

Debate 2

9 Keywords

- **Outcomes**
- **Effects**
- **Impact**
- **Levels of evaluation**
- **Objectives**
- **Qualitative and quantitative indicators**
- **Effectiveness**
- **Accountability**
- **Decision- making**

◆ Why evaluate impact?

✚ We should evaluate impact for a simple and objective reason: It is only by measurements, comparisons and observations that we can measure the fulfilment of objectives, the need for improvement, the deviation from initial objectives, the outcomes of others which have appeared during the implementation of an action. There are INNUMERABLE possibilities of outcomes, desired or otherwise, which may arise during or at the end of a process. There is, therefore, no doubt that evaluation is an act of responsibility, commitment and courage in order to show outcomes, successes and failures, and to propose adjustments.

Evaluation is a process which is part of a human being's journey and which is with him or her at all times. Redirection, amendments and relocation arise from a process of personal reflection which contemplates evaluation issues. Like individuals, organizations are also bound by the conditions of evaluation, of appraisals for their growth and development.

Evaluation is a tool to guide knowledge and interpretation, which benefits decision-making and the transformation of reality. It is composed of a set of management activities, technical and methodological, with the purpose of generating useful information for rectifying and ratifying a process. From this perspective, evaluation consists in the search for efficiency (doing things right), effectiveness (doing the right things) and effect (generating a socio-economic impact on the environment).

Owing to their nature, follow-up and control are a set of administrative and technical measures which must pervade all activities carried out during the whole of the development process. These are the basic actions of supervision. The results of evaluation are included in the operational stage when problems are detected which need to be resolved, with relation to the effective structure and implementation of activities.

Only evaluation enables affirmative and assertive decision-making, rectifying or ratifying a process. (Andrea Barboza)



A statement which is often heard with regard to the subject of quality and the continuous improvement of processes approach is that "what cannot be measured cannot be improved". If a continuous improvement approach is sought in vocational training, it is necessary to measure, evaluate at different stages of the process, in order to improve, adjust or correct possible deviations. My observations in this regard are:

If vocational training (VT) is considered to be an investment with long-term profitability, and not an expense, it is indispensable to **systematically evaluate its impact on the basis of improvements made with the application of knowledge, behaviour, skills and new technology**, among other aspects, on the part of those who have received vocational training, both individually and as a process within the organization to which they belong and the society in which they live. (Mario Miranda)



As we have seen, evaluation cannot be viewed as an isolated outcome... it should be a systematic process which determines the value or meaning of training. In a wider sense, evaluation could be addressed in order to: perfect the process of the improvement of training, decide on the future of an intervention, verify the achievement of objectives, identify outcomes which translate into benefits/profitability, certify learning, etc.

In view of the fact that "what cannot be measured cannot be improved", and that measurement without reflection does not lead to improvement, as an output of reflexive analysis a virtuous circle of continuous improvement is generated which should be part of the training process. In our experience of the evaluation of the impact of training using the Self-training and Assessment Guides by Competencies, we have carried out a variety of activities in three stages:

- Planning stage: includes defining the objective of the assessment (establishing purposes, determining indicators...) and developing an evaluation plan and database (project and data analysis plan).
- Compilation of data stage: during and after implementation (instruments, method, etc.)
- Data analysis stage: involves isolating the effects of training on the basis of the usual methods (control groups, trends analysis, forecast method, % estimates, use of experts, etc.), converting data to a monetary value, calculating return on investment, identifying intangible indicators (satisfaction, increase of loyalty, reduction of conflict, improvement of communication, etc.).

In our case, evaluation is a tool which can lead to benefits in the fulfilment of organizational objectives and specific strategies to optimize impact evaluation in terms of qualitative and quantitative benefits. Therefore, if we are able to agree on an Operational Assessment Guide, we shall be contributing to making training an investment and not an expense. (Berta Rojas)



It is necessary to reflect upon the subject of the use of resources, which are often public, in our institutions. The "what for" argument which is often used is answered by the need to show that such funds are fulfilling their anticipated purpose; that is, helping people to improve employability,

achieve employment, obtain an income, escape extreme poverty – in sum, that they are generating a genuine social impact. (Fernando Vargas)

- ✚ In our view, the very definition of impact evaluation points to the answer to “why evaluate”, in the sense that evaluating makes it possible to generate enlightened, informed, relevant, efficient and effective public policies, with adequate and coherent coverage according to the objectives established, and to their causality.

