

Debate 3

9 keywords / expressions

- **Social dialogue**
- **Participation and involvement**
- **Opportunities**
- **Interests**
- **Benefits**
- **Approaches**
- **Common objectives**
- **The culture of evaluation**
- **External evaluation**

What participation is expected from social actors in the impact evaluation processes of training?

- ✚ Social actors play a very significant role in impact evaluation, since they are responsible for developing a **framework of action** for the development of people's competencies and vocational qualifications throughout their lives and work. (Conocer)
- ✚ For several years, the organizations which represent workers in Argentina have been leading a variety of projects on vocational training and the certification of labour competencies. Through these activities, the unions have constructed a perspective which redefines and broadens certain processes which have historically been limited exclusively to the purview of businesses. In this way, the outlook of trade unions acknowledges the **new labour relations framework** (which naturally has an impact on the definition of workers' training policies) structured through processes such as technological and organizational innovation, the demands of quality and the ever-increasing demand for vocational competencies, but at the same time, relates it to solidarity, and social and formative inclusion – in short, to social justice.

Recognizing the central and strategic nature which a worker's knowledge assumes, in order to respond to the imperative of production in our time, the unions participate actively in the management of numerous vocational training institutions in the development of this process. The working class, as an organized social group, has understood the significant role of the educational process and, therefore, workers' organizations also defend an educational system which will prepare them in equal conditions in a society which offers equal opportunities. It is in such circumstances as these that the work of the unions acquires significance, and a double line of action is observed:

Towards businesses, in order to defend conditions and scenarios in which it is possible for workers to become involved and share objectives, and
Towards the workers, to re-signify and reaffirm the values of their own identity, such as solidarity, which, far from disappearing, is now highly significant in a labour market which is extremely uncertain and has a strong tendency to expulsion and exclusion.

In this context, we understand that the unions must ensure that workers:

- have the necessary competencies to perform their jobs successfully
- accept their role as citizens
- obtain recognition for their knowledge
- work in decent conditions, and
- obtain decent and productive work, performed in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.
(Alejandro Waisglas)

✚ It is undeniable that employers, workers and governments have their own specific agenda with regard to vocational training programmes and this should be borne closely in mind when designing impact evaluation tools. It must be ensured that everyone participates and becomes involved in the determination of the scope, content, duration, methods and resources to be used to develop programmes.

With regard to the evaluation of vocational training impact, in my view we should bear in mind three different approaches (on the basis of the meaning of 'approach' as focusing one's attention or interest on a matter or problem in order to attempt to resolve it correctly):

- THE FINANCIAL APPROACH: This approach will predominate amongst employers, since they will focus their interest on the relation between training and outcomes obtained in the organization's production or services (costs, quality, productivity, efficiency, technological discipline, customer satisfaction, work security, etc.).
- LIFELONG LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH: This is the approach which will predominate amongst workers, since they will focus their interest on permanent professional advancement, the acknowledgement of their competencies, achieving better opportunities of being employed (employability), better wages and better working and living conditions, amongst other aspects.

- **SOCIAL APPROACH:** This approach will predominate in governments; their interest will focus on achieving higher levels of education and culture, and better qualifications so that people are able to assume different roles as citizens in a society, satisfying needs, facing economic and social changes and educating in values, amongst other aspects. (Mario Miranda)
- + It is legitimate, logical and natural for each of the parties – trade unions, business and administrative organizations – to have their own slightly different interests or objectives with regard to training and, therefore, with regard to the evaluation of training or of the results obtained. However, the **final objective of each and every one is ultimately the same:** that training should serve to improve people's competencies and qualifications, their employability and, as a result, the competitiveness of businesses and of the whole of society.

In Spain, throughout the eighties and nineties, social partners had an essential role in the creation of a vocational training system based on social dialogue, which combines the interests of businesses with those of the workers in such a vital subject as training, the acquisition of new competencies, and qualification. In the awareness of the role they have played so far in the expansion of a training culture, we believe this debate is very relevant, in view of the fact that this is the time to take a further step in our commitment to society in such an important subject as vocational competencies and preparing workers and businesses to face the future with higher expectations. (Carlos Gómez)

- + The participation of **social actors as designers of policy, executors of programmes and beneficiaries** is essential for the development of permanent follow-up evaluation, without which it is impossible to carry out feedback and the improvement of processes. The following, in particular, should take part:
 - Beneficiaries and executors, in order to obtain the information required most reliably, depending on the methodology and the tools being used; in other words, the culture of evaluation.
 - Executors of programmes, in order to generate awareness that evaluation and the systematic organization of information gives rise to benefits for the whole organization in the decision-making process.
 - Policy designers, in order to provide tools and means to facilitate work within the organizations. (Gustavo Vargas)

◆ In what roles? At what stages?

