

FOREWORD

Training has many manifestations and different purposes in the life of individuals and society. This document will look into one such manifestation, namely the links of training with the productivity and working conditions of organisations.

In its most elementary form, productivity is defined as the relationship between input and output. Improving that ratio would theoretically result in higher levels of welfare. This assumption is debatable for a number of reasons, in particular because country or enterprise statistics do not take into account all possible inputs. They specifically disregard those with no market price but undeniable social value, like for example noxious effects on the environment, deterioration of working conditions, physical and mental fatigue of workers, stress, and others. The same can be said of products or outputs which are not all necessarily socially useful and may even destroy social and natural assets (e.g the environment) as a result of which productivity would be negative for many countries and companies if such variables were to be considered (ILO, 2000).

In view of these measuring difficulties, not just any improvement in the productivity of organisations/enterprises is socially desirable, but only those stemming from a socially responsible management. If it fulfils this condition, productivity becomes the basis for welfare. It is in this sense that we use the term productivity in this paper.

Identifying the factors that determine an enhancement of productivity in organisations has been object of study by many analysts in the last century; some of them have emphasised theoretical aspects, others empirical ones. In addition they have also looked into the impact and effects of training initiatives on productivity.

There is plenty of normative literature on productivity and training management, addressed to managers and directors of organisations or to those that implement training programmes.

Less abundant are the studies interconnecting both aspects, explaining the conceptual framework underlying their own research and that of others, and sug-

gesting a standard for a model or proposal that has been tried out and verified. This has been the aim of the present paper, according to the sequence recommended by authors like Deming for strategies to improve organisations: the rationale or conceptual framework should precede techniques or instruments (ILO, 2000).

The fundamental proposal of our work is to show that it is feasible and profitable to improve the productivity and working conditions by promoting the ongoing learning of the employed personnel. The notion itself is not new; what is new is the context in which the proposal is made, the direction given to training and the concrete and proven instruments used to implement it.

The relationship between training and productivity is viewed with the current backdrop of organisations, characterised by constant change, where information circulates with increasing ease and fluency, which requires the building and refashioning of new environments and methods for learning. Having formerly been mainly in the hands of educators, training is nowadays a strategic element analysed at board meetings of leading companies in the world. Attaining the best possible influence on the organisations' capacity to learn is the current challenge of directors and managers, as well as that of trade unionists that try to participate and guide the process of modernisation.

Traditional behaviourist training, with its structured and rigid curricula focusing on programmed teaching and deriving from a static view of the knowledge required by work processes, loses significance in this context (Román Diez, 1999). The fact is acknowledged that organisations learn in many different ways through the persons that make them up. Formal courses in classrooms are only one way (perhaps the least important one) in which organisations learn.

How can we bring influence to bear upon this complex and also very strategic process for organisations? If flexibility is one of the characteristics distinguishing modern organisations from their predecessors, would not the manner of influencing learning have to be flexible as well? Flexible in the use of teaching techniques and the structuring of contents, in the time and place of instruction, with open access and in accordance with specific needs, these appear to be the new doctrines of training organisations (Haghey, 2000).

Flexible learning means that the traditional dividing line between those who teach and those who learn vanishes, the split between operation and training, between theory and practice, the needs of the organisation and those of the individual, explanation and evaluation, explicit and tacit knowledge, costs and benefits. Having lost its traditional mantle, training management calls for new processes and instruments.

Flexibility, adaptability, fitting into context and above all focusing on learning rather than on teaching, are some of the characteristics that training processes and instruments have to comply. The risk implicit in opening up training spaces is loss of control, as the process becomes more complex. Focalisation on the one hand, and striving for improved productivity and working conditions on the other, seem to be the main guidelines of training management for organisations.

This paper approaches training from the overall angle of organisations, not just as an isolated effort to train individuals. It is interrelated with the management of knowledge and training organisations, where the concept of learning is made extensive to the organisation as a whole.

It specifically analyses training management forms and instruments, making it possible to modify the enhancement of productivity and working conditions in firms and enterprises in Latin America. To that end it cites concrete experiences of methodologies tried out in companies of countries of the region, mainly Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

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