This makes it possible to **legitimize public action by showing its value and effect**, offering society as a whole results which redound in the improvement of people's quality of life.

In addition, impact evaluation enables making public action “transparent”, which contributes to the process of democratization of decision-making. (Liliana Conocer)

- ✚ On the basis of a degree of consensus achieved in the region, state or country regarding the general objectives which training should aim at, it is essential to reflect upon the goals of quality and relevance they suggest, and propose strategies in order to address systematic evaluation activities and the improvement of relevance and quality.

For this reason, it is important that training institutions should set themselves the constant goal of increasing their relevance and quality, inasmuch as the basic purpose of vocational training is to contribute to the development of a region, state or country, fostering the comprehensive training of persons, aimed at satisfying not only social demand, but also personal aspirations.

The relevance and quality of training will be achieved insofar as workers or students are in possession of the capabilities which will allow them to incorporate themselves critically and creatively into productive, social or governmental activity, responding efficiently and effectively to the economic and social demands of the community, as a result of a training process.

The relevance and quality of a training process should be endowed with the cognitive, technological, cultural, social and ethical conditions which a society requires. Therefore, controlling the relevance and quality of training implies establishing a continuous and systematic process of evaluation leading to determining the value or quantity of the achievement of the objectives established, in keeping with the needs of the population and productive activity. For this evaluation to constitute a genuinely adequate means to supply the essential elements which will make it possible to enhance the qualitative level of training, it must be applied at all stages of the process and in those critical factors which have a significant influence on the achievement of relevance and quality. It should also provide information, both at an institutional level and at a sectoral level, and by economic activity, by forms of action and by operational activity. (Magali Soria)

What leads us to evaluate impact (training programmes, policies)?

- ✚ There is no other way to determine impact than by recording outcomes and transforming this information into decision-making. It is evaluation which will enable persons who undertake an action, programme or project to identify the weaknesses of a process and the possible causes of failure, and all of these factors as a whole will become the richest possible source of information for DECISION-MAKING. (Andrea Barboza)
- ✚ Very often the **need – or the pressure – to show that the training mission is being fulfilled**. (Fernando Vargas)

◆ What type of outcomes and impacts should be evaluated?

Differences between levels of evaluation / outcomes and impact

- ✚ The evaluation of outcomes should be distinguished from the evaluation of impact. It may be possible to achieve very good results and zero impact. That is, I could have vocational training manuals with updated content and yet, this is no guarantee that the quality of training or of the teaching and learning process will improve. I believe this answer takes care of the first question, for those reasons. (M Sladogna)
- ✚ It should be pointed out that there are several levels of evaluation (satisfaction, learning, applicability and impact) and that the debate focuses on impact. When in 2009 in Brasilia we proposed initiating this work it was because evidence showed that it is possible to have **excellent results in the first three levels of evaluation and yet not produce an impact**, and this is a basic problem. In our view, the accumulation of competency which does not produce transformations in reality has never been the objective of training for work. (Carlos Gómez Plaza)
- ✚ “Results” consist in an increase of training on offer (more places, more curricular designs, more programmes). “Effects” can be summarized as how many of those places are taken up, how many people have access to the programmes, how efficiently the training on offer is being used. These are the two dimensions which are most widely-known. But there are still the impacts to consider; in general these are defined as changes in the well-being of the beneficiaries. In terms of training for decent work, this can be interpreted through indicators which include variables such as:
 - access to employment or promotion
 - a change from unemployment to employment
 - income before and after a programme
 - changes in standard of living (through poverty indicators, for example)

Are these all of the indicators? Do they summarize what is expected from training for workers appropriately?

