

Training & Employment

Democratising continuing training within French firms:

The role of information, career interviews and collective supports

The majority of executives know what possibilities are available in terms of training and take part in career interviews, whatever their company's training policy. Other employees have clearly more to gain from information provided, from the systematic implementation of professional interviews provided for by the 2004 training reform and from guarantees provided by collective supports. The deliberative area opened up by these instruments appears to reduce inequalities with regard to access to continuing training.

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Non-executives employees are those who have the most to gain from the opening of the dialogue on continuing training in companies. The dissemination of information, organisation of systematic career interviews and the existence of company agreements concerning training are just some of the things which seem to help reduce inequalities. This is shown by the results of a recent survey which for the first time juxtaposes and confronts the responses of 1 800 employees and those of their employers on conditions of access to training. The method used is very original in the French statistical system because the survey on employer-employee training (DIFES1) enables the responses of employees, training policies and human resource management in companies to be analysed (cf. table on final page). This approach helps opening up the "blind spot" of surveys on continuing training, which traditionally only examines one of the parts.

This methodology therefore seems particularly appropriate in order to report on the way in which the 2004 training reform is applied in companies. Over five years ago the social partners came to a unanimous agreement used as a basis for the Act of May 2004 relating to lifelong training and social dialogue, creating a framework whose aim is to "enable all employees to be active players in their training". Thus, the national interprofessional agreement and the law have deeply renovated the landscape of vocational training and particularly the conditions of access to training. They consecrate the existence of an intermediate area between training actions initiated by the employer within the framework of the training plan and those undertaken on the employee's initiative via individual training leave. These include actions covered by the individual right to training and also all those aimed at developing competences. They may be conducted outside working hours and could include a written commitment by the employer with regard to the impact of training. Career interviews may provide the opportunity to draft a formal agreement on these aspects. All of these changes aim to increase employees' scope of action.

However, as employees are invited to become active players in their training, increasing their responsibility, the need to provide them with tools enabling them to assume this responsibility becomes fundamental. In this context, the employee's ability to access information, to express themselves and be heard, are of vital importance. The main tools which can help them develop their action include: information made available by the company and the possibility to discuss training issues during interviews with line managers. Active employee involvement also requires the existence of collective supports, such as company agreements concerning training, offering guarantees in terms of procedures enabling employees to express their point of view. Respecting all of these items is an integral part of what could be described as the capability for voice. This cannot be summarised as a simple right to, but requires conditions to be guaranteed for ...

... this right to be effective. Disseminating these procedures enables debate and their specific impact on the access of employees to training are studied hereafter.

Non-executive staff, the main beneficiaries of the dissemination of information...

According to the CVTS3 survey data (cf. table on final page), the vast majority of companies said they provide information on training to their employees. Although almost all large sized companies are committed to such procedures, smaller companies are less involved whatever their business sector: approximately 80% of companies with less than 50 employees said they had informed their employees. On an initial level of analysis, the DIFES1 survey reveals two important dimensions. On the one hand, the fact that a company provides information does not necessarily mean that the employees say they have been informed. On the other hand, the scope of information varies according to the socioprofessional category of employees. Although on average two thirds of them said they had been informed of training possibilities in the company, this is the case for 85% of executives compared to only one out of two workers. On a second level of analysis, this linked employer-employee survey enables the employees' answers to be appreciated in the light of the policies described by the companies. Thus, the percentage of workers saying they had been informed increases by 65% when they work in a company which disseminates information, compared to companies which do not provide information. This increase is only 14% for executives. Overall, the information

disseminated by the company only provides a small additional gain for executives whilst it appears as essential for non-executives. 76% of executives declared that they have been informed of training possibilities even when the company provides no information on training, compared to hardly 30% of workers.

