Debate 6
9 Keywords

- **Determining factors**
- **Costs**
- **Evaluability**
- **Technical complexities**
- **Gradual progress**
- **Time from implementation**
- **Evaluators**
- **Design**
- **Use of outcomes**

The limitations of evaluation. How can the field of VT be evaluated? Recommendations for the management of costs, time and information.

🔸 From a strictly practical point of view and with the perspective we have gained after performing several evaluations of training activities for different entities (institutions, social agents, organizations, etc.), we believe that the main themes to be discussed for developing this guide —and ones which are usually linked to the limitations faced by evaluators when performing an impact evaluation— include the following:

- The **cost of** "rigorous" impact **evaluations** (counterfactual methodologies...) is usually high, both in monetary terms and considering the time and resources needed to carry them out. In fact, they are infrequently used. Even large organizations with well-developed information systems and training activities tailored to their needs tend to make little use of rigorous impact evaluations and then usually only for training which is considered "strategic".

This has led to the development of evaluation models that emphasize other dimensions of evaluation: the relevance of the training, its quality, its pedagogical effectiveness — in the understanding that if the evaluation is positive at those levels, the training will also have a positive impact (both on the organizations and the individuals). Therefore, in future stages of the development of the methodological Guides, it may be important to include the following topics:

- The convenience or usefulness of designing impact evaluations **that make gradual progress**, starting with some basic elements. Sometimes a number of variables must be considered in order to identify the cause-effect

relationship of a training activity (particularly in the case of short, cross-sectional or multisectoral programmes, those imparted by several agents or in various professional settings, etc.). In such cases the use of tools based on the trainees' self-perception (and, if they are employed, the perceptions of their supervisors and area managers) can provide valuable information about the effects of the training.

Thus, some evaluations carried out by CIDEC have shown that when assessments are focused on quality (the degree of satisfaction), the beneficiaries tend to evaluate training activities in a very positive way. When their applicability to the workplace is analysed, evaluations tend to be less positive and when questions are about the effects of the training on working conditions (what might be designated as a "self-perceived impact") the positive effects of many training activities are even more limited. This information is relatively easy to obtain and it provides an interesting insight into which training activities are most "useful" for organizations and individuals and this facilitates decision-making with a view to improvement.

- Within the framework of the impact evaluations themselves, some conditions must be considered. In its guides for the development of evaluation, the Ivàlua (Institut Català d´Avaluació de Politiques Públiques) points out that the basic requirements for a "useful" impact evaluation must include at least the following:

- The programme to be evaluated must be **stable** (the results for unstable programmes will very likely be irrelevant — it will not be possible to know which aspect of the programme has caused the effects). For a new programme, an evaluation of implementation is usually the best way of finding out what is going on (except in the case of a pilot programme). The objectives of the intervention must be sufficiently clear (in order to be able to determine to what extent they are being achieved). On occasion, the evaluations will show shortcomings that are due to imperfections of the interventions.
- An **adequate knowledge of the implementation process** is needed. As we have already mentioned, besides knowing if a programme is operating effectively, it is necessary to know the reasons, in order to make well-founded decisions.

Production of the impacts must be feasible: it is generally necessary for **some time to elapse after the implementation** of the intervention in order to be able to detect impact (in the case of vocational training, to be able to identify an impact on the trainees). (Juan José De Andrés and Isabel Arrillaga)

- Some of the limitations usually mentioned are the lack of information, of resources and even of qualified people.

Impact evaluations frequently face other difficulties such as the geographical dispersal of users and the lack of systematised information.

Evaluation sometimes appears to be a difficult exercise due to technical complexities and the need to use the relevant tools efficiently. To this end, it is decisive to train technical staff.

It is advisable that institutions should have an adequate conceptual design based on the reduction of uncertainty and limitations. A document containing the design of the evaluation serves to define many parameters and pave the way for its execution. A good example available to this community is the Evaluation Design of the Ministry of Labour of Argentina.

Cooperation projects usually include an amount for evaluation in their budgets. A similar practice might be put into effect in the funding for the programmes usually carried out in training centres. (Fernando Vargas)

- Evaluator profiles: With respect to the agents who carry out the evaluation, it must be said that the profile of the evaluators is one of the main factors for achieving reliable evaluation outcomes, whether at the institutional, governmental, programme or project levels and with relation to educational issues. Important traits — a good evaluator is:

  - inquisitive
  - critical
  - an explorer
  - encouraging
  - creative
  - a good communicator
  - able to carry out changes
  - an appraiser
  - knowledgeable
  - aware of his limitations
  - capable of making impartial records
  - observant
  - ethical
  - faithful to the defined methodology

(Andrea Barboza)