively implemented.

Don Kirkpatrick took on the challenge of showing the impact of his supervisory skills training for industrial foremen in the 1950s as the subject of his PhD dissertation. He adapted the work of Raymond Katzell and created what is now known as the Kirkpatrick Model: Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results. He did not promote his research; it was discovered, shared, and used by the training industry. He was asked to document and expand upon his ideas in three books in the 1990s.

Don's eldest son, Jim Kirkpatrick, applied his background in education, psychology, and training to co-author these iconic books with Don. While working for a consulting company to share this work and guide organizations in applying it, Jim and I met at a training event. Shortly thereafter we married, and with encouragement and blessing from the Kirkpatrick family, I started Kirkpatrick Partners.

Within Kirkpatrick Partners, Jim and I took a critical look at the four levels and their use worldwide. We found several notable issues:

- The model was widely known and referenced, but sometimes incorrectly.
- Even with the simplicity of the model, it was seldom fully or effectively applied.
- When the model was fully applied, it produced measurable results and the evidence to substantiate them.
- Because the model was seldom fully applied and therefore not entirely effective, other, more complex models were built off the model as a solution.

Our work was proverbially cut out for us. We embarked on restating the model in an actionable form with more explanation and practical application tips so organizations could use it completely and effectively. We instructed training professionals to recast their roles as learning and performance architects and focus their attention on what happens in the job environment. We evangelized the importance of Level 3 (Behavior), which is the degree to which training graduates apply what they learned in training when they return to their work. We made Level 3 a literal bullseye in the recast model, so even those who didn't read our work would see its relative importance.

The story should have a happy ending here, but it doesn't. After nearly 15 years of evangelizing the New World Kirkpatrick Model for training effectiveness, the needle had not moved much. Training was still on trial. A good percentage of workplace learning and performance professionals believe in the importance of involving themselves in on-the-job performance, but even the most enlightened still struggle to get the support and resources they need from their organizations.

It was time for a new voice and a new approach. By that point, Jim had largely stepped back from day-to-day work and I was tired from carrying the weight of leadership and operations for so long. I was proud of what Jim and I had built together, but I accepted the reality that the future of the Kirkpatrick legacy required renewed energy and a fresh perspective. With no clear succession path in place, the most responsible decision was to find new leadership rather than risk stagnation.

In 2023, I put Kirkpatrick Partners up for sale. Fortunately, the iconic brand and loyal following gained the attention of multiple potential buyers. Vanessa Milara Alzate rose to the top because of her experience in training, building a brand, and starting a successful small business. Equally important, she impressed upon me the commitment to family and legacy that she has learned as a Latina. She promised to honor Don's legacy and continue to grow and evolve the Kirkpatrick Model for the next generation of training professionals.

I shared everything I had learned over my 15-year tenure and made myself available to Vanessa and the new team for a transitional period.

Then I stepped away from the company. It was essential to have a clear and complete transition, allowing new leadership the space and authority to guide the company forward with confidence and independence. Leaving the business fully was not easy, but it was the right decision for the health of the organization and the brand.

This book is evidence that Vanessa has kept her promise to the Kirkpatrick family. She humbly yet boldly presents fresh ways to use the Kirkpatrick Model. Jim and I took the approach of meeting the training industry where it was and recommended small steps toward building partnership with the business to increase the likelihood of cooperation at Level 3. Organizations that committed to doing this were successful and created the stories we shared in our books. Sadly, not enough organizations are doing this.

The world is moving faster and faster, and no single department, including learning and development, can work in a vacuum and drive significant results. To remedy this problem, Vanessa supercharges the business partnership approach with her recommendation to align the entire organization to the Kirkpatrick Model. Using this easy-to-understand model, organizations can efficiently enhance performance and increase results to create the success they need to thrive in today's competitive, resource-starved environment.

The ideas in this book are all Vanessa's. She has focused exclusively on the Kirkpatrick Model since acquiring the company in 2023. She's worked tirelessly to connect with the training community and integrate its ideas and experiences into this book. She makes herself very accessible and connects regularly with hundreds of training professionals around the world. From a distance, I saw her invitations to surveys, focus groups, and individual conversations to gain a deep understanding of where the industry stands in training, evaluation, and performance.

The industry welcomed and supported Jim's and my efforts during our tenure. Please do the same for Vanessa. I feel qualified to say that I know what it's like to be in her shoes. Running Kirkpatrick Partners was the hardest thing I have ever done. It was the final exam for everything I

learned in school, on the job, and in life. I made a lot of mistakes. I also got enough things right for Kirkpatrick Partners to be in the 25 percent of small businesses that succeed in the long term, as well as the small percentage of those that are sold to a new owner. I am proud of the certifications we created, which thousands of professionals have earned and implemented. We owe our success to countless loyal, generous, and kind followers around the world. And the small but loud handful of critics who showed us where we could improve.

Please continue to support the Kirkpatrick Model and Kirkpatrick Partners under Vanessa's leadership. As always, the Kirkpatrick Model is your model. It belongs to the practitioners who use it every day. It endures after decades because it remains elegantly simple and infinitely flexible. This book provides the spark to create the momentum you need to truly "do Level 3" and make a difference in your organization and the world.

Vanessa's integration of science with the model provides great support and evidence for global implementation. Read this book with an open mind and note small changes you can make today; then, craft a vision for where you want your organization to go in the future. Remember that successful programs and organizations adapt the model and make it fit their unique culture and structure. If you are not among those who have already done this, it is critical that you join them now. Share your successes and challenges with Vanessa and become part of the Kirkpatrick legacy. Everyone's success relies on it.

Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick, Founder, Kirkpatrick Partners

Preface

I cannot believe I am writing the next book in the Kirkpatrick legacy. To say that I am honored is the understatement of the century. I am a Latina from New Jersey who fell into learning and development and then entrepreneurship as what I lovingly call the “Accidental Agency Owner.” Never in my wildest imagination did I believe I could be qualified to speak on the illustrious Kirkpatrick Model. I don’t have a PhD. I am not a Kirkpatrick. I am me. I have spirit, drive, and grit. I am the one who will tell you, “Everything is figureoutable.” This is the mantra I take forward as I bring the Kirkpatrick Model to the next generation. And it’s the same mantra I bring whenever I am told I can’t or no one wants to do evaluation.

