

Developing a New Evaluation Approach for the National Agencies' Network Training Courses OUTCOME REPORT

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Subject of this report

This report provides an overview of outcomes whilst developing and testing a new evaluation approach in BiTriMulti training course. The report briefly lists the activities undertaken, provides the background information on 'pre-then-post' and 'post-then-pre' evaluation approaches, summarises the outcomes of the on-line survey research of evaluation practices used in different European courses. The report is concluded with recommendations from the developments made and tested in BiTriMulti training courses.

Activity period: December 2009-October 2010

Tasks and activities undertaken: readings of theoretical inputs on evaluation designs in training activities, on-line survey research of evaluation practices in different courses organised on a regular basis, designing, testing and evaluating new evaluation approach for BiTriMulti training course.

Background information

Currently Network training courses of National Agencies (further referred as NA network TCs) implement 'pre-then-post' evaluation system. The so-called pre- and post-questionnaires are used to collect evidence on the self-perceptions of participants about their knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences before the course begins as well as at the end of it¹. In this way, training team is able to provide evidence and evaluate the educational impact of the training courses. However existing research data raises some concerns about the limitations of such evaluation approach (Colosi and Dunifon², 2006; Lewis³, 2002; Rohs⁴, 1999).

The main concern of the 'pre-then-post' evaluation system is that due to the response shift bias – the difference in participant's prior understanding of questions compared with informed understanding after the educational inputs. There is a tendency to overestimate own knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences before the course begins due to lack of extensive knowledge on the subject or fuller understanding of the complexity of the topic addressed. Therefore, 'pre-then-post' evaluation system does not reveal the full educational impact of the training courses.

In order to overcome the response shift bias it is recommended to use a 'post-then-pre' evaluation system. According to this system participants are asked to share their self-perception at the end of the course together with their evaluations of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences as they think/feel were before the beginning of the course. Whenever resources allow, Lewis (2002) and Rohs (1999) recommend using an integrated evaluation system: pre-questionnaires before the course begins and post-questionnaires with self-perceptions of self before the course but expressed at the end of the training course.

Results from the on-line survey research

As part of the development activities, an online survey was launched during the period from February to April, 2010. The purpose of the survey was to collect evaluation practices and ideas from different

¹ Evaluating Training Activities in European Youth Work @ <http://www.salto-youth.net/tools/Evaluation/learningquestionnaires/> (accessed on 8-11-2010)

² Colosi L. and Dunifon R., What's the Difference? "Post then Pre" & "Pre then Post", Cornell University, Cornell Cooperative Extension, 2006

³ Lewis D. K., Points for Consideration Retrospective Pretest Posttest, Ohio State University Extension, October 6, 2002

⁴ Rohs F. R., Response Shift Bias: a Problem in Evaluating Leadership Development with Self-report Pretest-posttest Measures, Journal of Agricultural Education, Vol. 40, No. 4 1999

European training courses. The main goal was to search for possible developments and improvements in the following areas:

- 1) Increase the scientific qualities of evaluation system implemented in the European trainings;
- 2) Integrate the existing evaluation practices more closely with the Youthpass process in training courses;
- 3) Advance further technical tools used by trainers for data collection, analysis and reporting;
- 4) Increase coherence between evaluation practices in different European training courses;

On-line survey research was designed to collect data from practices in 9 training courses that are run on a regular basis at the European level. Trainers from the following training pools were invited to share their practices and ideas on the evaluation in their training courses⁵: SOHO, TicTac, ToM, ToT, C2C, Get Involved, GiN, Appertiser, ECTC. Pre-then-post evaluation system is implemented in the practice of all courses targeted by the on-line survey research.

On-line survey included 26 questions (23 open-ended, 3 with limited choices). 16 individual responses and 1 collective response on behalf of one of the training pools were received back. The number of responses represents the contribution from more than half of trainers in total who work on a regular basis in the training courses targeted by the survey. Also, at least half of respondents from each training pool were reached.

The results of the survey show that all of the courses implement pre-then-post evaluation system as it is described in the SALTO web-page (see Background information) except for the follow-up questionnaires that are implemented in the practice of one course only. Small differences exist in the way how teams use evaluation tools, e.g. 2 courses use on-line platform to send pre-questionnaires in advance, in one course participants are allowed to review their pre-questionnaire at the end of the course. In most of the courses there is a clear role division, where the report trainer is responsible for evaluation and reporting.

The difference exists in how the data is managed and used on the spot. This depends a lot on whether the training team has enough time to integrate the data on the spot or just to be able to use after or during the reporting phase. Also there is no necessity for every training team to prepare the annual report including data from all the training courses. This depends on the type of the training course (e.g. long-term course has different practice) and the number of courses organised per year (e.g. small numbers do not make sense).