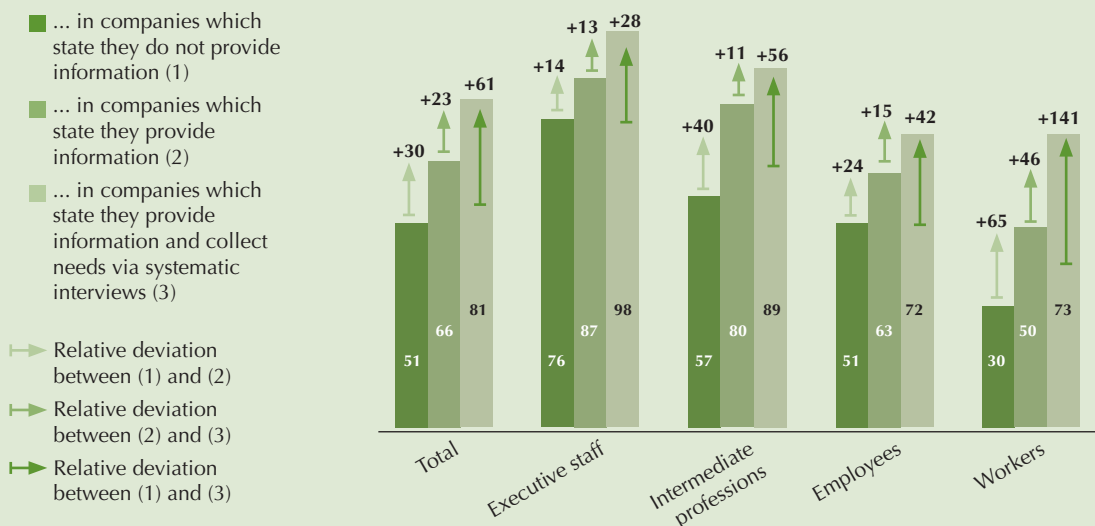
Furthermore, to ensure that information on training is received, companies must assign it with a specific function and this function must correspond to the expectations of any potential beneficiaries. Disseminating information on training has two basic functions. On the one hand, advertising the training plan which comes within the employer's prerogative, and trying to ensure it is fulfilled. On the other hand, starting a process for collecting expressed needs, ie. organising a deliberative area whose aim is to reconcile the employee's individual project and that of the company. Implementing a systematic process for collecting needs based on career interviews thus enables employees to take part in the joint construction of their training path, which for everyone encourages the appropriation of information. However, in this case too, the additional gain is higher for workers. The implementation of systematic interviews leads to an increase of 46% in the number who say they have been informed compared to companies which do not disseminate information, whilst there is only a 13% increase for executives.

... and the systematic implementation of career interviews

The 2004 continuing training reform provides for the organisation of career interviews between employees and line managers at least once every two years. In 2006, 54% of companies stated they had conducted such interviews. This practice is more common in the field of finance and insurance, where training is commonplace, but is still rare in transport, construction and the food industry, which resort to training less frequently. For all sectors, only 16% systematically carry out these interviews with all those concerned. The rate of companies which carry out interviews for all employee categories increases with the size of the company: 10% for companies with less

Information on training

Proportion of employees who say they have received information on training

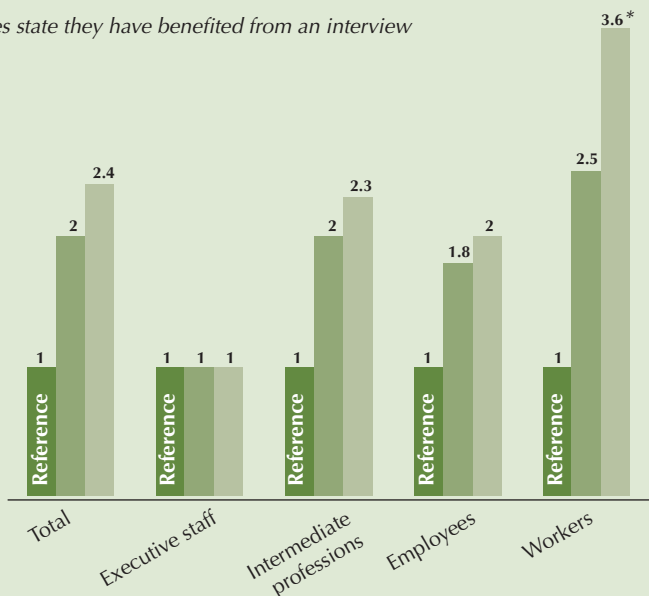


Source: DIFES1 - Field: employees from companies which employ 10 or more people.

■ Professional interviews

Relative probabilities that employees state they have benefited from an interview

- ... when the company conducts non-systematic interviews (reference)
- ... when the company conducts systematic interviews but has not signed a company training agreement
- ... when the company conducts systematic interviews and has signed a company training agreement



* Reading: In companies which systematically conduct interviews and which have signed a company training agreement, workers are 3.6 times more likely to state they have had a professional interview than those in companies which do not. The probability remains unchanged for executive staff.

These results come from logit models carried out according to socioprofessional categories. The variables introduced in the model are the level of generalisation of interviews by companies, the existence or not of training agreements and the size of companies as well as their business sector (industry or services). Probabilities are calculated with regard to a reference probability, equal to 1, shown in dark green on the graph.

Source: DIFES1 - Field: employees from companies which employ 10 or more people.

than 20 employees compared to 64% for those with over 1 000. Also, employees do not benefit from training homogeneously: 60% of executives say they have taken part in career interviews, compared to around 40% of intermediate professions and employees, and only a quarter of workers. This deliberative area, supposed to make the decision process more interactive, is therefore rarely a generalised practice for all employees. When the organisation of interviews is not generalised in companies, it is the non-executive staff which is most deprived.

The confrontation of companies' and employees' responses on this subject once again sheds light on the effects of company policies. Belonging to a company which systematically interviews all employees increases by 2.5 the probability for workers of declaring they have had an interview all other things being equal. This probability is multiplied by 2 for intermediate professions and by 1.8 for employees. Only executive staff stand out. Regardless of the extent to which interviews are generalised in the company, the probability of them saying they have participated does not vary. We can assume that conducting interviews with executive staff is already a regular practice in companies and that applying the reform above all enables non-executive staff to have a voice in the matter, *a fortiori* when it is combined with the existence of company agreements at least partially concerning training. Thus, non-executive staff gain most from the implementation of systematic interviews.