I began my career as a corporate trainer at a customer relationship management (CRM) software company training pharmaceutical sales reps. In this role, I learned all about the ins and outs of developing training. I was a consultant to pharmaceutical company clients. Oftentimes, the customers would come to my team, and we would prescribe what they needed. If I am honest, it was not always consultative. Instead, it was a preset prescription. We’d say, “Oh, you’re rolling out CRM? Great! You need the package with a few presession videos, a couple days of in-person training, and some quick reference cards. We’ll laminate them and put them on a silver ring so participants can keep them in their laptop bags. Your sales reps will be pros once they leave!” Talk about taking orders, right? I didn’t ask, “What do you want the reps to be able to do when they finish training?” or “What is the problem you are solving by introducing this new CRM?” At the very least, I had my laminated quick reference cards. Little did I know that years later, those quick reference cards would be classified as a “required driver” or “performance support” in the Kirkpatrick world. Maybe I was an early adopter of performance after all.

Over the years, and through necessity, I began to take my own approach to “proving my value.” I started researching evaluation to show my customers the value I brought and that I was worth the money they spent on me. That is when I stumbled on the Kirkpatrick Model: four levels—Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results—just four things I had to remember to integrate into my solutions. It wasn’t complicated, and it already flowed into my process.

Why was proving my value so important to me? I knew the only one who would sing my praises would be me. Not many want to give credit to the training or learning department for their role in performance improvement, so I had to do it for myself to, as Jim Kirkpatrick shares, “Protect and leverage the training investment.”

Over time, I developed an approach focused on Level 4 in my needs assessment, giving me a consultative edge in the field. This approach allowed me to create solutions that met the needs of my customers and their target learners. I firmly believe that win-win solutions are the key to organizational success. The business meets its goals, the learners feel valued, and the organization thrives.

When I became aware of the opportunity to purchase Kirkpatrick Partners, I felt a moment of shock followed by thinking that “I need to do this.” Why? I believe wholeheartedly in the model that is part of the foundation of our industry. To me, it is the way to save ourselves. If we leave evaluation to chance, it will never get done, and then we will face the same fate again and again.

In this book, I am going to take you on a journey. We will start with honoring the legacy that Don, Jim, and Wendy gave us with their versions of the Kirkpatrick Model. Then, I will unveil the present state of Kirkpatrick Partners—the next iteration of the updated Kirkpatrick Model. This iteration will do what I love to do: bring things back from the past and refresh them with innovations from the present. This iteration of the Kirkpatrick Model focuses more on Level 3, or how we create behavior change and how outside influences affect evaluation strategy and data. More importantly, in this book, I share my vision for forever, including new applications of the model to areas outside training and you.

Introduction

Around the globe, the learning and development industry is at a crossroads. We risk being labeled a cost center, becoming obsolete, or worse, being phased out. We are often the first to go during an economic downturn. As an industry, we have struggled to prove our worth, become performance consultants, and demonstrate our value. To secure the future of our industry, we must urgently embrace a culture of evaluation. This is not just a choice but a necessity to protect our future, departments, and industry.

The key to protecting ourselves lies in evaluation. Evaluation is the only thing that can show the value we bring in facts, figures, and stories. For far too long, we have relied on the premise that if we build learning content that is engaging and that people enjoy, it will be enough to ensure our future. We place more value on beautifully designed content and techniques like gamification than on the fundamentals: good, sound instructional design grounded in performance. We must gather data to see our impact and understand where we may have missed the mark and need to improve.

Too many learning initiatives begin without any direct ties to the organization. We create content based on requests and assumptions from stakeholders, as well as our own assumptions in L&D. Too many learning professionals fail to ask, “Why?” And I get it. I have been there. We do not want to appear to be questioning someone who ranks above us in the organization, or as a consultant, we may be afraid to ask, “Why?” and risk the sale. However, without that simple question, we have made ourselves order takers rather than strategic partners. After years of not being seen as a strategic partner, it becomes difficult to rebrand to get a seat at the table.

But it's not entirely on us. Most organizations value speed over quality. This has caused evaluations to suffer because we favor templates and checking a box to say we have done an assessment—any assessment—over developing quality evaluation strategies that are tailored to measure behavior and performance. Instead, we spend our time reporting on seat time, knowledge check scores, and whether the participant found the training experience enjoyable. None of these is a predictor of performance or leads to behavior change.

When we can evaluate, we often fail to get the evaluation process correct. We assume that we can begin with Level 1 (Reaction) and Level 2 (Learning) assessments and eventually get to Level 3 (Behavior) and Level 4 (Results), but that is not the case. We need to start with understanding the business goal—the Level 4 result—to then create the measurement and assessment strategies and tactics required to complete a full evaluation.

However, what is probably most harmful to the success of implementing learning evaluation throughout organizations is the fact that the value of evaluation in making data-driven decisions is still not prioritized for learning. We separate evaluation in the learning unit from evaluation throughout other organizational units, which causes L&D and the business to speak two different languages.

I am here to tell you this does not have to be the case forever. In line with Jim Kirkpatrick's guidance, evaluation can and should be embedded as a required component of your learning unit, rather than approached as an afterthought. We can shift the tides in our industry to move from learning and development to learning and performance, but we can't be the only ones to make the change. The organization as a whole needs to adopt this change and come together to commit to evaluation and adopt a culture of evaluation.

A Culture of Evaluation

I titled this book *Building a Culture of Evaluation* because I believe wholeheartedly that the only way to make good decisions that allow organizations to become agile, future-ready, and employers of choice is by implementing a culture in which evaluation is a requirement and part of

the organization as a whole. Without feedback and dialogue about what is and isn't working, we stay stagnant and hurt our growth and potential. Organizations must stop making decisions without any data to support them and based only on the perception of the person in charge. As a leader, you must identify the value of your program to allocate your resources and show the value of your department.

At the time of this writing, we are in the middle of another reduction in the learning industry. Day in and day out, I see more reductions in force, typically beginning with the learning department. Why? We've been branded as a cost center, and executives don't understand the value of learning as an organizational accelerator.

While much of the conversation about evaluation tends to focus on demonstrating value as a reaction during downturns or budget cuts, a culture of evaluation is equally essential, if not more so, during boom times. When resources are abundant, organizations face a different challenge: making strategic choices among many competing opportunities. It's precisely during these periods of growth that leaders need reliable feedback and clear evidence to guide investments, avoid waste, and double down on what's truly working.

In many strategic planning meetings, organizational leaders proclaim they want to create a culture of continuous improvement. However, for this to work, we must have a culture of evaluation. We need to know what is and isn't working, as well as how what we are developing and creating contributes to the organization's ultimate goal and its mission.

Everyone across the organization must become comfortable with evaluation, see the real data (the truth of what is and isn't working), and commit to necessary change. Feedback is good; it gives us opportunities to grow, improve, and innovate. This is why we must start by building a culture of evaluation, not continuous improvement or learning.