The survey also reveals some positive appreciation of good practices whilst implementing pre-then-post evaluation system in different training courses. Responses show that in general trainers appreciate the opportunities to use the evaluation data gathered, when time and human resources allow, immediately on the spot. Possibility for quick overview of the evaluation results is seen as one of the strong points in the evaluation system that is based on pre- and post-questionnaires. Clear task division having a report trainer present in the team works well in most of the practices. Team support and involvement in the interpretation of the data obtained from questionnaires is seen as a beneficial part for further reporting. Trainers who use the on-line platform and advanced Excel tool referred to such practice as a good improvement, in cases when it is not limited due to the technical difficulties.

However, the responses of the survey also raised a number of issues that might be improved in the current evaluation practice. Reflections suggest the improvement of the evaluation system towards the use of on-line tools and other data management tools that would reduce manual work (especially, in courses that do not yet use on-line platform or automatic reporting). Another common suggestion concerns the long-term impact research. Trainers expressed the thought that it might be valuable to identify the real impact of their educational activities as the follow-up of their courses. Also, a

⁵ For more detailed information on SOHO, TicTac, ECTC, ToM, Appertiser and ToT refer to NA Network Training Courses @ <http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/nanetworktcs/> (accessed on 8-11-2010) and on C2C, GiN, Get Involved refer to SALTO Participation RC @ <http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/participation/> (accessed on 8-11.2010)

suggestion was made to update the content of the questionnaires by relating questions more closely to the objectives of the course, reducing open-ended questions and having a better introduction of the purpose of evaluation. In at least two cases a question was raised about how to interpret the situations when the participants rate their prior knowledge, skills and attitudes higher than they do in the post-questionnaires.

Some critical remarks were made about the validity of the evaluation data and tools. Furthermore, the purpose of the current evaluation system and its benefits are not always clear. The evaluation system that is based on pre- and post-questionnaires seems to be too simple for the long-term training courses. Some difficulties were also mentioned, such as communicating critical feedback towards NA's work in the report due to fear that this will influence future hosting opportunities.

Respondents were asked to share their opinions on how different actors perceive the current evaluation system. Responses showed that most of the training teams understand the benefits and value of the current evaluation system, regarding the questions as when the evaluation is useful and what is useful for evaluation of the training's educational impact. Following the trainers' responses there is a lack of information on how National Agencies perceive the current evaluation system. Most information is obtained from the hosting NAs which seem satisfied by the current evaluation practice and clear reports. As the survey results show, the participants' perception of the evaluation often depends on the introduction and explanation made by trainers. Responses to the question regarding the relation of evaluation practice with Youthpass process varied. Some of the trainers regarded it as two separate processes, but some viewed it as processes that sometimes overlap.

The results of the survey were presented during the annual evaluation and developments meeting, which gathers together trainers who work on a regular basis in the Networking training courses.

Test phase of post-then-pre evaluation approach

A test phase was implemented for the post-then-pre evaluation approach in BiTriMulti training courses during the period from February to October, 2010. In total 5 training courses applied a mixed evaluation system having a pre-questionnaire at the beginning of the course and then later a post-questionnaire with re-assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes before the course, but as perceived at the end of it.

The graphs (see Annex 1) based on the data obtained from 5 training courses showed a difference between the participants' initial perception of knowledge, skills and attitudes in comparison to their perception at the end of the course. The shift was observable in all of the areas of learning estimated by means of questionnaires. This suggests that applying post-then-pre evaluation approach in training courses makes it possible to reveal underestimated educational impact of the course due to the elimination of the response shift effect.

BTM training pool evaluated the test phase positively and agreed that it went rather smoothly with only minor technical difficulties related to the use of the Excel data analysis tool. The following conclusions and suggestions were made for future implementation of the evaluation approach:

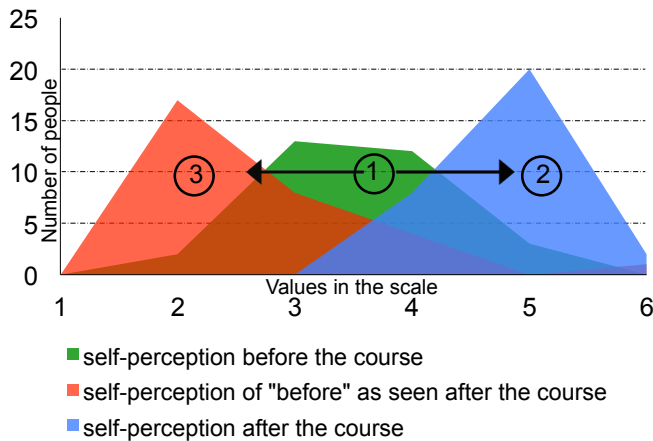
- To continue implementing the evaluation system which is based on the post-then-pre approach
- To use only one questionnaire at the end of the course that would include scales for self-perception before and after the course
- To use the Word template of report together with the Excel data analysis tool solving further technical difficulties
- To improve the questionnaires by relating the questions more closely to the objectives of the course and minimising the qualitative questions in them