- + One of the structural dimensions necessary in all policies or training and employment measures, as a condition for achieving the objectives proposed, is **generating opportunities for social dialogue and real participation for social actors.** The participation of social partners in defining and directing stages makes it possible to provide an

appropriate response to the needs of the productive sector. It is also essential in other aspects:

- The management of training centres
- The definition of competency standards
- The evaluation of institutional results
- The impact on the labour conditions of workers (in the understanding that labour insertion requires bearing in mind social differentiation criteria and structural variables which constitute essential aspects of labour dynamics and occupational insertion), amongst others. (Alejandro Waisglas)

The series of actions to be performed by the different social actors have been visualized as constituting four priorities:

- ◆ Anticipation and identification of the need for competencies and qualifications.
- ◆ Acknowledgement and validation of competencies and qualifications.
- ◆ Information, support and counselling.
- ◆ The mobilization of resources (Conocer)

The design of tools to evaluate the impact of vocational training requires the **inclusion of the different social actors** from the moment of conceiving the programmes, as well as their approach to the measurement of their impact. (Mario Miranda)

✚ Through the *Dirección Nacional de Orientación y Formación Profesional* (National Directorate for Vocational Guidance and Training) and within the framework of active employment policies carried out by this Ministry of Labour, we intend to evaluate public policies within the context of the social dialogue of representative actors from the various sectors, convened by the State. In this respect, **from the very design of the policy**, the participation of actors representing capital and labour – in their nature as essential actors in the process – becomes a central factor. Thus, and addressing evaluation itself, at the risk of providing only an outline, we can now categorize the participation of the main actors in the following evaluatory stages.

◆ Insofar as they are **participants in the policies** which are being deployed: in this sense, return to a tradition which takes into account the words of individuals, acknowledging their particular and situational points of view, key elements in all social policy. The development of a qualitative and quantitative strategy has been considered in order to contemplate the analysis of the processes which made actions possible or hindered them. This contextualizes evaluation by incorporating the perspective of participating actors and the analysis of the operation of resulting institutions – sectoral councils, for example – in order to ensure the success of activities. Thus, a mixed approach adds, in qualitative terms, the possibility of learning about priorities and problems identified by the actors and provides sensitive information in order to evaluate

sustainability and improvement of the *Sistema Nacional de Formación Continua* (National System for Lifelong Learning).

◆ As **producers of information**: some of the significant aspects to be considered in the design of our impact evaluation are constructed on the basis of information derived from the actors themselves, which in some cases could imply the development of training strategies for the generation of reliable, valid and comparable information.

◆ **Participants in the analysis of the information** arising from this evaluation. An essential element in the validation of the findings of impact evaluation is sharing evaluation readings and analysis with the actors. This can help us to make sense of some of the qualitative and quantitative data constructed throughout the research process.

◆ **Commitment with regard to the results of the evaluation**: The actors will also be subject to question by the outcome of the research, and they will perceive themselves as participants in the processes originating in the policies being evaluated, and modify or reinforce processes on the basis of the findings.

That is, the inclusion of actors is anticipated at different stages of the evaluation. And although their participation in the design process has not been contemplated, it is possible to consider their active inclusion in the construction of data and in the understanding of such data, which would help to strengthen the feasibility of the design, the commitment of the actors towards evaluatory actions and the validity of the results on the basis of the inclusion of multiple points of view. (Susana Barasatian, Nora Morales)

✚ Impact is something which must be confirmed, above all, by the individuals concerned in the learning process and the area in which it is applied; that is, the worker who learns and the organization in which he or she works. The remaining actors in the process should **facilitate conditions** so that outcome evaluation may be carried out.

Social partners can contribute a great deal as **promoters of impact evaluation**, making existing methods and tools known, setting up networks and communities which can exchange experiences and examples of good practices.

Jointly, they can promote a **culture of responsible training**, aiming at continuous improvement, evaluating outcomes, measuring impact and fostering the necessary changes so that results continue to improve. We believe that the active participation of social partners in decisions and policies to be applied in the field of vocational training is the right way to guarantee these principles.

In the **sectoral setting**, employers' and union representatives can encourage the processes of training impact measurement carried out within the sectors, disseminate the best instruments with which to do this, adapt existing tools to the sector involved, foster and lead the exchange of good practices between businesses and workers of the same sector, or even between different sectors.

Taking a **company** as a specific organizational unit, social agents can also play a significant role: employers can support the processes of evaluation and outcome measurement and apply these processes in their companies, providing the necessary resources to implement them. (Carlos Gómez)

- ✚ In order to evaluate the impact of training it is important that the knowledge, abilities, skills, and behaviour of students or workers who have gone through a formal education process should be valued or measured by the productive, social or government sectors, so that there is a genuine impact on the relevance of education.

Because of this and in order to genuinely evaluate the relevance of education for the productive, social or government sectors, all of these sectors should participate in:

1. Determining that training programmes contain the knowledge, practical skills, technology, tools, equipment, material, etc. necessary for students or workers to perform at a high level of efficiency in a given function or occupation.
2. Produce a body of evidence which will make it possible to verify the knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviour of students or workers.
3. Produce the appropriate measuring instruments which can provide feedback to the education system with regard to training programmes and possible deficiencies involving practical and theoretical knowledge.

