

Disconfirmation of Expectations of Utility in e-Learning

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Using pre-training and pos-training paired surveys in e-learning based training courses, we have compared the *expectations of utility*, measured at the beginning of an e-learning course, with the *perceptions of utility*, measured at the end of the course, and related it with the trainees' motivation. We have concluded that what motivated the trainees was their long-term end-in-view of improvement. The expectations of the trainees were thus more related to the future utility of a course than to their current job. The trainees perceived the absence of training as a violation, by their employers, of the *psychological contract*, due to the loss of *future utility* the course would provide. Higher levels of *final motivation* were obtained at higher levels of *future utility* and when expectations were surpassed. Our conclusions stress that e-learning courses are not always just-in-time solutions. This can inspire training managers to plan courses having in mind the future uses the trainees expect, rather than their current jobs or needs.

Keywords: computers and learning, e-learning, expectations, motivation, training

When e-learning courses started to spread out, the way training courses were offered changed. The training companies increased their training portfolio, which started to include smaller courses, dealing with specific training objectives. Packages of short and flexible modules replaced courses that took several months to complete and the duration of a course shrank to the

point where trainees could attend a single 2-hour course. Even universities, which traditionally offered long-term educational programs, started to offer short-term courses, some of them using e-learning. The trainers began to test new pedagogical approaches and their relation with the trainees became more informal and closer. The training companies positioned their e-learning courses as training solutions permanently available, and delivered on the promise that the trainees could start a course almost immediately. In this scenario of short and permanently available courses, the training companies assumed that the trainees would search for short-term e-learning courses when facing specific and urgent problems and for longer courses, either in e-learning or in traditional formats, when dealing with long-term and structural skills.

The idea of e-learning based training as being just-in-time training influenced the way that training companies planned and offered their courses. They took for granted that the trainees were expecting to solve job-related problems or improve their performance within their current job, and conducted the courses with that purpose in mind. This was especially true in situations where the courses were paid by the companies the trainees worked for: if an e-learning course was about a specific topic and a company was paying for the registration, then the expectations would be related to short-term benefits to the company. But what if this was not true? What if e-learning courses meant fulfilling expectations of long-term usefulness and had nothing to do with the current job of the trainees?

In order to help training companies ensure that they know the real expectations of the trainees, we present a case study where we assessed the expectations the trainees had at the beginning of an e-learning course, checked if those expectations were confirmed during the course, and compared the results with the trainees' motivation. The aim of our study was to design an approach to assess expectations and the way they were confirmed, and to put it into practice. We intended to understand expectations and their relation with motivation in e-learning based training. Specifically, we intended to identify the motives that drove training efforts, what were the trainees' expectations, and what happened if those expectations were not confirmed. We intended to test the hypothesis of the trainees' motivation and expectations being more related to enhancement, rather than to current performance. The other hypothesis under analysis was whether e-learning courses could be assumed as just-in-time training solutions for immediate needs and related to a perception of immediate usefulness. Testing these hypotheses would provide guidance to e-learning positioning, sales efforts, and pedagogical planning.

The article starts discussing *motivation to learn*, a desire to develop expertise and develop the planned skills and attitudes. It discusses what may

motivate trainees, as well as Horton's (1996, pp. 11-12) primary influences on that motivation. It then discusses the promises of training involved in the *psychological contract* (D. M. Rousseau, 1989, 1995) held between the trainees and the company that employs them, and presents two scenarios for the provision of training. One of the scenarios deals with the hypothesis of providing training not to suppress immediate training needs, but to ensure job commitment and the future employability of the trainees. Next, the article discusses *expectations of utility* as a motivational element that influences both the motivation to learn and the to use of what has been learnt (Holton III, 1996, p. 9).

Following this theoretical framework, the second part of the article presents our empirical research held at an e-learning based training company. We present the general profiles of motivation, as well as the trainees' perceptions of the short-term and long-term usefulness, or utility, of the courses. In order to assess expectations and their evolution, we differentiate between *expectations of utility*, which were formulated at the beginning of the course and initially motivated the trainees to learn, and *perceptions* or *reactions of utility* (Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennet Jr, Traver, & Shotland, 1997) formulated at the end of the course. We then analyze the effect of the *disconfirmation of expectations* (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980, 1993) about training utility in the trainees' motivation. The article ends analyzing the perceptions of training provisioning under the psychological contract.