Further references

For further information and clarification you may contact Nerijus Kriauciunas via email nercas@email.lt or visit trainer's profile <http://trainers.salto-youth.net/NerijusKriauciunas>

Annex 1. Evaluation graphs from 5 BiTriMulti training courses

Ability to carry out an evaluation of a project



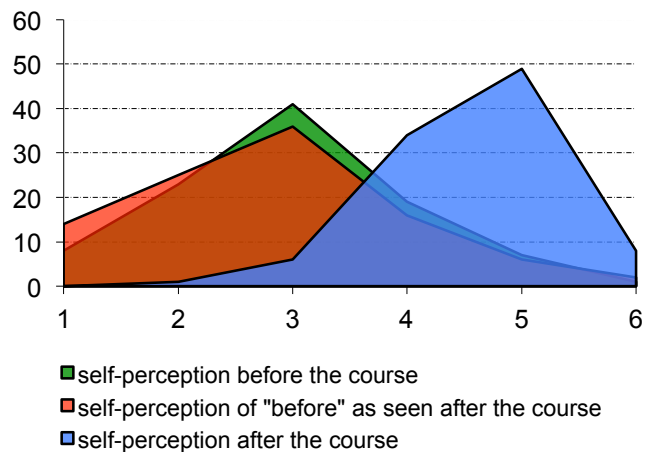
This season BTM training courses are undertaking the test of new evaluation developments. The main change from before is that participants are asked at the end of the course to give their perception of what were their knowledge, skills and attitudes before the course. Such additional data allows considering possible overestimation in participants' initial self-perception. In order to include this data the graphs are displayed differently and interpreted as follows:

INTERPRETATIONS: The shift of the area 2 to the left comparing with the area 1 reveals the positive impact of the course as perceived by participants and expressed in pre- and post-questionnaires. In addition, the shift of area 3 to the left comparing to the area 1 extends the impact of the course by eliminating possible overestimation in one's self-perception done at the beginning of the course.

4.1 Knowledge of international youth exchanges



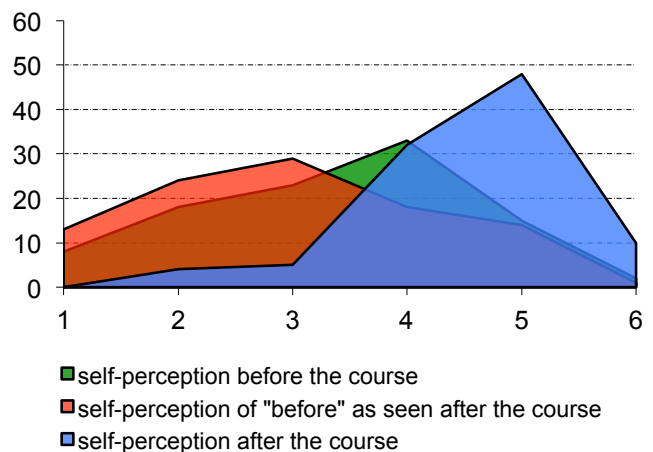
4.2 Knowledge of the European Youth in Action Programme



4.3 Confidence in presenting organization and ideas



4.4 Skills in developing an international project



4.5 Ability to identify an appropriate partner group



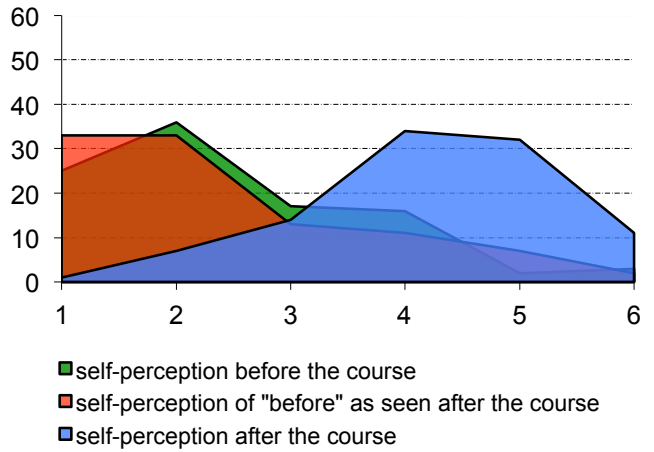
4.6 Skills to negotiate and co-operate with a potential partner group



4.7 Awareness about the preparation work necessary for an exchange



4.8 Familiarity with the Youthpass tool in the Youth in Action Programme



4.9 Confidence to run an international youth exchange

