

INTRODUCTION

In general terms, this publication is intended for all those members of trade unions or people related to the domain of trade unions who have responsibilities concerning vocational training. However, in particular, it is meant to provide elements that may be useful for the activities carried out by trade unions in working centres, both regarding the inclusion of vocational training issues to collective bargaining, or in the development of participation experiences in the management of vocational training policies and the development of staff at such level.

For those reasons, in the first place, we attempt to present one perspective of the historical development of vocational training as well as an updated viewpoint of the field. For this, we have not only resorted to vocational training international standards but also to the latest developments that have taken place in the world and, especially, in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This allows us to show the dynamic aspect of vocational training, both at a conceptual level and at a practical level, which also confirms the close link that exists between training and the transformation processes that occur in the labour world.

Secondly, this publication places a special emphasis on the fact that the importance of vocational training is not only related to the intrinsic aspects of the field but also –and particularly in the view of union members– to the multiple links that it maintains with labour relations systems in general and, in particular, to other issues which are the object of bargaining within such framework. In such way we approach the relationship between training and matters such as employment, productivity, competitiveness, wages, labour safety and health, equality of opportunities and labour career.

Since the main objective of this publication is to cast light on the negotiation and management of training in working centres, the third chapter is devoted to analyse the different implications and characteristics that training issues may have in the entrepreneurial field according to the diversity that the entrepreneurial area has in the region and in the world. As a consequence, a variety of existing perspectives on training are studied according to factors such as the size and level of technological development of enterprises, their inclusion in the formal or the informal sector of the economy, and the productive sectors they are

part of. Furthermore, it is argued that training should be considered as a strategic investment within the scope of the enterprise.

Issues concerning collective bargaining and vocational training as well as trade union participation in its management in working places are discussed in chapters four and five, respectively. In both cases, we have tried to present an outlook of the alternative options and the resources available to trade union delegates whether in the context of collective bargaining or management. We also take the chance to expand on the different characteristics of bargaining and participating in management, without a bias in favour of those experiences which belong either to one strategy or the other and which are equally valid according to the definitions of each organisation and the particular context in which they may take place.

Finally, we should say that for the purpose of exploiting this publication in trade union training activities, it may be used as a whole or in modules. Therefore, each chapter is a thematic unit on its own.

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WHAT IS VOCATIONAL TRAINING?

Searching for a definition of vocational training

In general, when we use the term “training” together with the adjective “vocational” in a conversation or in a text, we refer to a certain type of training whose main objective is preparing people for work. Probably, this is the simplest and most commonly used definition of vocational training.

But if we want to go further and understand what vocational training currently means to those who provide it and those who receive it, to those who manage it and those who perform it and, in general, to all those who might be interested in it, we should answer questions such as:

- Are we talking about training for an employment, as it has been understood for a significant period of time during the 20th Century, as a labour activity subject to a contract, wages, and clearly specified conditions, or do we refer to training for employment interpreted in a broader sense, including not only wage employment but also non-wage work, independent work, or self-employment?
- Does it refer to a specifically technical preparation that may be necessary to perform one or many tasks in a job post or trade? Or does it refer to something broader which seeks to find a better understanding of working environments and other aspects which are related not only to people’s working life but also to issues regarding their personal, cultural, and political development?

Regarding the first question, training is in fact oriented to provide qualifications for wage employment or contract work and also to all sorts of work that can be found in modern societies.

With reference to the second issue, it is also possible to state that vocational training should not only train people for all types of work and their modalities but also for community life in order to understand social and working relations and to act in a transforming way. Therefore, it could be said that vocational training means both training for work and training for citizenship.

In that sense, a general and internationally accepted definition states that *vocational training is an activity directed to identifying and developing human capabilities for a productive and satisfying working life. According to it, those who take part in vocational training activities should be able to understand and, individually or collectively, to influence working conditions and the social environment.*¹

Therefore, it is possible to say that vocational training is simultaneously:

- *An educational activity* oriented to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to perform either a particular job post, an occupation, or a professional activity in the labour market. At the same time, it acts as a supplementary form of other types of education by training people not only as workers but also as citizens.
- *An activity connected with the processes of technological transfer, innovation and development.* The transmission of knowledge and skills already implies a type of technological transfer to workers, and through them, to enterprises. At the same time, since knowledge is the fundamental basis for the processes of technological innovation and development, vocational training is a strategic tool that becomes essential for these processes to take place.
- *A labour fact* and a key issue within labour relations. Governments, entrepreneurs and workers are now increasingly interested in it since they are becoming aware of the importance of its contributions to the distribution of employment opportunities in general, to the rise in productivity and the improvement of quality and competitiveness, to the achievement of appropriate and healthy working conditions as well as the possibility for social dialogue at various levels.

Vocational training has a pedagogic component, as well as other types of education, but with a stronger emphasis on technical and technological aspects. Compared to other forms of education, it shows both a deeper concern about the links between the contents and methods of such training, and the changes that take place within the production and labour world.

All in all, it could be said that vocational training:

- Is an educational activity.
- Is oriented to provide the necessary knowledge and skills for an appropriate professional and labour performance but also to fully exercise the right of citizenship by workers.
- Has both theoretical and practical components but with a greater influence of the latter compared to other types of education.
- Has a very strong technological dimension based on the need to go along with the changes in the productive processes of this field.

¹ See Recommendation 150, adopted by the International Labour Conference, 1975.

- Has a clear labour aspect, not only given by its technical contents but also because it prepares people to get involved in certain labour relations.

The evolution of the concept of vocational training in international labour standards

The concept of vocational training is dynamic. Its meaning and scope has varied throughout history and it still keeps changing.

One possible way of considering the evolution of the concept of vocational training is by analysing the changes that have taken place in the international standards of the field.

- In 1939, the International Labour Organisation, through its Recommendation 57, established that:

The expression vocational training means any form of training by means of which technical or trade knowledge can be acquired or developed, whether the training is given at school or at the place of work.

- An evolution of the concept of vocational training is later confirmed: it is no longer considered an end in itself; it becomes a means or tool not only oriented to employment but also to the development of broader abilities and aptitudes. In 1962, the International Labour Organisation, in its Recommendation 117, expressed that:

Training is not an end in itself, but a means of developing a person's occupational capacities, due account being taken of the employment opportunities, and of enabling him to use his abilities to the greatest advantage of himself and the community; it should be designed to develop personality, particularly where young persons are concerned.

- In 1975, the International Labour Conference adopted Recommendation 150, which conveys an even more ambitious concept of vocational training. While it regards vocational guidance and training as an integral group of actions, it links them directly to other forms of education. In such sense, vocational training is not exclusively oriented to the productive and labour aspect but to the whole social environment:

Recommendation 150 dated 1975: For the purpose of this Recommendation, the qualification of the terms guidance and training by the term vocational means that guidance and training are directed to identifying and developing human capabilities for a productive and satisfying working life and, in

conjunction with the different forms of education, to improve the ability of the individual to understand and, individually or collectively, to influence working conditions and the social environment.

- Most recently, a revision of vocational training international standards and guidance was carried out at the International Labour Conference organised by the ILO. In its Resolution on Human Resources Development dated June 2000, among other things, the following was expressed:
 - People and enterprises benefit from training as well as the economy and the society in general.
 - Training highlights the fundamental values of society: equity, justice, equality of treatment among men and women, non-discrimination, social responsibility, and participation.
 - Training (together with education) is a component of an economic and social response to globalisation.
 - Training (and education) does not solve by itself the problem of employment but they contribute to the improvement of employability of people in the highly changing internal and external markets.
 - Vocational training must be integrated and articulated with economic, employment, and other policies.
 - Everyone has a right to education and training.
 - Social partners should strengthen social dialogue about training, share responsibilities when formulating training and education policies and take actions among them or with governments so that they actually invest in, plan and implement training.

A current view on vocational training

We have already discussed the most distinctive aspects of vocational training and the changes that its conceptualisation has suffered throughout the evolution of international labour standards. We will now analyse the main current features of vocational training in the different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Vocational training has become a very important factor with the advent of new ways of organising and managing production and work.

This is so because knowledge has gained an unusual prominence with respect to other productive factors such as land, capital goods or technology. Vocational training is an advantageous means to access such knowledge and spread it.

Vocational training is no longer directed to qualify people for their performance at a specific job post, it is rather oriented to provide and promote competencies which may be applicable to a range of labour situations and occupational areas.

This is also caused by changes in the models of organising work and production as well as the new labour market reality. It is very unlikely that active workers and employees remain in the same position or performing the same tasks. Most frequently, they are required to be capable of moving along the different phases of the production process and acquiring higher levels of responsibility, for which they need to put more and newer abilities into practice. The labour market has become unstable and workers face changing labour situations throughout their active life: they can be wage employees, unemployed, independent workers, contract workers and many other possible combinations in terms of their labour journeys. In order to successfully “sail” through these changing situations it is not enough to acquire some skills and knowledge; rather, it is necessary to acquire broader competencies that could be applied in different contexts and situations.

Vocational training is no longer regarded as a short stage prior to active life; on the contrary it is part of a life-long process of training together with other forms of education.

The latest requirements in terms of occupational mobility within productive and services organisations, as well as in the labour market, are added to the rapid technological changes. This not only results in the fact that workers have to be continuously trained in order to face changing labour situations but also that this permanent updating becomes an unavoidable requirement if they wish to relate to technological environments that tend to vary so often.

Nowadays, the responsibility of vocational training is shared among many actors and is assumed as a challenge for the whole society.

Throughout the history of vocational training, we have found stages in which it was understood as a State responsibility, other stages in which it was only considered to be a concern for enterprises and other stages in which the main responsibility laid on each worker. All these views implied a bias in the objectives of vocational training, problems with the efficient use of the available resources and difficulties in the coordination and articulation of the actions developed. Nowadays, any enterprise wishing to remain competitive has to invest systematically in the training of its staff; workers always have to pursue this training and claim it; the States must provide funds so that the access to training is possible for all workers and all enterprises.

As a consequence, vocational training is considered an issue of the labour relations systems and, therefore, an object of bargaining.

Vocational training has several interests in itself since it is a crucial factor among competitiveness and productivity strategies of enterprises; a requirement demanded from workers but also their right to improve their opportunities to find a job and keep it; an element that has to be fostered and facilitated by States in order to increase the chances of a successful insertion of the national economy in the international context. Such interests should be represented in those instances where decisions are made about how, where and how much is to be invested in training.

Can vocational training be useful as a tool for organising workers?

As we have seen, vocational training is an instrument that serves simultaneously to multiple objectives. Some of them are framed within the employer's interests while others are more related to the interests of workers. In fact, through the attainment of objectives such as the increase in productivity and the improvement of enterprises competitiveness, it may favour scenarios of employment assurance and possibly of wage or extra wage increase.

From the point of view of the individual worker, it is clear that the access to higher levels of qualification improve their opportunities to keep their jobs and improve their working conditions in many aspects. Therefore, workers will always be interested in improving their qualifications.

The mere consideration of these reasons leads to the conclusion that it is important for trade unions to get interested in vocational training: it can improve working conditions and defend workers' employment and, at the same time, it echoes a demand made by those who integrate the union and those represented by it.

The greatest challenge consists in the fact that vocational training should not be arranged within the enterprise according to a system exclusively articulated based on the relationship between vocational training and each worker. In such framework, training is likely to be designed and provided by only taking into account the employer's interests since there is no collective organisation that may exert pressure on and negotiate in favour of workers, thus resulting in workers competing against each other.

The role of trade unions lies precisely in establishing and defending a concept and policy of vocational training which does not only serve the purposes of the enterprise but also the interests and needs of all workers: thus ensuring equal opportunity in the access to training and negotiating the way in which workers will benefit from the improvements and profits that enterprises will obtain at the expense of training.

In spite of the previous considerations, vocational training is a tool to be used by workers' organisations at least in the following aspects:

- It fosters further participation of workers in trade unions since these organisations have started to take notice of certain needs particularly felt by workers: the access to opportunities to increase their own qualifications and the improvement of working conditions.
- Vocational training does not only involve the transfer of technical knowledge but also other aspects concerning the education on values and labour relations. Therefore, it can also be organised together with trade union training as it enables to spread the trade union's point of view and proposals at the same time that it teaches workers how to get organised.