MOTIVATION TO LEARN

The theories on needs, motivation, and education take for granted that humans have an intrinsic and latent motivation to learn (Cropley, 1985; Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1980; Wlodkowski, 1999). The human innate need to learn is homeostatic: motivation exists initially and is hampered by several barriers (Ahl, 2006, p. 396). After those barriers are removed, motivation to learn will re-emerge. Even so, although generally motivated to learn, adults may be motivated to a specific course and not to another. They reveal interest in a course if it offers them specific benefits (Ruberson, 1977). The benefits of training may be related to the *process* of learning and the joy of discovery and learning, the experience, the social networking, or even the pleasure of listening to inspiring trainers. Other less hedonic expectations can be related to the learning *outcomes*, the technical component (Grönroos, 2007, p. 74) of the learning service. Individuals may seek to escape from uncomfortable realities (Baumeister, 1990; Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991) and restore lost skills. They may also desire to improve themselves, which, most likely, will be related to long-term objectives. The motivation to grow

and fulfill needs of social and professional affiliation (Alderfer, 1972; McClelland, 1975; McClelland & Burnham, 1976) can also justify the search and the motivation for a course.

The discomfort caused by the non-alignment between beliefs and behavior can help explain the motivation to learn. For instance, believing that a course could improve one's career or job opportunities and not having attended it in the past, may lead the individuals to enroll in the course and reduce the cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Intrinsic motivators, such as fun, self-esteem, or pleasure (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985) can coexist with external factors (Petri, 1991) such as tangible rewards or promotions that the trainees expect to receive at the end of the course.

Motivation to use (or transfer) what has been learnt, *readiness for the intervention* (Holton III, 1996, pp. 11-12), *job involvement* (Noe & Schmitt, 1986), and *commitment* (Tannenbaum *et al.*, 1991) also influence motivation to learn. This brings out two questions: the first is the influence of the *psychological contracts* in training decisions, which we discuss in the next section. The second is the influence of who had the idea, made the decision, and paid for the course. As commitment depends on what one has invested (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), we can expect higher motivation from those individuals who searched for the course, made or participated in the decision, and paid the registration fee. The degree to which the trainees are involved in the process of needs assessment and are given choices about training, also influence their motivation: The trainees who may choose which training course to attend increase their motivation to learn and have better learning outcomes (Hicks & Klimoski, 1987). However, those who are allowed to choose but whose choice is not accepted become less motivated than those who are not allowed to choose at all (Baldwin, Magjuka, & Loher, 1991).

TRAINING DECISIONS UNDER THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

The literature on training management (e.g., Buckley & Caple, 1990; Peterson, 1992) suggests that the first step of the training process is to assess the training needs. The models on training management assume that the companies that invest on training will *benefit* from it and provide different approaches to measure those benefits (e.g., Phillips, 1996). What is not explicit in these models is that companies sometimes provide training to their employees acknowledging that the benefits to the company may be restricted to the maintenance of the workers' commitment and there are no expectations of performance improvement. Moreover, the company may know, in advance, that other companies will be the only ones to benefit from the learning outcomes.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762, p. 117) defined a *contract* as “the act of a man who said to another ‘I give you all my goods on condition that you give me back as much of it as you please’”. It involves a *reciprocal* engagement between the two parties and the slightest modification of the contract can void it (J. J. Rousseau, 1762, pp. 51-52). The *social contract*, as idealized by Rousseau (1762) created the roots of the modern corporate *psychological contract* (D. M. Rousseau, 1989, 1995). The *psychological contract* expresses the unwritten expectations and promises that operate between employees and managers. The work contract does not only cover how much work is to be performed for how much pay. It also involves an obligation of reciprocity that includes a set of rights, privileges, and obligations of the worker and the organization, which are not formally stated (Schein, 1965, p. 11). The *psychological contract* may include dozens of items. These items tend to be focused on inducements, such as pay, training, promotion, respect, and employee contributions, such as effort, ability, creativity, and honesty (Conway & Briner, 2005, p. 31).

If training is included in the pack of promises that constitutes the psychological contract, as Conway and Briner (2005) suggest, we can hypothesize two scenarios:

- 1) The company provides training to the employees to improve performance. The company discloses immediate training needs or identifies new skills that will be required to cope with strategy changes. The investment in training is believed to improve performance, which, in turn, will have an impact in the business performance. In this scenario, the benefits will revert to the company. Due to the training, the employees may notice that their performance has been enhanced, and that may increase their self-confidence and motivation to work.
- 2) The training provided by the company will not have an immediate impact on the employees’ performance within the company, and may never have. Yet, it will have an impact on their future careers. The training provides the competences that the employees will need in the future when the relation with the company is over and they have to find a new job. In this scenario, the company provides training to compensate the employees for the instability of the formal contract. Having prepared the employees for a career outside the company makes it easier for the company to let them go when they are not needed anymore. It also makes the employees more comfortable with the idea of being dismissed, as they feel confident and competitive to face the labor market. In this scenario, the corporate benefit is the non-violation of the contract, the retention of the employees, and their motivation to keep performing as always. The training is an instrument, not to improve performance, but to keep the homeostatic status of the psychological contract and to prevent it from becoming

ing void. The training provided under this scenario is as important as the former kind, even though the literature on training management tends to focus its attention on training needs based on expectations of in-company performance improvements.