And, on the other hand, there is also the question of impact on the company, arising from the characteristic of training which impacts both

people and their productive context. In this case, impact variables can be linked to productivity changes which are measured by, for example, improvements in sales volume, in product quantities, in reduced numbers of faulty products returned, in fewer labour accidents, in a drop in personnel turnover, etc. (Fernando Vargas)

- ✚ The value chain of a public policy programme can be summarized by the following stages:
 1. Input: the organization of financial, human and material resources.
 2. Activities: a set of tasks carried out to transform input into products.
 3. Products: goods and services obtained.
 4. Outcomes: intermediate effects of the products on the beneficiaries.
 5. Purposes or impact: general improvement of the long-term well-being of the beneficiaries.

In this regard, an evaluation and follow-up system should bear these stages in mind by means of indicators throughout the chain, in the areas of management, product, intermediate effects and long-term effects (impact).

Follow-up evaluation, which should be continuous, focuses on the first four stages and impact evaluation, on the last. (Gustavo Vargas)

Objectives / impact relation

- ✚ I believe consensus is quite clear with regard to the fact that impact evaluation or VT results goes beyond establishing how much the training on “offer” has increased. It consists in identifying to what extent the objectives and outcomes of the programme which were initially established have been fulfilled. (M Del Cid)

- ✚ It is important to evaluate (in our case) the policies and how they impact:
 - the quality of life of workers (employed or unemployed),
 - the reduction of labour mortality or accident indices,
 - product quality, process quality and also the quality of actor participation.

It is important to evaluate impact not only on workers, but also on how actors participate in policies or programmes, and on the competitiveness of businesses. This last factor, because vocational training has an impact on the training needs of the population and on the competitiveness of businesses; the well-known crossroads between inclusion and competitiveness. (Mónica Sladogna)

- ✚ With regard to the type of outcomes to be evaluated, we consider that the text by Ernesto Abdalá provides four outstanding dimensions which we cannot and should not omit in the area of vocational training, establishing precise indicators which we should like to see included in the Guide:

- Beneficiaries
- Employment: labour insertion, labour satisfaction, labour experience - previous and type of job

- Income
- Citizen role
- Competencies: basic, technical and psycho-social
- Government
- Legislation
- Quality standards for the courses
- Training/educational policies
- Specialized government departments
- Employers
- Growth
- Cost-benefit of training/education
- Reduction of losses
- Increase of productivity
- Greater competitiveness
- Training/educational bodies
- Increase of relevance with regard to the requirements of the productive, social, educational and government sectors
- Institutional sustainability
- Fostering of education-labour coordination (Conocer)

✚ All of this debate and the process are under way with the objective of producing value, that training for work ("for employment" in Spain) should produce value and this means defining its objectives clearly; that is, what should be transformed, what impact is desired. Only in this way can the evaluation of impact be situated.

In Buenos Aires, several possible objectives were considered for **training for work which determine the impact to be obtained**. On these lines, we ratify through our presentation, that the outcomes to be achieved are basically two:

1. To improve labour results in the learner.
2. To improve labour position/conditions or finding another job.

The second outcome depends on the first. The path to follow, the strategy used to obtain these results, is to generate competency through learning/training for employment. If competency is not generated, the second outcome (employability) is not achieved.

Under another heading, several objectives/outcomes to be obtained are mentioned. It is possible to place them in a sequence:

The "source" impact is the improvement in labour results, and the rest are either different manifestations of the same one, or consequences:

- Increase of productivity
- Better quality
- Cost reduction
- Accident reduction
- Fewer operational errors
- Increase of levels of satisfaction of internal and external customers
- In addition, the possible improvement of the labour conditions of the learner, who is now more competent. (Carlos Gómez Plaza)

- ✚ A consultative paper originating in the United Kingdom (Skills for Sustainable Growth) is presented which refers to the evaluation of the effects of training on:
 - **Society** (the benefits are mentioned of people included in learning processes both in terms of individual development and of social and civil commitment – a decrease in criminality, improvement of health and more tolerant attitudes towards minority groups).
 - **Economic productivity**
 - **People's wage-earning expectations**

The importance is pointed out of knowing its effects, not only for decision-making in public administration, but also so that people and businesses can make the learning decisions best suited to their needs. (Isabel Arrillaga)