Finally, collective bargaining on vocational training, led in an appropriate way, may facilitate the negotiation of other labour issues from a new perspective. Wages, employment, labour career, productivity, and working conditions, among other things, can be approached by taking into consideration the global elements which are related to the management of productive and services organisations, starting by the negotiation of some training aspects.

To sum up:

- The concept of vocational training and its practical application has changed throughout history and keeps doing so.
- If we compare it to regular or general education, and in spite of the already mentioned changes, vocational training still maintains a close link with the labour world.
- As the labour market, technology and the ways of organising work and production change, vocational training tends to be updated in theory and in practice.
- Thus, vocational training is not oriented nowadays to training for the performance of a specific job post; on the contrary, it tries to provide broader abilities that may allow workers to act in a wide range of working situations: occupations, occupational clusters and the labour market in general.
- In the past, vocational training consisted of a limited period usually prior to the active learning life. Nowadays, it has become a continuous process throughout people's life. Besides, this strengthens the links between other forms of education, both formal and informal.
- The role of vocational training within productive processes has become more significant than ever. Its contribution to the improvement of productivity and competitiveness is now unquestionable.

- Vocational training is no longer an expert's belonging. Its potential contribution to different goals makes it interesting from various points of view. Nowadays, vocational training is an object of bargaining and, as such, it is one of the main issues within labour relations.
- Vocational training can become a tool to be used by workers' organisations, not only due to its own importance but also because it is a way of fostering negotiation and participation opportunities in other labour issues.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND LABOUR RELATIONS

Vocational training is not only related to education and technological development, it is part of the labour relations systems. This is clearly revealed by a number of facts: vocational training has started to appear in labour legislation of all countries; it is increasingly being included in collective bargaining and it has aroused a significant interest and participation from the main labour actors: the State (through the Ministries of Labour), enterprises and workers (through their representative organisations).

This is mainly due to two reasons:

First; vocational training is a labour issue in itself since it is the fundamental tool through which the necessary knowledge and skills for work are transferred. This has always been like this and therefore it becomes particularly important nowadays when knowledge often becomes the main production factor.

Second; because in spite of its specific importance, vocational training is related to all the issues that are part of the labour relations systems: employment, wages, productivity, quality, competitiveness, labour safety and health, working conditions and environment, social protection, and equal opportunities.

Training as a labour fact

Training has always been closely related to labour relations. Even in the pre-industrial stage, when production was mainly hand-made, there already existed the roles of the master craftsman and the apprentice in which the former gradually allowed and fostered a successive accumulation of knowledge and skills in the latter who, eventually, became a bearer of such knowledge and carried on with the trade's tradition. At that time, the learning process was absolutely integrated within those first labour relations and it was part of the "rules" of production and work of the time.

Alternatively, the development and boom of the industrial age went by together with the trends towards specialisation and higher levels of work division in society. Although learning has never stopped to take place as an important activity in working centres, at some point, the responsibility for training those

who would work in certain job posts began to lay on other institutions or organisations, both physically and institutionally, which became known as training centres.

Simultaneously to the first industrialising efforts, this last trend was observed in Latin America and the Caribbean by means of specialised instances in charge of the training function. In such stage, the apprentice is a person –generally a young person– who attends training courses in an institution for a certain period of his life and who eventually becomes a worker after being hired and placed in a job post where he may apply the previously acquired knowledge and skills. However, this was the most common situation though not the only possible one. In fact, in the mid seventies, some vocational training institutions, such as the National Training Institute (INA) from Costa Rica and Cinterfor/ILO itself, were already concerned about designing and implementing strategies that would allow the certification of workers who, through their own labour performance, had attained qualification levels that deserved a formal acknowledgement.

If we refer to the industrialisation stage that took place influenced by the import substitution development model, we could say that training played quite a disguised role within the labour relations systems of the time. Although qualifications were an essential component of production in any place and circumstance, during such stage, “labour relations” mainly referred to bargaining and/or conflict facts and processes regarding wages, stability and ways of promoting employment, extension of certain social benefits, etc.

In such context, training was an activity which was rarely the object of negotiation. It was practically never mentioned in collective bargaining and labour legislation only made a few references, mainly in statements or some explanations concerning the institutional environment in which it could be carried out (usually a national and public entity). In several countries, workers’ and employers’ organisations kept a high interest in it but, after all, it was limited to the participation of delegates in executive instances of vocational training institutions.

In fact, they constituted labour relations systems within a context in which:

- a. The State played a fundamental role in several aspects: collective bargaining, production and direct provision of services and in the protection of national production by means of trade barriers.
- b. Enterprises have particularly developed in a strongly protectionist context, focusing on the domestic consumer market, and therefore they did not have much pressure neither from consumers nor from competitors.
- c. Workers and their organisations struggled for more and stronger rights, taking into account a basic assumption that the State and entrepreneurs also considered: production and employment would increase steadily, in spite of possible cyclical crises. Besides, trade unions were organisations in the process of strengthening since it was believed that both industrial production

and wage-based contracts would grow indefinitely as well as their representation basis and their power.

- d. As a consequence of the “internal” development strategy itself, the need for innovation and development was restrained, product life cycles were quite long, and the demands for training and especially retraining of the labour force were not as strict in terms of updating with new techniques, tools, materials, or ways of organising work. The challenge was then quantitative: to provide enough qualified and semi-qualified staff for industries.

In the last twenty years, this reality has radically changed in practically all its aspects thus bringing about, among other consequences, a reassessment of training within labour systems and an increasing interest of actors in it. Why?

Firstly, because **the international insertion strategies of regional economies have changed**. In a more or less radical way, national production has begun to be exposed to other types of regulations, which require urgent measures to improve their competitiveness either by means of unilateral commercial opening policies or in the context of regional integration processes. This has intensified the technological change rhythm applied to production and reduced the life cycles of products and, therefore, of training; thus causing constant pressure to update it.

Secondly, **the relative importance of the “knowledge factor” within the new ways of organising production and work has increased substantially**. The control of information and knowledge then becomes strategic, in the same way as land or means of production were controlled in the past. The ability to build up knowledge and manage it under the concept of learning organisations is considered to be a fundamental strength to achieve competitiveness and has resulted in an appreciation of human gifts. Therefore, the interest showed by different actors to take part in the decision-making stage of the design, implementation and financing of training has become fundamental too.

Thirdly, **the assumption of a regular and indefinite growth of production and employment –or, better said, the direct relationship between them– has turned out to be no longer valid**. Although production may continue to increase –as it does, in fact–, employment is not generated at the same pace and, we often observe the occurrence of a new and worrying phenomenon of economic and productive growth together with an increase in unemployment. In many cases, the employment rise in those sectors that have greater economic dynamism is not enough to make up for the dismissals caused by the new capital-work relationship, affected by the introduction of technological innovations and the shutdowns in sectors that cannot counteract competition with foreign goods. In the old context, during crisis periods, it was enough to implement compensation-like policies such as unemployment insurance or emergency employment programmes. Nowadays, a new generation of active labour market policies has arisen and they always regard training as its main and strategic component.

In this new context, the positioning of productive and labour actors changes, bargaining becomes more complex and the approach of issues such as wages or labour stability in an independent way becomes more difficult. We now pay much more attention to the relationship among employment, wages, productivity, production, competitiveness, quality, etc. Training has been reassessed and is now beginning to be regarded as a strategic issue. It is included within an increasing number of collective agreements and it is also contained in labour law. Even in contexts of serious conflict, social dialogue and coordination experiences in the field of training are taking place and seem to multiply with a great development and sustainability capacity.

Ministries of Labour are beginning to take the lead in the vocational training scenario of Latin America and the Caribbean, mainly in the definition of policy guidelines. This is the result of both a phenomenon contained in a general process of restructuring and re-establishing the State's role in social and economic life and the already mentioned training appreciation in the field of labour relations.

From their old mediation role in the capital-work relationship, that focused on wages, stability and working conditions, these Ministries are now expanding their field of action by approaching the vocational training dimension from the point of view of active employment policies. This is expressed both in terms of the standards and the institutional structure itself, since they are creating and developing different offices and services, which take specially into account vocational training and its relationship with the other labour aspects.

The origin of this further responsibility that Ministries have taken up is the understanding that **vocational training is a crucial element to design and implement active employment policies.**

In the mid seventies in Chile, approximately ten years later in Mexico, and specially as from the beginning of the nineties in other countries: Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, to name a few, Ministries of Labour developed ambitious projects by which they became more involved in the field of creating public employment policies. These programmes, mostly financed by taxes administered by the Ministries, and sometimes reinforced by credits from the international banks, not only acknowledge the importance of vocational training in view of the results achieved, but they also begin a reformulation of their traditional institutionality: the incipient training systems seek to be defined by paying more attention to the **training demand** coming from the productive sector. This approach seeks to overcome, in some way, the stiffness of some national institutions that were found to be sticking to a programme and organisational structure that appeared to be too dependent on the training offer available.

As a consequence, it could be said that training has a leading role in the active employment policies that begin to be promoted by labour Ministries. Within this orientation, the developed concept has a role that focuses on the design of policies and strategies, the creation of financing mechanisms, and the supervi-

sion, monitoring, and evaluation of training actions, thus assigning the task of executing such actions to other public or private agents.

As it has been already stated, the value given to these policies becomes evident as a large amount of financial resources is assigned for the execution of various programmes and projects. These funds may come from different sources: public funds for training established by the law; extraordinary resources from public funds; unemployment funds; together with Ministries of Labour's capacity to assume public indebtedness in the field of vocational training (projects with the IDB and the World Bank, among others). As a short review, we could mention the following examples:

Tripartite instances are also significant since, with the coordination of the Ministries, they integrate employers and workers into the discussion and decision-making about the policies that are dealt with.

But the important role Ministries of Labour have been playing in the already mentioned **active labour market policies** should specially be acknowledged. As long as such Offices can participate in the definition of the great national guidelines regarding development and productive change strategies, together with their participation in the field of strengthening and updating the training offer, they have the chance to act simultaneously and coherently upon the different and main sides of the problem.

The decision to intervene in the labour market by means of employment policies has a number of reasons: cater for transition problems in the process of economic opening; give an answer to social risk situations through redistribution instruments; correct market failures, whether regarding the link between labour supply and demand or the issue of training.

There is a field within the new concept of active labour market policies where the Ministries of Labour have taken, and take, highly important actions: programmes and projects oriented to youth training and employment. Being directed to youth in a situation of structural unemployment and social risk, they were created as mechanisms of mitigation of the social effects of policies of structural adjustment and opening to international trade with the economies of the region, with their corresponding processes of reorganisation of state social services. Through an intensive and concentrated process of training services, training by cross-cutting competencies of a psycho-social type, education levelling and work practice, the programmes seek to increase labour insertion opportunities of this sector of the population. Some of their main characteristics are: adopting the detection of opportunities of work practice at enterprises as an indicator of the relevance of training; self-focusing on the target population; and the decentralised and market-regulated execution.

To sum up, Ministries of Labour in the region are definitely taking action in the field of vocational training and they are contributing to its integration through higher and national strategies related to productive transformation and the chal-

lenges to increase productivity and competitiveness at enterprises and the economies, so as to guarantee an environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth.

Vocational training's connection with other labour issues

Training and employment

In an adverse context in terms of availability of employment, such as the one we live in, there often appear callings for solutions expected to be given by vocational training and general education.

In that sense, it could be definitely argued that the global solution to the problem of the lack of employment does not only require an answer from the field of vocational training. To be clearer: neither training nor education generates more employment by themselves.

However, this does not mean that both vocational training and education do not have a role to play in the struggle against unemployment; indeed there is no effective strategy in that sense that could ignore the training aspect in some way. But training needs to be aided by other policy measures, mainly economic ones: public investment, encouragement of private investment, simplification of the access to credit –consumer credit and productive investment credit– among others.

So, what is the role of vocational training with regards to employment?