EXPECTATIONS OF UTILITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF VALUE

Expectancy-value theory helps understanding the motivations underlying the individuals' behavior. The willingness to perform a particular behavior depends on the extent to which the individual believes that a consequence will follow and on the value he puts on that consequence (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972; Mazis, Ahtola, & Kippel, 1975). *Expectations of utility* are a motivational element that influences both *motivation to learn* and *motivation to transfer* (Holton III, 1996, p. 9). In our empirical research, we differentiate between *expectations of utility*, measured at the beginning of the course, and *perceptions or reactions of utility*, measured at the end of the course. These reactions are also expectations of a hypothetical *future use*, as they are different from *effective use*. Yet, to differentiate both types of expectations, we call *expectations of utility* the expectations formulated at the beginning of the course and *perceptions of utility* the expectations formulated at the end of the course.

Reactions are usually associated with emotional and affective responses, and do not correlate (Dixon, 1990; Noe & Schmitt, 1986; Warr & Bunce, 1995), or correlate poorly (Alliger & Janak, 1989), with learning. They are even excluded from some training evaluation models (Holton III, 1996). Alliger *et al.* (1997) distinguish *affective reactions*, which are close to Kirkpatrick's (1959) reactions, from *utility reactions*, while Warr and Bunce (1995) suggest a tripartite division of reactions that includes the difficulty of training, the enjoyment of training, and the *usefulness* of training. Reactions about *utility or usefulness* reflect the perspective of a course being useful, somehow, somewhere in the future. Moreover, as they correlate, to some extent, with immediate learning and are strongly correlated with transfer (Alliger & Janak, 1989; Alliger, *et al.*, 1997), they can be used as indicators of *transferability* or possibility of use (Ruona, Leimbach, Holton, & Bates, 2002). They can also be used to measure the *fitness to use* of a course, *i.e.*, the perceptions of quality (Cação & Figueiredo, 2010). Utility reactions are measured by asking questions such as "was the training of practical value?" In other words, a course is useful to a person when it enables her to accomplish functions that she *values*. This suggests that *utility* may be related to a perception of *value*. Yet, the notion of *value* can have a multiplicity of meanings (Fronzizi, 1971; Holbrook, 1999). One of the possible interpre-

tations is that the perception of value is related to an *end-in-view* (Dewey, 1939, p. 34) and an expectation of *use*. In this scenario, *utility* is related to *value* and we can expect the trainees to be more motivated if an *end-in-view* exists (even if it is a long-term end) i.e., if there are *expectations of utility*, and these are confirmed during the course. Reactions about utility are disconfirmations of the expectations (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980, 1993) of utility that the trainees formulated at the beginning of the course and had motivated them. In our empirical research, we relate the perception of *value* with *utility*, especially with *future utility*. We also relate the disconfirmation of *expectations of utility* with motivation.

METHOD

We surveyed customers of a provider of asynchronous e-learning for professional training, with twelve years of experience in the consumer e-learning market and 60.000 clients from 29 countries. The reasons for choosing this company were related to its significant market share in Portuguese speaking countries, such as Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique, as well as countries that traditionally welcome Portuguese-speaking immigrants, such as France, Luxembourg, Canada, and Switzerland. The diversity of courses offered was also a reason for choosing this company, as it would increase the study's generalizability: it offers about 200 short-term courses in Portuguese about diversified topics, such as management, design, marketing, foreign languages, healthcare, soft skills, design, pedagogy, and technology. The courses take up to 30 hours to be completed and range in length between 1 and 9 weeks.

Over a period of 3 months, we surveyed 1463 customers. The participants were attending one or more courses and we asked them to answer two surveys, which were not mandatory. The participants did not receive any incentive or reward for answering these surveys.

