


**Evaluating Informal Learning**



**Presented by**  
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**Which best describes your role?**

- a. Instructor
- b. Instructional designer
- c. Instructor/designer-developer
- d. Learning consultant
- e. Manager
- f. Faculty
- g. Student
- h. Other

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**Which best describes your employer?**

- a. I work for myself or for an organization that exclusively specializes in training (and related) services.
- b. For-profit organization.
- c. Government
- d. Educational institution
- e. Nonprofit organization
- f. Other

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**Which best describes your primary motivation for evaluating learning programs?**

- a. External: management in my organization demands it or this is part of the culture of my organization
- b. Internal: I want to know about the effectiveness of my work
- c. I'm just curious about the topic; I don't feel any pressure to evaluate
- d. Other

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**Before proceeding, what do you hope to learn in today's session?**

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**Agenda**

1. Opening activity
2. Background
  - a. Definitions of informal, self-directed, and nonformal training
  - b. Why informal learning is important to the workplace
3. Why evaluating informal learning is important to do
4. Myths and realities about evaluation
5. Framework for evaluating informal learning
6. Wrap-up



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**Opening activity: How would you conduct this requested evaluation of informal learning?**

A manager wants you to collect Level 1 evaluations for on-the-job training.

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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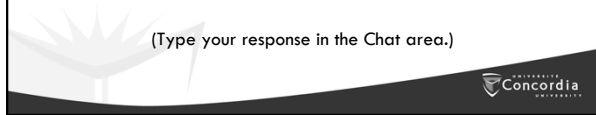
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**2. How would you conduct this requested evaluation of informal learning?**

A training administrator wants enrollment information for the quick tour of the new Learning Management System, which the department uses to "sell" the system to users.

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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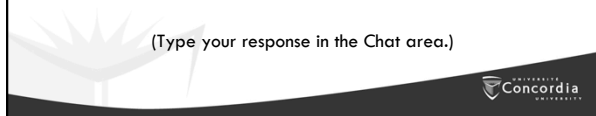
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**3. How would you conduct this requested evaluation of informal learning?**

A product development manager asks you to report on the extent of learning from the online help provided with the software her team develops.

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**4. How would you conduct this requested evaluation of informal learning?**

One of your top first-level customer support representatives seeks a promotion to second-level support, but needs to demonstrate that he has the skills and knowledge for the job. Formal schooling ended after the first year of university (most reps have a bachelor's degree) and he only participated in the 6-week new hire training.

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**5. How would you conduct this requested evaluation of informal learning?**

A board member of your nonprofit wants data on the impact of the confidential health information site that your agency publishes.

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**Based on this discussion, how easily can you apply methods used to evaluate *formal* learning to *informal* learning?**

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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




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**Informal learning involves learner control over aspects of:**

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Process (who controls and assesses the learning process)                          | Location (intended for learning)  | Purpose (is learning is a primary or secondary goal)                              | Content (abstract or technical, or related to a practical, everyday skill)        | Consciousness (awareness that learning occurred)                                  |

Colley, H., Hodkinson, P., & Malcolm, J. (2003). Wihak (2009)




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**Contrast with these related terms.**

| Term                   | Use   |
|------------------------|---|
| Formal learning        | Instruction in which the instructor or some similar "expert" sets the objectives and determine the requirements for successful completion |
| Nonformal learning     | Learning that happens incidentally, accidental learning in non-learning contexts  |
| Incidental learning    | Same as nonformal learning  |
| Self-directed learning | Self-study programs aiming towards a goal (usually overseen by a tutor and formalized with a contract)                                    |




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**Informal learning fills the gap between classroom and workplace.**

- Practical applications of concepts
- Tips and tricks that help novices become journeymen
- According to some studies, the source of 70 percent of all work-related knowledge.




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**Evaluating informal learning “fosters a culture of reflection and analysis to improve performance” (Laiken et al)**



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**Evaluating informal learning provides insights into use, effectiveness, and value.**

**What is the extent of satisfaction with various resources used for informal learning?**

**What did workers learn?**

In what ways does the organization benefit from informal learning by workers?

**What is the extent of participation in various informal learning activities?**



Which informal learning efforts that the organization formally supports are providing tangible benefits to the organization?

How can workers receive recognition for their informal learning?

If informal learning benefits the organization, how can organizations better support informal learning effort?

How do workers learn informally?