- Firstly, although vocational training does not have a straight influence on the availability of global employment, it is a tool to promote equal opportunities to employment. If we analyse unemployment, we see that those who are poorly qualified, are far more affected by it.
- Secondly, workers' good training is the necessary platform from which initiatives can be taken in terms of technological innovation, adoption of modern schemes of production and labour management and, all in all, every effort to make enterprises more productive, competitive, and with more chances to survive and, therefore, to keep the available jobs and create new ones.
- Thirdly, in some cases there is a potential demand for work that does not manage to be catered for due to the lack of qualified staff. Although this kind of unemployment is usually a minority within the total amount, it should not be neglected.
- Finally, vocational training increases and improves the competencies needed by the worker in order to have better chances to keep their job or get a new one, as well as to have access to better paid jobs under proper working conditions.

Training and productivity

According to a broad definition, productivity is the relationship between the production obtained by a production system and the resources used to obtain it. Therefore, productivity is defined as the efficient use of resources –labour, capital, land, materials, energy, information– in the production of goods and services.

Productivity may as well be defined as the relationship between results and the time devoted to achieve them: the shorter the time spent in achieving the desired result, the more productive a system becomes.

Although productivity is sometimes related to work intensity, this means that most of the times there is an excess of effort or an “increase” in work, which usually leads to very limited rises in productivity. As it is usually said, the essence of productivity improvement is not working harder but more intelligently².

There is a straight and positive relationship between training and education, and productivity. This is confirmed by comparing countries and seeing that the best results, both in terms of productivity and economic growth, are found in those countries with better-trained individuals. Even technology –the other element that is considered to be crucial for increasing productivity– is not more than the consequence of education, culture, creativity, and management systems.

However, many countries have policies of structural adjustment and opening to global economy that promote a never-ending restructuring process in large enterprises, leading to staff cut downs and affecting millions of workers. Often the enterprise's operation and achievements are diminished, resulting in new staff cut downs and undermining workers' trust and mood, even reducing productivity.

On the other hand, small enterprises are playing an increasingly important role in nowadays productivity systems as part of the suppliers chain, local producers and distributors networks. Although large enterprises have a strong influence on job creation, small enterprises are in fact the generators of most job posts. Many of these job posts provide stable income and a new working environment, however, there is a high number of job posts which are non-satisfying, lowly productive, dangerous or lacking the most basic social protection.

Alternatively, different approaches advocate the idea that if quality employment is promoted, it may actually be profitable thanks to the progress of productivity. Investment is thus suggested in two key factors: vocational training and labour safety and health.

² Prokopenko, Joseph, *Productivity management: A practical handbook*, ILO, Geneva, 1989, p. 3-4.

Training and competitiveness

Nowadays, it is more often heard that vocational training is a fundamental component within the strategies to improve competitiveness. In its more literal sense, the term competitiveness refers to an enterprise's, sector's or country's ability to compete within the framework of economy.

Even though this concept has been valid throughout time, it gains greater importance in the present context of economic globalisation, where the opening processes enable enterprises, productive sectors and national economies to show their strengths and weaknesses more clearly.

Nevertheless, there are different approaches to sort out the most appropriate strategies and, specially, the combination of measures that may be more effective. On one hand, we find strategies examples which are mainly based on macro-economic measures tending to lower production costs, such as decisions in terms of exchange policies, tax exemption or labour costs reduction (wages, dismissals, etc.). On the other hand, there is the need to gear efforts towards a strategic horizon outlined by the achievement of what has been called "systemic competitiveness".

One of the main differences between the two competitiveness approaches lies in the differing time scope of their policies. The first approach is usually adopted with the aim of obtaining more or less immediate results, within circumstances that appear to be adverse. The classic and most current example is that of resorting to the devaluation of the national currency so as to bolster the foreign trade sector, whether as a unilateral measure or as a reaction to similar decisions taken in other countries. Such measures have an almost immediate effect and thus they are the most frequent strategies to increase competitiveness.

Conversely, the systemic competitiveness approach aims at long-term results. It does not depend on a limited and relatively simple block of measures, on the contrary, it is based on a complex policy range, which, once integrated, would lead to an overall more competitive position of the economy. Policies of investment in public and private infrastructure, of technological innovation and development, and of human resources (education and training), are some of the most typical instruments outlined by this approach.

It is particularly within this second approach that vocational training has a clearer and more central role. It is therefore understood that when investments are oriented to rise the qualifications level of the population, they become an action to promote the increase in competitiveness and, at the same time, they reinforce the effectiveness of other complementary policy lines. Even though vocational training is –in any context– a useful venture, it is within the framework of long-term strategic approaches where its contributions to benefit the society and the economy have a stronger chance to be expressed.

On the other hand, it is evident that as long as vocational training holds an outstanding position within long-term strategies, it faces the challenge of re-assessing itself in terms of strategies and in articulation with other fields of activity. It is in such sense that it is possible to confirm that two types of approaches affected by their corresponding types of reductionism have progressively become out of date in the region.

- Firstly, that concept of vocational training as a limited stage usually prior to the active life of a person. In Latin America and the Caribbean, in accordance with similar processes in other regions of the world, vocational training is rather regarded as an ongoing process, necessary throughout a person's life and no longer as a simple preparation for the insertion in a particular job post.
- Secondly, the idea of vocational training as a specialised field of activity and in a certain way as a self-referent, is becoming less popular, compared to the belief that vocational training is both an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional issue, so that it should integrate that framework of comprehensive attention strategies towards economy, productive sectors and chains, enterprises, and the community.

Therefore, vocational training has striven for two types of integration: one considered in a vertical sense, as it seeks to provide answers not only to different situations but also to the own transformation of such situations (continuing training); the other, in a cross-cutting sense, seeking to establish articulations with other fields of social and economic policy, with varied institutional environments and taking part in different disciplines.

In brief, the two main dimensions of a transformation process in vocational training that seeks to place it in a strategic and functional horizon in order to achieve systemic competitiveness.

Training and wages

Under-qualified workers are not only more affected by unemployment and the different forms of labour precariousness³ but also by lower wages when they are actually employed. This direct and clear correspondence can easily be confirmed in reality: qualified labour is better paid than non-qualified labour.

This is valid not only inside enterprises but also in the more general environment of the labour market:

- **At the enterprises**, because it is natural that the more a worker contributes to the institution's productivity and competitiveness the more he is paid,

³ According to the ILO, precarious employment is a "work relationship lacking employment security, one of the most important elements of the employment contract", and it "includes temporary contracts and fixed-term contracts, home work and subcontracting".

apart from the fact that in most modern enterprises, highly qualified workers are regarded as being part of the business' assets, and they need to be kept.

- **In the labour market**, because workers who have a higher level of qualification have broader margins and opportunities to move, and they look for the jobs which better suit their interests, particularly regarding the amount of income they receive.

The above already brings up a fundamental issue for trade unions: defending and promoting opportunities to increase the level of qualification of workers is one of the main ways to protect their labour stability and wages.

However, we all know that it is not enough to struggle for more training opportunities for workers, and hope that this would spontaneously, or by the mere will of employers, bring about an improvement in staff wages. This is another aspect of the correspondence between training and wages which is extremely important for the trade union's perspective: the possibility of negotiating wages by means of the tool (and the argument) of vocational training.

The main objective of every capitalist enterprise has always been to maximise benefits (or better said: profit making). Any other objective the enterprise may have or action it may take is oriented to and depends on that. Thus, producing more and with higher quality, reducing costs, and conquering markets are all objectives which only make sense for the business if they are geared to obtaining greater profits.

Following that line of thought, the enterprise will always want to favour the changes and actions that may result in an increase of its profits, whether directly or indirectly. And it is plainly obvious that it will resist and avoid anything that goes against that, i.e. anything that either directly or indirectly leads to a reduction in its profit rates or to lower down its growth pace.

This is one of the essential aspects of bargaining and the worker-employer conflict, in the sense that workers, within their possibilities, wish to have something similar: decent and higher (if possible) income, at the lowest cost available (saving their free time, working under hygienic and healthy conditions, with perspectives of professional and labour development, and keeping a stable employment).

Throughout history, the difficulties stemming from the conflicts of interests between one party and the other have been overcome by two mechanisms or situations:

- When the number of workers is scarce compared to the amount required by enterprises, their cost (wage) increases, since it becomes more expensive for enterprises to diminish their production pace than trying to keep wages low. With regards to this, the most frequently quoted example is that of Ford automobile factory during the 1920s: workers, exhausted by the non-stop

rhythm imposed by the assembly line, were massively quitting their jobs; however, the increase in productivity made it possible for Ford to multiply their wage per hour by four so as to encourage them to stay.

- When through the mechanism of strike trade unions have succeeded in breaking the employers' resistance to increase wages once they are faced with a prospective reduction of earned profits because of a decrease in their production pace or a complete stop.

Nevertheless, the above is becoming less frequent. On one hand, the high rates of unemployment always leave an available reserve of workers to which enterprises can resort without the need to increase wages or reduce their profits. On the other, the economic opening and the new rules of global competition, force trade unions to consider further factors (apart from the wages workers are bound to lose while struggling for benefits) when deciding whether to keep or call off a strike. When enterprises are more vulnerable, a long-lasting strike may mean a reduction of markets, and in extreme cases, it may cause the enterprise to disappear, resulting in a loss of employment.

But as long as vocational training –as it was stated above– contributes to enterprises' productivity and competitiveness, it may be regarded as an indirect, but effective, factor for business profit increase. Consequently, it should be possible to discuss and negotiate the way in which the obtained benefits are distributed between the enterprise and the workers, specially taking into account the contributions made by trained workers to the achievement of the objectives set by the enterprise.

In that sense, some enterprises in the region have been designing “variable remuneration” models, by which wage increases depend on increases in productivity. Therefore, it is possible to encourage enterprises to set about modernisation processes which, bearing in mind different strategies –among them the continuing training of their workers–, are oriented to increase their productivity levels. This is complemented by specific agreements establishing that wages will rise in proportion to positive results obtained.

Training and health at work

To “know how” to do one's own work in due time and properly, with quality and creative capacity, is no doubt one of the crucial goals of vocational training. This not only implies that workers efficiently combine their knowledge with real production or service rendering situations, but also that they may do so under non-hazardous conditions, without threatening their life or health.

It is essential to build up a culture of prevention, education and training that takes into account the issue of health and safety in all aspects. This is why it becomes absolutely necessary to incorporate everything related to prevention into vocational training.

The traditional look on these aspects places the emphasis on the need to incorporate prevention rules and measures into training, in the different stages of the work process. This means to detach the different phases of labour, study the risks and dangers that appear in each of them and integrate gradually the appropriate preventive measures into them. This way of dealing with the issue adjusts to the Taylorist criterion of division of tasks.

However, we have witnessed to what extent there have been changes in the contents and the ways of working, where the borders between job posts are blurred and workers must face changing situations with a higher degree of initiative. This forces us to regard this issue with a new look, but not leaving aside the traditionally used prevention techniques, which might actually still be useful.

Part of this new approach regarding training and safety and health consists of the need to foster self-care in future and present workers by embarking in what some have called “training in values”. In that sense, principles such as those referred to the defence of one’s own indemnity, non-discrimination, solidarity, acquisition of a healthy lifestyle, intelligent consume, preservation of ecosystems, self-respect and respect to others, may be incorporated as cross-cutting contents of all training actions.

Although the above reinforces the importance of considering vocational training as an essential tool for the systems of safety and health management at work, and, therefore, it should be part of the cross-cutting contents of training programmes, it must not lead to the conclusion that once the worker has assimilated this kind of knowledge and promoted such values he is the only one responsible for his safety and integrity.

The fact that the worker assumes a more active role in his health care and his physical and psychological integrity does not relieve the enterprise from all responsibilities. Once more, the schemes that add the specialised technical component (qualified professionals in the prevention of labour risks) to the workers’ and employers’ participation in safety and health management at work seem to be the most appropriate ones.

In this sense, *Safework*, the International Labour Office’s InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment, states the following: *the investigation of the origin and underlying causes of work-related injuries, ill-health, diseases and incidents should identify any failures in the OSH management system and should be documented.*⁴ (...) *Such investigations should be carried out by competent persons, with the appropriate participation of workers and their representatives.*⁵

⁴ InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (*Safework*), International Labour Office, Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems, Geneva, May 2001, p. 18, item 3.12.1.

⁵ Idem p. 18, item 3.12.2.

Finally, some countries have a labour legislation that establishes the obligation to constitute bipartite committees of labour safety and health, while in other cases some enterprises have chosen that alternative without there being any legal provision in that respect. Having such space for participation in the management of labour safety and health is an opportunity for trade unions to have a say in the management of such important dimension, in which training –according to the already exposed reasons– will have an outstanding role to play.

