

SECOND ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Independent evaluation of training and learning activities on the thematic area of “Strengthening employers’ organizations”

I. Introduction

1. In the *ILO Field operations and structure, and technical cooperation review* (2013), concern was expressed about the relevance of the Centre’s services to ILO constituents. In response to this concern, the Centre committed to conduct independent evaluations of thematic technical areas of expertise on a cyclical basis. Two independent evaluations of thematic areas were consequently undertaken in 2014 and 2015.¹
2. In 2016, the thematic area of expertise selected for independent evaluation was the “Strengthening of employers’ organizations”. The objective of the evaluation was to provide the Centre with evidence of the relevance and effectiveness of its training and learning activities related to this area of expertise. The findings and recommendations will inform decisions about the further development and evolution of the Centre’s portfolio of training and learning activities in this area in 2017, and beyond in the 2018-19 biennium.²
3. The evaluation reviewed selected training and advisory services of the Centre aimed at strengthening employers’ organizations, including interventions to:
 - enhance capacity of their governing bodies, membership management structures and leadership to adapt to a changing policy environment and to fulfil their representative functions;
 - improve and innovate their service mix in order to retain and recruit members and to improve business performance;
 - improve their analytical capacity to engage in evidence-based policy advocacy on a broad range of policy issues affecting business.³
4. The evaluation was carried out in June - July 2016 and covered a sample of 15 relevant training and learning activities implemented in 2015. This allowed for a time lapse of at

¹ CC 77/4 and CC 78/3.

² The full text of the report of the independent evaluator is available at: www.itcilo.org/board

³ ILO Programme and Budget for the biennium 2016-17, p. 37.

least six months between participation in the activity and follow-up evaluation. The evaluation focused on 12 activities to strengthen employers' organizations undertaken by the Employers' Activities Programme of the Centre. In accordance with the Centre's policy and strategy to promote tripartism across the portfolio of all training programmes, the sample also included three activities organized by other training programmes that had registered the participation of employers' representatives.

Assessment criteria

5. The evaluation focused on the relevance of the selected activities to the needs of the participants and, where applicable, to the institutions supporting their participation; the validity of the activity design; efficiency; effectiveness; impact, and sustainability.

Relevance and outreach of the activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are the activities based on the needs of employer constituency and how are these needs identified? • Outreach: did you reach the right people to be relevant and effective? • What factors were considered in designing the activities?
Validity of the design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the design and contents contribute to achieving the intended results? • Did the end-of-activity evaluation and (where applicable) the follow-up activity evaluation effectively measure results and progress? • Was the design of the activities in terms of duration and timing valid?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the training objectives been achieved in relation to the training activities selected for the evaluation? • Which ones were more effective and why? • Which gaps remain and how could these be addressed through follow-up activities? • To what extent have the activities contributed to strengthen the institutional capacity of employers' organizations? • How and to what extent did the training contribute to the ILO Programme and Budget targets?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the intended capacity results of the activities logical and realistic in terms of addressing the needs? • Have the resources invested into the delivery of the activities been used in the most efficient manner? How economically were resources and inputs (funds, expertise, time etc.) converted to results? Did the results justify the cost? • What time- and cost-efficiency measures could have been introduced without impeding the achievement of results? • Were the roles and responsibilities of Centre officials, including programme management, who were responsible for the implementation of the activities, clearly defined and understood?

Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the employer constituents' perceived benefits from the activities (differentiated by groups)? • What evidence exists of constituents benefiting from the activities? • What actions might be required for achieving long-term impact? • How do the programmes contribute to strengthening the capacity of EOs overall to play an effective role in the national development process? • How well did the activities under evaluation operationalize the Centre's Strategic Plan for 2012-2015, the ILO Outcome 9 strategy, ACT/EMP Turin and ACT/EMP HQs workplans for the 2014-15 biennium? • How well did the activities contribute to the CPO's 801 of DWCPs? (CPOs 801 series are designed to specifically deliver outcomes and activities to develop institutional capacity of employers' organizations and directly contribute to the results reported under Outcome 9).
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent can the capacity developed through the evaluated activities be maintained/replicated? • How likely is it that the results of the activities will be maintained or upscaled by the participants?

Methodology

6. The evaluation relied on several data collection techniques. This "mixed methods" approach combined both hard and soft evidence and involved multiple means of analysis:
 - Desk review: Analysis of the documentation related to the training activities under evaluation: flyers, training needs analysis, former evaluations reports, end-of-activity questionnaires, follow-up surveys and other documents reporting evidence on the training covered by the evaluation.
 - An online survey, to ask participants about the impact and results of the training activities. A total of 410 participants were surveyed, with a response rate of 46 per cent.
 - Face-to-face interviews with staff of the Centre, including the Programme Manager, Activity Managers and Programme Assistants in the Employers' Activities Programme, as well as staff from other Training Programmes who contributed to and/or participated in the selected activities.
 - Interviews via skype or telephone with employers' organizations who had sponsored participants in training activities of the Centre, to explore tangible and non-tangible changes resulting from the activities.
 - Five case studies of employers' organizations applying the knowledge acquired by training participants.