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**By nature, informal learning does not lend itself easily to evaluation.**

- All models of training evaluation assume externally defined objectives, completion, and evaluation.
- But when learning informally, workers:
  - Set their own objectives—and they’re not always observable and measurable.
  - Decide for themselves when they’ve completed the program—even if their concept of completion differs from yours.
  - Decide for themselves what completion looks like.



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**Established frameworks fall apart when evaluating informal learning.**  
 Consider these issues with the Kirkpatrick Model.

| Level                    | Issue   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1 (Satisfaction)         | Much learning occurs either accidentally or from events intended for other purposes.                          |
| 2 (Learning)             | By nature, no objectives against which to test. Much learning occurs unintentionally.                         |
| 3 (Behavior or Transfer) | By nature, no objectives against which to assess. Informal learning processes are the ones used for transfer. |
| 4 (Impact)               | Because most informal learning is individually driven, no business objectives against which to evaluate it    |




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**Others have faced—and addressed—similar challenges.**

| Museums  | Marketing  | Web communications   |
|--|--|--|
| Free-choice learning   | Ads and Press Releases   | Effectiveness of sites   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Longitudinal studies</li> <li>Interview-based techniques</li> <li>Quickie numbers</li> <li>Different types of satisfaction surveys</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct marketing measures</li> <li>Recognition studies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Count usage statistics:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many people visited</li> <li>How long visitors stay</li> </ul> </li> <li>Run analytics reports</li> <li>Place satisfaction surveys on every screen</li> <li>Conduct period surveys</li> <li>Seek descriptive information through usability tests and focus groups</li> </ul> |




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**A Framework for Evaluating Informal Learning**

| Individual Learning                | Learning Across Groups of Workers                                |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Identifying what workers learned   | Determining the extent of use of resources for informal learning |
| Identifying how workers learned it | Assessing satisfaction with individual resources                 |
| Recognizing acquired competencies  | Identifying the impact of individual resources                   |




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### IL-1: How would you identify what workers learned?



(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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### IL-1: Identify what workers learned.



- Self-assessments
- Process portfolios
- Coaching interviews



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### Partial Sample: Self-Assessment

**Are You an Informal Learner?**  
 Before Training and Development professionals can effectively provide and promote informal learning for others, they need an awareness of their own interests in, and preferences for, informal learning. This activity is intended to help sensitize you to your informal learning preferences.  
 Instructions: Answer these questions. For responses, see the answer key below.

1. One morning when you start your e-mail program, everything looks unfamiliar. You quickly notice a special notice at the top of the screen, "We've unveiled a new look. Click here to learn more." What do you do *first*?
  - a. Click where indicated to learn more about the changes to the program.
  - b. Ask the person in the office next to yours to explain what's going on.
  - c. Ignore the invitation to click here and fumble your way through the interface.
  - d. Sign up for a class to learn about the new e-mail interface.
2. You're the new coordinator of vendors for your department, which has never used vendors before but plans to start using them in the future. To prepare for this new role, what do you do *first*?
  - a. Ask your friend in the Purchasing Department what to do.
  - b. Find the company policies and procedures on managing vendor relationships on the Intranet.
  - c. Sign up for a class on managing vendor relationships.
  - d. Start the job and figure things out as you experience them.



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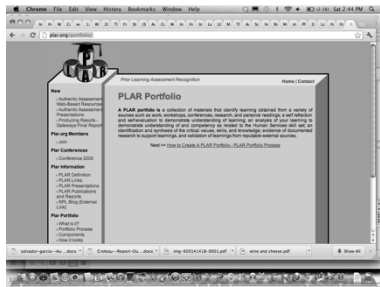
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### Partial Sample: Process Portfolios



From <http://plar.org/portfolio/>.




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### Sample: Process Portfolio Reflection Form

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Title                    |  |
| Type of program          |  |
| Client                   |  |
| Production tools used    |  |
| About this sample        |  |
| Unique Issues            |  |
| My contributions         |  |
| Skills I excelled at     |  |
| Skills I need to develop |  |




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### IL-2: How would you identify the means learners used to learn informally?

(Type your response in the Chat area.)




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**IL-2: Identify how workers learned informally.**

Process portfolios                      Coaching



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**IL-3: How can you formally recognize the competencies workers have developed through their informal learning efforts?.**

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**IL-3: Recognize acquired competencies.**

- Employee education records
- Skills assessments
- Certifications



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### What's the difference between a certificate and certification?