Training and equal opportunities

Apart from being an instrument that contributes to productive labour, quality and competitiveness in enterprises, vocational training helps to promote equal opportunity –if well administered.

We all know that equal opportunity, so often expressed by the law, has many obstacles in practice, thus the opportunity to access employment, education, decent wages, and other fundamental rights is not in fact equal for everyone, it is affected by issues of gender, age, race, educational level, etc.

Indeed, even when there formally exist rules against discrimination and it is established the equality between men and women, adults and youth, and any other distinction that could be made based on the particular characteristics of individuals, not all of them arrive at this starting point with the same opportunities.

For those reasons, the concept of “positive action” has increasingly been used in labour relations in order to correct the situations of discrimination or unequal work opportunities. Positive action consists in having a formally unequal treatment in order to benefit a historically discriminated or disadvantaged group, so as to guarantee an authentic equality situation with respect to other groups.

Positive action may be articulated at two levels:

- Positive action measures: are specific actions with the aim of eliminating a certain obstacle for equal opportunities in a short term.
- Positive action programmes: are complex actions aiming at achieving, at a medium or long term, real equality between diverse groups within a specific framework.

Positive action may be developed from multiple fields, being vocational training one of them. We will now consider some examples of positive action which make use of vocational training as a fundamental feature:

- *Young workers who have just been hired by the enterprise:* although it is often the case that when youth incorporates to enterprises they have higher academic merits than the adults, they usually have scarce previous experience. Training actions specially devised for them may contribute to making up for that lack of experience so that it does not become an obstacle for their personal

development. In other cases, youth may have preparation or qualification deficits which may also be overcome by special action.

- *Adult workers must face technological changes in the contents of their work and in the procedures to carry out:* even workers who have a long career inside an occupation or an enterprise may be affected by these types of changes, turning them into a vulnerable group. Updating or re-qualification actions are some of the alternatives that should be available to those workers.
- *Workers with disabilities:* there are much more people with disabilities than one would imagine. Apart from serious and clearly evident disabilities, many workers suffer from slight disabilities which also bring about consequences for their activities and professional development. An appropriate acknowledgement of this factor becomes both an opportunity to promote specific training actions and an element to be considered by all such actions in order to achieve their goals.
- *Women workers with children:* women are typically the most systematically disadvantaged group in labour relations. This fact, which is easily confirmed by endless situations, is frequently reinforced by the double condition of being young and a mother. Despite the importance of formal regulations against women discrimination, they do not solve the whole problem, since formal equality does not automatically mean real equality. Vocational training may participate both from the point of view of designing actions to contemplate the situations faced by women workers so that they may have effective access to this opportunity of professional development, and by teaching values among all workers –men and women– so as to contribute, even if not entirely, to promote a cultural change reaching both the labour and the domestic environments.

Training and labour career

Labour career refers to the route or path followed by a worker whether within an enterprise or in the labour market. Historically, careers have been associated with the first feature, since workers used to stay for long periods or even during their entire labour life in the same enterprise. Nowadays the second situation is more often the case, since instability and labour rotation are becoming common practice.

The labour career is made up of a series of aspects: the enterprises where workers have had a job, the positions held, the duties assumed, the tasks or types of activities developed, and, of course, the qualification acquired throughout their labour life. But there are other kinds of relationships between training and labour career.

In the first place, training has the task of both preparing to develop a satisfactory labour career and accompanying such career through the necessary

complementation, updating, or specialisation for the different moments and situations workers go through.

Secondly, and ideally, the labour career should be conceived in comprehensive terms, not only taking into account aspects such as the enterprise where they have worked at, the tasks carried out and the positions or responsibilities held, but also the own training process developed by the worker throughout his life. As it has already been said, this training process is both composed of formal processes (courses, programmes, seminars) and informal ones (knowledge acquired at work). In this sense, labour career and professional career would probably be interchangeable terms.

Third, what matters most to the worker and the trade union: guaranteeing the access to training opportunities, as well as recognising qualifications formally or informally acquired, constitute a highest order tool for negotiating better working conditions, wages and labour progress in general.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND THE ENTERPRISE

Training as an investment and its returns

Both in terms of general economy and domestic economy it is a basic rule that, in order to obtain a future benefit it is necessary to invest and, usually, that investment initially implies some sort of expense. However, the idea of “expense” is often affected by judgements. Therefore, expenses are classified as necessary – those we cannot avoid– and as extra –those we could live without.

It is according to this distinction that the expenses for food, health, or housing are always regarded as being essential. But this is inevitably relative. What is to be considered necessary or extra depends –among other things– on cultural factors and on to what extent an individual, a family, or a community have their basic needs satisfied.

Education and vocational training as essential needs

Considerations about the nature of our expenses are then determined by the cultural, economic, and social conditions under which we live. Nowadays, vocational training, together with education is considered to be something absolutely necessary, essential, and therefore it has been widely recognised as a basic and universal right.

This is not only related to its possible function as an enabler of access to knowledge in an abstract way or as a way of elevating our conscience and spirit. Today, more than ever, the access to training and education constitute a crucial element to guarantee the access to the most elementary things: a job, a source of income, health, food, housing.

That is why training is regarded as an investment beyond the expenses it may imply. It is an investment that, as it was stated by the definition contained in Recommendation 150, allows us to have access to an *active, productive, and satisfactory life*.

What has been said until this moment is clear from the point of view of workers and their families. And that is why every worker will seek, to the extent of his possibilities, to increase his training, as well as to invest in his children’s education and training.

Reasons preventing enterprises from investing in training

However, from the point of view of productive organisations, the need to invest in vocational training has not always been assumed just as naturally. Many entrepreneurs tend to regard their workers' training more as an expense than as an investment that may bring them tangible and significant benefits.

Among other commonly heard arguments that justify a scarce or non-existent concern about staff training in enterprises, we could mention the following:

- It is cheaper to go find already qualified workers (by other enterprises or entities) than dealing with their training in the enterprise itself.
- Workers training causes waste of effective working time which the enterprise cannot possibly afford.
- When an enterprise has the initiative to train its workers, once they are qualified, they leave the enterprise to look for better opportunities or are directly sought by other enterprises.
- There is no better training than that provided by work.

Such arguments evidence a reality that could be outlined as follows:

- There is a sector within enterprises with extremely conservative beliefs in terms of investing in training the workers they hire.
- More than describing an "external" reality to which enterprises should be adapting, these arguments show some of the most common attitudes and practices among enterprises.

Let us see why those arguments should be discussed.

- ***It is cheaper to look for already qualified workers (by other enterprises or entities) than dealing with their training in the enterprise itself.***

This argument reveals a big dose of opportunism and it can only provide short-term results. Those acting according to this criterion expect that others will take care of the costs of training (other enterprises, the State, the workers themselves) and they only want to enjoy the benefits of an investment they did not make. If this was merely a marginal behaviour (only a few entrepreneurs) it could work for a while, but, what if this becomes the rule? If no one invests in training, in the medium-term that free "fountain" of qualified workers will eventually dry. Of course, one can always expect that the Government will take care of such investment, but, what if the State fails to do so completely or properly? In fact, what should be done is to substitute an individualistic and eventually harmful behaviour by another one with a strategic, global, and long-term look on the issue.

- ***Workers training causes waste of effective working time which the enterprise cannot possibly afford.***

This is the only argument that could be considered valid, at least for one portion of the enterprises. Indeed, specially in what refers to micro and small enterprises, often the financial limitations make it impossible for them to embark in such investments (not only training) that would help them overcome the critical situations the usually fall into. However, and despite what has been said, this should not serve to justify enterprises' passivity over this issue. Rather, it could become the basis to claim the State and the business organisations the design of specific policies and strategies to facilitate the access to vocational training services to these types of enterprises. On the other hand, this argument is also wrongly used to justify behaviours as the ones described in the above paragraph.

- ***When an enterprise has the initiative to train its workers, once they are qualified, they leave the enterprise to look for better opportunities or are directly sought by other enterprises.***

This argument, which is generally used as something negative, is not negative, in fact. Workers –or any other person– usually have aspirations and they pursue self-improvement. Therefore, it would be logic that if someone is not happy with his job, whether because he is not motivated by it, or it does not seem appropriate, or he wishes to access a higher level of income, he will be looking for new opportunities. In addition, the fact that staff rotation is high due to this kind of factor, may be the natural consequence of the behaviour shown by the first argument dealt with here.

However, it is important to ask oneself not only why workers are attracted by other work proposals, but also which situations drive them away from enterprises. And though the amount of wage received is a key element, it is not the only consideration made by workers. They also assess how much their present job helps them to increase their qualification and to what extend their qualifications are borne in mind at the time they are being assigned the tasks, responsibilities, and other benefits. Thus, a comprehensive policy of training and work management promoted by enterprises, offering their workers qualification opportunities which are recognised and properly remunerated may also be a good strategy to retain enterprises' best qualified staff.

- ***There is no better training than that provided by work experience.***

Indeed, work can be a qualifying activity. Nevertheless, it is not safe to make absolute judgements about which type of training is the best: whether the one taking place at the workplace or at a training centre or long-distance training through the computer. It all depends on the subject of training, the

didactic resources it requires, and the possibility and availability of the trainee. Furthermore, not every job is qualifying and even some are the opposite, since they tend to disqualify trainees, whether because they cause information to be out of date, or they use backward technologies compared to those used in enterprises belonging to the same sector, or working conditions are so bad that they lead to the devaluation of the workers and their knowledge.

In any case, training offered by enterprises through their own work processes does not occur spontaneously, on the contrary, it should be designed, programmed, and conducted in a systematic and strict way: improvising hardly ever brings about good results. Moreover, it is unthinkable that an enterprise alone may be absolutely self-sufficient to train its workers without resorting to any external resource: if that were the case, though the training provided may actually be valid to some extent, it will eventually be limited (and limiting).

The role of training in the new approaches to work organisation and management

Vocational training developed in most parts of Latin America through a process of permanent adaptation to the present models of organization and management production and work. From its origins to the 1970s, vocational training institutions developed an offer of courses and programmes geared to qualifying workers that would insert in productive processes characterized by:

- A centralised control of production processes at higher levels, and with scarce assignment of responsibilities to those directly involved in operational tasks. The division of the productive process which classified functions in management and planning on one side and execution, on the other. They were called “low confidence systems”.
- Manual or execution work was divided into the simplest possible operations, resulting in the worker only taking care of a few routine and repetitive tasks.
- Likewise, there was a precise definition of positions, posts, or functions, in terms of knowledge, abilities, and skills they required, as well as of the degree of responsibility they implied and the corresponding payment.

As from the 1970s, countries in Latin American and the Caribbean started to suffer changes which affected their labour and productive realities, thus posing new challenges for vocational training:

- The rhythm of technological innovation, and, specially of technological transference of productive processes, increase.
- There appear new approaches to work management, where the old division between manual and intellectual work is blurred, where workers begin to be

required to assume greater responsibility and to display a wider range of abilities.

- Job posts become less precise and there is an increase in posts rotation within enterprises, as well as worker rotation among enterprises.
- The labour market turns more unstable and wage and formal employment is no longer the predominant form of labour relationship: informality, self-employment, freelance work and unemployment increase.

The new approaches coming from the field of vocational training have largely tried to account for these changes. However, we are still far from reaching an agreement about which would be the most appropriate ways to achieving it.

- Firstly, because although all the above mentioned changes have taken place, it does not mean that the new models for work and production organisation are completely applied in all enterprises and sectors. In fact, we can frequently find in any of our countries situations where a modern and flexible production with high amounts of technology and new schemes of work management coexist with an “old style” industrial production with a strong work division, as well as home industry and services.
- Secondly, because although there is a quite complete knowledge about the type of abilities, skills, and aptitudes (or “competencies”, using a more modern word) that would be necessary to cater for these new ways of organising work, we are far from achieving an agreement on which are the best mechanisms to develop them.
- Thirdly, because today’s labour market reality not only demands certain competencies for determined job, but also to deal successfully with a variety of labour situations which are no longer circumscribed to the enterprises’ scope.

