

TLIC PAPER

Beyond Learner Reaction: Measuring the Impact of Leadership Development at The Ivey Academy

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an in-depth exploration of The Ivey Academy's transition from traditional satisfaction-based evaluations to a more comprehensive impact evaluation approach in leadership development. Recognizing the limitations of relying solely on participant satisfaction, The Ivey Academy adopted a modified framework inspired by the Kirkpatrick Model, which evaluates satisfaction, learning, application, and long-term impact. This framework utilizes a range of data collection tools, including surveys, interviews, and action plans. The paper details the implementation process, from securing stakeholder engagement to designing effective surveys and overcoming the challenges of resistance and operational limitations. A key focus of the paper is on the impact survey results from the first term of open enrollment programs, which demonstrate significant improvements in workplace behavior and leadership strategies among participants. Additionally, it highlights the challenges in ensuring data comparability across diverse programs and audiences. Looking ahead, the paper discusses future directions for The Ivey Academy, emphasizing the refinement of the evaluation process, expanding impact measurement, and exploring standardization across various leadership development programs. This approach underscores The Ivey Academy's commitment to driving real-world change through leadership education, offering valuable insights for other institutions aiming to adopt similar evaluation practices.

KEYWORDS

leadership development, impact evaluation, Kirkpatrick model

1 INTRODUCTION

The Ivey Academy at Ivey Business School is a premier provider of leadership development in Canada, offering a wide array of programs from organizational leadership to strategic management and operational excellence. As part of Western University's Ivey Business School, the Academy combines academic rigor with practical insights to create impactful learning experiences for leaders. Its diverse portfolio

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includes custom programs designed for specific organizational needs, professional development courses, and certification programs across various business disciplines.

Historically, The Ivey Academy relied on satisfaction-based evaluations, focusing on participants' immediate reactions to program content and delivery. While satisfaction metrics provided some insights, they fell short in capturing the broader and long-term effects of leadership development on individuals and their organizations. Recognizing these limitations, The Ivey Academy shifted towards a more comprehensive evaluation framework inspired by the Kirkpatrick Model [1], which assesses not only satisfaction but also learning, application, and real-world impact. The transition to the new approach started in 2023 and it has already started to produce impact results, which are shared in this paper. This transformation allows the Academy to align its evaluation practices more closely with its strategic goals, demonstrating the true value of its programs.

2 BACKGROUND

The conventional approach in evaluating executive education programs has predominantly focused on reaction-level data, emphasizing learner satisfaction as the primary metric of success. This method is rooted in the immediate feedback collected from participants after the completion of a program, typically through surveys or questionnaires that inquire about their overall experience, the relevance of the content, and the quality of instruction. According to a 2018 report by UNICON (the global consortium for university-based executive education) [2], a significant majority of organizations, about 81%, regularly utilize reaction-level measurements to evaluate their programs. This contrasts starkly with the mere 41% that regularly employ results-level measurements, which assess the long-term impact of education on individual and organizational performance.

While this method offers quick insights into participants' overall experience, it provides only a surface-level understanding of program effectiveness. Immediate reactions capture emotional responses but fail to measure how knowledge is applied in the workplace or leads to meaningful long-term change. Satisfaction metrics also risk misalignment with strategic objectives, potentially emphasizing participant enjoyment over real-world utility. This can lead to complacency, where institutions may overlook critical areas for improvement, thereby hindering innovation and program relevance.

Given these limitations, a more comprehensive evaluation process was essential to truly measure the impact of leadership development programs. The Ivey Academy recognized the need to shift beyond satisfaction metrics to gauge the tangible outcomes of its programs on participants and their organizations. Impact measurement was needed due to several advantages:

Validation of Learning Outcomes. It provides concrete evidence that leadership development delivers enhanced skills, strategic thinking, and operational efficiency, demonstrating the return on investment for both individuals and organizations.

Alignment with Organizational Goals. Impact measurement ensures that learning outcomes are directly tied to strategic objectives, highlighting how programs contribute to driving change and fostering innovation within organizations.

Personal and Professional Growth. Beyond the classroom, it captures broader effects on participants' career progression, decision-making, and leadership transformation.

Continuous Improvement. Feedback from impact metrics allows The Ivey Academy to refine its programs continuously, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in a dynamic business landscape.

Social and Economic Contributions. Leadership programs contribute to addressing societal challenges by equipping leaders with the skills to drive sustainable and ethical business practices, extending the impact beyond organizations to the broader community.

Enhanced Credibility. Institutions that measure and communicate real-world impact strengthen their credibility and reputation, showcasing a commitment to meaningful outcomes rather than just program delivery.

By implementing this approach, The Ivey Academy ensures that its programs deliver value that extends far beyond satisfaction, fostering real-world change and leadership growth.