Learning professionals often believe that no one cares about evaluation, or they cannot access data to measure Levels 3 and 4 because other stakeholders in the organization guard that information. This happens all the time in all types of organizations. It's one of the responses I would give if someone were to ask me, "What keeps you up at night?" It can be

challenging and lonely to do this work when it seems like no one values evaluation—until they want the data it would provide—or recognizes the value in your role. Unfortunately, for years, the learning department has been viewed as a nice-to-have, not a must-have, as well as expendable when recessions happen, sales are down, profits need boosting, or funds need to be reallocated. It is exhausting to know you add value to the organization and can do more to unlock tremendous potential, yet no one is buying into the process. I want you to know that I see you.

Evaluation needs to go beyond the learning function. We must evaluate our employee engagement initiatives and change management strategies, software investments, and strategic plans. Without stopping to evaluate the value of all the investments our organizations make, we will continue to spend and waste organizational dollars; then, in downturns, jobs are lost, and we continue to move further away from the ability to achieve organizational performance excellence.

When you have a culture of evaluation, all business areas have the same goal: improve organizational performance. You can move beyond silos and begin to be the learning and performance hub and heart of the organization. You can partner with others in the organization to provide performance support to departments that want to excel. Because everyone has the same goal, you won't be scared to share data for fear that something may come out that is unflattering to your work; rather, you will be looking for the shortcomings so you can make improvements and then celebrate the wins. You can gather data and discuss the need for it without fear of what will be done with it.

A culture of evaluation goes beyond measuring the aftereffects of an initiative; it is about planning and defining the strategy to improve the organization's performance. It helps organizations identify how to unveil change and make decisions. It goes beyond the L&D department and instead inspires relationship building. It's how we move out of learning and into performance. It is how we move from taking orders to becoming strategic partners. But we all have to get on the same page to do this work. The L&D team shouldn't be the only part of the organization pushing for a culture of evaluation and striving to become more strategic;

other departments also need to be involved for real change to happen. At its core, a culture of evaluation empowers organizations to make better bets, take smarter risks, and sustain momentum so that in both lean and prosperous times, the learning function is always seen as a value center, driving performance and future readiness.

A culture of evaluation also gives you a common language, lens, and decision matrix to ensure that your outputs are purposeful and drive value for the organization. Suppose an initiative, like a new marketing campaign, cannot be tied back to Level 4 Results (such as the mission), or you cannot identify the performance you are trying to elicit (such as turning buyers into raving fans). In that case, the initiative should not move forward. I know this idea may sound really audacious to you, but trust me, it is for me, as well. I believe, however, that the only way we create change and get to realize our dreams is by being audacious. So, let's do that. Let's take the Kirkpatrick Model and apply it outside training. Let's use the model to make decisions for the business. Let's use it to measure our performance and success. Let's become Powered by Kirkpatrick® and show our stakeholders that everything we do and every decision we make is not made by chance but guided with purpose, with data, and with measurable results and meaningful outcomes.

The Evolution of the Kirkpatrick Model

From Donald Kirkpatrick to Jim Kirkpatrick and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick, we are now at the next iteration of the Kirkpatrick Model, which is focused on building a culture furthering the work of the Kirkpatricks, developing relationships, creating a community, and turning learning into behavior change to get results. For far too long, many of us have tried to do evaluation only to be stopped before we could even get started or reach Level 2, let alone Levels 3 and 4. Over time, we begin to believe that it can never be done, and the model has a problem. I am here to tell you, I have been in your shoes and have said those same things. However, as I started honing my skills as a consultant, I began to see how to marry the needs of the business with my objectives as a member of the training department, and the language I used was that of the Kirkpatrick Model.

The Kirkpatrick Model has not stood the test of time by standing still; it has evolved over the years, and we have continued to refine the model to meet today's needs. In this book, you will see the next version of the Kirkpatrick Model built by and for you—to be agile, to continue to withstand the test of time, and to inspire organizations. This is not an iteration I built in a dark room by myself; it was built with what I learned from the Kirkpatricks, our global affiliate network, the Kirkpatrick Partners team, and our customers through listening and community outreach.

What's Ahead

This may sound cliché, but the future is now. As artificial intelligence takes over more tasks in the workplace, we are finally recognizing that our work structures, education systems, and even many long-standing business processes were built for the industrial age, not the information age we now inhabit. With the speed of change in today's world, doing things the way they've always been done no longer works. A new generation—Gen Z, with Gen Alpha close behind—has entered the workforce. They won't stick around if an organization doesn't align with their values and priorities. If they cannot find the jobs they want, they become entrepreneurs.

So, we can no longer stay stagnant. We must adapt, advance, and finally change. This generation values growth, mentorship, and collaboration. These are three things the L&D department can provide. If the department is not there because it cannot prove its value, who will be responsible for creating these programs? And if this support is missing, what happens to the employees who need it? They leave. This is why the Kirkpatrick Four Levels® and building a culture of evaluation are more important than ever.

Why the Kirkpatrick Model? Because it works. After decades in the L&D world, the model has been shown to transcend learning to evaluate other areas. Its flexibility and simple design break down barriers and get everyone to speak the same language. Throughout this book, you will read stories about organizations and practitioners who have used the model successfully since the era of Don Kirkpatrick. The common thread

throughout their stories, tips, and tricks is that a world in which evaluation is done correctly affects not just the initiative and the unit but also the organization—and the organization is better off because of it. By looking at the success stories, we can answer these questions: How were they able to apply the model successfully? How did they overcome obstacles with stakeholders?

I want you to hear more from your peers and others on how they apply the model, so you can see what is possible and how. This book is not just about me and my thoughts on how evaluation should be done. Rather, it is about the best practices, the applications, the stories, and, more importantly, the community I have been privileged to build during my time as owner of Kirkpatrick Partners. It is those stories and those people that will inspire me forever.

This book is your first step into operating an organization that is Powered by Kirkpatrick—a place where teams use the same language and framework to evaluate all initiatives, not just training. We'll move beyond the evolution of the Kirkpatrick Model itself and focus on how you can use this approach to design, measure, and improve a wide range of programs across your organization.

Here's what you'll discover in each part of the book:

- **Part 1. Building a Culture of Evaluation.** This opening section explores the foundational mindset and organizational practices needed to create a culture of evaluation. You are introduced to the why behind evaluation, examining its essential role in supporting data-driven decisions, building strategic alignment, and driving meaningful change. This part unpacks the barriers that prevent organizations from embracing evaluation and offers practical guidance on fostering commitment, trust, and psychological safety. By the end, you will have a clear understanding of what a culture of evaluation looks like and actionable steps to begin embedding evaluation into everyday practice.
- **Part 2. Applying the Kirkpatrick Four Levels.** The second section dives into the practical application of the Kirkpatrick Model across a range of common organizational initiatives. Through detailed

examples—including instructional design, onboarding, leadership development, product launches, and change management—this part demonstrates how the Kirkpatrick Four Levels framework can be used not just to measure outcomes, but also to design more effective programs from the start. You will learn how to connect evaluation to real business needs, create meaningful metrics, and integrate feedback loops to drive continuous improvement and lasting results.