As a consequence, and in a very simplified way, we can find the following approaches within the field of vocational training:

Traditional approaches

Training in centres for job posts performance

Training that takes place exclusively in training centres is frequently questioned by the following arguments:

- It is often isolated from what effectively happens in enterprises and the labour market in general.
- In many cases it has problems with technological updating.
- Students or apprentices do not have the chance to apply directly what they have learned to real work conditions, before they finish their training period.

However, as we will see further on, training that exclusively takes place in centres may be of good quality and make up for the above problems quite extensively.

The main problem lies in the approach of the training provided. If training is oriented to exclusively prepare people to hold specific job posts, these people will have a hard time trying to insert in enterprises requiring a wider range of knowledge and, possibly, that workers carry out varied functions. In that sense, they will have trouble moving in the labour market, where the job post progressively stops being the basic organisational unit of these productive processes.

Training at work, at traditional enterprises, and to job posts

Training that exclusively takes place at the enterprise is also under questioning, specially when it takes place at traditional enterprises which have not yet incorporated modern technology and management approaches. Among the lacks of this approach it is possible to mention:

- Exclusively practical information does not provide the necessary theoretical background that should be incorporated in order to face possible technological changes or tasks.
- At the most, it is good training for working at the enterprise which provided the training, however not necessarily at other enterprises, even if they belong to the same sector or activity.
- Since these are traditional enterprises, workers who receive training there will neither have access to modern technologies nor have the possibility to fully develop their capacities.

In addition, traditional enterprises usually have ways of organising that are based on the division of production processes and strictly defined job posts. Therefore, despite the limits and opportunities that such enterprise has or offers, the knowledge it teaches is hardly ever adaptable to the changes that the enterprise itself may undergo, or –in the event that the worker finds another job– to the conditions other enterprises may set.

Alternate or dual training, between traditional centres and enterprises, to obtain job posts

Regarding the problems caused by training which is exclusively provided at training centres or at enterprises, the advantages of alternate or dual training are frequently set out. This training modality basically consists of sharing training time between both spaces. Thus, the training centre is usually in charge of theoretical training, while training practice takes place directly at the enterprise.

However, and despite the advantages it may have, if alternate training is based on traditional enterprises or on centres which are out of date from the point of view of technology and if, additionally, training is focused on holding job posts, it will have the problems outlined for the two previous approaches anyway.

Modern approaches

Training at innovative centres with a strong technological load and oriented to the development of labour competencies

As it was said before, when training takes place exclusively at centres it might be of quality. This requires, nevertheless, that such centres or institutions take into account the following:

- Establish effective communication mechanisms with the productive world, with enterprises, and with the centres that spread new technologies.
- Recreate within the centre itself the most similar conditions to the ones the students will be faced with when they are actually at work.
- Be always concerned about having updated technology, whether at the centre's own premises, or through agreements with other institutions.
- Encourage both the participation of entrepreneurs and workers' organisations throughout the centre's life and management, as a way of improving the relationship and communication with these actors.

If the centre sees to that, it will probably adopt a modern approach geared to training workers in a wide range of competencies that will enable them to handle a variety of posts and work situations.

Training at modern enterprises oriented to the development of labour competencies

It is obvious that being trained at a modern enterprise –from the point of view of its technology and its management models– is better than doing so at a traditional one. Among other positive aspects, these enterprises offer the alternative of an advanced technological framework and modern approaches of work management.

However, the sole fact of having these advantages does not completely guarantee the availability of an appropriate training environment. Not all enterprises –no matter how advanced and modern they are– have the possibility and the will to use their own productive space as a training environment, make use of all the necessary resources and staff in charge of training, in order to do a sustained investment in their workers' qualification.

Only a few enterprises, though very important ones, have the possibility to train its staff completely on their own. The rest, the wide majority, have limited resources and funding, and they can only partially divert its staff's attention to training functions. Moreover, they are not in the position to devise their own autonomous staff training policies along the lines of the organisation's strategic plans.

Finally, although the quality and relevance of training may be guaranteed, equal opportunities for the different groups that form the enterprise to access training cannot be assured.

Alternate or dual training and the cooperation between innovative centres and modern enterprises (also innovative) oriented to the development of labour competencies

The most common thing in our societies is that the ideal combination of resources to accomplish a certain objective requires a simultaneous combination of actors and institutional environments. This is specially so for the field of vocational training, where we can find enterprises which may constitute potential environments for qualification but they do not have the experience or the necessary resources to develop the pedagogical effort that training requires.

On the other hand, the experience in training activities that specialised institutions may have, is not always accompanied with the necessary state-of-the-art equipment. Moreover, it is often the case that while some spaces are appropriate for the transmission of certain values other ones are not.

Alternate or "dual" training, i.e. the alternative crossing of students-workers through the environment of a studies centre to that of workplaces, regarded as training environments in their own capacity, is a widely adopted strategy among many countries. The idea here is to provide training with an appropriate balance between theory and practice, where the training centre has to offer the former and the enterprise the latter.

But there are multiple alternatives apart from dual training. Among them, we could mention the following:

- Training at the enterprise provided by instructors who are specially hired to develop their work based on a training plan agreed on between the enterprise and the vocational training institution.
- The training of active workers from an enterprise or a group of enterprises at training institutions with courses or programmes which are standardised or tailor-made for the enterprises' needs.
- The training of trainers by training institutions, for workers who will carry out tasks as monitors or instructors in their own enterprise.

Different enterprises, different views on training

Although we usually talk about “enterprises” and “entrepreneurs”, we all know that the entrepreneurial universe is actually extremely diverse. That is why we can find, for example, differences according to the following aspects:

- Their size: enterprises may have many or few workers, as well as high or low turnover.
- If they belong to the structured or formal sector of economy, or to the unstructured or informal one.
- If they are agricultural, agro-industrial, industrial, commercial, service enterprises.
- The technological level they have incorporated.

It is due to these differences, that the entrepreneurial world does not have a uniform vision about many subjects, and vocational training is no exception. Furthermore, and beyond visions, not all enterprises have the same opportunities to access vocational training. Let us consider that more in depth:

The size of enterprises and vocational training

It is a general trend among most countries in the region that large-sized enterprises, the so-called “large enterprises”, have greater chances of accessing vocational training than smaller enterprises. The small and micro enterprises sector, in particular, often has very low levels of access to that type of services.

Maybe this could be associated with different visions, which allot higher or lower importance to training. However, this does not work automatically: we can find large enterprises which pay little or no attention at all to the training of its staff and small enterprises which consider training as one of their main priorities.

It seems that there are certain factors that objectively explain this different behaviour, and, therefore, the visions behind them:

- Among large enterprises and even among many medium ones, there are greater possibilities of finding productive and service organisations which, according to their size and their presence in the market, are forced to develop a long-term strategic vision. When enterprises plan their future, they often make investments, among which there is the training of its workers.
- Large enterprises have in general higher availability of liquid funds that could be applied to training. Conversely, small and micro enterprises usually have meagre financial margins, thus eliminating the possibility of an investment in training.

- Although it is not always the case, it is more often to find modern approaches to work management, with all its emphasis placed on workers' qualification, among larger enterprises than among small and micro enterprises.
- Finally, and from a political perspective, large enterprises have a better capacity to organise and represent their interests, which gives them greater power to carry out public pressure in order to obtain varied benefits, such as the access to training mechanisms and opportunities (public programmes, tax incentives, subsidies, etc.).

Enterprises and vocational training in the formal and informal sector

The insertion of enterprises in the formal or structured sector of economy, or in the informal or unstructured sector, is not independent from the issue we have just dealt with: the size of enterprises. Although we may find all sizes of enterprises in both sectors, the informal sector usually gathers much more small and micro enterprises than the formal sector. This factor explains why there are fewer chances to access training and to make big investments in training for the informal sector. But there are other factors to consider:

- The informal sector also has a lower level of technological development and more traditional styles of business management compared to the formal sector.
- It is more difficult for enterprises of the informal sector to organise themselves and exercise some pressure upon the State and other actors.
- Their main characteristic –being constituted outside the legal provisions in force– may save them from paying taxes but could drive them away from the institutionalised mechanisms to access not only training, but also credit, technical assistance, and different subsidies and public policies.
- Although the State, international bodies, and non-governmental organisations sometimes devise programmes and projects oriented to offer them support, they also face the systematic opposition from the formal entrepreneurial and legally constituted sector, which regard and denounce them for being a form of unfair competition.
- However, and despite the above, many informal enterprises actually constitute branches of formal ones, and provide them with services, non-registered staff and production. In addition, some formal enterprises avoid their obligation to train, thus leaving workers' training in the hands of enterprises with little financial margin and scarce opportunities to access training mechanisms.
- Finally, what causes qualification deficits to be higher in the informal sector is that formal enterprises, particularly those which have modernised, tend to expel their less qualified workers, whom once faced with unemployment,

look for alternative income sources and many times do so in the informal sector.

Productive sectors and vocational training

It is difficult, and probably useless, to try to establish what approaches generally characterise different productive sectors.

Firstly, the classification of enterprises according to their size, and according to whether they belong to the formal or the informal sector, crosses all sectors and production branches. The agricultural sector, as well as the industrial one or the service sector all gather large, medium, small, and micro enterprises and they also have a formal and an informal sector.

Secondly, these sectors appear to have different levels of technological updating: there are modern, technologically outdated, or traditional enterprises.

Finally, the strict division in primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors is becoming more and more blur. For instance, the agricultural production tends to be in many cases agro-industrial, while services may also be not only linked to sectors such as commerce or banking but also as industry and agriculture.

It is worth mentioning though, one of the most outstanding and modern ways of conceiving vocational training strategies: the development of training strategies for sectors of productive chains. We will now consider two examples:

- *Tourism sector*: it involves transport enterprises (air, sea, and land transport), agents, and tourism enterprises in the country or abroad, hotels, public and private services of tourism information and orientation, security services, entertainment services and enterprises, among others.
- *Wood, cellulose, and paper sector*: it involves forest establishments, transport (in route, by train and by sea), ports, storage zones, paper enterprises, carpenter's workshops, specialised shops, etc.

When strategies are developed to assist productive chains or sectors like the ones above mentioned, a series of advantages appear:

- If each productive chain is conceived as a process with stages controlled by different enterprises, then these enterprises are very much interdependent: forest production requires a good transport system to move its production, and they both need buyers that will mostly be enterprises that manufacture furniture or paper enterprises. A good diagnosis of one of these chains could detect the training needs they have in order for the whole process to work properly. For example, if chain saw operators lack training, it could affect the whole chain process from the very beginning, or if there is a defective transport system, it could cause delays or increase the price of the final product.

- The above helps to achieve a more efficient use of the available training resources by giving priority to those stages which are more critical and avoiding fragmentation and lack of coordination between the different initiatives.
- Finally, not only what refers to training aspects improves with this type of approach: it is also easier to detect other type of problems that may affect the efficiency and quality of the sector.

Technological level of enterprises and views on vocational training

It could be affirmed that, although there may be some exceptions, the greatest technological development of enterprises is in general associated with a greater concern about vocational training. Therefore, among the enterprises that pursue technological development and innovation, we can find the following typical situations:

- In some cases there is coinciding development: the enterprise simultaneously pursues technological innovation and staff training as part of its general strategy with productive, commercial, and quality assurance objectives, among others.
- Some enterprises, however, yield to a “magical” vision of technology, thinking that such unilateral innovation will almost automatically produce a number of results: lower costs, greater productivity, better quality, fewer staff members, etc.

In the first case, we find a natural and potentially more harmonious or coherent development of the two dimensions. Enterprises update their workers’ knowledge prior to or at the same time they incorporate new technologies.

In the second case, enterprises are usually faced with diverse obstacles and conflicts: sub-use of new equipment, materials, or programmes; failures and damages due to the inappropriate use of technology which is not properly known and mastered, work accidents, labour conflicts as a result of global or selective job losses due to lack of qualification, among other aspects.

To sum up:

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- Although some traditional visions among enterprises regard training as an expense, more modern visions on entrepreneurial management consider that training is a strategic investment itself and regarding other investments (for instance, investments in technology), whose success depend on it.
 - Workers, who regard training as accumulated capital that enables them to build more dignifying and stable labour and professional alternatives, also accept the vision of training as an investment.

