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Improving Proximity Responses for the Adaptation of Vocational Education and Training

2015-1-ES01-KA202-015976

Guide 4:

HOW TO ASSESS THE IMPACT

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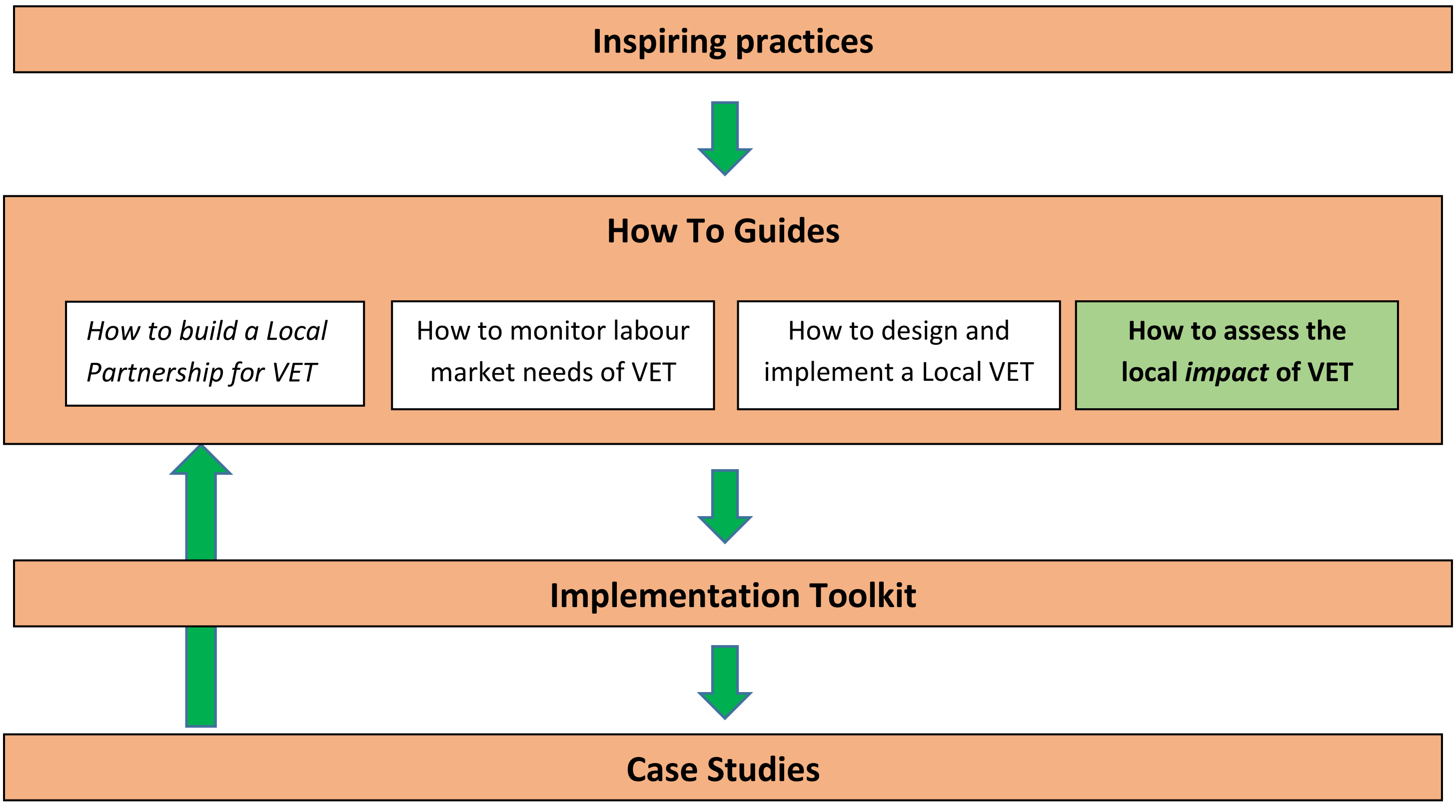
INTRODUCTION

This "How to Guide" has been developed in the framework of the Project "Improving Proximity Responses for Vocational Education and Training – ImproVET" funded by ERASMUS+, Key Action 2 under the contract 2015-1-ES01-KA202-015976. General information on the project and an overview on the structure of the Intervention Model can be found in the introduction part of the Intervention Model.

This is the How to Guide number 4 out of 4 within the Intervention Model. Each one of the Intervention Model elements can be read separately, but partners strongly encourage the reader to keep in mind its internal coherence as shown in the following diagram.



In this diagram, the *How to Guide* you are about reading has been highlighted in green. Along the following pages this Guide will provide tools, methodologies and tips that will help local agents involved in Vocational Education and Training to assess the impact of the VET program on trainees, companies benefiting of training, the local partnership and finally the territory on which the VET program applies.

PREVIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

The primary objectives of a Vocational Educational and Training (VET) and Continuous Vocational Educational and Training (C-VET) program is to increase knowledge and improve the marketable skills of workers. To this aim, it is essential to determine the impact of the program actions to determine to what extent objectives have been fulfilled. Therefore, VET programs need to go through evaluation processes that create valid, useful and reliable information for program revision and partnership effectiveness improvement.

Evaluating the impact is part of a learning-by-doing approach, also known as experimentalist governance approach. A learning-oriented system of governance of the local partnerships therefore means that they can adapt their practices and goals in light of comparative implementation experience. The output of the evaluation process is used to identify learning possibilities, both positive and negative to adapt and revise VET plans and practices as they develop. To stimulate learning, the evaluation exercise needs to be integrated with the whole system.

The evaluation exercise is a learning process itself: even the criteria for evaluation can be revised in light of experience with their application.

Also the participation of all parties interested in training, participants included, is fundamental for successful impact evaluation. We highly recommend to adopt participatory approaches also in the evaluation phase, in order to build consistent methodological frameworks that may represent all stakeholders' point of views.

When considering the evaluation of any project or programme, a number of key concepts should be noted, such as:

- the moment at which the evaluation is carried out;
- the questions the evaluation is expected to answer;
- the criteria and dimensions orienting the evaluation.

The first key concept relates to timing, which is often an underestimated exercise in evaluating. You may consider three kinds of evaluations:

Ex-ante evaluation: It takes place during the planning stage and implies evaluating the relevance and quality of it regarding its need or demand

Mid-term evaluation: It is carried out during the implementation and its purpose is to make changes and improvements so as to accomplish objectives.

Ex-post evaluation: It is done some time after having finished the training action and it aims at verifying whether the suggested objectives were fulfilled.

In this guide we focus on the ex-post evaluation, as we opted in the project for a result oriented approach. Nevertheless, it's of outmost importance to consider impact assessment in the project design since the programming phase of the VET intervention to be able to logically move from objectives to results and have at hand the right information and data when you will look for them.

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In ex-post evaluation, the exercise should not be conducted too soon after the intervention, as some time is necessary for the impacts to be verifiable. It should not be conducted too long after the intervention, either, as information may be contaminated by other variables and any results and recommendations that may emerge may come too late for decision-making. Impact evaluations are usually conducted six to twelve months after the intervention, in the case of evaluations that measure employability, although new information may be collected some time later (two years, for example) or even with panel methodology on a yearly basis, to see how employment conditions evolve over time. Shorter interventions, such as those conducted by enterprises, may require shorter timeframes (even as short as a few weeks or a month) to evaluate impacts.

The impact evaluation answers to support the programming process, thus helps to adjust, extend, reduce or replace interventions. It is useful in order to:

- Check whether a training is really a response to the demand for skills;
- Contribute to the creation of better systems for skills development;
- Create a wider and permanent information system which supports the definition of more consistent skills development interventions
- Improve the management of VET programmes and implement organizational learning processes.
- Spread knowledge on the programme and the various activities developed among stakeholders.
- Encourage an enhanced management and understanding of all parties involved
- Improve employability and employment rates of the active population of the territory
- Know to which extent a skills development program helped to improve enterprises' results
- Promote a culture of lifelong learning and skills development within organizations.

It is thus of utmost importance to define clearly which are the objectives (the questions) of the evaluation exercise and therefore clear which dimensions are to be investigated. The choice of methodologies are linked to the clarification of the above.

Evaluation methodologies may be quantitative and qualitative. It is advisable to incorporate qualitative and quantitative evaluation strategies. A mixed approach increases the possibilities of identifying priorities and difficulties based on the opinions and experiences of the stakeholders. Qualitative strategies involve the use of more flexible and focused methods for gathering opinions, representations and behaviours, which are difficult to access through quantitative perspectives.

Quantitative may be experimental and non-experimental. Experimental methodologies make use of "experiment-type" conditions to form the group of participants and the control group. The impact is determined on the basis of the changes recorded in the group of participants as compared with the control group. This approach uses statistical comparison techniques to establish the cause-and- effect (causal) relationship between the training activity and participants' changes. An essential characteristic is that impact is measured comparing participants with non-participants. Among the most famous and simple way to conduct a counterfactual analysis we can mention the difference-in-differences analysis.[1] This methodology is the one we suggest as the most effective for assessing the impact on individuals; it is described in Step 1 of this Guide.

Non-experimental design, instead, does not include control groups, but only the population that has taken part in the project. Surveys on participants on their employment conditions after attending a training are of this type.

In both cases, sampling methodologies are needed to ensure representativeness of the group under analysis. Sampling is the procedure whereby a sub-group is selected which faithfully represents the entire group of participants. There are statistical techniques for estimating the size and characteristics of a sample; the golden rule is that every programme participant should have the same chance of being selected for the sample.