- **Part 3. The Future of Evaluation and Performance.** The final section looks ahead to the evolving landscape of learning, performance, and organizational transformation. It explores how advances in technology, data, and behavioral science are reshaping the way organizations measure, adapt, and thrive. You are introduced to the idea of your organization becoming Powered by Kirkpatrick, so that evaluation is embedded as an ongoing, organization-wide system that empowers people and teams to drive sustainable impact. This part provides a blueprint for future-proofing your organization by harnessing new tools, building data fluency, and cultivating a mindset of continuous learning and adaptation.

Take your time as you read this book. Soak in the changes and get inspired by the stories of others and how you can apply them to your work. Use the QR code in the appendix to access a companion guide to help you jot down notes, ideas, and strategies to remember what you are learning and take action. This book is not only intended to paint a vision of the future for you; it is meant to inspire you to take immediate action.

PART 1

Building a Culture of Evaluation

In this opening section, you will discover the essential mindset and practices that set the stage for everything that follows in this book. This part lays the groundwork for why evaluation is not just an activity or department; rather, it's a fundamental approach that empowers organizations to make better decisions, drive meaningful change, and create lasting value across every function.

We begin with the *why*—exploring the pressing need for organizations to move beyond gut instinct and tradition and instead adopt a culture in which evidence and honest feedback become the foundation for agility, innovation, and sustainable growth. You'll see how a culture of evaluation goes far beyond measurement for compliance or reporting. It means embedding evaluation as a daily practice: one that shapes strategy, breaks down silos, and invites everyone to become a steward of continuous improvement.

We'll look at what often gets in the way, including fear of feedback, lack of alignment, fragmented data, and an overemphasis on short-term wins at the expense of long-term value. More importantly, we'll uncover the antidotes, such as commitment from leadership, collaborative frameworks, psychological safety, and the courage to see and share what is actually happening.

You'll learn why successful evaluation requires more than just new tools or dashboards; it's a shift in mindset. Organizations must create the right environment—one in which measurement is valued, feedback is actionable, and data is used not to assign blame, but to spark curiosity, fuel learning, and focus effort where it matters most.

Part 1 gives you the road map to start building this culture. You'll find practical steps for engaging stakeholders, aligning leadership, and integrating evaluation into every part of your organization. You'll see that when evaluation is woven into the fabric of daily work, organizations don't just improve; they transform.

CHAPTER 1

A Culture of Evaluation

Picture this. You walk into your company's New Year's kickoff meeting. You sit down, the lights dim, music starts, and the video highlighting the previous year's accomplishments plays on the big screen. Your CEO takes the stage to share how this year will top the previous year's successes. After explaining how the organization will do more for its customers by becoming more agile and focusing on customer service and innovation, the CEO shifts to how the business will improve internally. The CEO then shares the strategic vision for the next three years, culminating with the words "create a culture of continuous improvement." Everyone nods and claps at the prospect of the organization's next phase. Some think this will be the magic bullet that will unlock innovation, efficiency, productivity, and engagement. Others know the phrase is corporate lip service, meant for shareholders, not employees.

After the kickoff, teams meet. Siloed by department, they begin outlining how they believe they can drive continuous improvement in the organization within their guardrails. Everyone starts moving in different directions, prioritizing what they think needs improvement based on a mix of facts, feelings, and assumptions.

A year later, team leads and executives meet to share the improvements the company has made, but with no baseline to show what has improved, no scorecard to track and report findings, and no collaboration, the impact is blunted. Achievements feel like a haphazard list of alterations with no sense of what improved or if anything truly improved at all.

Challenges to Changing Organizational Culture

Many of us can easily picture this scenario. You may even be living it! You might see it within your organization, the organizations you are working

with, or organizations you have been part of. We receive mandates to become more data driven, yet organizations are struggling with data quality, siloed data, data governance, data literacy, and more. Leadership starts talking about algorithms, technology, and chief data and analytics officers, but pretty soon, these innovations start to coil into tangled webs of data connection points that never come to fruition. And despite what you may see online, “just 26.5 percent of organizations report having established a data-driven organization” (Bean 2022). Why is this number so low, despite the popularity of data-driven outcomes? What is the most significant barrier to establishing a data-driven culture?

Becoming data driven involves a culture change that is far too large for most organizations. In addition, organizations that want to make big changes are beginning the process in the wrong place. They fail to create new cultures and enact large changes because they often underestimate the time it takes to shift culture and take too much change on at once. Many organizations have not matured enough to handle that change. Others overcomplicate what data driven means.

If this sounds familiar, know you are not alone. We are ready to talk about the antidote to this challenge. The first step in building a culture of continuous improvement is building a culture of evaluation.

The Power of Evaluation in Organizational Success

The missing link for creating a culture of continuous improvement is evaluation. Evaluation is all about understanding what works, what does not, and why. When done well, evaluation goes beyond vanity metrics such as likes, net promoter scores (NPS), and passing grades. Instead, it creates meaningful insights that can inform future decisions and actions. When organizations set out to improve, they must have a baseline understanding of where they currently are to understand what needs improving and if they have, in fact, improved. Evaluation provides this baseline.

When you embed evaluation into your goal of continuous improvement, you empower yourself in many ways. You can identify your organization’s successes as well as opportunities for improvement. You can identify waste and make better decisions that are strategically aligned

to business goals and outcomes. Evaluation encourages agility, bringing innovation from failure and promoting accountability and ownership, which, in turn, can give employees a higher appreciation for the utility of evaluation. Most importantly, consistent evaluation moves organizations from a reactive state to a proactive one that ultimately allows them to achieve better results.

The Key to Successful Organizational Evaluation: Measurement

Evaluation depends on measurement. Organizations need a reliable way to assess progress, effectiveness, and outcomes. Measurement is the foundation of data-driven decision making, helping organizations move beyond guesswork and gut feelings. When data is absent or misused, decisions are made that lead to waste, inefficiency, and stagnation. Measurement provides insight into where the organization currently is (baseline) and then allows the organization to track progress toward the goal.

Many organizations focus on outputs, not outcomes (for example, the number of training sessions delivered or training completed as opposed to behavior change or organizational results). This gives the illusion that there is effectiveness; however, there is no real value.

Organizations often struggle with measuring impact. The barriers to effective measurement include:

- Lack of understanding of the true problem or goal
- No measurement practice
- Siloed data and departments
- Failure to close the loop
- Fear of feedback and failure

While these obstacles may seem formidable, understanding them and knowing what can be done to combat them provides the foundation for building your own culture of evaluation.