II. Summary of the conclusions and recommendations made by the evaluator⁴

Conclusions

7. **Relevance and outreach of the activities** – The programme officers reach out to employers' organizations when designing and programming a new training activity. They share a focus on assuring that the training activities answer the needs of employers' organizations. Participants are motivated to participate in the training activities, as they perceive them to offer significant professional advantages. Next to learning extra skills, ability to network is of prime importance. Seventy-eight per cent of the participants claim that the content of the training activity met their professional needs. The training activities experiment with a number of innovative practices for stimulating learning.
8. **Validity of the design** – The training activities of the Programme for Employers' Activities receive high activity evaluation scores from their participants, consistently higher than the Centre's baseline scores. The Programme does not systematically assess results and progress of employers' organizations after a training activity. The duration and timing of the training activities are of concern to a minority of participants. Some participants suggest an extension of the duration of their training.
9. **Effectiveness** – The vast majority of the participants (85 per cent) claim that their training provided them with knowledge of new ideas, theories or strategies to strengthen their employers' organization. They make a plea for more focus on practical issues, such as examples, approaches and case studies. The training activities provide content that is new for the participant, but often also improves the knowledge base of the organization.
10. **Efficiency** – The roles and responsibilities of Centre officials were clearly defined, understood and appreciated.
11. **Impact** – Seventy per cent of participants claim that they personally used the knowledge they acquired and have achieved positive results while doing so. This effectively strengthened their employers' organization. Sixty per cent of the employers' organizations have begun new initiatives as an outcome of a training activity. Content that is more adapted to the local context could, however, increase the long-term impact. Further, the impact in the national developmental process of the participating countries seems modest.
12. **Sustainability** – Virtually all projects initiated as an outcome of a training activity will be maintained. As they are perceived as successful, the vast majority of initiatives is expected to be up-scaled. However, a high turnover of trainees might hinder capacity-building within employers' organizations.

⁴ Quoted from the executive summary in pp. 3 ff. in the evaluation report; also refer to pp. 65 ff. in the report for a more detailed version of the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned.

Recommendations

- 13. A well-defined target group** – The Programme for Employers' Activities can establish a deep and almost personal relationship with its clients. The knowledge and familiarity with its customers is a major asset for the Programme and probably explains part of the high conversion to impact of its training activities.
- 14. Generating impact is difficult** – Generating impact should be the ultimate purpose of each training activity: a change in personal or organizational behaviour. This is, however, also difficult to achieve. The Centre deserves credit for venturing on this difficult path. As neither the Centre nor any other training institution has a decisive grip on these settings, one should be prudent in measuring, assessing and evaluating the impact of training activities.
- 15. Involving participants** – The Programme for Employers' Activities embeds a number of innovative approaches in its training activities, often directed towards more active involvement of participants. Such innovative methods require (more) efforts from the participants, both while preparing for a training activity and running the training activity. It should be noted that the participants do not mind these extra efforts from their side and evaluate them favourably.
- 16. A high turnover might hamper impact** – Over a period of one year, at least 19 per cent of participants left the employers' organization they worked for. This could hinder impact and capacity-building considerably.
- 17. The CRM collaboration as an exemplary impact-generating training** – The development and approach of the CRM system and training package is a good example of the intense and fruitful collaboration between the Programme for Employers' Activities and its target group. Each participating employers' organization embarks on a training trajectory spanning several months and contact moments. One cannot but note that "impact" is almost self-evident.

Lessons learned

- 18. Establishing an intense contact with a well-delimited target group: interviewing a small number of participants to measure impact evaluate training activities** – Becoming more acquainted with the impact and results of training activities does not necessarily imply a quantitative approach. The Centre could opt for a qualitative approach and focus on deepening its learning on what aspects of a training activity were of particular use and what could be improved. Such information could be collected with a limited number of individual interviews. These interviews would, after for instance six months of implementation, provide both a detailed insight into the impact of the training activities and be on the outlook for suggestions on how to improve a training activity. The programme officers are well placed to carry out (a small number of) such interviews.
- 19. Establishing intense contact with a well-delimited target group: organizing post activity follow up** – Throughout this evaluation, participants stressed the importance of (informal) contacts between participants, both during and after a training activity. This suggests that the Centre could provide added value and strengthen employers' organizations by facilitating or stimulating such post-activity network building, for instance by installing an online forum or organizing other low-budget follow-up activities.
- 20. Strengthening training components that facilitate impact** – While it is hard for the Programme for Employers' Activities to influence impact directly, it can nevertheless

stimulate impact indirectly by adapting the format of its training activities. It can build on a number of innovations with which the Programme has already experimented and that could be partly responsible for the high impact measured in the survey.

