



# Evaluating training context competence of use: Productive and unproductive models of use



Giovanna Esposito<sup>a,\*</sup>, Maria Francesca Freda<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *SnAPSi Center, University of Naples Federico II, Via Giulio Cortese, 29, 80133 Naples, Italy*

<sup>b</sup> *Department of Humanities, University of Naples Federico II, Via Porta di Massa, 1, 80134 Napoli, Italy*

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 4 December 2013

Received in revised form 4 February 2015

Accepted 9 February 2015

Available online 23 February 2015

### Keywords:

Vocational training

Competence of use

Models of use

Training evaluation

Sense-making processes

Reflexive competences

## ABSTRACT

This study discusses an evaluation model carried out in vocational training contexts and draws from a line of studies that have analyzed the processes of meaning construction according to a semiotic and contextual perspective (Freda, 2011; Freda & De Luca Picione, 2014; Salvatore & Freda, 2011; Salvatore & Venuleo, 2008; Valsiner, 2007).

The study aims to identify models of use of training contexts (thought of as different ways to give meaning to the relationship between the trainee and the training context), as well as to analyze their relationship with social-demographic variables and course type. An additional aim is to investigate training outcomes to discern any connection existing between models of use and competence of use (e.g. the ability of trainees to participate and benefit from the training setting for their professional development aims).

An especially designed ad hoc open-answer questionnaire was administered to 76 trainees in the ex-post impact training phase. We adopted a multi-method analysis methodology (Bolasco, 1999).

Data analysis pointed to three models of use: Opaque, Learning, Development. The last one showed a significant association with training outcomes which were effective and useful to hypothesize the development of a competence of use.

The results have interesting implications for the design of evaluation programs directed to the sensemaking processes that organize the relationship between the formative self and the training context.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The European Council in Lisbon has focused on the enhancement of the global competitiveness of EU members' economies; hence, many projects and evaluation models have been developed to promote *lifelong learning* and identify the hallmarks of training effectiveness (Buiskool, Van Lakerveld, & Broek, 2009).

Training agencies have had to adapt to new European policies by redefining their training curricula goals and “key competences” to successfully deal with constantly evolving jobs (Official Journal of the European Commission, 2006). It is no longer sufficient to teach purely theoretical or technical skills that individuals can apply “as is” in work contexts; rather, those people are needed who have “complex” competences and must be able to “combine” and

“mobilize” (Le Boterf, 2000) their resources, knowledge, and skills to perform effectively in the workplace (Pilz, 2009).

The need for skilled workers has had obvious implications on training-evaluation methods with many different evaluation models being developed as a consequence. Generally, the choice of an evaluation approach depends on many factors, such as the *evaluand* or its purpose (control vs. learning). However, every evaluation approach has its own limits and resource needs (Bates, 2004; Hansen, 2005).

However, it is beyond the scope of this work to present a comprehensive review of these models. To discuss the theoretical foundations of our evaluation model, we need to investigate two different evaluation notions in the scientific literature, which are reflected in two different theory and practice evaluation frameworks: one that assesses training on the basis of the effectiveness/efficiency goals achieved (Kirkpatrick, 1994; Mager, 1985; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999) and the other assessing the basis of the *significance* of the training (Lichtner, 2002) in terms of its ability to change the subjects' representation and use of learned professional

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39 081 844 42 70; fax: +39 0818427419.

E-mail addresses: [giovan.esposito@unina.it](mailto:giovan.esposito@unina.it) (G. Esposito), [mfreda@unina.it](mailto:mfreda@unina.it) (M.F. Freda).

skills. The second evaluation method is an evaluation framework designed to capture the dimensions of the way a training participant deals with the training experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 2008) to allow for an assessment of the individual's competence in using the training for their own professional development goals.

The first framework was defined by Scriven (1991a) as *Goal-Based Evaluation*. It requires a rigorous and detailed definition of the training goals that are then characterized as expected, observable, and measurable behaviors. This framework, inspired by a positivistic paradigm and implemented through behaviorist models, is rational and strives to subject training to a decision-making schema. The efficacy/effectiveness of the training is determined by the achievement of set goals. Evaluation models following this framework use mainly quantitative tools and methods of investigation, are inspired by a *testing* logic, and need to ensure validity and reliability (Stame, 2010). This framework has been mainly used to evaluate so-called “theoretical–technical training, which emphasizes the acquisition of theoretical and technical competences (Lichtner, 2002). This framework often includes evaluation models defined as “summative” (Scriven, 1991a, 1991b), i.e., assessing the effects of a program in its entirety after it is over. Summative evaluation allows predictions to be made for the applicability of the same program in other contexts.