Lack of Understanding of the True Problem or Goal

Albert Einstein is thought to have said, “If I had one hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only five minutes

finding the solution.” Most organizations spend five minutes defining the problem and 55 minutes on the solution. To measure properly, you must understand the problem you are solving. Without uncovering the actual problem or goal, organizations make broad assumptions that result in measuring the wrong things and developing solutions that do not address the root cause of the problem.

No Measurement Practice

When you don’t set up a measurement practice, it feels like climbing up a large mountain. In a report by Watershed LRS (2024), 36 percent of respondents reported having trouble measuring the impact of learning because of competing priorities, 18 percent did not know where to start, and 9 percent shared they had no demand to measure the impact of learning. These findings mirror what we typically see in our organizations: the inability to evaluate or measure impact to improve. If measurement of a program or initiative is not set up, you cannot measure impact. In chapter 2, we will walk through the Kirkpatrick Model, including how to measure Level 4 (Results) using data sources that may already be tracked somewhere in your organization and a process that does not involve a challenging equation to determine impact.

Siloed Data and Departments

While an organization may not have a measurement standard or practice, teams often curate their own data, which they use to inform their own work. However, this data is not always shared across the organization. Without communication across teams to share data at the organizational level, a company will likely encounter redundancies in work and initiatives. It will also struggle to create a measurement practice that generates and shares meaningful data across departments. For example, return on investment (ROI) is often calculated differently by department, making it meaningful only for the department or person who calculated it—and those who agree that the correct calculation was used.

A common barrier for organizations is the inability of departments to access data that another department owns. Without support from

senior leadership to share data across departments, an organization will never achieve the efficiency it needs to create a culture of continuous improvement.

Failure to Close the Loop

Organizations may also struggle with the types of data they use to measure their initiatives. For example, surveys are a common form of data collection within a typical measurement practice. They're an easy way to cast the data collection net widely to capture the most data with the least amount of human effort. The evolution of survey platforms has helped make surveys the measurement tool of choice because they offer built-in analytics, customizable (and beautiful) visualization, recommended questions, and automated reminders for ongoing data collection. Therefore, multiple surveys are sent frequently from different departments to gather feedback on their own work and strategic initiatives without any coordination across the organization. A common barrier to measurement is *survey fatigue*—the weariness or disinterest that respondents may feel when they are asked to complete too many or overly complex surveys. While overreliance on surveys can contribute to survey fatigue, another key factor is often overlooked: the failure to close the loop with respondents.

In so many areas of work, employees are asked to provide their feedback, and far too often, they are not made aware of how that feedback will be used. For example, organizations often send out a yearly employee evaluation survey that requests feedback about engagement, benefits, and compensation. Change based on feedback, however, rarely occurs. Employees want to know that if they give their time and share their opinions, something will come of it. When employees experience survey fatigue and realize that the data goes into a black hole, they stop answering the surveys, or they provide unhelpful responses.

To combat survey fatigue from over-surveying and monster-sized surveys, it's crucial to identify multiple data sources and collection methods. Tools like text messages, social listening, heat maps, and sentiment analysis can provide data that traditionally would have come from surveys. To combat survey fatigue due to a lack of closing the loop, before asking for

feedback, share how you plan to use it once you've analyzed the data and reviewed potential solutions. Reflect on these questions as you build your communication plan:

- What types of solutions are you looking to implement?
- What changes to [*the policy, program, or initiative*] are you exploring?
- What are some barriers preventing you from enacting change?

Prioritizing Short-Term Wins Over Long-Term Wins

Demonstrating the overall organizational impact takes time, and, unfortunately, the speed at which we need to see change does not always equate to the amount of time it takes for change to happen. In a world full of instant gratification and constant dopamine hits, we must find other ways to provide those while building a strong foundation for organizational change. In L&D, we often find ourselves battling this problem. Our initiatives take time to fully show their long-term effects. For example, if a new onboarding program for managers is designed to strengthen manager-employee relationships and build trust, it may take time to see meaningful change as new managers go through the program. We hold back on sharing any Level 4 data because there appears to be no organizational effect, when instead, we should find short-term wins to share with stakeholders as we wait for the long-term impact to take shape.

Fear of Feedback and Failure

Two more human aspects are also attributed to the lack of culture of continuous improvement: fear of feedback and fear of failure.

We often have negative associations with the idea of feedback, which leads to an unwillingness to evaluate our work. There are many reasons people fear negative feedback, including the way our brains are hard-wired, overconfidence or bias in our abilities, a tendency to perceive feedback as criticism rather than constructive or productive input, and anxiety about the potential consequences of that feedback. In a *Harvard Business Review* article, Jackman and Strober (2003) cite this fear as the

reason most companies only provide feedback during annual reviews and argues that the avoidance of feedback is due to people's hatred of being criticized. Measurement is often avoided for fear that if the results are negative, it can cost employees their jobs. In addition, when a program or initiative that someone was certain would solve a problem falls short, it threatens their confidence in and perception of their skills or work.

Closely linked to the fear of feedback is the fear of failure. When a program or initiative that someone was certain would solve a problem falls short, it does more than disappoint—it threatens their confidence in and perception of their skills or work. In many organizations, failure carries a stigma that can stall careers, damage reputations, and erode trust. Leaders, therefore, may avoid measuring outcomes altogether, reasoning that if no one looks too closely, no one will discover shortcomings. Yet this avoidance creates a vicious cycle: The lack of evaluation prevents learning, the absence of learning increases the chance of repeated mistakes, and repeated mistakes deepen the fear of future failure.

True cultures of evaluation and continuous improvement flip this narrative. They treat feedback and failure not as threats, but as essential sources of information. Feedback clarifies reality, and failure provides data about what doesn't work—which, in turn, points the way toward what might. Organizations that normalize and reward learning from setbacks build resilience, innovation, and long-term success.

A Strong Evaluation Culture = Agility, Innovation, and Growth

It's a common misconception to think of evaluation as a one-time event that only takes into consideration what has already occurred. Rather, evaluation is a forward-looking, continuous process that, when executed collectively, unlocks the ability for organizations to be agile, innovate, and grow. When organizations transform their mindset to embrace evaluation as a continuous process, they can:

- Assess performance regularly and adapt to what is working and adjust against what is not.

- Encourage innovation because they can adjust quickly to test new ideas and learn from results.
- Establish a growth mindset for employees by providing constructive feedback and sharing how their work influences the organization's mission.
- Build customer loyalty by refining services and products while enhancing the customer experience.
- Outperform their competition through learning and improvement.

What Does a Culture of Evaluation Look Like?