(Type your response in the Chat area.)




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### Popular certifications

| In Training and Development, and Related Fields  | In Fields Outside of Training and Development  |
|--|--|
| CPLP<br>CPT<br>CTT<br>CTDp<br>CTP<br>SPHR<br>CHRP<br>Certifications to administer particular evaluation instruments, such as DISC and MBTI | PMP<br>Certifications to provide service or maintenance on particular products, especially advanced telecommunications and software<br>Facilitation techniques<br><br>(This is merely a representative list, it is not intended to be exhaustive.) |




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### A Framework for Evaluating Informal Learning

| Individual Learning                | Learning Across Groups of Workers                                |
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### LAG-1: Determine the extent of use of individual resources.

- Analytics
- Compiling data from individual learning efforts

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### Example: Analytics

The screenshot shows a Blogger analytics overview page. It includes a line graph for 'Pageviews' from August 27 to September 3, 2011. Below the graph are sections for 'Posts' and 'Traffic Sources'. The 'Posts' section lists three articles with their respective pageview counts: 'Sadie Katch is Chasing' (45), 'Caught My Eye: Yet Another Discussion of the First...' (15), and 'Museum Review: Centennial Olympics Exhibition' (8). The 'Traffic Sources' section shows two sources: 'http://notebook-stu.org/index...' (2) and 'http://research.asu.edu/search2.../trigrams/tracktrail...' (2).

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### Sample: Form for tracking the inventory of resources available.

| Topic areas (based on specific phase in lifespan of the job) | Objective (to be added, based on needs of the particular job) | Conscious of Learning or Not? | Individual Learning |          |          |          |          | Group Learning |          |          |
|--|---|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|----------|
|  |   |                               | Method 1            | Method 2 | Method 3 | Method 4 | Method 5 | Method 6       | Method 7 | Method 8 |
| Orientation  |   |                               |                     |          |          |          |          |                |          |          |
| Onboarding   |   |                               |                     |          |          |          |          |                |          |          |
| Building proficiency   |   |                               |                     |          |          |          |          |                |          |          |
| Addressing undocumented issues                               |   |                               |                     |          |          |          |          |                |          |          |
| Updating skills  |   |                               |                     |          |          |          |          |                |          |          |
| Choosing the next job or career                              |   |                               |                     |          |          |          |          |                |          |          |

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## LAG-2: Assess satisfaction with individual resources.

- Surveys
  - Focused on individual resources
  - Focused on informal learning processes
- Focus groups




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## LAG-3: Identifying the impact of individual resources.

- Rater systems
- Specialized reports
- Long-term studies




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## Example: Rater System



The screenshot shows a search results page on Merlot.org. The search term is 'Education'. The results are sorted by 'Overall Rating'. The first result is 'WebQuest: Pass' by Berna Dodge, with a rating of 1.0/5.0. The second result is 'Skills.org: Basic Skills' by Barbara Kocourek Nelson, with a rating of 1.0/5.0. The third result is 'Neuroscience for Dummies' by Eric Chudler, with a rating of 0.0/5.0. The fourth result is 'The atRiskProject' by John Koppelman, with a rating of 0.0/5.0.




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**Use additional means to evaluate informal learning.**

- Embed questions in an employee survey
- Establish “panels” to assess long-term learning
  - Follow individuals over a long time period
  - By well-defined characteristics, such as (but not limited to) cohort, job class, age, start date



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**What challenges do you anticipate applying these techniques in your organization?**

(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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**Educate senior management**

- About the unique
  - Nature of informal learning
  - Challenges in measuring it
  - Characteristics of reporting on informal learning activities
- Evaluation is a rhetorical act



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### Take-Aways

What insights about evaluating informal learning presented today will you apply on the job?



(Type your response in the Chat area.)



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### Learn More about Informal Learning

- Carliner, S. (2012.) *Informal Learning Basics*, Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.
- Cross, J. (2006.) *Informal learning: Rediscovering the natural pathways that inspire innovation and performance*. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.
- Enos, M.D., Kehrhahn, M.T., & Bell, A. (2003). Informal learning and the transfer of learning: How managers develop proficiency. *Human Resources Development Quarterly*, 14(4), 369-387.
- Marsick, V. & Watkins K. (2001). Informal and incidental learning: The new update on adult learning theory. *New Directions For Adult and Continuing Education*, (89), 25-34.



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