

## The Underestimated Rituality: Analysis Based on Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model

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**Abstract.** With the emergence of various studies in cognitive psychology, rituality has become a term frequently appearing in field of management, especially in enterprise staff training. Though there is no description of “rituality” in the content about staff training in the well-accepted ADDIE theory and model, the concept does play an important role throughout training activities. However, it is difficult to bring out the significance of rituality in evaluation of training results. There is certain relevance between rituality and all four levels of Kirkpatrick Model and Reaction is the most influenced level. Also, it often produces some changes in aspects of Emotion and Behavior, and this, in turn, will improve the results. This thesis proposes some suggestions on the optimization of the Kirkpatrick Model from a new perspective, *rituality*.

### Research background: Difficulties Facing Evaluation of Training Results Concerning Cognition

Training is playing a more and more important role in the development of capabilities of enterprise staff, yet many managers still have some misunderstandings towards training development, such as considering training as useless. De-Qing MA (2015) argues the negligible role formalism training[1] plays is not directly proportional to the enterprise' input. Also, he thinks its influence cannot be effectively assessed, therefore it is an unnecessary enterprise activity. But Song YE (2016) believes rituality is becoming increasingly significant in trainings, which can realize trilateral benefits of enterprise, staff and student supervisor[2]. The following researchers have done studies in this field.

Aiming at reasons why training become useless, Juan XIAO (2007) suggests one of the difficulties facing current training evaluation is that its indicator setting is not sufficiently systematic. It is a hotly debated topic among researchers how to measure the probable results of a training using an integrated system of performance indexes[3]. Quite a few managers have indiscriminately copied Kirkpatrick's Model when setting up evaluation indexes without taking the reality into account, which would result in unreasonable settings of indicators to evaluate a training. This is one of the reasons why many people believe training is useless.

Moreover, rituality, or sense of ritual, is severely ignored in modern researches. Detailed studies have been done in terms of sense of happiness, sense of self-efficacy, and moral sense, etc., while there are only a canty few researches about rituality. It is obvious that among all senses, rituality has always been in a neglected position. The reasons for that can be found in opinions of Liang LI, Ying WANG and Ji-Hao NIU (2018). According to them, one of the key problems in training process is its monotonous evaluation method. A great assessment of education quality should be done both qualitatively and quantitatively[4]. Currently in many training activities, there is generally little interconnection between the two types of assessments of teaching and studying quality and qualitative assessment is often neglected. People often give up collecting qualitative data since they are considered difficult to be quantized. As a part of qualitative assessment, rituality is also underestimated though its actual effect in training is significant. As a result, neglecting rituality in researches is basically slowing down the progress of training. This is another reason why trainings are considered useless.

Based on aforementioned analysis, it is easy to perceive that the reason why trainings are deemed useless by an increasing number of people is that rituality is neglected in performance evaluation. Rituality has a remarkable influence on and can become an indicator in result evaluation of enterprise training.

## Literature Review

The word “ritual” has a longer history compared to “rituality”. In China, the word for ritual first appeared in *Book of Songs*, the very first collection of Chinese poems completed more than 3,000 years ago. There is a line “*I will take laws and regulations of King Wen as our rituals in order to strive for the peaceful governance of the country.*” In the west, the word ritual first appeared in 19<sup>th</sup> century and it was explained in details later. The core of the ritual view of communication is a sacred ceremony where people get together in forms of group or community (James W. Carey, 1989) [5]. Studies from the perspective of psychological states show that rituals are behavior modes formed in collectives and groups and that they are bond to inspire, maintain or re-create some psychological states in groups (Emile Durkheim, 1912) [6]. Initially the explanations of ritual in China and in the west were not the same and they were even widely different from what we have endowed the word with today. However, during semantic progression, both cultures have added senses of divinity and society to this word and it gradually evolved to the *ritual* we know in contemporary society.

