

Company-based training vs. employees' aspirations

Although employees in low-skilled jobs are as likely as any others to express an interest in receiving training, they actually submit significantly fewer applications for training. How can this gap be explained? While a wish to receive training goes hand in hand with employees' perception of their career prospects, in conjunction with their aspirations, the submission of applications for training is determined more by companies' practices.

Continuing vocational training (CVT) contributes to the development of competences and life-long learning; as such it is one of the elements of the European flexibility strategy that seeks to balance companies' needs for flexibility with the 'security' of individuals in the labour market. The reforms of the continuing training system in France that were introduced in the 2000s follow the principles of the strategy adopted at the European level. In a constantly evolving economic and technological environment, the development of competences and a rise in levels of qualification are regarded as a 'lever to increase companies' competitiveness' and 'a structuring element in increasing the security of individual trajectories' (National Intersectoral Agreement of 4 December 2013).

The 2004 act, in which continuing training was one element in a broader reform of social dialogue, marked an important stage in the evolution of the French CVT system. It introduced the principle of employer-employees' co-responsibility for the development of their competences, conjointly with the needs of companies and the economy more generally. Since 1971, the emphasis had been placed mainly on employers' responsibility for ensuring that employees were able to adapt to their jobs and to technological and organisational change. Without calling this obligation into question, the recent reforms aim to make employees 'actors in their professional development'. In this way, they place employees' aspirations as an important lever in improving access to training and professional development.

The DEFIS surveys (cf. box p. 3) provide a means of capturing employees' career aspirations in all their diversity. Those aspirations can be compared not only with employees' interest in receiving training as expressed in applications submitted but also with their career situation and prospects and the context of the company in which they work. However, employees' interest in training and the applications submitted emerge as two distinct realities. While the majority of employees express a desire to take part in training within the next five years, with few differences between the various skill levels, only 31% of employees submitted applications for training over the past year and those applications are very unequally distributed.

Two thirds of employees wish to receive training regardless of their level of qualification

Whatever their level of qualification, many employees express a desire to take part in training in the next five years. For example, 72% of commercial employees wish to take part in training, the same proportion as managers and executives (cf. Table 2). Overall, employees' interest in taking part in training is very closely linked to their desire to enhance their job content and to take on more responsibility. On the other hand, low-skill workers and commercial employees who would like to receive training tend to want to change occupation, find another job or move to another employer. Employees' career aspirations reflect their perceptions of their situation and prospects, which ●●●

Jean-Marie DUBOIS
(Céreq)

Ekaterina MELNIK-OLIVE
(Céreq)

CONTINUING
TRAINING
DEFIS
(DISPOSITIF D'ENQUÊTES
SUR LES FORMATIONS ET
ITINÉRAIRES DES SALARIÉS)
TRAINING AND
EMPLOYEE
TRAJECTORY SURVEYS
EMPLOYEES
COMPANY
APPLICATION FOR
TRAINING
INTEREST IN TRAINING



Initiated by the CNEFP (Conseil National d'Évaluations de la Formation Professionnelle/ National Council for the Evaluation of Vocational Training), the Defis surveys are carried out by Céreq and managed jointly by Céreq and the CNEFP.

1 Career aspirations associated with a wish to receive training (by social category)

%	Managers, executives and higher intellectual professions	Intermediate occupations	Administrative employees	Commercial employees	Highly skilled workers	Low-skilled workers	Total
Share of individuals who wish to receive training (in the next 5 years)	72	74	68	72	60	60	68
Of them, share of individuals who wish ... (in the next 5 years)							
to take on more responsibility	68	65	68	63	63	65	65
to expand their job content	85	82*	82	73	80	76	81
to change occupation	36	38	51	58	41	54	43
To find another job or move to another company	43	45	50	66	43	54	48

Source : Cnefp-Céreq, Defis 2015.

Field: employees in companies with 10 or more employees

*Among the employees with a job in the intermediate occupation category who have expressed a desire to receive training in the next 5 years, 82% said they wanted to expand their job content.

●●● vary considerably depending on their level of qualification. Employees in the least skilled jobs appear less satisfied with their situation: jobs not matching their qualifications, less interesting work, working conditions adjudged to be more arduous. For example, 48% of commercial employees and 60% of low-skill workers state that their working conditions are arduous (compared with 23% of managers and executives). Furthermore, their opportunities for career development within their company appear to be more restricted: only 18% of commercial employees say they have a chance of getting a wage increase in the next 12 months (compared with 41% of managers and executives).