Let's consider this question through the lens of an alternative kickoff meeting. Instead of building a culture of continuous improvement, your CEO announces that you are going to build a culture of evaluation. The organization is not attempting to become more data driven, but rather one that evaluates the choices you make daily using a consistent framework, the Kirkpatrick Four Levels. After the meeting is over, leaders start to speak the same language: Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results. Initiatives are measured by how well they help to support the organization in its quest to achieve its mission. Data is shared across departments, and instead of using simple metrics and numbers to tell stories, you triangulate your data and use multiple methods and sources to ensure you see the whole picture before making any decisions.

Organizations that embrace a culture of evaluation use a common language so that data can easily be shared across the organization. To be agile, innovative, and growth-oriented, continuous feedback loops are essential. These feedback loops empower the organization and its employees to confidently identify areas for improvement because their insights are backed by data. It's not just about learning from mistakes but also celebrating successes and replicating what works.

A culture of evaluation is more than the practice of evaluation: it's a transformative mindset. Embedding data-driven decision making into the operations of an organization sparks agility, innovation, and growth. It is the foundation for continuous improvement where change moves from possibility to reality.

A culture of evaluation shifts the focus from an assessment that is reactive, post-implementation, or crisis-driven to an approach that's proactive and future-focused. A proactive evaluation culture includes:

- Looking forward, predicting challenges, optimizing processes, and driving innovation
- Conducting a holistic analysis that includes both quantitative and qualitative data to get a complete picture
- Pivoting strategies quickly and efficiently based on real-time feedback
- Creating a supportive environment for employees, where evaluation and, in particular, feedback are offered in an environment of psychological safety and viewed as opportunities for growth

While this is what a culture of evaluation looks like at a macro level, let's now take it to a more local level: What does a culture of evaluation look like for a project or initiative you are working on? Gone are the days of creating programs without a clear understanding of how they support the business and without setting metrics and goals, then retroactively scrambling to find the data to understand more about the initiative or program's impact after it has been implemented. Instead, as a program or initiative is developed, the first question asked should be whether the request is aligned with the organization's mission and/or strategic plan. If the answer is yes, the next questions are:

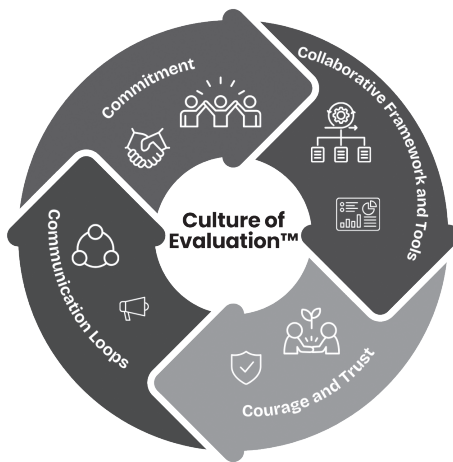
- What problem are we looking to solve?
- Is this the right solution?

Finally, once alignment and analysis are complete, the program can be developed with a clear goal and identified metrics so that data can be captured throughout the program and shared across departments to make better organizational decisions through collaboration.

Components of a Culture of Evaluation

To create a culture of evaluation, organizations need commitment, a collaborative evaluation framework and tools, courage, trust, and communication loops (Figure 1-1).

Figure 1-1. A Culture of Evaluation



Commitment

First and foremost, commitment is crucial to building a culture of evaluation—commitment to the process and commitment from leadership. Shifting to a culture of evaluation takes time. You need to recognize and celebrate the small wins—such as the successful implementation of a new evaluation tool or a positive change in stakeholder perception—to keep the momentum aimed toward the goal. During the culture shift, leaders must be committed to navigating the rollercoaster, bringing on additional champions, and supporting those more resistant to the change.

One of the most common challenges human capital professionals face is gaining stakeholder buy-in. To shift toward a culture of evaluation, you must convince your stakeholders and colleagues of its importance. We know that building a culture of evaluation is not an option—it is critical for organizational success.

Many people resist change, even change that brings benefits. To turn stakeholders and colleagues into champions, you must first understand why they resist change. Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, listed “Seek first to understand, then to be understood” as his fifth habit. You must understand the reason for resistance

to co-create a solution. Resistance to change typically comes from many sources, including:

- Fear of the unknown
- Loss of control
- Comfort in the way things have always been done
- Fear of failure
- Fear of incompetence
- Perceived increase in workload
- Lack of trust in leadership or the change process
- Misalignment with goals
- Poor communication and lack of engagement
- Influence from others

Emphasizing the benefits of a culture of evaluation, such as improved decision making and organizational growth, can inspire optimism, motivation, and commitment.

A Collaborative Evaluation Framework and Tools

Many organizations struggle to ensure that the data they collect is valid, accurate, and understandable. If the data only means something to a small group, it does not benefit other groups or the larger organization. With so many data collection frameworks spanning industries, as well as employees trained in diverse methods of data collection and evaluation, it is easier for everyone to evaluate and report data in their own way, rather than using one unified system and language.

That is why the first step is to choose an evaluation framework that promotes collaboration with stakeholders. A framework must not only provide structure for collecting and interpreting data, but also create a shared language that allows business leaders, HR, learning teams, and frontline managers to work from the same playbook. Without this alignment, evaluation becomes fragmented and loses its ability to inform collective decisions. Of course, we recommend the Kirkpatrick Model, which is designed to connect learning, behavior, and results in ways that resonate with stakeholders. But the imperative is not the model you choose—it is that you choose a model that everyone can use consistently. This unified

approach is what turns evaluation into a collaborative discipline rather than a technical exercise owned by one department.

By embracing a flexible and straightforward evaluation framework across business units, you are creating a common language for the organization and unlocking a world of possibilities. No longer will reports and dashboards need to be deciphered, nor will slide decks need to be carefully interpreted to help audience members grasp the data's significance. Instead, the data's meaning will be easily understood by all, and everyone will have an equal footing on which to base decisions, fostering a more equitable and efficient work environment.

Once the framework is established, setting up the tools to monitor and report on the data becomes essential. This is where organizations can also trip themselves up by becoming too bogged down in finding the right technology or by using inadequate technology that doesn't offer the insights necessary to make meaningful decisions. Finding the right tools for the job is becoming easier.

This is where artificial intelligence (AI) has changed the game. Since the release of ChatGPT in late 2022, a wave of new tools has emerged to help leaders not just crunch numbers but synthesize meaning from massive volumes of qualitative data. Where organizations once defaulted to quantitative data because it was easy to tally, AI now makes it possible to analyze thousands of open-text comments, stories, and observations, highlighting themes and patterns that were previously hidden.

This matters because qualitative data is where the richness lies. Numbers can show us *what* happened, but stories and themes explain *why*. AI makes qualitative data scalable, reliable, and usable at the same speed as quantitative data. In other words, AI allows us to elevate qualitative data to its rightful place in decision making—not as an afterthought but as an equal partner to the metrics.