- Apart from being an investment (from the individual, organisational, and collective perspective), training is an essential need and a fundamental right of all workers.
- The arguments against training may be questioned by workers and the trade union by means of solid arguments from the conceptual, economic, and political point of view.
- Although training has been an important element in all forms of organisation and management of production and work, the new approaches on this field give training a greater leading role, as long as the knowledge factor acquires strategic importance.
- Along with traditional and modern approaches on labour and productive management, there also exist traditional and modern approaches on training.
- A priori, there is no unique or most appropriate way to provide training. The best training is the one that best adapts to the qualification objectives that have been set, to the available resources and means, and to the possibilities of those who participate in these training actions.
- The entrepreneurial universe is heterogeneous, thus creating different perspectives about the importance of investing in training. In general, despite some exceptions, large, technologically advanced and formal enterprises often invest more in training.
- The relevance and efficiency of training policies and strategies is enhanced by conceiving the economy not so much in terms of sectors (primary, secondary, and tertiary) but in terms of productive and service chains.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

What do we understand by collective bargaining?

Collective bargaining has close relationship with trade union freedom. According to the ILO Convention N°98 and Recommendation N°94, the legitimate subject to bargain and sign a collective bargaining, on behalf of the workers, needs to be, necessarily and primarily, a trade union organisation. This is different for employers, who have greater freedom (whether one employer, or several employers, or one or many employers' organisations may celebrate collective agreements). Then, it is not possible by principles that a collective agreement be celebrated by an inorganic group of workers; the rule states that a trade union organisation has to intervene.⁶

The above is based on the primary goal of collective bargaining that consists in the worker being able to negotiate with the employer under rather fair conditions or with greater bargaining power than he would have if he were negotiating on his own. Since the worker is in a less privileged situation than the employer, he negotiates collectively in order to oppose the power of quantity to the economic power of his opposing party.

In collective bargaining:

- There is a conflict or confrontation of interests and it is introduced as a mechanism to solve such conflict.
- The term “bargaining” itself indicates that we start from different postures or points of view between two or more actors, among whom a transaction is sought, and, ideally, an agreement is reached.
- The main objective of collective bargaining is then to reach an agreement, a “collective agreement”. At the same time, that agreement is not considered to be the end of the conflict, but rather a sort of “truce”, for which duration

⁶ Ermida Uriarte, Oscar: “Evolución de las relaciones entre lo sindical y lo participativo en relación con la negociación colectiva”. In: *Derecho colectivo del trabajo*. Teaching Materials. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Facultad de Derecho, Lima, 1990.

terms are set and the conditions that the subscribing parties have promised to respect are established.

Nowadays, it is almost a common denominator in different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean the fact that collective bargaining has gone backwards at a branch or activity sector level. The only level at which there is a relatively important incidence of collective bargaining is that of enterprises. This is often the result of modifications in labour regulations openly seeking that effect, while in other cases it has been the result in practice but without significant changes in the regulations in force.

The loss of incidence of collective bargaining becomes even more evident when we take into account the large number of workers who do not follow the traditional path towards wage and formal labour insertion. More and more workers begin to integrate the bulk of the informal or unstructured sector of economy, are affected by unemployment, or are inserted in the labour market under other modalities such as self-employment and micro enterprises. As a general rule, these workers do not have access to collective bargaining.

It is unquestionable that these processes lead to a weakening of workers' ability to negotiate, not only because collective bargaining is restricted to enterprises –and therefore trade union's pressure margins are reduced– but also because the new social and economic context limits these organisations from the point of view of the issues that could effectively be included in the bargaining.

Vocational training as a bargaining issue⁷

Within this situation where trade unions have lost ability to bargain and exercise pressure, it seems that vocational training allows for the bargaining margins to be broadened, despite the already mentioned restrictions.

In accordance with that, vocational training is a growing component of collective bargaining at its different levels and expressions. As vocational training began to be a part of the labour relations system, it was inevitable that sooner or later it would be reached by collective bargaining:

- Vocational training as a worker's right may be subject to be included in collective agreements, just as any other labour right.
- As an economic instrument, employers may have a high interest in regulating vocational training through bargaining.

⁷ A large and in-depth study on the links between vocational training and collective bargaining in: Ermida, Oscar; Rosenbaum, Jorge: Formación profesional en la negociación colectiva. Cinterfor/ILO, Montevideo, 1998. This publication in spanish is available at: <http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/spanish/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/ermida/index.htm>

- Since collective agreements are flexible standards, they have the appropriate features to go along with the changing needs of training, as technological changes continue to take place.

Finally, the different levels of bargaining (at enterprises, by branch, national, and even international), offer a wide range of alternatives, each of them showing better or worse ability to consider the varied aspects of vocational training. For instance:

- The big framework agreements or national social pacts are particularly appropriate to establish ample guidelines of training policies and to create general competence bodies.
- Collective agreements of industrial branch or economic activity may prepare sectoral training plans, set industrial policies and regulate the rights and obligations in force for a whole sector.
- Enterprise collective agreements may orient the specific training plans of a certain enterprise as well as adapt the provisions of agreements and pacts of higher order.

Types of clauses about vocational training in collective agreements

Collective agreements that deal with the issue of training usually contain the following items:

- *General or programme expository clauses*

These clauses are incorporated to collective agreements with the aim of formally establishing aspects such as the parties' will to promote vocational training at the enterprise or the right of workers to receive it. Without them being less important, these clauses do not generally specify the mechanisms or formulas to achieve the contents of the agreement.

- *Clauses on free time for training*

This kind of clauses, which are more specific than the previous ones, establish the relationship between training time and work time, fixing an amount of working hours that will be devoted to training, or else the enterprise will give compensations for training provided beyond working hours.

- *Provisions about special training programmes*

Occasionally, there could be clauses referring to training programmes oriented to facing concrete problems or changes. This could refer, for instance, to the implementation of an internal system of quality assurance or the introduction of new technologies into productive or service rendering processes.

- *Creation of bipartite committees to manage such programmes*

In some countries, the law regulates the creation of bipartite instances for the management of training programmes (as it will be seen in the following item). However, in some cases (both in sectors and enterprises) this type of instance is expressly created through the agreements reached in collective bargaining, and, as such, they are included in the agreements.

- *Provisions on training actions funding and –to a shorter extent– incentives for attending courses, fellowships, etc.*

Some examples of collective agreements even include funding schemes for training actions, for instance, by fixing the contributions of the enterprise and/or the workers, through deductions in their wages, to create training funds, or to allot them a special sum with the same objective. In other cases, it is possible to find agreements that develop policies which foster the training of the enterprise's workers, whether through the assignment of working time or financial assistance for that purpose.

- *Clauses establishing the employer's duty to provide training*

Through this kind of clauses the employer commits himself to provide the necessary training to workers in order to help them to carry out their job in a more efficient way, without them thinking they might lose their job because of qualification deficits. As a rule, this kind of agreements are based, on the one hand, on the effective acknowledgement of workers' right to receive training, and, on the other, on regarding training as part of the necessary entrepreneurial investment to achieve goals related to productivity and the quality of production or services.

- *The link between training programmes and staff reductions for budgetary reasons*

Some enterprises start staff reduction processes after introducing new technologies or as a consequence of diverse difficulties. In that sense, agreements have been made in order to minimise job losses and offer support to workers who have been made redundant by means of training actions. In such situations, the workers who have lower qualification levels are the most vulnerable ones, therefore, the chance of being able to receive training becomes a key aspect, whether to stay at the enterprise, or to have better tools to look for a new job.

- *Clauses that connect vocational training with remunerations and/or productivity*

Finally, there are some few cases of connection experiences between training policies and other labour aspects, such as remunerations and productivity. Agreements by which rises in remunerations –wages or extra-wages– depend on the improvement of productivity, have already been carried out in several enterprises of diverse countries in the region through the so-called “variable remuneration”.

neration models”. However, some collective agreements by activity and enterprise level have taken a further step: in the understanding that productivity is a function of training, the increases in workers’ qualification are translated into improvements in their remuneration. In spite of the incipient nature of these agreements, they are a possible path to take in terms of collective bargaining for trade unions.

Bargaining strategies⁸

Bargaining is an essential component of trade unions’ work. Although it cannot be labelled as a struggle measure, it is, under normal conditions, a strategy to look for solutions and possibly to prepare struggle measures. Bargaining, then, adds to strikes and demonstrations –the traditional ways for trade unions to exercise pressure and to struggle.

In order for bargaining to be feasible and to produce significant results, certain basic conditions need to be present:

- *The political will to bargain:* bargaining must be the best alternative for both parties. Only those who are forced by the circumstances to take up the alternative of bargaining are in a suitable starting point to achieve a reasonable agreement.
- *A minimum number of interests in common:* no bargaining can possibly take place if parties have only reasons to continue the conflict but not to find a solution that will benefit both.
- *Personal readiness:* bargaining is a human process, made by individuals. Therefore, it is necessary that it has a basic ingredient: personal readiness to bargain.

It is important that the necessary conditions exist to carry out bargaining, and the chosen method to bargain is just as important. What follows are some useful recommendations to that respect:

- *Separate the person from the problem:* when we bargain with the other party, we are not dealing with an abstract representative; it is a person with emotions, a scale of values, different background and points of view, and quite unpredictable. Just like us.
- *Each bargainer has two types of interests: the substance and the relationship:* each of them wants to reach an agreement that satisfies the substantial interests which originated the conflict. But also they are interested in their relation-

⁸ Most of the contents of this item have been taken from: Graña, G. (coord.): *Manual de formación sindical para delegados de base de la industria de la construcción*. Cinterfor, Montevideo, 2002. This Trade Unions Guide is worth consulting, and it is available at: http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/spanish/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/man_fs/manuafs.htm

ship with the other party, so that it may not affect future relationships and bargaining negatively.

- *Separate the relationship from the substance:* it is necessary to separate the problem from the personal relationship, by dealing with the substantial problem itself, while the relationship is based on clear-cut perceptions, plain communications and appropriate emotions.
- *Separate the process of generating from the process of deciding:* since the hyper-critical judgement hinders imagination, it is better to separate the creative act from the critical one, the act of thinking from the act of selecting an alternative.
- *Multiplication of options swinging between the particular and the general:* the task of generating alternatives includes four types of thoughts: the first one is to think about a particular problem; the second one is to make a descriptive analysis (situation diagnosis, problem classification, and provisional suggestion of causes); the third type of thought is to consider what could possibly be done; the fourth and last is to arrive to a precise proposal that could be taken to action.
- *Resort to the help offered by different professions and disciplines:* they may offer alternatives we have not primarily considered.
- *Generate agreements with different degrees of intensity:* if an agreement cannot be reached in terms of substantial issues, it may be reached on secondary issues.
- *Changes in the scope of agreements:* if the substantial could not be agreed on, it may be possible to make a partial agreement including fewer parts or lasting for a shorter period of time.
- *Search for mutual benefits and identification of shared interests:* it is important to remember that both parties may end up even worse than they are now. Shared interests are opportunities to may make bargaining more fluent.

TRADE UNIONS PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING MANAGEMENT AT THE ENTERPRISE⁹

What is meant by trade unions participation in the enterprise's management?

Participation in the enterprise's management, such as the case of training committees, should also be taken apart from other types of participation.

Even when they coexist, **participation in management is different from participating in the earnings of the enterprise**. The latter may be defined as a retribution system that gives the worker –apart from his common wages– a percentage of the earnings, profits or benefits of the enterprise, but without participating in losses. This tends to be part of the wages, since in fact it is merely a part of the remuneration, a remuneration modality, a marginal wage element added to its basic element.

Participation in management is different from participation in the enterprise's ownership. The latter includes any system that gives the worker part of the enterprise's capital. Thus, in theory, the worker has a double condition: as a worker, and –even if slightly– as a partner, whether capitalist or owner. Theoretically, when this participation becomes more extreme, it implies the participation both in the earnings and in the management (the worker receives earnings and has some sort of access to management, in his capacity as shareholder or co-owner).

In general, it could be said that when there is participation in management instances:

- There must be common interests and objectives between enterprises and workers.
- It is the shared design of a common strategy for the whole enterprise involving the employers and the workers, rather than a transaction between opposing interests and strategies.