3 THE SHIFT TO IMPACT EVALUATION

3.1 Conceptualization

In the pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding and assessment of the real-world impact of their leadership development programs, The Ivey Academy has embraced a theoretical framework inspired by the renowned Kirkpatrick Model. This model, a cornerstone in the field of training evaluation, posits a multi-level approach to assessing the effectiveness of educational programs:

Reaction. Measuring learners’ immediate response to the program.

Learning. Assessing the extent to which participants have acquired the intended knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Behavior. Evaluating the transfer of learning to the workplace and the changes in participants’ behaviour.

Results. Measuring the outcomes that the program generated as tangible change in the organization (e.g., increased productivity, improved organizational performance).

While staying true to the essence of the Kirkpatrick Model, The Ivey Academy has adapted its terminology to better resonate with our internal stakeholders and facilitate engagement with the evaluation process. The four levels of evaluation, renamed as satisfaction, learning, application, and impact, represent a holistic approach to measuring the outcomes of the Academy’s programs. Each level addresses a specific question and employs distinct instruments to gather relevant data, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation levels at The Ivey Academy

Level	Question	Instruments
1. Satisfaction	Do participants enjoy the learning experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Program Survey • Post-program debriefs
2. Learning	Do participants achieve the planned learning objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre- and Post-Program Surveys • Participation Quizzes or polling • Submissions for interactive activities

(Continued)

Table 1. Evaluation levels at The Ivey Academy (*Continued*)

Level	Question	Instruments
3. Application	Do participants apply their learning at work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact Survey • Interviews • Action Plan
4. Impact	Do participants create tangible change in their teams based on their learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact Survey • Interviews • Action Plan Outcomes

To ensure the integrity and effectiveness of this expanded evaluation approach, The Ivey Academy established a set of guiding principles. These principles serve as a compass, delineating what they strived to achieve and avoid as they designed and implement the evaluation process:

Evaluation as a learning driver. We view evaluation not as a judgment of success or failure but as a powerful tool for driving iteration and learning across all programs.

Ungraded approach. Our evaluation process is ‘ungraded,’ with results anonymized and decoupled from program completion to encourage honest and constructive feedback.

Valuing all Feedback. Both qualitative and quantitative feedback are considered equally valuable, as they collectively inform and enhance our learning design process.

Focus on real-world impact. The ultimate measure of success for our programs is the real-world impact they have on participants, transcending traditional metrics of achievement.

Integration within activities. We prioritize assessments, such as Action Learning Projects, that are seamlessly integrated within program activities, enhancing relevance and application.

Contextualized metrics. Our evaluative metrics are designed to avoid biases and provide contextually rich analysis, recognizing the complex realities in which learning is applied.

3.2 Implementation

The transformation of evaluation mechanisms at The Ivey Academy was spearheaded by the Learning Experience Design team. This strategic choice underscored the importance of framing evaluation as an integral aspect of the learning journey, rather than a peripheral business operation. The team’s approach ensured that the evaluation process was deeply rooted in educational principles, focusing on capturing the true essence of learning impact.

Initial steps and stakeholder engagement. The journey began with the Learning Experience Design team outlining a general model and set of principles for the new evaluation approach. Recognizing the multifaceted impact of leadership development, the team embarked on a collaborative process, engaging a broad spectrum of internal stakeholders. This included upper management, the business development team, operations personnel, and faculty members. Each stakeholder group brought unique insights and requirements to the table, enriching the development of the evaluation framework. The collaborative effort aimed to ensure

that the evaluation mechanisms were comprehensive, addressing the diverse visions and information needs across The Ivey Academy.

Development of survey instruments. The outcome of this process was the creation of three survey instruments: the pre-program, post-program, and impact surveys, each serving a distinct purpose in the evaluation lifecycle:

Pre-program survey. Designed to establish a baseline of participants' confidence and familiarity with the program's learning objectives. This initial assessment provides a critical comparison point for measuring changes in participants' confidence, as gauged in subsequent evaluations.

Post-program survey. Focuses on assessing participant satisfaction across various dimensions of the learning experience, including program management, facilities, activities, and inclusivity. It also measures participants' confidence in achieving the learning outcomes, comparing these findings with the baseline established in the pre-program survey. This comparison helps to evaluate the alignment of program content with stated learning goals and its effectiveness in facilitating participant achievement.

Impact survey. Administered 4–12 months post-program, this survey aims to capture the longer-term effects of program participation on workplace behavior and outcomes. By collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, the impact survey seeks to understand the extent of behavior change and tangible results experienced by participants as a direct consequence of their learning.