Qualitative methodologies include non-numerical data sources of information. They do not measure but try to understand relations among factors and processes, perceptions and expectations of actors, explanations of results. Some of the typical questions asked in this kind of evaluation are:

- What were the impacts of the programme?
- What do these impacts mean for the beneficiaries?
- What mechanisms have generated these impacts?
- What is the context or environment in which these impacts were generated?

Qualitative methodologies are obtained at the place where the project or training activity has taken place, by means of direct observation, interviews, document review or a combination of these, with a wide coverage or using sampling techniques. It includes techniques such as case studies, context analysis, focus groups, and interviews.
Case study is one of the most widely-used qualitative methods. The purpose of case study is to analyse the effect of the programme on its beneficiaries, considering their needs, to what extent such needs have been effectively met by the activity. To that end, a case study uses multiple data collection techniques, including observation and analysis of available documentation and interviews to participants and employers.

[1] For more information on this evaluation technique, please refer to: J. Russell, R. Cohn, "Difference in difefrences", Bookvika publishing, 2012, and A. Martini, M. Sisti, "Valutare il successo delle politiche pubbliche – Metodi e casi", Il Mulino, 2009.

Another technique used is focus groups, mostly for understanding which significative change the interested parties perceive and how they explain it and evaluate it. In focus groups key players are called to participate to analysing the changes and the data collected in previous evaluations. It is either a good methodology to explore the various dimensions of impacts, or to comment and provide more depth to evaluation results stemming from other methodologies.

For the purpose of this Guide, we will not limit the analysis to the effects on the labour market activities and performances of the people who follow the classes, because in this way we would narrow down our research too much. Our aim is to understand the difference made by the VET programme also in the local ecosystem, and to compare the outcome produced by the intervention to what would have likely happened in the absence of the intervention.[2]

Impact evaluation needs to be planned from the outset of the training intervention, when it is in the design stage. The pre-requisite is the understanding and clear description of a programming, and namely the logical framework definition, where goals are classified hierarchically into general, immediate, specific, targets. At the end of the Guide you'll find a checklist for controlling the set of prerequisites for a good evaluation. In the planning phase, you need to define a design that clearly establishes the different stages of the evaluation and specifies the activities that will be carried out, a timetable for each of these activities, the resources needed and the budget for implementation. Be aware that impact analysis is an activity that needs resources as other activities.

All considering, we suggest to use the simplest design possible, as the more complex a methodology, the more costly it is, and the greater the chances of jeopardizing the viability of the impact evaluation. An option is to decide between an internal and an external evaluation, based on the resources available, as it is important to set aside financial resources for the impact evaluation, at the design stage, as the availability of such resources is an unavoidable conditioning factor.

[2] White, H. (2006) Impact Evaluation: The Experience of the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank, World Bank, Washington, D.C.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The following description of the process to be carried out to perform an impact analysis consists of four steps:

1. Assessing the impact on individuals
2. Assessing the impact on companies
3. Assessing the impact on local partnership
4. Assessing the impact on the territory

We believe that the impact assessment shall include the four levels, but, again, timing and budget constraints could suggest to concentrate on one or more. In case of constraints, we warmly suggest to prioritize step 1 in order to have feedbacks on the primary goal of VET, namely employability and employment of participants. In other terms, the effects on individuals represent the cornerstone of the whole impact evaluation design.

DESCRIPTION

Step 1: Impact on individuals

Description

People who participate in training can access better working and payment conditions, a higher employability and a better quality of life. Developing qualifications and competencies should guarantee their capacity to adapt to changes in technologies and the organization of work. Furthermore, recent research conducted by CEDEFOP has proved that vocational training can foster confidence and self-esteem, contributing to the individual's engagement with their family and society.

Assessing the impact of the training on the individuals, the following features and evaluation questions shall be considered:

- impact on skills and competences: did trainees improve their skills? Do they know how to perform new tasks?
- relationships with other individuals: did trainees learn from relations with trainers and mentors? If yes, what (soft skills)? Did the relations with other trainees empowered self-esteem and self-confidence?
- recognition of achievement: has the training lead to the qualification of skills?
- more probability to find a job or have a better job: has training been useful to find a job? Have competencies demanded at work been developed? Have working conditions improved? Has income improved because of the newly acquired competencies? Has employability improved?

The main feature of VET deals with the ways in which the content of the learning experience impacts on individuals' skills and capabilities. We focus here on whether the skills, knowledge and competences learned in VET may be translated into economic and non-economic outcomes, even if you shall consider that, most programs, and namely IVET, provide also a set of skills that do not focus exclusively on the technical aspect of the profession, but also on other skills that are more general and useful for daily activities.