⁹ Most of the content of this chapter have been taken from: Ermida Uriarte, Oscar. "Participación de los trabajadores en la empresa, panorama teórico y comparativo". This piece of work appears on: *Derecho colectivo del trabajo. Teaching Materials*. Facultad de Derecho, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima, 1990.

- The collective agreement is not the main objective of participation instances; on the contrary, it is the running of the instance itself and the development of common activities or strategies.

Different degrees of participation in the enterprise's management

By degrees of participation we understand the different levels of intensity workers' intervention may have in the enterprise's administration or management. These levels go from the mere right of workers to be informed, to the full exercise of the enterprise's direction by the staff.

Thus, the degree of participation may be classified into three broad levels: cooperation, codetermination, and self-management.

- **Cooperation or collaboration** is participation's lowest intensity manifestation and it includes all the advisory means by which staff intervention can take place without being binding to the employer (the employer is not obliged to comply). Although it is possible to make a distinction between several sub-levels, such as the "information" level (where workers only have the right of being informed), "advice" level (where they have the right to give their opinion), the determining and characteristic feature of cooperation or collaboration is that, even when the employer is obliged to let workers participate (inform them, consult them, receive their contesting, and even reconsider), it does not bind him to act in a certain way and he still exercises his full powers of direction, without sharing or assigning it.
- Alternatively, **codetermination** implies that the workers effectively intervene in the management, administration or direction of the enterprise. Codetermination then implies that decisions at the enterprise should not be made if workers do not take part in that decision-making. This does not mean, however, that the degree of power the workers have is necessarily the same or equivalent to that of employers. In fact, codetermination may be exercised either jointly or by a minority. When codetermination is exercised by a minority, workers are a minority compared to the employer, thus, decisions may be adopted with workers' participation but against their opinion. When codetermination is exercised jointly, each parties' weight is equivalent, thus, any decision can not be made without the agreement of both of them.
- **Self-management** is the third and highest degree of participation. In this case, it is the staff who, in an exclusive and excluding manner, runs the enterprise. But, as it may be observed, it is arguable whether we can properly talk about "participation" in this case, since in self-management one party is completely excluded and substituted by the other.

What is a Training Committee?

Then, from the point of view of the type of participation, a training committee is not:

- A way of participating in the enterprise's earnings.
- A way of participating in the enterprise's ownership.

The committee may indeed coexist with such types of participation and be derived from them. However, a training committee is a way of participation in the enterprise's management which refers to a specific area: that of internal training and staff development strategies and policies.

From the point of view of the degrees of participation, a training committee may be:

- A cooperation instance: when the committee becomes an advisory instance in the enterprise, which is consulted by the employer, but does not bind him to comply with its resolutions.
- A minority codetermination instance.
- A joint codetermination instance.
- A self-management instance.

It is not the only area or subject in which we can find such participation instances. Work conditions and work environment, labour safety and health, staff-reduction or business restructuring processes, incorporation of new technology, are subjects or areas where we can find examples of committees or commissions set up to allow for different degrees of participation of workers in the enterprise's management.

How is a Training Committee set up?

The creation of a training committee depends on the existence of a framework of labour relations which favours workers' participation in the enterprise's management, or, at least, in the training policy of its staff.

That participation-favouring framework is not always available. When it is available, it is generally related to the following factors:

- There is a legal framework that makes use of different mechanisms to compel or promote the creation of participation instances in enterprises' training management.
- The general approach of the enterprise is directed to encourage workers' participation in this type of instances.
- Participation in training management is the result of a process of struggle carried out by workers and of bargaining with employers and the government.

We will now consider each of these factors in depth:

Legal framework that compels or promotes workers' participation in training management

There are at least two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean –Mexico and Chile– which have legal provisions that establish that it is an obligation to create bipartite instances at enterprises, particularly oriented to agree on and carry out training plans in such environment.

Mexico is the oldest antecedent regarding this matter. In this country, 1980 Federal Labour Law states that: *“Each enterprise shall constitute Joint Committees on Training, integrated by an equal number of representatives from workers and the employer, which shall monitor the instrumentation and operation of the system and the procedures implemented to improve workers' training, and shall suggest measures in order to improve them; pursuant to the needs of workers and enterprises”* (Federal Labour Law, Title four, Chapter III, Article 153-I).

More recently, in Chile, the reform of the Statute of Training and Employment by Law 19.518 of October 1997 stated the following: *“Enterprises shall set up a bipartite training committee. This shall be obligatory for those enterprises with 15 or more staff members. The duties of the committee shall be to agree on and evaluate the occupational training programme(s) of the enterprise, as well as to advise the directors in terms of training”*. (Title I: about training, Paragraph 2nd, On Bipartite Training Committees, Article 13).

In both cases the law fixes a joint composition of these instances. Besides, the Mexican Joint Committees on Training increase the number of representatives from both parties in proportion to the number of workers in the enterprise¹⁰ whereas the Chilean Bipartite Training Committees are always integrated by three representatives from the employers and three representatives from the workers.

The balance made regarding the results of both experiences appears to be dissimilar. In the Mexican case, beyond the merit of having the pioneer legislation on the matter in the region, the Joint Committees on Training do not seem to have worked enough to exploit all the potential they were supposed to have at the beginning. In Chile, the creation of a legal instrument to promote the setting up of enterprise Bipartite Training Committees is still too recent to allow us to reach conclusions.

¹⁰ In enterprises with not more than 20 workers, one representative from the workers and one representative from the employers. In enterprises with 21 to 100 workers, three representatives from the workers and three from the employers. In enterprises with more than 100 workers, five representatives from the workers and five from the employers. Oficio N° 01-4197 *Formación y operación de Comisiones Mixtas de Capacitación y Aiestramiento*, Barbagelata, Héctor-Hugo, *Digesto legislativo de la formación profesional en América Latina y el Caribe*, Tomo III, Cinterfor/OIT, Montevideo, 1981.

Entrepreneurial approaches open to workers' participation

Although it is not the rule in Latin America and the Caribbean, one cannot ignore the fact that some enterprises do have management approaches that favour certain degree of workers' participation. In some cases, it is possible to find modern labour relations frameworks where the administration sees the advantage of keeping civilised relationships with their workers and does not regard their organisation in trade unions as a threat but rather as part of the "game's rules". This does not always result in some form of participation, but in any case it is a favourable factor for the existence of bargaining mechanisms and ways of acknowledging the trade union as a valid interlocutor in such bargaining.

Among the enterprises which work with this type of relationships, we may find experiences where bipartite instances are created to deal with issues such as training and professional promotion of workers.

In addition, it should be pointed out that new approaches on business management have been widely spread among our countries. These approaches focus on the need for workers to become more involved in the objectives and the operations of the enterprises they work at.

In other words, there is a new idea that begins to be spread: it is not enough to count on the exclusive physical strength of workers, it is also necessary to benefit from their intelligence, their knowledge, and their will to achieve the production and/or quality goals set by the enterprise.

From the point of view of workers, this type of approach allows for more than one position.

Some positions hold that what enterprises pursue is to increase the levels of workers' exploitation, not only in terms of the amount of effort they may offer but also by increasing the quality of such an effort, thus maximising their profits. In other words, a threat that needs to be resisted.

Alternatively, other positions argue that although it is true that what enterprises pursue is to increase their productivity and competitiveness levels, and therefore their profits, they have, at the same time, no other choice than to start sharing decision-making, at least in some areas or stages of the productive process. In other words, it is a chance that could be possibly taken.

Workers' participation in training management as a consequence of their struggle and bargaining with employers and the government

This factor normally precedes the two former ones. The passing of a law by which this type of participation is promoted or becomes compulsory, or the fact that an enterprise agrees to establish a new instance for codetermination in terms of training, are the result of a long struggle and the efficiency of workers to negotiate these issues through their trade unions.

Consequently, such results may only be achieved when trade unions assume the fact that vocational training is a strategic issue for workers' interests and they are concerned about bargaining in that sense or conquering participation spaces in its management, with the same emphasis as the other issues dealt with in the agenda.

Nevertheless, there is a difference in importance among the issues which are usually the object of bargaining and labour conflict and vocational training. Vocational training is a field where it is potentially easier to reach agreements between workers and employers, since through the adoption of appropriate training plans it is possible to imagine scenarios where the benefits are both for the enterprise and its workers.

How is a Training Committee integrated?

At an international level, there is no single way to integrate a Training Committee. We have already seen the differences existing between Chile and Mexico, the only countries in the region where this subject has been regulated by the law. We could say then that its integration will depend on:

- Whether there is or not a nationwide regulatory framework in that respect.
- The result of bargaining that takes place at each enterprise between employers and workers.

There are two aspects that trade unions regard as fundamental in terms of the integration of a Training Committee:

- Firstly, if there will be joint participation of employers and workers or not. That is to say, whether the enterprise and the workers will have the same number of delegates in the Committee.
- Secondly, the way in which workers' representatives are elected.

The joint or non-joint nature of the Committee affects whether workers are able to make their opinion prevail in arguments and at the time of voting, and also it forces the search for agreements and it prevents enterprises from taking decisions unilaterally, beyond any discussion that might have taken place at the Committee's meeting.

There are several forms to elect representatives:

- a) Delegates may be workers who are members of the trade union and are directly appointed by the trade union's direction.
- b) Delegates may be workers who are members of the trade union, elected through the vote of the other members of the trade union.
- c) Delegates may be workers who are members of the trade union, elected through the vote of all workers, whether they are members of the trade union or not.

- d) Delegates may either be workers who are members of the trade union or not, being thus elected in different voting instances.
- e) Delegates may either be workers who are members of the trade union or not, being thus elected in a single voting instance of all workers, whether they are members of the trade union or not.
- f) Workers' delegates may be appointed by the enterprise's management office.

As it may be gathered, each of the above possibilities brings about different consequences, both for the operation of the Committee and the trade union itself.

Options (a), (b), and (c) are usually accepted by the trade union, and the adoption of one of them will depend on the specific reality of both the organisation and the enterprise.

Options (d) and (e) are more difficult, since they admit two possible forms of representation of workers, one through the trade union, and the other, directly made by workers without mediation of the trade union. This is the prescribed manner in which delegates to Bipartite Committees for Enterprise Training are elected in Chile, according to the following format:

Degree of membership to trade unions	N° of trade union representatives	N° of non-union representatives
More than 75% of the enterprise's workers are members of the trade union	3	0
Between 50% and 75% of the enterprise's workers are members of the trade union	2	1
Between 25% and 50% of the enterprise's workers are members of the trade union	1	2
Less than 25% of the enterprise's workers are members of the trade union	0	3
There is no trade union in the enterprise	0	3
Procedure for the election of delegates	Direct appointment by the trade union or internal voting	Voting

Finally, alternative (f) is not applicable to any trade union, since it implies a total dependence on the enterprises' discretionary will and it cannot be considered to be an actual form of participation.

What are the issues dealt with by a Training Committee?

The range of issues that could potentially be dealt with by a Training Committee is really broad. This is not only due to the richness of vocational training itself, but also (and mainly) to the great amount of links that exist between vocational training and other dimensions belonging to the productive or labour fields.

At the same time, a Training Committee may be devoted to general and strategic subjects, but it may also deal with solving specific and routine issues.

Let us consider some of them:

- *General training strategies or plans for the enterprise, geared to improving workers' skills and knowledge, as well as spreading information about the new technologies to be applied on them.*

Undoubtedly, the most ambitious goal a Committee may have is to discuss, agree on, and define a general training plan for the enterprise. For that purpose, it is not enough to make a simple enumeration of the training actions that could be implemented. On the contrary, it implies a clear and shared definition about the goals that the enterprise has –within certain terms– regarding a number of dimensions: production, productivity, quality, sales, etc. Taking this as a starting point, an analysis is made to define what types of training actions could contribute to the achievement of goals and who they are geared to. After that, the requirements of such training actions in terms of resources are studied (funds, instructors, classrooms, materials, tools, equipment, etc.). Finally, all the above is translated into a schedule of actions, ordered according to the objectives they contribute to achieve and the corresponding achievement indicators.