The second framework, in contrast, is inspired by a socio-constructivist paradigm and focuses on the sense-making processes constructed by the trainees in an inter-subjective way. In this framework, which is known as *Goal-Free Evaluation* (Scriven, 1973, 1991a), the evaluation does not focus on the set purpose/goals/achievements of a program but on an understanding of the modalities through which the program is developed and implemented. This evaluation framework assesses the processes and the results as they happen, and focuses on the human experience and what people are actually doing and feeling, all of which also assist in understanding the program's adherence to the goals, which may not necessarily be set in advance (Stake, 2004). Training is thought of as a process of transferring cross-cutting competences, and as a collaborative process based on negotiation between the various participants (Bryson, Patton, & Bowman, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Again, following Scriven's famous classification (1991a), the goal-free evaluation comprises *formative* evaluation models (Scriven, 1991b). This is an evaluation approach that assesses a program while it is still in progress, which means that it focuses on the process rather than on the outcomes, and is designed to improve the specific evaluation program without attempting to generalize the data obtained.

## 2. Evaluation model for assessing competence of use

This study uses the second evaluation framework and deals with the development of an evaluation model for the assessment of the sense-making processes through which trainees organize their relationship with the formative context.

The model is based on the socio-constructivist paradigm, according to which reality can be known only as a mental construct that is socially and experientially based (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1985; Harrè, 1986). In this work, we hold the socio-constructivist assumption that knowledge is a process of social construction, i.e., individual construction processes (patterns, categories, belief systems, goals, and intentions) are shaped by social interactions, all of which guide them. In this sense, communication and language are not representations of reality or ways to know reality; rather, they contribute to construct and shape reality itself (Pearce, 1994). Following on from these socio-constructivist assumptions, the evaluation model we present here is designed to study the sense-making processes in terms of the representations that are

shared and exchanged between the participants in a *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998).

Specifically, our evaluation model draws from a line of studies that have analyzed the processes of meaning construction according to a semiotic and contextual perspective (De Luca Picione & Freda, 2014; Freda, 2011; Freda, De Luca Picione, & Martino, 2015; Salvatore & Venuleo, 2008; Valsiner, 2007, 2008a). We refer here to models that theorize the continuous involvement of the mind in sense-making processes, and in giving meaning to the internal and external world. Semiotic processes unfold in an inter-subjective way and are always mediated by the cultural context in which they are produced; in other words, knowledge always has a contingent, situated, and contextual nature (Freda & Martino, 2015; Salvatore & Freda, 2011; Valsiner, 2008b).

Our notion of sense-making processes comes from a specific definition of meaning, according to which sense-making is a dynamic relationship-organizing process: it is not something behind a sign; it is a trajectory of relational development that contributes to organizing contexts (De Luca Picione, 2014; De Luca Picione & Freda, 2014; Freda & De Luca Picione, 2014; Valsiner, 2007, 2014). Sense-making is therefore an action (Salvatore, 2013; Weick, 1995) which contributes to the definition of the relationship between the self and the context. Sense-making is not conceptualized as an a-posteriori act necessary to give meaning to an event or relationship, but as a process of construction of the relationship itself, a device through which this relationship is activated and transformed. If we use this conceptualization within a training context, the relationship between the trainee and the training is organized by the multiple meanings which shape it and affect its outcome (Freda, De Luca Picione, & Esposito, in press). In our view, in order to analyze training effectiveness, we need evaluation models that are able to grasp these sense-making processes and can organize the relationship between the trainees and the training context. The adoption of this semiotic and contextual perspective implies that we do not consider the trainees as subjects who activate sense-making processes due to individual context-independent characteristics or dispositions, but as individuals who assume specific roles and functions due to the formative context in which they are participating and that they inter-subjectively contribute to building.

Starting from these theoretical assumptions,<sup>1</sup> our study addresses the issue of developing an evaluation model designed to identify the *competence of use* of training. By *competence of use* we mean the ability of trainees to participate and benefit from the training setting for their professional development aims (Esposito & Freda, 2009). The *competence of use* represents the ability to give meaning to the relationship between the formative self and the training context in order to build an effective learning process. The *competence of use* is not a trait of trainees or a skill that develops only in certain training environments; it represents the capacity to use personal and contextual resources in a functional manner. However, participation in training contexts is driven by several processes of sense-making that do not always lead to competence of use. We use the name *models of use* for these different ways of giving meaning to the relationship between the self and the training context (Esposito & Freda, 2009; Esposito, Freda, & Servillo, 2013). These models of use are not functional or dysfunctional per se; they become productive or functional when they allow individuals to adapt effectively to the contextual

<sup>1</sup> Other theoretical approaches have inspired our evaluation model, such as responsive evaluation (Stake, 1967, 1983), realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and contextual evaluation (Cook, 2006). Similarly to these approaches, our model is aimed at identifying the processes of sense making, and it focuses on the need to activate negotiating, reflexive, participatory, and contextual evaluation. Our work does not expatiate on the details of these evaluation models as they are well known in the evaluation field.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/319411>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/319411>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)