Researchers from home and abroad have made following explanations on how to understand ritual. According to Song YE (2016), ritual is an activity that brings individuals or groups into a specific situation through languages and actions and that it is a stylized pattern of a certain group formed in major events at monumental moments[2]. Randall Collins (1986) elaborates on the ingredients of interaction ritual in his book *Interaction Ritual Chains* as follows. 1) Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence, whether it is in the foreground of their conscious attention or not. 2) There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded. 3) People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other’s focus of attention. 4) They share a common mood of emotional experience [7]. It is thus clear that modern researchers in eastern and western countries have formed similar concepts about rituality and ritual chain. Based on opinions and views mentioned above, the authors have summarized three significant features of rituality. First, the function of rituality can only be maximized whenever witnessed by a group of people. Secondly, rituality can impel participants to greater efforts and potentials by satisfying their spiritual needs of feeling important. Last but not least, rituality is the nature of a ritual which can be felt naturally during the process without any deliberate creation. However, how much people can feel depends on whether the host attaches importance to rituality or not.

To sum up, now there are studies focusing on the development process of rituality, but few of them involve studies in enterprise training result assessment. This article will start with the history of ritual and rituality and analyse the effect of rituality on training appraisal based on Chinese and foreign literatures.

A large number of training evaluation methods are now used in academic circles, with the most popular one being Kirkpatrick’s Model, an evaluation model proposed by Donald Kirkpatrick, an American social scientist in human resource management, in 1959. (Hai-Hang ZHENG, Dong-Mei WU, 2006) [8].

The purpose of evaluation at reaction level is to provide information of participants’ responses to the design and implementation of the training. Participants’ instant reactions will be assessed, including their responses to learning contents, activities, guidance efficiency, and the training itself (Li LI, 2005) [9]. In evaluation at behaviour level, *behaviour* refers to application of knowledge and skills at work and attitudes towards one’s job, which can also be taken as job performance (Xing-Han LI, Ya-Lin REN, Zhi-Hao JIANG, 2018) [10]. Evaluation at result level is a higher level concerning whole organization, which is to judge whether or not a training has made specific and direct contributions to the business performance of an enterprise. It can be measured by a series of indexes, such as accident

rate, productivity, staff turnover, quality, employee morale, and customer service of an enterprise (Kun-Lun MAN, 2007) [11].

### **Analysis of Problems and Causes Based on Kirkpatrick's Model**

Rituality has the closest interconnection with reaction level. Key influencing factors in the process of training transfer are achievement motivation, instant gratification and transfer climate and they all have positive effects on improvement of individual performance (Xiu-Li Wei, Qian-Qian KOU, 2016) [12]. Hereinto, instant gratification depends on whether the atmosphere built up with rituality is appropriate or not. It is normally assessed through a questionnaire given to and filled out by the participants. This questionnaire functions in two ways. On the one hand, according to those feedbacks, problems in the training can be found and the training can be improved and perfected. On the other hand, its rituality will be enhanced. Participants will know that they are very important in training, their advice needs collecting and their attitudes will have certain effects on the result. Emotional energy will be strengthened to achieve a highly emotional attachment. It is not difficult to see that gratification of participants towards training activities is an important indicator in terms of reaction and rituality is a main approach to increase their satisfaction and perceptual cognizance. The essential function of rituality is to make the participants feel that they are important in the enterprise and are reorganized by the enterprise. Although the need for gratification may vary from person to person, the need of a majority of people; as been gradually realized with the rapid development of economy. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, only when people's physiological and safety needs have been satisfied to a minimum degree will they pursue higher needs, namely, social need, the need for esteem and self-actualization. It is a requirement in current times to satisfy one's spiritual needs and rituality is an evitable outcome when spiritual needs are to be met in contemporary society.