While most employees tend to regard continuing training as a lever to actualise their career opportunities and their wish to progress within the company, for low-skilled workers it is also a means of improving their situation by accessing a new occupation or finding another job.

Submission of applications for training influenced by company context

Despite the widespread interest in training expressed by employees of all levels of qualification, the share of those who have actually submitted an application for training is as unequally distributed as actual access to training. Thus 56% of managers and executives took part in at least one vocational training during the 18 months preceding the survey, compared with 22% of low-skilled workers (cf. table p. 3). Employees in low-skilled jobs are also those who submitted the fewest applications for training in the previous 12 months (19% of low-skilled workers compared with 50% of managers and executives).

While a wish to take part in training reflects individuals' needs and aspirations submitting an application is determined more by the practices and rules, either tacit or explicit, put in place by employers and internalised by employees.

Consequently, can employees who do not submit applications be considered responsible for the shortfall of their training? Being an 'actor' in their own training requires an ability to identify and select a training that matches their aspirations, and then to express their wishes, make themselves heard and so on. The context of the company, its training practices and, more broadly, its approach to human resource management play a major role here. They determine the possibilities of dialogue between employer and employee about the latter's career development. In concrete terms, what is required are practices likely to foster exchanges that are both personalised (interviews with management devoted to defining training needs) and supported by collective decision making (notably through the employee representatives). Such practices encourage transparency (dissemination of information on training opportunities) and leave room for personal choice (opportunity to express an opinion about the content of proposed training, for example). In our analysis, all these aspects seem to encourage employees to submit applications for training (cf. table p. 4).

Furthermore, being informed of training opportunities and mentioning training needs during interviews increases both the chances of submitting an application for training and expressing an interest in training. Can it be concluded that information and personalised and targeted dialogue between ●●●

2

Rate of access to training vs. interest in and applications for training (by level of qualification)

%	Managers, executives and higher intellectual professions	Intermediate occupations	Administrative employees	Commercial employees	Highly skilled workers	Low-skilled workers	Total
Share of individuals who wish to receive training (in the next 5 years)							
Yes	72	74*	68	72	60	60	68
Share of individuals who submitted one or more applications for training (in the past 12 months)							
Yes	50	37	30	23	19	19	31
No, but they could have done so	36	42	44	43	52	47	44
No, they were not able to submit an application	14	21	26	34	29	34	25
Share of individuals having taken part in one or more training courses (in the past 18 months)							
Yes	56	47	38	27	34	22	40

Source : Cnefp-Céreq, Defis 2015.

Field: employees in companies with 10 or more employees

*74 % of employees with a job in the intermediate occupation category state that they wish to receive training in the next 5 years.

●●●employee and employer facilitate adjustments between the employee's careers aspirations and what the employer can offer in terms of training? At the very least, it should encourage us to take account of the effects of organisations and their practices on employees' career aspirations.

Finally, vulnerable employment situations (short-term contracts, risk of job loss) do not encourage employees to submit training applications. Nevertheless, they do not fetter their training needs and expectations. Previous studies have already highlighted the effect of unstable career trajectories on access to training. Employees who have been on a series of short-term contracts are less likely to access employer-funded training and also enjoy fewer opportunities to take a publicly funded course of training leading to a formal qualification (such programmes are targeted as a matter of priority at those individuals furthest removed from the labour market).

Employees in low-skill jobs less likely to choose their training

A training application may reflect a wish to take part in training as well as the demands related to the work environment. In this case, company-based training helps to keep employees in their jobs but without necessarily taking account of their aspirations in terms of career development.

When companies finance their employees' training (the majority in France), they tend to ensure that the training provided meets their own objectives: satisfying the legal requirements (a declared objective for 75% of companies providing training),

supporting change (67%), introducing new working practices (52%) and so on. Forty-three per cent of them also use training as a means of motivating their employees or developing staff loyalty. It appears that compulsory training directly linked to job tasks has greater weight in the training provided to the low-skilled, while managers and executives are more likely to benefit from training programmes that are more likely to take account of their wishes. Manual workers have less access to training provided by their employer and the training they do receive is more often perceived by them as 'imposed'.