Quantitative and qualitative aspects

- ✚ The impact of VT may be expressed **both qualitatively and quantitatively**, by means of reference indicators. (Mario Miranda)
- ✚ “What cannot be measured cannot be improved”; therefore it is necessary to measure and to this end we need both qualitative and quantitative indicators; but without quantitative indicators we are lost. Training has an obvious cost; for it to constitute an investment there must be a return, at least in the same terms (the basic reasons why training is considered an expense and not an investment may be recalled). (Carlos Gómez Plaza)
- ✚ It has been made clear that when we refer to “outcomes” we mean the qualitative and quantitative “change” which the programme seeks to achieve with regard to the beneficiaries, in terms of people reached, of progress in their working conditions (access to a job, quality of labour insertion, access to social security, income or wages, etc.) and with regard to the conditions of productivity of the labour activity or business involved. (M Del Cid)
- ✚ Challenge: to be able to give an account of the complexity involved in the necessary integration of social and economic aspects with the **measuring and evaluating** functions which appear in all of the definitions contributed. Once the general concepts have been agreed, the difficulties begin to appear in the search for strategies and the design of instruments. It is impossible not to associate the impact evaluation of VT, with the general problem of evaluating the quality of education, and in that specific field, the complexity of discovering qualitative indicators which show whether these processes are effectively contributing (and how) to the construction of a fairer society. In this respect, it is important to define the **conceptual framework** (philosophical and ideological) on which we are based, inasmuch as we know that in the field of social science, the evaluator's neutrality does not exist, and objectivity is a target which must be constructed. (Manuel Gómez)

- ✚ **General indicators** can be defined in order to evaluate impact at the different levels of the VT process, but it is essential to define the **specific indicators** which characterize processes, activities and organizations which carry out VT. (Mario Miranda)

Anticipate the evaluation of impact

- ✚ The evaluation of the VT's impact should be carried out throughout the process, from its conception, through the planning, execution and application of the training received (prior to, during and subsequent to VT). In the specialized literature on the subject, several different levels are defined at which VT impact should be measured: -Reaction (level of satisfaction with the VT to be received, being received or which was received), - Learning (level of knowledge acquired as a result of the VT received), - Behaviour (level of application of the VT received, in labour performance), - Results (level of improvement achieved in indicators and outcomes of productive or services processes in organizations).

The establishment of general and specific indicators to evaluate impact at each of these levels constitutes an essential element in order to achieve a **comprehensive** impact evaluation of VT. Impact evaluation cannot be perceived as the result of isolated action, but as the result of a sum of actions which take place at different moments of the vocational training and which have a direct relation to the level at which measurement is made, the time at which the evaluation is made and the indicators established for the measurement. (Mario Miranda)

- ✚ We also agree that impact evaluation must be **provided for from the very beginning** of the process (from the initial attempt at a first design); only thus can it be included as a real operational process (agile, simple, cheap and reliable)

In our view, impact evaluation **must be carried out in every action** devoted to generating competency, large or small. If the training activity is complex, the impact for which it was set in motion will not be generated until it is completed, and it will not be possible to measure it before that moment. But if it is simple and short, it should be measured as soon as it is applied (obviously, learning should occur as close as possible to the moment of application, in order to reduce or eliminate the forgetting curve to which inaction leads). At all events, long learning processes often include in themselves the forgetting processes which correspond to each of their parts.

Finally, in this message, impact evaluation should be carried out at **the first moment there is reasonable evidence of a result**. It can also be done again further on, at new periods, but the way to guarantee that evaluation is able to distinguish between what is due to training from what other components produce is linked to the clarity which always occurs in the short term (evidence of the new is clear and time can obscure it). (Carlos Gómez Plaza)

✚ Objectives, outcomes and even targets to be set beforehand have been pointed out, which will imply devising a baseline of indicators and overcoming a variety of methodological determining factors and so on...

It has also been reiterated that this impact evaluation will require a follow-up of the occupational and financial situation of the beneficiaries, before the start of the programme, during, and after, which will imply a special effort, as well as financial costs which must be assumed as part of the process. (M Del Cid)