Another feature relates to the formation of social relations, both between learners and between learners and teachers, mentors, masters and employers, as some, and not of minor importance to the effect of employability, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups, the benefits of VET are based on socialization, through the transmission of attitudes and behaviours. Relationships between learners and mentors are important: industrial mentoring in schools through business- education partnerships; community mentoring aimed at supporting young people from ethnic minorities; or mentoring as an intervention responding to issues of social exclusion are of crucial importance to enhance the employability of learners through the acquisition of soft skills.

Even if in several European countries vocational qualifications tend to be perceived as second best to academic qualifications, the attractiveness of VET is mostly related also to the recognition of qualification, which is in turn a lever in the labour market.

In the following paragraphs, we will describe how to set up the assessment of VET on the individuals.

Building the experimental group

The first and most critical task is to design the treated and the control group (non-treated). After the launch and advertisement of the training programme, the number of applications should be broad enough to make reasonable inferences starting from it. When the deadline for the enrolment is closed, the selection of the two groups should start. The members of the two groups should know taking part in the selection process entails that they should be available in the future for quick checks of their occupational status, so to gauge the effect of the programme. In this phase, maybe counter intuitively, the aim should not to pick the most suitable profiles to take part in the programme, but rather to create two groups whose components are similar enough. The aim of the impact assessment is, as a matter of fact, to understand whether the whole training is useful, to spot weaknesses and amend them. Also, if the treated group does not achieve more successful results than the non-treated group, then the effect of the training is questionable, and major improvements should be made, or the project design restarted from scratch.

The indicators for creating and monitoring the two groups, participating and not participating to the training, are both quantitative and qualitative. The rationale behind this choice is the quest for having an evaluation as sound as possible, and limiting the assessment to only one family of indicators gives a partial view of the process. We will limit the indicator list to the most obvious ones, but this partial list should likely be completed with more programme specific ones, at the discretion of the programme governing board, and of the evaluation team. Nevertheless, the evaluator should know a trade-off exists between the comprehensiveness of the evaluation form, and the responsiveness of the people belonging to both groups: the more the evaluation is time consuming, the higher the number of dropouts from the process.

Starting with quantitative indicators, the groups sampling should consider at least:

- Activity rate: the percentage of both groups, both employed and unemployed, composing the manpower supply in the local labour market. This indicator considers the effect on the willingness to work of the participants, regardless of their working condition, starting the collection of data before the start of the programme;
- The Employment rate: similarly, the employment rate should consider the working condition of the applicants, so to check whether the people willing to engage in the courses are former students just entering in the labour market, unemployed, professionals (checking the presence of entrepreneurs), or other status;
- The sector of work (in case of professionals) or the field of study (in case of students), to see if they want to improve their skillset or they want to change their occupational group and/or sector.

As for qualitative indicators, the most relevant are:

- The informal skills of the participants to the project, including the skills they claim to have, even without certification;
- Their motivation to enter the programme;
- The importance of the learning objectives of the VET programme in their choice to participate;
- The perceived value and the opportunities of the VET programme.

Both sets of indicators are usually measured using questionnaires with closed and open questions but, if an interview phase is foreseen, the information available should be completed by the committee in charge of selecting the applicants to the training course. This holds especially for the qualitative indicators.

Analysing the effect on learning and skills

The second task is assessing the learning outcome consequent to the training. The assessment of the learning seeks to assess the effectiveness of the training action in terms of how it developed the competencies of trainees. The evaluation is carried out using instruments for assessing learning, for instance: questionnaires, final tests, observation of performance, portfolio of evidence or other appropriate modalities for the type of competency to be evaluated.

To assess it means to measure what kind of knowledge has been acquired by the participants and which new skills have been developed. We suggest a self-perceived assessment, as other methodologies and indicators are quite complex. Good proxies for learning are skills recognitions schemes, such as the issue of qualification certificates or validation procedures, generally activated by public employment services, social partners' agencies or educational centres.

Consider that when the training session was planned, a list of specific learning objectives was set: these should be the starting point for your measurement. Keep in mind that you can measure learning in different ways depending on these objectives, and depending on whether you are interested in changes to knowledge, skills, or attitude.

Pre and post training tests must be completed by every participant, possibly in anonymous form. In this case though, anonymity is not a mandatory condition as participants have less opportunity to distort their answers. The pre-assessment shall be carried out in the first stage of training. It partially assesses the design and particularly focuses on the process and the resources used, from the trainee's point of view.

The post assessment examines how trainees react to training: how they assess the relevance of content, the performance of teachers, the organization, the methodology, the achievement of objectives and other general aspects of the training intervention. It generally involves the use of questionnaires that trainees fill in once the training action is completed. Other techniques, such as work groups or in-depth interviews, are also used. In most training institutions, the use of satisfaction questionnaires is common practice.