Reducing the extent of unequal access to training

Unequal access to continuing training has often been highlighted since the promulgation of the Act of 1971. This tendency still remains relevant today. According to the CVTS3 survey's data, although on average almost one out of every two employees followed a course financed by companies in 2005, there are great discrepancies between the different socioprofessional categories. The rate of access to all forms of continuing training is 57% for staff and 62% for intermediate professions, whilst this figure is below 40% for other categories: 39% for employers and 37% for workers.

However, the way in which companies seize the possibilities offered by the reform strongly conditions access to training for employees and workers. This varies according to whether companies provide information or not, and according to whether career interviews are generalised or not. Rates of access by employees and workers are higher again in the case of companies which say they provide information and conduct interviews with everyone and where employees also say they receive information and take part in interviews. In this dual situation, all other things being equal, the probability of accessing training is multiplied by four for workers and twelve for employees. This multiplying effect does not exist for executives and intermediate professions which already have high access

rates. We can see that their probability of accessing training remains unchanged whatever the company's level of openness in this matter. In this respect, developing the capability for voice for all employees is a true vector for reducing unequal access.

Training is today apprehended as part of the construction of vocational paths for which employees are themselves partly responsible. Making employees accountable with regard to their career and training, involves providing them with the tools required to assume such a responsibility. The Act of May 2004 provided some solutions to the issue of training in companies, but the implementation of its provisions remains insufficient. Few companies offer all their employees conditions which favour the development of their capability for voice on training. However, when this is the case, the extent of inequalities between socio-professional categories is reduced and the duration of training increases. While the duration of courses and training periods financed by companies is 21h per trainee for companies which do not provide information, this figure is 29 h when information is provided and employees say they have received it and 34 h for companies which both provide information, conduct interviews with all their employees and sign agreements which at least partially concern training. However these training courses nevertheless remain short and company centred.

More generally, remains the issue of the training system's ability to provide tangible training

perspectives during employees' careers, particularly for the least qualified employees. In this respect, the French situation is atypical. Although French companies are amongst the leading ones in terms of training for their employees, France is in the very last position in the European Union in terms of formal training for adults leading to a qualification or a diploma. This discrepancy is largely due to an educational system which strongly focuses on initial training and also to the way in which the system of continuing training is regulated and managed, that is mainly above all through collective negotiation, within branches and with national coverage. At least two issues should therefore be considered: (1) how to offer the least qualified employees favourable conditions enabling them to be proactive in the design of their career paths and (2) how to reconcile training courses which enhance the competitiveness of companies and equal distribution of the scope of possibles for employees. These are the stakes facing the system's many players (companies, social partners, State, regional council) in the coming months.

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Further reading

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- A. Checcaglini and I. Marion-Vernoux, "Continuing training at European firms: The first steps towards homogenization," *Training & Employment* no. 80 May-June 2008.
- D. Corteel, M. Lambert, J. Vero, B. Zimmermann, *Capability for learning in French companies*, Net.doc no. 50, Avril 2009, pp.115-154.
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- J.-M. Verd, J. Vero and M. Lopez, "Trayectorias laborales y enfoque de las capacidades. Elementos para una evaluación longitudinal de las políticas de protección social", *Sociología del Trabajo*, no. 67, Winter 2009, pp. 127-150.
- B. Zimmermann, "Pragmatism and the Capability Approach. Challenges in Social Theory and Empirical Research", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9 (4): 467-484, 2006.

Surveys

• Continuing training 2006 - FC2006

The Continuing Training survey 2006 (FC2006), jointly carried out by the Céreq and INSEE (French National Institute for Statistics & Economic Studies), questioned a sample of 16 500 people aged under 65 who had finished their initial training in 2006. FC2006 aims to apprehend all forms of continuing training followed by individuals as well as the context in which they have evolved.

• Continuing vocational training survey - CVTS3

4 700 companies were questioned in 2006 about continuing vocational training they partially or fully finance for their staff. These companies belong to the private sector and employ 10 or more people. This European survey was implemented in France by the Céreq, in coordination with the DARES and INSEE.

• Linked Employer - employee training information system - DIFES1

The linked employer - employee training system is based on two surveys: FC2006 and CVTS3. It is an "employee first methodology" which for the first time in France matches the responses of around 1 800 employees and those of their employers on the subject of continuing training in companies. This dual questioning enables the characteristics of employees and their training practices to be linked to the company's economic strategy, organisational changes, its human resource and training management policy. DIFES1 enables the different points of view to be confronted and for us to be able to understand, if necessary, the discrepancy between employees' and employers' declarations about conditions of access to training. This system was designed by the Céreq, DARES and INSEE. ■

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