

FOREWORD

Through the gradual removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to international trade of goods and services and the subsequent increase of international commercial competition, the process of economic globalisation has transformed the competitiveness of enterprises, of sectors or branches of activity, and of national productive systems, into one of the main –if not the most important of all– factors conditioning the economic and social development of nations.

In this context, productivity –an essential element determining the degree of competitiveness of enterprises, sectors and countries– acquires fundamental significance. Competitiveness is efficient use of all productive resources –labour, capital, land, raw materials, energy, information, etc.– and increases in productivity imply a more rational, rather than more intensive, use of such resources. Raising productivity basically means working better and not just harder.

Vocational education and training, either basic or ongoing, on-the job training, is a precondition to the successful introduction of technological innovations and new systems for organising work in firms and enterprises and branches of activity.

Not only training is required to attain higher productivity. Such prerequisites are epitomised in the concept of decent work, promoted by the ILO, which may be defined as productive work carried out with freedom, equity, safety and dignity, with due protection of the workers' rights, adequate remuneration and social protection.

Training, productivity and decent work are therefore closely intertwined notions that strongly influence and define one another. Training is a prerequisite for genuine increments in productivity, but it is also intimately related to each and every one of the dimensions usually attributed to decent work: employment of good quality and quantity, workers' rights, safety, representation and social dialogue.

As in decent work the rights of workers are respected, and as vocational training has been recognised as a human right and fundamental element of many universal and regional Declarations and other instruments, jobs that do not offer training opportunities can hardly be termed as decent work.

The role of training has been widely proved and documented regarding the employability of persons, both concerning their risk of losing a job through problems in adapting to technological innovations and/or restructured procedures, and their possibilities of accessing labour markets with increasingly higher qualification requirements. Regarding safety and health at work, it is quite obvious that it would be practically impossible to improve the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases without adequate training programmes in that area.

Finally, concerning the link between training and social dialogue, the dual nature of training –which is at the same time a right of workers and an economic instrument– has turned it into fertile ground for negotiation and dialogue. With ever greater frequency, collective labour agreements (at enterprise or sector level) include training as a central issue; bipartite or tripartite arrangements are institutionalised for planning, managing and monitoring training programmes and activities. All this not only has positive repercussions in the quality and relevance of the training itself, but also –as a spillover of the bargaining and the agreements reached– has on occasion led to an improvement of labour relations as a whole, through the practical dialogue involving the social partners.

All the above, the strong links between training, productivity and decent work, have far-reaching consequences for the action of vocational training institutions (VTIs). As their main goal is to contribute to the development of their respective countries' human resources, and thereby further their economic and social evolution, the issue of productivity must have an outstanding and explicit place on their vocational training plans and agenda. VTIs will in that manner attain their ultimate object, namely, improving men's and women's possibilities of accessing decent work.

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