- *Preparation of workers for carrying out new functions, whether as a result of their mobility within the enterprise, or as a consequence of the creation of new job posts.*

It is more and more often the case that workers move between the different stages of the production process. Indeed, regardless of whether such mobility actually takes place or not, there is a tendency to demand from workers a more complete knowledge about the whole processes and tasks at the enterprise. In addition, professional profiles tend to change and a strict division of job posts is no longer required; it is rather demanded that workers master an increasing amount of competences, so that they can act in the diverse and changing situations and contexts. This kind of transformations also requires that workers are prepared to face change, whether in the form of new or more frequent functions and tasks, or by trying to take advantage of the acquired qualifications in order to develop a career.

- *Incorporation of aspects related to labour safety and health within training plans and the job itself.*

In some countries, legislation states that it is an obligation to establish bipartite instances regarding labour safety and health, while some enterprises from countries with no legislation on such matters do have such instances all the same.

In the event that an enterprise has both a training committee and a safety and health committee, it is clear that both instances should be very closely working. In the case where there is no such instance, the training committee may and should have an influence on the safety and health plans of the enterprise.

This is due to two elemental reasons:

- First, there is no sound policy on safety and health that does not have a strong training component: the best mechanisms to prevent labour accidents and diseases are of little value if workers do not know how to use them or if they are not aware of the risks they may be faced with or how to prevent them.
 - Second, because labour safety and health are an integral component of vocational training: learning to work also implies other things, like working in a safe way, without risking one's physical or mental integrity or that of workmates.
- *Detecting training needs according to the changes in the forms of labour management and administration, the productive objectives or the objectives to ensure quality in products and/or processes, the changes in the required productive profiles, the incorporation of new technologies, etc.*

A Training Committee may also be a useful instance to go along with the changes that are taking place at the enterprise, reinforcing its positive effects and neutralising the negative ones.

The adoption of new schemes of labour management and administration that suggest changes both in terms of labour contents and of the way it is carried out, may not have the expected results for the enterprise, thus affecting its stability, the wages, or the working conditions of workers, if it does not take into account all the dimensions and aspects involved. Among them, we find that an appropriate training within a new culture in the organisation and the training to face new labour contents and procedures become essential.

Likewise, the adoption of schemes to ensure quality could be regarded as a key component of training, to the extent that it is not possible to access a certification without having previously taken into account this aspect.

Finally, the incorporation of new technologies is also an event where training becomes clearly essential. Technological innovation that is understood in a restricted sense, as the mere acquisition of equipment, software, or materials, usually ends up having several problems: from the sub-use of the incorporated

technology, to the generation of conflicts with different degree of seriousness. The appropriate training and information not only helps the enterprise to achieve its goals of production, productivity, or quality, but also it upholds the rights of workers.

- *Elaborating and accepting indicators of the contribution of training to productivity in the enterprise, its external competitiveness, profit rates, and rationalisation of resources, so that they may act as input for bargaining aspects such as wage, number of posts, work careers, extra-wage benefits.*

When an enterprise adopts a strategic approach on internal training, it takes into account the contributions made by such strategy or any of its components to fulfil certain objectives. In that sense the aim is to specify and –if possible– to quantify, the extent to which the actions to be developed will contribute to an increase in productivity, a higher quality in products or services, and, therefore, the benefit of the firm.

From the point of view of trade unions, it is important that participation in training management may prove useful for guaranteeing a contribution to the interests and needs of workers. That is to say, how wages, work careers, number of job posts, and other aspects will be affected. In this scenario, the trade union delegate will try, within his functions, to make benefits, if any, reach workers too, and if there are any negative effects for workers, he will try to offset or lessen such effects.

The above involves bargaining so that all indicators are taken into account at the moment of designing a training strategy; not only those that are of interest to the employer, but also the ones that may interest worker.

Simultaneously, this work helps the trade union to assess the quality and the results of its participation in the Committee, and to obtain useful input for bargaining with the enterprise. An example of this would be that the trade union were able to negotiate that, in the event of there being an increase in productivity as a result of training, this would also be reflected in wages rise.

The trade union delegate: proposed profile

In this section, we will deal with the issue of the aspects and conditions a trade union delegate should ideally have to integrate an Enterprise Training Committee, leaving aside the usual considerations for the election of delegates. Even though this may seem contradictory, the following reasons show it is not:

- The appointed or elected workmate may not initially have all the necessary conditions and knowledge, but he may acquire both –and other– during the exercise of his function as a delegate, as well as by means of specific training actions.

- The reasons that lead a meeting, a directive board, or the trade union members to appoint or elect a workmate, through the vote in an election, may vary from enterprise to enterprise and from trade union to trade union. The delegate may be chosen because he has sound knowledge about the whole enterprise, or for his ability to discuss, argue, and bargain; because he has a natural calling for the issue of training or for other reasons.

In brief, we could risk, at the most, two features that a potential delegate candidate should have: motivation and desire to improve in his function.

We will now consider, in general, the type of knowledge that a trade union delegate to a training committee should have and the abilities he would need to develop.

- *Regulations governing the Committee's operations*

First of all, it is necessary to be familiar with the regulations that govern and specify the operations of the instance in which he participates. In some cases, it will be a national-scope legal provision, e.g. Mexico and its Federal Labour Law or Chile and the Statute of Training and Employment. In other cases, it will be necessary to be acquainted with the agreements both at the levels of branch or enterprise that originated the setting up of the Committee.

Through this knowledge, the delegate will know what the chances of action are, the limitations there might be and the guidelines for the integration and operation of the Training Committee.

- *Other regulations that govern vocational training*

Apart from the above mentioned regulations, it is important to know, at least generally, the provisions that rule vocational training at a national level. Such regulations may be related to the existence and operation of training institutions, to learning contracts or training fellowships, among others.

An appropriate knowledge about all the regulations on that matter will complement the Committee's own regulations, in addition to discovering action opportunities. For instance, the regulations on apprenticeship contracts would possibly allow the delegate to suggest the application of this modality in the enterprise, or else to control the possible divergences that may occur with respect to the guarantees that in different senses the law may establish.

- *Terminology and basic concepts on vocational training*

In order to go deeper into the management of vocational training at the enterprise, it will be necessary to assume the challenge by mastering a number of terms and concepts that belong to this field. This will enable the delegate to have

more tools for the development of his function, along with sharing a common language with the other delegates from the workers, the enterprise's representatives, the trade union, and other actors (educational or vocational training authorities, instructors, etc.).

- *Staff availability and characteristics and training resources in and outside the enterprise*

Whether it is to discuss or elaborate a training plan or strategy, or to determine specific actions, the delegate will try to have the most possibly complete knowledge about the training resources inside the enterprise, the existing opportunities to access external resources and the appropriate mechanisms to enlarge the availability of both.

At a first level, an appropriate knowledge about the qualification of the enterprise's own workers would help to determine its possibilities to develop training actions. Such qualification may either be strictly technical and of direct use at work, or in terms of qualification and training experience.

It is worth considering that while some people have a sound knowledge about certain techniques, working processes or operations, they do not have an appropriate ability to transmit such knowledge. During a training programme or course, these people can produce positive results if they are offered support through pedagogical advice and didactic resources.

Other people have, instead, a natural or acquired ability to provide training and master different techniques in that sense. They can precisely be those who may offer support to the first ones.

Finally, there are people who master both aspects and their contribution is, therefore, extremely valuable to the training efforts that want to be made.

It is almost certain that we can find some people who have the above mentioned characteristics, and it is one of the challenges of a Training Committee to be able to single them out, motivate them, and integrate them into its training plans. Obviously, this does not mean that an enterprise always has the necessary staff to develop training actions of any kind and under any circumstances. On such occasions it will be necessary to resort to external staff or to institutions or bodies which specialise on providing the required training. In any case, it is always good to know as exactly as possible what it is needed to achieve the expected effects.

At a second level, it is necessary to have the availability of an appropriate infrastructure and equipment to carry out training. Although nowadays training at the workplace is strongly promoted, the conditions not always favour its total or partial implementation.

Some mainly theoretical contents may require a classroom to be properly taught, and despite the fact that some enterprises have taken this into account

and have got special or adaptable rooms for that purpose, it is not always the case.

At other times, the enterprise may be interested in its workers being trained in the use of new technologies before these are actually incorporated. In that case, it is possible to resort to training institutions which do have such technologies, to the suppliers, or even to internships in other countries.

It could also happen that, even with the appropriate equipment, it cannot be diverted from production, thus making it necessary to resort to outsourcing.

At a third level, there is the availability of didactic resources, different from the ones already specified in terms of infrastructures and equipment. We include here from paper and pencil or blackboards, to video sets, OHPs, personal computers, *datashow* (projects IT software such as Power Point or videos). But also, and specially, we refer to the opportunity to have training guides or manuals, exercises, and work dynamics particularly designed to cater for the areas that require the training and according to a methodology that both suits the enterprise and the worker. Regarding the former and the latter, the enterprise will not always have staff members like them, and it is common and reasonable to resort to agreements with third parties to devise a scheme of exchange, or to hire their services, to rent or purchase.

Finally, there is a fourth and fundamental level that consists in the availability of financial resources to support training actions. Once again, resources may come either from the enterprise itself or from outside. Although important enterprises and many transnational enterprises do have funds which are specially devoted to their workers' training, it is not the case in most enterprises, particularly small ones.

- *Appropriate knowledge about the enterprise's operations*

Among the aspects a trade union delegate should be able to handle, the most important one –though the hardest to achieve– is probably having broad and deep knowledge about the enterprise's operations. This type of knowledge includes, among other things, the following aspects:

Areas and processes: All enterprises –even the small ones– are usually divided into different areas and they carry out a number of processes. Large enterprises in the industrial age used to have –and still have– great complexity and multiple processes. Modern enterprises tend to reduce and integrate areas and they seek to identify their different processes in a better way. Small enterprises, in general, have the characteristic of being simpler, though they are not less capable of being analysed with the same criteria.

One of the main discussions among the field of business management is to place the emphasis on organising enterprises according to areas or processes. In the past, most enterprises –and even today the most traditional ones– are pic-

tured as being divided into big areas: administration, production, management, sales, etc., within which the different processes were included. Nowadays, the enterprises that adopt the most modern management approaches tend to trim down the number of areas and reduce their influence, giving more importance to the definition of processes, which are usually in touch with many areas.

In any case, to be able to know the areas and processes through which the enterprise's operation go, the relationships between the different areas, the different processes, and between areas and processes, will help the trade union delegate to suggest actions that tackle key issues and mean a real improvement in some aspect.

Staff structure: Another aspect the trade union delegate should be familiar with is the way in which the enterprise's staff is organised. This varies greatly among different enterprises, both in terms of their size and the activity they perform. There are complex enterprises with many hierarchical levels: directors' offices, sections, units. There are enterprises which are rather horizontal and despite having a certain hierarchical structure it is rather divided in terms of functions. The previous item, referred to areas and processes, becomes of key importance to understand how the enterprise's staff is distributed, what their relationships are and what functions they perform.

Ideal qualifications structure: By this we mean the qualifications the enterprise's workers should have, taking certain guidelines as reference. Such guidelines could be the present situation of the enterprise in terms of infrastructure, equipment, and technology, plus the objectives it pursues regarding production, sales, quality. This perspective of workers' qualification is the only variable upon which action is taken. It may also be a hypothetical guideline, in which qualification is regarded as being dependent on the transformations taking place at other dimensions (productive, technological, commercial, etc.). In this last sense, an enterprise is believed to introduce changes in several inter-dependent aspects: the need to incorporate new technology, increase production, improve the rates of productivity and be better positioned in the market, which all require training actions.

Present qualifications structure: But the "ideal" qualifications structure always needs to start from the basis of the enterprise's real situation regarding its workers' qualifications. What level of formal education have they reached? Do they have any kind of vocational or technical training? Did they receive such training at the enterprise itself, at other enterprises, or at an external institution? What competencies do workers actually master? These are some of the questions a trade union delegate should be able to answer before proposals are taken before the Committee itself.

Management approach: We have already said that enterprises have different management approaches both in productive and labour terms. In some cases, the approach is explicit and it is even documented. In other cases, there are implicit approaches or operational dynamics based on rather unclear rules and conceptions which are mainly intuitive or based on traditions or customs.

When the enterprise has an assumed and explicit approach, the trade union delegate should be familiar with it and be able to discuss it critically. When that is not the case, the trade union delegate may contribute to define and make it explicit, since it is always better to discuss and bargain when the concepts and assumptions on which the opposing party's (the enterprise) behaviour is based are clearly known.

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