At the enterprise level, this integration creates a central scorecard that blends headline metrics from across business functions and then uses curated stories and qualitative insights to bring those numbers to life. At the programmatic level, it shifts the focus away from vanity metrics (like NPS or completions) and toward ongoing signals (such as application rates,

behavior change metrics, and qualitative feedback loops) that allow leaders to adapt in real time and ensure programs achieve their intended outcomes.

Courage and Trust

Another related term for evaluation is *feedback*, and in today's world, feedback has become perceived as negative for many reasons. At its core, this is an issue of courage and trust. Feedback requires courage from those giving it—they need to be direct, have difficult conversations, and risk being vulnerable or critical in service of improvement. It also requires trust from those receiving it—they need to trust that the feedback is offered with good intent and will be used to help them grow rather than to punish them.

This same dynamic plays out at the organizational level. Whenever we talk about evaluation, we hear about survey fatigue and lack of response. Organizations frequently ask, “How do we increase our survey response rate?” However, we should actually be asking, “How much trust exists between the organization and its people?” Too often, surveys consume our most precious resource—time—without leading to visible change. When people take the time to write thoughtful responses, they expect to see improvements in programs, culture, or customer experience. However, if no action is taken, trust erodes. Over time, the feedback quality will decline; eventually, participation dries up completely.

Courage and trust are inseparable when building a culture of evaluation. Leaders must have the courage not only to ask for feedback but to act on it, and employees must trust that their voices will make a difference. Without both, evaluation becomes an empty exercise—one that exhausts people rather than energizes them. With both, feedback becomes a powerful engine for growth, learning, and meaningful change.

Communication Loops

A fundamental value of a culture of evaluation is transparent communication looped around to all parties. Strong communication loops ensure information flows among all levels of the organization and allow teams to refine their strategies, make informed decisions, and drive continuous improvement.

Without structured communication loops, evaluation data flows one way and recipients won't understand how the information affects the organization, project, or initiative. When feedback flows consistently, organizations can adjust in real time, rather than delaying changes due to a lack of data and continuing down paths that are not effective. Communication loops also prevent data from falling into black holes, never to be shared with the appropriate stakeholders who can course correct. When feedback only flows upward to leadership, frontline employees begin to suffer from what appears to be survey fatigue. But we also know that employees suffer from something similar to survey fatigue: feedback fatigue. This leads to the risk that the organization will miss out on opportunities for improvement.

Communication in organizations needs to use a multimodal approach. Organizations that rely on one method of communication risk requests for feedback not reaching all the organization's employees. We live in an era when we are fed constant communication, and the most important commodity is our attention; therefore, organizations need to identify multiple approaches to gathering feedback. Perhaps it's through a text message, a poll or survey distributed through Slack or Teams, an internal social media channel, or a focus group. There are many ways to gather feedback. We need to leverage as many as possible to cast the widest net and create a comprehensive view.

How to Build a Culture of Evaluation in Your Organization

To build a culture of evaluation, you must be intentional in your approach. You are not just changing a process; you are transforming an organization and its culture. This work takes time.

Use this road map as your guide.

Step 1. Align Leadership

This work must begin with leadership. Organizations look to their leaders for guidance on how to react to situations and change. If leadership is not aligned with how important the work is to the organization's future, the

culture will not shift. By emphasizing the role of leadership in building a culture of evaluation, leaders can feel empowered and responsible for driving change.

Powered-Up Practice

Rather than selling the process, sell the dream state first. Often when we sell change, we sell the process to get to the dream state, which emphasizes the work rather than the reward. Instead, if we start with the dream state by setting the vision, others may be more willing to go through the process to achieve the dream state.

Leadership needs to understand the value of a culture of evaluation, specifically how it can unlock growth and support their strategic vision. It isn't meant to be added work, but the path to greater productivity and a happier, healthier organization.

Set expectations that leaders must actively participate in the culture shift process and be champions for this change. Lower levels of leadership will look to the higher levels as a model for how they should react to change. It's important that everyone takes responsibility for the culture shift. The entire organization participates in a culture of evaluation, including all levels of leadership. When this does not happen, the consequences ripple quickly. If senior leaders don't model courage and commitment, midlevel leaders will assume the change is optional or unimportant, and frontline employees will disengage. Instead of a unified movement, you'll end up with isolated teams making progress while others resist or ignore the shift entirely. This inconsistency breeds frustration, undermines trust, and reinforces the belief that "nothing really changes here." Even worse, valuable insights from evaluation may go unheeded, causing the organization to repeat mistakes, miss opportunities, and waste resources.

A culture of evaluation cannot thrive in pockets—it must be collective. If only a handful of leaders participate, evaluation will remain a compliance exercise rather than a transformational force. But when leaders at every level visibly take ownership, they set the tone that evaluation is

essential rather than optional. That clarity creates alignment, accountability, and momentum, which allows a culture shift to take root and endure.

Step 2. Assess the Organizational Environment

Change efforts and training initiatives frequently fail because the systems and environment in which the change or training is taking place are not conducive to optimal performance. First, you must understand your organization's attitude toward evaluation. Consider these questions:

- Do employees perceive evaluation as punitive?
- What current processes are in place for gathering and using data?
Are they effective, or do they need to be adjusted?
- What barriers exist in the organization that prevent evaluation, such as time, resources, or skills?

Don't rely solely on your own observations for this work. Get feedback from others in the organization through qualitative data collection efforts, such as interviews and focus groups.

Step 3. Define What Matters

Organizations often struggle with tracking too many metrics or they fear tracking the wrong ones. To be successful, organizations must define what success looks like, which, in turn, drives the key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with organizational goals and ensure employees understand how their work contributes to the organization's success.

But remember, be flexible and adjust your KPIs over time. The organization will evolve, and your KPIs should as well.

Step 4. Make Evaluation a Must, Not a “Nice to Have”

Too often, organizations treat evaluation as optional—something to do if time, budget, or interest allows. This mindset undermines progress and credibility. Instead, evaluation must be woven into the organization's core processes, meeting structures, and decision-making systems. It should be as routine as budgeting or performance reviews, not an afterthought.

Begin by reviewing your organization's processes and identifying where to include evaluation. Then, establish clear procedures to ensure evaluation

is consistently applied. Resource allocation is one of the biggest barriers, but it is also where commitment becomes visible. Use your assessment of the organization to determine which resources to dedicate to evaluation. This could mean adjusting roles and responsibilities, hiring employees with the right skill sets, acquiring new tools, or investing in training.

When people see evaluation as optional, they'll quickly slip back into old habits of relying on assumptions, incomplete data, or anecdotes. But when evaluation is treated as essential, it becomes a driver of trust, accountability, and continuous improvement. The difference lies not in the intent, but in the discipline of making evaluation a non-negotiable part of how the organization operates.