- 21. Involving participants** – Many participants state that the practical aspects of the training activities should be expanded. They suggest reserving more time for case studies, field trips and practical exercises. Respondents highlight the benefits of interactive sessions such as discussions, role-plays and team assignments. They suggest creating more room for interactivity in future training activities, as they felt that they learnt a lot during these interactive sessions.
- 22. Countering the negative implications of turnover** – Another approach to generating impact would be to reduce the impact of the high turnover rate, by stipulating that several participants from the same employers' organization take part in a training activity. This would ensure that knowledge and skills remain current in the employers' organization, even in the event of a trainee leaving. Similar actions also would include increased focus on local training activities (allowing for the participation of several persons from the same organization) and facilitating the dispersion of the content of the training within the employers' organization.
- 23. The local installation and training workshop of CRM** – One practical issue warranting some attention is the short time frame of the local installation and training workshop during a CRM project.

III. Management response

- 24.** The Centre welcomes the findings of the independent evaluation. It notes in particular that the evaluation found that the overall results of the training activities of the Centre to strengthen employers' organizations were very positive and significant in multiple areas and that it was possible to document that more than 85 per cent of all participants reported increased knowledge after training and that more than two out three of these participants went on to implement this knowledge to the benefit of their organization. The Centre acknowledges that these good results have been driven by the hard work and the commitment of the staff of the Employers' Activities Programme. The following paragraphs set down the management response to the issues raised and the recommendations made by the independent evaluator.
- 25.** The Centre will support the Employers' Activities Programme to further deepen the existing customer relationships with employers' organizations worldwide. In close consultation with the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities at Headquarters and with employers' specialists in ILO field offices, the Employers' Activities Programme will step-by-step build online learning platforms for each standard course that are to be linked to the e-campus of the Centre and will provide an internet-based backbone to communicate with participants before, during and after training. The learning platforms will be used to launch customer needs surveys before training, to provide access to training materials and exercises during training and to run Communities of Practice after training. The online learning platforms will be made widely available to staff from local employers' organizations, thus contributing to the wider dissemination of knowledge among the target group in the field and increasing the chance that institutional memory can be retained by the organization even if a former participant should decide to leave.
- 26.** Further to the concern for wider dispersion of knowledge among employers' organizations in a cost-effective manner, the Employers' Activities Programme will bring

to market in 2017 its first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). The MOOC will be targeted at board members of local employers' organizations.

27. The Centre will further refine its in-house monitoring and evaluation system, and support the Employers' Activities Programme to pilot follow-up evaluation surveys with small samples of former participants six-twelve months after training. These qualitative customer interviews are meant to complement the existing end-of-activity evaluation surveys and the external and independent impact evaluations. Their main purpose would be to verify emerging training impact, and at the same time to maintain relationships with former participants and incorporate their feedback into the design of new training courses. Pending the outcome of the pilot, the Centre might decide for a rollout of these customer panels among other Training Programmes.
28. The Employers' Activities Programme will increase the time allotted for CRM training of local employers' organizations.
29. The Employers' Activities Programme will expand the use of training courses built on the concept of multi-step learning journeys, where several learning contacts are made with participants face-to-face (either on Campus or in the field), and via distance learning modalities including webinars, online communities of practice, web coaching etc. More in particular, in line with the priority actions laid out under outcome 10 of the ILO Programme and Budget for 2016-17, the Employers' Activities Programme will roll out the Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprises training package that follows a modular and multi-step learning approach and blends face-to-face training with distance learning. Emulating the successful example of the CRM package, the EESE package will come complete with a software application for use by employers' organizations.
30. The Employers' Activities Programme will rely more strongly on local expertise to customize its training courses and to deliver training in the field. As in the past, the Programme will draw on the expertise of both employers' specialists in ILO field offices and local employers' organizations to make its courses fully relevant to local context; going forward, the Programme will emphasize more strongly on training these field employers' specialists as trainers in specific areas of interest that relate to its training Programme to in turn train local employers' organizations. This additional emphasis on a training of trainers approach denotes a shift in focus away from training on Campus in Turin towards training in the field *in cases* where training products of the Employers' Activities Programme have reached maturity. It implies that the Programme will in turn step up its new product development efforts in order to replenish its activity pipeline, stay relevant for its global constituency over time and to contribute to the sustainability of the operations of the Centre. The choice of these new products will be determined by the ILO Strategic Policy Framework 2018-2021, and might include training products to promote inclusion of people with disability at the workplace, and human resource management services for employers' organizations.

The Board is invited to provide its comments and guidance on the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluator, and on the management response, so that the comments and guidance can be taken into account by the Director in the follow-up.

Turin, August 2016