Analysing the effect on employability

The effects on employability of trainees is an ex post exercise, therefore you'll have nothing to do during the training except to set several deadlines to evaluate the programme and its effects on the two groups. We suggest you set controls after 6 months, 1 year, 3 years, as the survey should be repeated several times to be able to analyse both short and medium term effects of the training.

The control should to be made on all the indicators that have been used in setting the control group, while adding new ones that can be relevant. It is important to notice that some of them need to be changed. For instance, the motivation to enter in the programme should be changed in a personal comment explaining whether it was worth to undertake the training (it can become a question for the control group in case they find another position in another sector).

The treated group will have additional questions aiming at understanding what has been learnt during the training.[3] It is the standard evaluation part of the greatest part of the projects that in our case should be analysed in the broader frame that the counterfactual analysis allows.

The additional questions to the treated group revolve on a deeper understanding on the following themes:

[3] An interim evaluation is also foreseeable throughout the process for the treated group.

a) the effectiveness of the training in keeping the attention and interest high throughout its duration;
b) the validity of the exercises;
c) the ease of navigation (in case the course was on-line); and
d) the possibility to apply what they have learned during the course for job search or in their daily work.

Questions b) and d) will be repeated during the following surveys on the effect of the programme in the following years.

Key questions and critical points

As for the setting of the control group:

- The selection process should consider the needs of the impact assessment. The evaluator must have a say in the process from its start;
- During the selection process there should be a survey of basic indicators that should be collected and checked regularly afterwards;
- These should be both quantitative and qualitative (considering motives that lead to the decision to participate in the training process);
- The key characteristics of the profiles chosen for the two groups (the treated and the control group), should be as similar as possible;
- A higher number of people in the groups raises the statistical soundness of the evaluation;
- The dropouts in both groups create attrition and minimizing it is key;
- Live interviews tend to engage the respondents the most, followed by telephone interviews, and by written questionnaires;
- The participants' feedback plays an essential and immediate role in monitoring and improving the training quality in terms of organization and content;
- It is very important that feedback tools provided should not require a long time to be filled and should be mandatory to complete. This will minimize the risk of people not completing those, which would lead to inconsistency in the measurements;
- It would be ideal to have some benchmark values to be able to compare the data with acceptable performance standards for the training provider;
- As a suggestion, usually these assessments are expressed using simple numbers, with ordered values (negative, insufficient, sufficient, good, excellent) or with reaction scales. These are the simplest ways to measure;

As for the learning and skills assessment

- The evaluator needs to be in touch with both the treated and the control group, and a stable figure is more advisable: the bond with the people is key;

- The evaluation should be unbiased and independent from the trainers: the only relevant stakeholders for the evaluators are the ones in the boarding group of the programme;
- The evaluator should draft a report with the sheer facts, and reports strengths and weaknesses of the programme;
- Possible suggestions should be kept in a different section;
- The evaluator should try to distinguish the problems affecting the design of the programme, from the ones revolving more around the quality of the teachers/ the practical experience.

As for the employability

- Effects on job finding, in case of VET, and on career or job re-placement, in case of CVET, are subject to many external factors. As they are measured over a short, medium and long period of time, you shall consider also factors such as changing in individual personal goals, family conditions, exposure to job offering not linked to the training.
- Change in employment status must be assessed considering the type of job: contract, duration, partial or full time, are dimensions that give a different value to the result of the evaluation
- As VET has direct and indirect effects, above all on personal attitudes and soft skills, which are not often recorded in formal end of training evaluations, the assessment shall consider also these kinds of effects on individuals, as they are strong factors in employability according to many research findings.

Inspiring experiences and useful tools

Here below an updated collection of the measurement techniques and tools required for the qualitative survey with the training participants:

- The Rating Scale
- Diaries and checklist for observation by the tutor (on going)
- Questionnaires (ex ante, on going, ex post)
- "Assessment Days" be implemented with trainees (ex post); The format of an assessment day could vary from company to company. It might involve one or more pf the following types of interviews, such as: group, panel and individual interviews. Or it may be required to complete a range of tests and group exercises. trainees could be asked to give a short presentation or perhaps even a complete written exercise, such as: an in-tray exercise or a 'case study' one.
- "Assessment expectations" of trainees about training (ex-ante, ex-post).

Results and outputs for the Step

As for building the experimental group

- An initial assessment of the characteristics of all the respondents
- Two groups of people as similar as possible, one being the treated group, and the other one the control group
- A full-fledged list of tools for feedback measurement, both qualitative and quantitative
- Timeline of the assessment activity and reporting
- Tools to assess the participants’ attitude
- Tools to assess the participants’ prerequisites

As for assessing effect on learning and skills

- Tools to assess the actual learning
- A report with all the information collected, divided by phase;
- Constant comparison between treated and control group;
- A section more focused on the execution on the training, based on information collected through interviews with the treated group;
- Optional: recommendation for the future.