Pilot and full implementation. The new evaluation process was first piloted with the QuantumShift program in May 2023, serving as an initial test case for the refined approach [3]. Following the successful pilot, The Ivey Academy proceeded with the full implementation of the new evaluation framework across all open enrollment programs in the Fall of 2023. At the time of writing this publication, the impact surveys of Fall 2023 open enrollment programs (first implementation term) have finalized.

4 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

The process of transforming the evaluation methodology was ambitious and, as with any significant change, not entirely smooth. The change encountered various challenges, from cultural resistance to practical limitations, each requiring thoughtful solutions.

4.1 Ensuring data consistency and comparability across programs

One of the most complex challenges was ensuring that the new metrics would allow us to gather data that was comparable across different programs. This was particularly difficult in open enrollment programs, which attract a diverse audience from varied workplaces and contexts, making it challenging to develop standardized metrics. The solution was to include questions that were generalizable enough to work in any context, leaving an open question for participants to provide specific examples of positive results, which were analyzed qualitatively.

In custom programs, metrics need to be tailored specifically to the client's objectives, yet still allow for some level of comparability with other programs to ensure consistency in evaluation. Balancing these needs has required careful design of evaluation tools to capture both program-specific and cross-program data.

4.2 Resistance to change

The traditional method of evaluating programs had been deeply embedded in The Ivey Academy's processes for decades. Its straightforward nature – a single, generic survey to gauge satisfaction – made it a comfortable routine for the team. The introduction of a more nuanced and complex method, with unique goals for each program and a series of three surveys instead of one, initially presented a shift from the norm. While some hesitancy was natural, The Ivey Academy also saw the emergence of early advocates who played a pivotal role in championing change. They emphasized the principles underpinning the new approach, particularly the need to capture the real-world change that programs aim to create. Engaging in extensive discussions and training, the team worked to shift the mindset within the organization, highlighting how the traditional method, while easier to administer, fell short in providing the depth of insights necessary for continuous improvement and alignment with strategic goals.

4.3 Navigating practical limitations

The shift to a new evaluation model required effective collaboration across different departments. As the learning design team was not directly involved in operations and program delivery, establishing clear transitions and hand-off processes was critical, particularly during the pilots and early stages of implementation. This transition is still for impact surveys, which take place months after the program conclusion.

Additionally, there was the practical limitation of maintaining high response rates. Historically, The Ivey Academy enjoyed a robust response rate for post-program surveys. However, the introduction of additional survey questions slightly diminished this rate. To counter this, time was allocated at the end of the last class for participants to complete the surveys, which proved effective for post-program feedback but less so for impact surveys. Currently, the response rate for impact surveys lingers around 20%, which is an area that The Ivey Academy is actively seeking to improve.

4.4 Ensuring clarity and reliability in the new metrics

With the new evaluation process came an array of new metrics unfamiliar to the organization, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Metrics by evaluation levels at The Ivey Academy

Level	Metrics
1. Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning experience metrics • Overall Satisfaction • NPS (Net Promoter Score)
2. Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence increase • Expected outcomes
3. Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to apply • Learning Transfer • Barriers & Enablers
4. Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in their leadership role • Positive results • Categories of impact

These metrics required a clear framework for interpretation, explanation, aggregation, and reporting. Transforming raw data into actionable insights necessitated a robust understanding of how to balance quantitative and qualitative results and determine the reliability of metrics based on response rates and participant feedback.

Developing this understanding involved training and development for Ivey Academy staff, the creation of new data analysis and reporting protocols, and a continuous feedback loop to refine these processes. The team recognized that the reliability of the new metrics would improve as more data was collected and that the true utility of these metrics would be realized in their ability to inform program adjustments and enhancements.

5 RESULTS FROM THE FIRST TERM OF IMPLEMENTATION (FALL 2023)

This section will focus on the impact survey results from our Fall 2023 open enrollment programs. For those interested in the results that include post-program surveys, please refer to the previous paper, *From Satisfaction to Impact: Evolving Evaluation Practices in Executive Education at The Ivey Academy* [3], which details these metrics.

The impact surveys, conducted six months after the completion of our Fall 2023 open enrollment programs, provide valuable insights into how participants applied the knowledge gained and the tangible impact on their professional environments. The data collected offers a comprehensive view of the program's long-term effects on participants' leadership abilities and organizational outcomes. Below are the key metrics:

5.1 Learning transfer

Participants were asked to rate the statement, "I am successfully applying what I learned in the program," on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree.

In total, 98% of respondents agreed to some extent that they are applying what they learned in the program, showcasing a strong transfer of learning. The mean rating was 6.05 / 7, highlighting that the majority of participants felt confident in translating program content into their daily work.