Learning level, which shows what the learners have learnt, ranks second in the framework of Kirkpatrick's evaluation standards. It is used, among all indicator, in a relatively wider scope, because it can provide practical data through written examinations, performance tests and scene simulations to assess the training result. Learning and rituality, an assessment to be done in terms of spiritual gratification, can mutually complement each other. Rituality in essence is a process of personal experience. Learners will often have and accumulate different experiences and feelings at class. But more than often when people realize they are getting together to do the same thing, they will form a kind of enthusiasm and it will spread quickly and level up to an extraordinary excitement (Xi-Yuan SHI, 2012) [13]. Rituality is a groupwork, and it helps learners to acquire knowledge. For example, if the same amount of knowledge is delivered through both on-site training and video training, it is logical to think that the trainees will also acquire the same amount of knowledge. However, multiple instances can prove that there are significant differences between the results of two kinds of training. The reason is the rituality in on-site training is much stronger than that in video training. Trainees of video training cannot get any direct visual hinting from other participants, which results in poor training effects. It is the often-neglected rituality that provides an environment to the trainees to receive visual hinting. But in traditional trainings, no specialized assessment is done about the influence of rituality, that is to say, rituality is an incentive in a training but never listed as an evaluation factor.

The third level is behavior. Starting from this level, we have come to the in-depth evaluation of training. Evaluation on this level is not commonly seen in actual applications due to increased difficulties and costs in follow-up assessment. Normally, the effects can be fairly obvious during training courses, especially the cultivation of organizational identification in aggregation period (Danchi ZHAO, 2016) [14]. But the organizational identification built up in training will gradually fades away in the process of maintenance and transfer. Rituality can act as a transformer of the employees. The emotional status in a ritual is contemporary, but as a consequence long-term emotion will be formed, and employees' commitment to enterprise culture and structure will be realized. (Yuxi WU, 2016) [15]. During such process, rituality become an important controlling tool and method, which prolongs the length of time training effects last on employees thus reaching the goal of improving employees attitudes towards enterprise.

The last level is Result. Shao-Yong Ye and Cheng-Yuan Zhou (2018) suggest and prove that the four levels are closely related with each other. In current trainings, levels of Reaction, Learning and Behavior all have positive and promotive effects on Result level. The effect of Behavior level is the most significant one, then Reaction level, and Learning level has the weakest influence[16]. As seen from analysis in the previous three sections, rituality influences all three levels of Reaction, Learning and Behavior positively. Therefore, it can be deduced that rituality has a positive effect on Result and will be beneficial to improvement of performance of learners and organizers. But the effect of rituality has often been omitted because it is difficult to be quantized.

## **Conclusions and Prospect of Research**

The text proves rituality's functions in trainings and explains why it should be a new indicator in result evaluation by giving details of the positive influences rituality have on reaction, learning, behavior and result levels.

All trainings have their respective aims and meanings. The valuation of result evaluation is to test whether a training has completed its goals and aims and to what extent they are completed. Naturally a training can not be done overnight. It is an investment in human resources, yet the exploitation of human resources are very flexible. Therefore, not all results of training can be immediately demonstrated in figures. One of the factors easily hidden is "rituality". It can produce maximum influence on a participant's spirit and mind, but there are no fixed standards for this part of evaluation. Therefore, relevant assessment needs to be human-based which will inevitably bring in subjective factors. This is another reason why rituality is taken as a standard in most result evaluation. However, though difficult to assess, it is never immeasurable and the important functions of rituality in training should never be ignored.

Rituality is a nature of training. But to what extent it is demonstrated is under the control of organizer on site. The reason why rituality should be taken as an indicator of training evaluation is because it is desirable that trainers consider the enhancement of rituality as a guidance. Four levels of training evaluation in Kirkpatrick Model show that rituality has everything to do with the quality of training development. It is a way to improve training quality at lower costs. Therefore, the effects of rituality in training should not be overlooked. People should recognize its importance and make it an indicator to assess training result. However, the text is not data-supported and further researches that digitalize the performance rituality brings about are urgently needed.

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