Step 2: Impact on companies

Description

The second step of the programme impact assessment deals with impact on companies taking part in the training programme and/or employing trainees. In comparison with the impact assessment of the participants, the quantity of information that is possible to obtain from them is more limited, and it should rely more on self-assessment conducted by the companies' executives or HR staff.

Two classic examples of indicators are the output and the productivity of the former trainees of the VET programme, in comparison with other newly hired staff members. While it may be possible to have companies properly tracking these two indicators, it is most often the case for them to rely on the opinion of supervisors, which express a subjective point of view.

Even with these premises, the feedback of companies should not be overlooked in impact assessments. Some evaluations make it somehow contingent upon the impact on the participants of the programme, but this approach should be amended. As a matter of fact, VET programmes should aim at the needs of the local companies (especially those taking part in the programme), and their feedback should be highly considered to provide a training that is as tailored as possible to the needs of the territory.

Ideally, the presence of companies and SMEs members in the programme board is highly recommended, so that they can have a say in the programme design and they can directly feed the discussion on how to amend the VET programme for the future editions. This is especially useful concerning:

- Possible organizational improvements;
- New topics to be dealt with during the programme; and in extreme cases
- Reshuffle of the trainers in case the outcome is considered unsatisfactory.

To fully fulfil the needs of the community, a high level of coordination among all the stakeholders is advisable. To this end, it would be important to consider the number of collaboration agreements between companies and SMEs on one side, and Public

Employment Services (PES), research institutes, universities, secondary education schools, and training providers on the other side.

Two dimensions must be considered: the agreements among the stakeholders involved in the project, and agreements among stakeholders involved in the sector of the programme, but not directly in the project.

Key questions and critical points

- It's not always possible to analyse the behaviour at workplace before the training and often it is not possible to extract the necessary data from assessments executed by the training provider itself (for example). For this reason, often it's necessary to rely only on the evaluation after the event, assess the results with behaviour data collected using interviews of the participants and other subjects in the company.
- It's important to realize that behaviour can only change if conditions are favourable. For instance, imagine you've skipped measurement at the first two previous levels and, when looking at your group's behaviour, you determine that no behaviour change has taken place. Therefore, you assume that your trainees haven't learned anything and that the training was ineffective. However, just because behaviour hasn't changed, it doesn't mean that trainees haven't learned anything. Perhaps their boss won't let them apply new knowledge. Or, maybe they've learned everything you taught, but they have no desire to apply the knowledge themselves. The feedback of the companies should weigh as much as the one received by participants;
- Including people from the companies in the programme boards or in their steering committees helps them to have a say in the programme and to make the trainings as relevant as possible to the needs of the local economic ecosystem;
- The highest cooperation among all the stakeholders involved should be sought;
- The indicators are more qualitative in this phase, and the quantitative ones should be exploited fully.

Inspiring experiences and useful tools

In some cases, it is difficult to disentangle a specific indicator targeting one person, especially in companies heavily relying on team work. Therefore, the evaluation plan shall complement the list with other indicators fitting the specific programme and sector.

Among the quantitative indicators to be considered, we can list:

- Subjective feedback on the level of output and of productivity of employed ex-trainees, expressed by the person in charge of the supervision concerning the level of the output and the productivity
- Need for internal training to complement trainee skills
- In case of CVET,

- increased employee retention, in comparison with other new employees who did not take part in the VET training;
- Increased output or productivity (if quantitative indicators are available)
- Reduced waste, to measure the efficiency;
- Quality rating, if available;
- Increased sales, as a proxy for quality;[4]

- In both cases (VET and CVET)
  - Changes in the production system or quality management, due to the person coming from the VET programme
  - Increased customer satisfaction based on customers' qualitative feedback. [5]

Results and outputs for the Step

- Report on company satisfaction of ex-trainees' outputs (VET) or trained employees (CVET)
- Number of companies or SMEs represented in the VET programme board or steering committee
- Proper support and involvement of the companies taking part in the programme
- Agreement between companies and training providers on possible programme improvements.

[4] It is important to be extremely careful with these indicators, since sales in many sectors tend to relate more to the economic cycle, advertisement, trends, rather than (or in addition to) quality.
[5] Feedback of customers can be used as second best, but an issue of representativeness arises if the ratio of customers leaving them is below a certain threshold.

Step 3: Impact on local partnership

Description

Depending upon the context, a local partnership may improve the quality of training delivered by public training systems, but also address the skills needs of enterprises and social cohesion in different ways:

- strengthening of existing training devices (with an emphasis on the equation between supply and demand)
- trainer training and retraining
- strengthening of steering capacities (support to policy definition, programming and monitoring-assessment tools, new occupational standards)
- development of vocational training financing tools
- development of new training schemes (especially in the form of sectoral Public Private Partnerships)
- incorporation of vocational training components in sectoral projects (agriculture and rural development, healthcare, …).