Initiatives such as these in today's globalized world will make it possible to show the relevance of education in the different sectors and to make a genuine impact on a country's public policy. (Magali Soria)

- ✚ Although a **comprehensive system** involves both follow-up and impact, it is considered in this body that in the case of follow-up, the organization should permanently carry out actions at all stages, from design to implementation of the programmes. However, in the case of impact measurement, although there is participation at certain stages of design and support, it is **wholly performed by a different institution, not the one which is implementing the programmes**, because of:

- The need for independent measurement of the long-term well-being of the beneficiaries. This is in view of the fact that measurements should isolate the effects that are NOT attributable to the programme (e.g. economic growth, particular or innate characteristics of the beneficiaries, etc.) and ascertain which effects can be attributed to the programme.
- The participation of an external institution in this type of task generates credibility in society, and particularly with regard to policy designers.

In view of this, SENA invites bodies which specialize in these tasks to perform an impact evaluation of its programmes. For this reason, the role of other social actors is more concerned with being **facilitators of the culture of evaluation**. (Gustavo Vargas)

◆ How to promote and implement it

- ✚ In addition, social actors need to have a legitimate interest which will enable persons who apply for certification to want their competencies to be recognized in the most positive way possible. Educational institutions should strive to obtain the highest possible recognition of their degrees and certificates of competence for their users, while institutions associated with employment policy should attempt to define and defend qualifications which will lead to greater employability, as well as raising the quality of employment. We believe that employers will be interested in paying for qualified workers, who are indispensable in carrying out specific productive functions, in order to obtain the desired qualitative and quantitative outcomes, thus showing that they value the competencies acquired. (Conocer)
- ✚ A factor which contributes to the dissemination of the benefits of evaluation is the availability of specific and explicit products which highlight the **benefits of evaluation in formative processes**. For example, inasmuch as information is a prized input, it is suggested providing computer systems which will facilitate the process, as well as rewarding the permanent update of data on the part of beneficiaries (traineeships, information on new programmes, labour intermediation, etc.). (Gustavo Vargas)
- ✚ An experience which has been under way since early last year at INET is the compilation of a catalogue of technical and vocational education degrees and certificates. This list of certifications will be available for consultation and guidance of private individuals, but also for employers and trade union organizations and will operate as a point of reference with regard to the training people have received in order to be eligible for a certification that they will submit in order to enter or advance in the world of employment.

In the awareness of the impact which this tool may have in educational, labour and union environments, we have attended carefully to its relevance from the first stages of design. We decided to construct this tool with a tripartite vision which would connect us, as an educational sector, to businesspeople, workers, other governmental areas involved in these matters (Ministries of Production, Labour, Agriculture), and other scientific agencies such as the *Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria* (INTA) (National Institute of Agricultural Technology) and the *Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Industrial* (National Institute of Industrial Technology). This task is being carried out within the framework of the *Consejo Nacional de Educación, Trabajo y Producción* (National Council for Education, Labour and Production) which operates within the orbit of INET, as a permanent consultative body. The field of work has been organized by professional groups and institutional forums have been set up in each of them.

In each forum (which is tripartite) a map of the group is agreed and the vocational profiles to be formed are identified and approved comprehensively at various levels, from the more complex technical operations to tasks pertaining to aides or assistants. University degree levels are excluded.

The first task shared with the social actors is a diagnosis of the current situation of the sector and its possible evolution over the next few years. This makes it possible to outline and prioritize the jobs which require the highest level of training. We include here the progress which has been made regarding roles standardized by the Ministry of Labour in its lifelong learning programmes. Once the profiles have been identified, INET's technical team develops frameworks of reference for training, which are submitted to consultation within the provinces and subsequently approved by the *Consejo Federal de Educación* (Federal Education Council), the Ministry's most senior body, which grants the certificates national validity.

Naturally, **participants' responses and involvement are not all the same**, but in general we have encountered a **very good response**. We believe this is based on three aspects:

- The tradition of participation in technical education which is prevalent amongst employers and workers in Argentina;
- The perception that we are discussing specific programmes, and
- The organizational reliability we have been able to construct.

So far, we have set in motion group forums in construction, the food industry, the metallurgical industry, automobile mechanics, the fruit-growing industry, the dairy industry, electric energy, the beauty industry, the vegetable-growing industry, the fishing industry, poultry farming, the garment industry, the leather and footwear industry. Shortly, we will include the flower-growing industry and the tourism and oil and gas sectors. Seventeen frameworks of reference have been approved. We hope that these actions will help to improve the quality of what is on supply, in view of the fact that the frameworks operate as a point of reference when the provinces wish to structure or restructure their range of offers. However, just as important, or even more important, is the fact that we shall be able to improve the impact of technical and vocational training on the country's productive possibilities and the quality of life of the workers. (Manuel Gómez)