Powered-Up Practice

Set the expectation that all projects and initiatives will be assessed for effectiveness.

Step 5. Use Technology Wisely

As you will read later in this book, technology can make organizations more human by enhancing human insight and streamlining data collection efforts. Many people fear that AI will replace humans. The fact is that AI tools will not take your job; however, they will change how your job is done and potentially cause you to be replaced with someone who knows how to leverage AI to work more efficiently and effectively.

Technology can be a powerful ally for making data visible, accessible, and actionable. Dashboards, visualizations, and analytics platforms allow us to see patterns that would otherwise remain hidden and provide real-time access to insights across the organization. These tools help uncover success stories, reveal gaps, and highlight where action is needed most.

But technology alone cannot tell the full story. For example, a chart may show a spike in survey results, but it cannot explain the leadership decisions, cultural shifts, or performance support that made the difference. A dashboard may connect learning activities to improved business outcomes, but it takes human interpretation to translate those numbers into meaningful information for stakeholders.

Leaders and evaluators must use technology as a starting point, not the finish line. Technology should be leveraged to reveal insights and free up time from manual data collection so people can focus on the real work: interpreting the results, connecting them to organizational context, and communicating the information in ways that build trust and inspire action. Stories grounded in data carry credibility; data brought to life through human storytelling creates impact.

The most effective organizations blend both humans and the technology. They use technology to capture, analyze, and visualize, and then rely on people (leaders, evaluators, and employees) to provide a narrative that shows why it matters and how it can be repeated or improved, in addition to what happened.

Powered-Up Practice

Humanize your dashboards with these tips:

- ▶ **Pair every chart with a story.** Don't just show numbers—connect them to real examples of people, teams, and outcomes.
- ▶ **Ask “so what?” after every visualization.** Push beyond the data to explain why the results matter for the business and what actions to take next.
- ▶ **Close the loop.** In addition to sharing the data, make sure to note any decisions and improvements you've made because of it. This builds trust and keeps people engaged.
- ▶ **Keep the human voice present.** Use quotes, case examples, and testimonials alongside analytics to bring the data to life.

Step 6. Encourage Open Conversation

Courage to provide feedback is crucial to building a culture of evaluation. At the same time, employees must trust that they are safe enough to deliver those insights. Work with leadership at all levels to develop transparent communication practices. Encourage open communication about feedback and how to shift to a culture of evaluation.

Normalize discussions about failures and lessons learned. Frame these conversations as opportunities to learn, not blame, and focus on

providing the most resources to middle management because they are the closest to and have the greatest influence on frontline employees.

Powered-Up Practice

Practice feedback loops. Ask employees to provide their input and then demonstrate how it leads to meaningful changes.

Step 7. Celebrate Wins and Learn From Challenges

Positive reinforcement of behaviors is essential for encouraging the actions we want to see. When individuals experience recognition for their efforts, they are motivated to continue practicing those behaviors, which helps accelerate their personal growth along with a broader cultural shift within the organization. Publicly recognize teams and individuals who are using evaluation insights to drive improvements.

Treat failures as learning opportunities to identify and shift direction toward success. Teams should share cross-functionally what is working and what is not to minimize the risk that other areas of the organization make the same mistakes.

Step 8. Give Grace and Have Patience

Have you ever seen a cruise ship make a turn? Is it fast or slow? Captains know that to turn the ship smoothly, they need to go slowly, bit by bit. Then, once the turn is complete, passengers are surprised to realize they have changed direction because that change was incremental to avoid disaster.

While giving grace and having patience is the final step in this road map, it is also the foundation of the journey. Remember to give grace to others and yourself. Change takes time, and not every evaluation effort will be perfect. Organizations must have room for iteration and learning.

Encourage leaders to be patient with employees and with the process. And remind employees that they should make mistakes to learn and innovate. Remember to maintain a long-term vision of the dream state and to celebrate short wins along the way. Constant feedback about the organization's process is crucial.

Powered-Up Practice

Use leading indicators and interim stories of success to show progress early—even before final results are in. Highlighting these “quick wins” builds confidence, demonstrates momentum, and encourages people to stay committed. At the same time, review these early signals to identify areas that need adjustments. This helps reinforce the idea that evaluation is an ongoing, adaptive process—not a one-time report.

Conclusion: A Foundation for Change

A culture of evaluation is more than a set of processes: It is the mindset and shared commitment that sets the stage for every step that follows. As you move forward in this book, keep in mind that this foundation enables all meaningful growth, learning, and improvement. Building a culture of evaluation isn’t a one-time event. It is an ongoing journey that, when fully embraced, transforms not just outcomes, but the very fabric of your organization. Organizations that prioritize evaluation do not just improve—they transform.



Momentum Builder

Implement a culture of evaluation in your department or unit to pilot test the process and gather data on the shift. This not only builds champions within your unit or department but also provides testimonials and insights into what to expect, as well as success stories to share. Use the Building a Culture of Evaluation Quick-Start Checklist in the appendix to guide your next steps.

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About the Author



Vanessa Milara Alzate is the owner and CEO of Kirkpatrick Partners and the founder and CEO of Anchored Training. With 20 years of experience in instructional design, learning strategy, and performance consulting, Vanessa has worked with organizations across industries, such as federal and state government, life sciences, financial services, higher education, and global retail. Her expertise is in aligning learning systems with mission outcomes, evolving traditional practices, and building organizational capability through proven frameworks and new technologies.

Throughout her career, Vanessa has been both a committed user and a strong advocate of the Kirkpatrick Four Levels®. She has experienced firsthand how the model drives meaningful improvements in training and performance. This deep professional connection made the opportunity to acquire Kirkpatrick Partners in 2023 not just a strategic decision, but a natural progression, allowing her to become the next steward of the world's most recognized evaluation standard.

Under Vanessa's leadership, the Kirkpatrick Model has evolved beyond its roots as a post-training measurement tool and is now a comprehensive operating system for designing, executing, and continuously improving programs that drive behavior and business results.

Vanessa's leadership philosophy is built on a deep respect for legacy, a drive for innovation, and a belief that transformation happens when people are empowered to challenge assumptions and build cultures of accountability and continuous improvement.

She holds a master of science in corporate and organizational communication from Northeastern University and a bachelor of arts in communication and political science from Rutgers University.

A proud Latina from New Jersey, today you can find Vanessa in South Florida, living out her dream of living within driving distance to Miami to enjoy a cortadito and Cuban sandwich. When she isn't working, you will find her shuttling her daughters between school and the soccer field, reminding them to make good choices, believe that dreams do come true for those who work hard, and always dream bigger.

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