3

The combined employer-employee Defis surveys

The training and employee trajectory surveys (*dispositif d'enquêtes sur les formations et les itinéraires des salaires/Defis*) link companies' practices with their employees' career trajectories as well as the training they have received. The surveys were carried out in two stages:

- the companies strand: a representative sample of 4,500 companies in the private sector (excluding agriculture) with 3 or more employees was surveyed in 2015. In the study presented here, the field was restricted to those with 10 or more employees.
- the employees strand: a panel of 16,000 individuals who in December 2013 were employed in one of the surveyed in the first strand in 2015. Respondents will be tracked over a 5-year period (from 2015 to 2019).

Above and beyond the longitudinal tracking, the innovative nature of the surveys lies in the fact that they link training to work tasks and employment. They also extend our understanding of continuing vocational training by taking account of the diversity of forms of learning and provide a basis for analysing the links between training and all the changes affecting the activity.

The analysis presented here is based on data from the first survey carried out in 2015. The data are representative of all employees in companies with 10 or more employees in the private sector who were working in the respondent companies in December 2013.

Defis is initiated by the National Council for the Evaluation of Vocational Training (*Conseil national d'évaluations de la formation professionnelle/CNEFP*), funded by the Joint Fund for the Safeguarding of Career Trajectories (*Fonds paritaire de sécurisation des parcours professionnels/FPSPP*) and designed by Céreq.

%		Yes	No, but they could have done so	No, they were unable to do so
Companies strand				
Presence of staff representatives within the company	Yes	35	43	22
	No	19	46	35
Employee training occupies a (very) important place in the discussions between management and staff representatives	Yes	38	41	21
	No	24	47	29
There is a time devoted to identifying training needs during the interviews between employees and management	Yes	34	44	22
	No	14	46	40
The company circulates information on training	Yes	34	43	23
	No	21	48	31
Employees strand				
The employee mentioned his/her training needs during the interview	Yes	47*	40	13
	No	15	47	38
The employee was informed about training opportunities within the company	Yes	34	49	17
	No	28	36	36
The employee is able to change the content of training proposals	Yes	36	48	16
	No	29	42	29

Source : Cnefp-Céreq, Defis 2015

Field: employees in companies with 10 or more employees.

*47% of employees who mentioned their training needs during their interview said they made one or more applications for training during the past 12 months.

This is particularly the case for two-thirds of the skilled workers who undergo training (compared with 49% of managers and executives).

In order to meet career development goals outside the company, employees have the right to request individual training leave ("congé individuel de formation") in order to undertake a longer course of training. The purpose of such leave is to enable employees, under certain conditions, to follow a course of training of their choice, to change occupation or acquire a qualification. Among the low-skilled workers and commercial employees who put in one or more requests for training, 25% and 23% respectively submitted at least one application for training leave (compared with only 14% of managers and executives).

In general terms, applications for training with the aim of changing occupation tend to be made more frequently by employees in low-skilled jobs. Similarly, employees in this group are also more likely to state in their applications that their goal is to find another job.

The recent reform of continuing vocational training (Act of 5 March 2014), which seeks to make employees 'actors' in their own professional development, places the emphasis on measures aimed at taking

better account of employees' aspirations: bi-annual career development interviews, career development advice ("conseil en évolution professionnelle"), personal training accounts ("compte personnel de formation") for all workers as soon as they enter the labour market, and so on. How are the actors – employees and companies – appropriating these measures? Will these measures help to close the gap between the aspirations of employees, particularly for the low-skilled, and the actual training opportunities offered? Finally, what effects will they have on workers' employment trajectories? These are all questions to be addressed in future studies. ■

Further reading

« Les freins à la formation vus par les salariés », J.-M. Dubois, Ch. Fournier, *Céreq Bref*, n° 323, octobre 2014.

« Sécurisation des parcours et liberté professionnelle : de la « flexicurité » aux capacités », P. Caillaud, B. Zimmermann, *Formation Emploi*, 113, 2011.

« Aspirer à se former, la responsabilité des entreprises en question », M. Lambert, J. Vero, *Céreq Bref*, 279, novembre 2010.

« Pourquoi les travailleurs précaires ne participent-ils pas à la formation professionnelle continue ? », C. Perez, *Formation Emploi*, 105, 2009.

« Les besoins de formation non satisfaits des salariés au prisme des catégories sociales », Ch. Fournier, *Formation Emploi*, 95, 2006.