Key questions and critical points

- it's crucial to distinguish different natures and goals of local partnerships to correctly assess them. As for example, there are these possible cases: modernisation of a public training mechanism in conjunction with the private sector; creation of sectoral centres under private management; support to one or several large private companies entrusted with a public service mission.
- Also, engagement and involvement may differ case by case and set different contexts to be considered when assessing the local partnership capacity. In example, you could consider the degree of involvement of the partners in managing and financing the mechanism, and the resulting legal framework;
- Partnership governance may vary from legally established consortium to informal consulting and coordination mechanism.
- Partners have different interests and roles. For instance, enterprises express need for skills for economic competitiveness in the short and medium terms (train

professionals) and are mainly interested in continuing education; job creation; financing of continuing education (by way of taxes). Professional organisations define jobs and skills frames of reference. Public bodies are responsible for VET supply; ensure VET's role of social integration (initial training for youth), implying a medium and long-term vision of the challenge of training (train an individual); recognize the validation of diplomas and certifications; etc. These requires that assessing the local partnership considers also how these are harmonized.
- Training actors often do not speak business language as enterprises do; this calls for a system of intermediation of the local pact;

Inspiring experiences and useful tools

Methodologies to enquire the effectiveness of local partnerships are mainly qualitative: documentary analysis, ex ante and ex post SWOT analysis, focus groups, interviews, the last two involving Pact promoters and national experts.

Results and outputs for the Step

- Ex ante and ex post description of local partnership nature, composition, governance model, goals, relevance in the territory
- Desk analysis of local partnership activity report
- Interviews and focus groups to local partnership partners and local stakeholders
- Local partnership effectiveness assessment report

Step 4: Impact on territory

Description

Society perceives the impact of the development of competencies as jobs of higher quality, higher employment and formality rates, reduction of poverty, social inclusion, respect for labour rights and competitiveness on global markets. Training should respond to the productive, technological, labour and socio-cultural context, as well as to the characteristics, conditions, needs and expectations of its target individuals. This is the double relevance of training, both social and economic.

Additionally, the development of qualifications can also help build more equitable societies. There is a close relationship between the various forms of labour market exclusion – such as unemployment, underemployment and low wages – and poverty and discrimination. An adequate training environment encourages team learning, as well as the development of knowledge and better attitudes, motivations and values, all of which lead to a better social integration. The recognition granted with a certificate of competence has a significant value in the labour market and in the educational environment, promoting social participation and the commitment to lifelong learning.

The assessment of the project impact on the territory is substantially different from the assessment conducted in the previous steps. This relates mainly to the fact that a longer perspective has to be taken into account, and a different toolset.

For what concerns the first point, while the effects on workers, companies or other stakeholders on the territory requires a relatively small amount of time, the impact on the whole territory has to involve all the relevant actors in a predefined area, as well as their interactions and the overall ecosystem, not only economic.

As for the toolset, specific EU guidelines shed light on which practices have to be implemented.[6] In this how to guide, we will try to summarize the most relevant messages. Normally, local actors and policy makers rely on ex-ante impact assessment, based on four sub-steps, namely:

[6] Please refer to the better regulation toolbox, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/info/files/better-regulation-toolbox_en

- The quantification of the issues at stake in the territory;
- The definition of a likely scenario for the future, the so-called "territorial baseline scenario";
- The evaluation of the likely effects of the policy proposal (in our case the VET programme) vs. the territorial baseline scenario;
- The involvement of experts and stakeholders.[7]

The VET programme territorial impact assessment should rely on the programme drafted at local level by the regional players and embed the programme evaluation within this framework. In this guide it is assumed, according to the most recent territorial literature and on the information available on online platforms[8], that the regional strategies build upon regional strengths and are in coherence with local players and the resources.[9] If these assumptions are satisfied, regions can become catalysts to revitalize the territory, and potentially become a magnet attracting outsiders or former inhabitants.[10]

Key questions and critical points

- Is the VET programme coherent with the strengths and weaknesses of the territory?
- Is it coherent with the regional/local/urban strategy?
- Is it possible to align it better with the resources and personnel available?
- The impact assessment on the territory has to be done every one or two years, taking into account the differences occurred at local level and changes in the regional strategy
- Describe the changes brought about by the training activities. They call for comparing current conditions with those prior to the implementation of the programme and at each of the evaluation milestones scheduled. To that end, it is necessary to have the so-called "baseline" and intermediate, final and impact assessment milestones.
- Reflect on the changes recorded in the target population (salaries, employment, welfare), as well as qualitative situations (satisfaction, health condition, well- being).
- Define how the local partnership is ensuring soundness and reliability
- Focus on economic return on training, so as to prove that it was worth the effort
- Assessment can be quantitative and qualitative, the latter being based on the participant's perception or degree of certainty with regard to a given situation.