5.2 Application enablers and barriers

Given a list of enablers, participants were asked to select all that apply in response to the following question: *What are the most significant reasons why you are applying what you learned?* Respondents attributed their success to several factors:

Program Effectiveness. 31 participants indicated they learned what they needed during the program.

Use of Materials. 30 participants reported referring back to program materials to support their application.

Personal Effort. 30 respondents credited their own discipline and effort in applying their learning.

5.3 Confidence in leadership

Participants were asked to rate the statement, “I’ve felt more confident in my leadership role since I completed the program.” on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree.

In total, 96% of respondents agreed to some extent that their confidence in their leadership role had increased after completing the program. The mean score was 6.2, indicating a high degree of leadership confidence gained by participants.

5.4 Positive results

Participants were asked to evaluate the statement, “I am already seeing positive results from this program.” on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree. 94% of respondents agreed to some extent that they are already witnessing positive results in their professional settings. The mean rating for this metric was 6.0.

Additionally, specific examples of positive results were evaluated qualitatively, and the following themes were identified from participants’ comments:

Improved Leadership Presence: Many participants noted that they had gained confidence in their communication and leadership styles, which helped them lead more effectively.

Enhanced Negotiation Skills: Some respondents reported applying advanced negotiation techniques to real-world scenarios with positive outcomes.

Better Handling of Difficult Conversations: A significant number of participants mentioned improvements in providing constructive feedback and managing conflict.

5.5 Future impact

Participants were asked whether they expected to see continued positive results from the program in the future, on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree.

In total, 94% of respondents agreed to some extent that they expected positive outcomes in the future. The mean rating was 6.16.

This strong belief in continued benefits reflects the enduring value of the program, suggesting that the skills and knowledge participants gained will support long-term success in their roles.

5.6 Program value

Finally, participants were asked to assess whether the program was a worthwhile use of their time, on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 is Strongly Disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree.

In total, 99% of respondents agreed to some extent that the program was worth their investment of time. The mean rating was 6.5.

This overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores the perceived value of the program and suggests that participants found the learning experience not only effective but also worth the time and effort they invested.

These results affirm the effectiveness of the new evaluation process in showcasing actual data to tell the story of the substantial and enduring impact of our programs on participants' careers and businesses.

6 THE WAY FORWARD

The Ivey Academy's journey toward refining its evaluation practices is ongoing. The initial applications have provided valuable insights and set a precedent for future efforts. Plans to refine the evaluation process are multifaceted, and include:

- Implementing strategies to increase the response rates for impact surveys, potentially by integrating follow-up reminders, incentivizing completion, or embedding the survey process more deeply within the program's closure activities.
- Strengthening our data analysis capabilities will be a priority, allowing us to transform raw data into more nuanced insights and actions. For this, it will be crucial to leverage technology to streamline the evaluation process, ensuring that data collection and analysis are efficient, secure, and scalable.
- Integrating more qualitative methods, such as participant journals, focus groups, and case studies, to capture the rich, narrative elements of participant experience and impact. A project is in place for the year 2024–2025.
- Creating specific client success cases that showcase the impact measured through the new process. This will help us share our results and best practices with a broad audience.
- Extending our evaluation to capture the broader societal and economic impacts of our programs, aligning with global sustainability goals and corporate social responsibility initiatives. This has already started with our pilot QuantumShift, seeking feedback from its 20 years of graduates to measure the broad impact of the program.
- Contributing to the executive education community by sharing our methodologies, challenges, and successes, fostering a culture of transparency and collaborative growth. We have started collaborations with other educational institutions as part of the FOME Alliance (Future Of Management Education, a global alliance of business schools shaping immersive and engaging online education) to refine and endorse a standardized approach to impact evaluation, potentially leading to a widely accepted industry standard.

Through these initiatives, The Ivey Academy is not only committed to enhancing the efficacy of its programs but also to influencing the broader field of leadership development. The ultimate goal is to establish a culture where the true measure of success is the real-world impact that learning experiences create, benefiting participants, organizations, and society at large.

7 CONCLUSION

The Ivey Academy's shift to a Kirkpatrick-inspired evaluation model has provided a more comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of leadership development. By measuring satisfaction, learning, application, and real-world impact, the new process captures a fuller picture of how participants apply their knowledge and drive change within their organizations. The results from

this approach have shown a positive transformation in participants' professional environments, confirming the effectiveness of this holistic evaluation strategy.

This transition has underscored the importance of moving beyond traditional satisfaction-based assessments to methods that truly measure program effectiveness and long-term impact. As The Ivey Academy continues to refine its evaluation practices, the goal is not only to enhance its own programs but also to contribute to the wider executive education community. By sharing insights and best practices, the Academy aims to foster a broader dialogue on the importance of comprehensive impact measurement in leadership development.

8 REFERENCES

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