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[7] For further information, please refer to: https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/territorial-policies/themes/territorial-impact-assessment

[8] E.g. http://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/?ind=popden&ru=fua&s=0&c=1&m=0&f=1&p=0&swLat=29.916852233070173&swLng=-23.818359375&neLat=63.074865690586634&neLng=45.615234375

[9] Cf. C. Salone (2010) 'Institutional Arrangements and Political Mobilization in the New Italian Regionalism: The Role of Spatial Policies in the Piedmont Region', European Planning Studies

[10] The reference here is at the jobs follow people paradigm developed by R. Florida in his "the rise of the creative class", edited in 2002.

Inspiring experiences and useful tools

The set of indicators presented in this section aims at providing a proxy of the effects of the VET programme in the territory.

The main quantitative indicator is the number of people willing to be enrolled in the programme. This constitutes a solid index of success not only of the VET programme, but of consistency with the territory, its network of institutions and players, its population and its resources. A rising number of potential participants demonstrate that the VET programme fulfilled an existing need.

For what concern the qualitative indicators, the more relevant and valid horizontally across the sectors are:

- The demographic origin of the people willing to be enrolled, to identify if the VET appeals a specific group/a narrow part of the population, or if it attracts across them;
- The geographical origin of the people willing to be enrolled, so to understand if the VET programme attracted people outside the original region and it has become a magnet for new labour force/for people coming from territories with similar ecosystems and having similar needs;
- Innovation, if the programme leads to the creation of new products, services or working organization methods;
- The creation, or the strengthening, of cluster at regional level.

The last point would represent an irrefutable indicator of success of the programme from a territorial perspective. Clusters are networks of companies (sometimes several SMEs, sometimes SMEs carrying out satellite activities for one or more big companies), research institutions, and universities. Their characteristic is that they are focused on the same business sector, and that they are heavily interconnected. Research institutions redefine the state of the art of the sector, fuelling the growth of companies in constant exchange with the education system. From their side, schools and universities focus on the sector and provide new profiles for all the local actors. Moreover, clusters tend to be more resilient to economic downturns.[11] The rise of a cluster represents one of the highest forms of synchrony between a territory and its economy, and it attracts several academic research[12] and mapping exercises.[13]

[11] P. Martin, T. Mayer, F, Mayneris, (2013), Are clusters more resilient in crises? Evidence from French exporters in 2008-2009.

[12] A whole literature started from the work: M. Porter (1990), The Competitive Advantage of Nations, New York: The Free Press.

[13] http://www.clustermapping.us/ , and http://www.clusterobservatory.eu/index.html

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Results and outputs for the Step

- Mapping of status ex ante of territory in relation to local partnership, local needs assessment and training program goals
- Context desk analysis ex post
- Stakeholders interviews and focus groups analysis
- Territorial impact report.

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CHECK LIST

Pre-requisite check

Dimension	Tasks	Check
Identify the expected change of the VET program	- definition general and specific objectives of the training - define the population and actors that are going to be effected by the VET program	
Select and define impact indicators	- identify measurable or observable indicators for those objectives - describe the initial situation in relation to those indicators (baseline)	
Determine the period necessary to evaluate the impact	- define the time for the expected changes in relation to each objective	
Define the partnership involvement	- define actions and methodologies to consider all actors concerned point of view	
Plan the evaluation	- Assess design alternatives based on the object of the evaluation, the subjects of the evaluation and the resources available - Define timing of evaluation tasks - Define the impact evaluation plan - Identify responsibilities and roles - Ensure financial resources for impact evaluation	

Impact assessment check

Dimension	Tasks	Check
Individuals	- Sampling of trainees and control group - Elaboration of questionnaires - Ex-ante survey - Baseline reporting - Ex post survey - Data analysis - Reporting	
Companies	- Sampling of companies - Contact list of managers or HR managers - Interview grid definition - Ex ante interviews to companies managers - Ex ante needs assessment and reporting - Ex post interviews to companies managers - Ex post needs assessment and reporting - VET providers / companies agreements	

	- Companies and SMEs entering in programme board/steering committee - Agreement among SMEs/ PES/research institutes/universities/secondary education schools/ training providers	
Local partnership	- Local partnership fact sheet and description of scope, governance, goals, relevance in the territory - Desk analysis of local partnership activity report - Interviews and focus groups to local partnership partners and local stakeholders - Local partnership effectiveness assessment report	
Territory	- Mapping of status ex ante of territory in relation to local partnership, local needs assessment and training program goals - Context desk analysis ex post - Stakeholders interviews and focus groups analysis - Territorial impact report	

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT IT

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