The first survey was introduced at the beginning of the courses and included questions about the motivations to attend the course, *expectations of utility*, and attitudes towards training (Appendix 1). The second survey was introduced at the end of the course. In this latter survey, the trainees were asked to rate their motivation and their perceptions of short and long-term utility (Appendix 2). This survey used a 1 to 10 numeric scale, where 10 was the highest value. Both surveys were made available online in a SCORM compliant file. The results were submitted directly to the service's servers and later analyzed with IBM SPSS^o.

In order to increase the validity of the study, we have asked other researchers to discuss the theoretical and internal validity of both surveys. We

also tested the surveys using a pilot sample of 66 respondents and made adjustments on the surveys, based on that.

We collected 582 responses to the first survey and 1099 to the second. 403 answers were paired, which means that, for the same course, the same trainee answered both surveys. We considered only the paired surveys and discarded the remaining data. One of our requisites was that the answers should be for paid courses, in order to guarantee that there was a financial effort involved, whether that effort came from the trainees or from the companies they worked for. In this way, we discarded 25-paired cases where the courses had been offered to the customers, and kept 378-paired answers.

We faced two types of duplication of records: the first occurred when, for the same registration, the trainee submitted answers twice, in one, or both, surveys. In this situation, we considered the second answer, since the most probable reason for a repeated submission was the correction of an initial appreciation. Yet, we realized that, for the initial survey, we could have kept the first answer, as it could be closer to the initial expectations. The second kind of duplication occurred when the same trainee attended more than one course, and, thus, had the opportunity to submit one survey for each registration. In this situation, we considered the first pair of answers and discarded the others, in order to ensure independency. After eliminating the duplicated answers, we kept 343-paired cases.

Of the 343-paired cases, none had more than 10% of missing values and 225 cases were totally complete. The cases considered included registrations in 127 different courses. 71.4% of the respondents were women, which was the regular ratio of female customers at the company. The participants' age ranged from 22 to 64 years and 78.7% held a graduation degree. 11.1% of them were unemployed. The cases analyzed included customers living in nine countries: Portugal, Spain, France, France, Switzerland, Holland, Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique. In order to diagnose potential biases, we confirmed that no individual course represented more than 5% of the sample. We also looked at the customers who had not answered the surveys and tested if there were differences in terms of age, gender, country of origin, type of course, difficulty, duration, trainees' situation regarding employment, and previous e-learning experiences. We did not find any differences on other than that regular customers (defined as customers who had already completed a course in the past 6 months) tended to decline the invitation to answer the surveys more often than first-time customers (72% of the non participants were regular customers).

RESULTS

General Profiles of Motivation

At the beginning of the course, we asked the trainees to identify what the *value* of a course was. 44.87% said that the *value* comes from the *utility* of the course, and 20.51% related it to the self-fulfillment provided by the course. Other notions of *value* received less than 10% of the answers and were related to the professional and personal status provided by the course, the experience gained, or the excellence or quality of the course. For 78.21% of the respondents, the *anticipation of some consequences* was the main motivation, which suggested the existence of an *end-in-view* (Dewey, 1939, p. 34) and of *expectations of utility*. Based on Friedman's (1940) test, we accepted the hypothesis ($p\text{-value} = 0$) that the expected *value* of an e-learning course was related to the expected utility, which was consistent with the expectancy-value theory. Yet, the consequences anticipated were not related to the *restoration* of lost skills, but to the *improvement and enhancement* (75.48%) of highly ranked skills.

At the end of the course, the majority of the trainees (80.47%) rated their motivation as 7 or higher in a 10-point numeric scale, and 42.6% stated that their motivation was 9 or 10 (columns 1 and 2 in Table 1).

Long-term Expectations

As *expected utility* is a motivational element (Holton III, 1996, p. 9), we looked closer at the relation between the *motivation* and the perceptions of *immediate* and *future utility* the trainees displayed at the end of the course. Acknowledging that *final motivation* correlated with *immediate utility* (Spearman $\rho = .667$) and *final utility* ($\rho = .684$), we related the *final motivation* with the *perceptions of immediate* and *future utility* of the course (columns 1, 3, and 4 in Table 1).

The perceived *future utility* was always equal or higher than the perceived *immediate utility* (columns 3 and 4 in Table 1) for every level of final motivation (column 1 in Table 1). The overall average *perceptions of immediate utility* of the courses was high (8.03), but the overall average *perceptions of future utility* was higher (8.23). The Wilcoxon (1945) test rejected the hypothesis of, overall, these two perceptions being equal ($p\text{-value}=0$), which is consistent with the reported need of *improvement and enhancement* and with the expectation of a long-term benefit.

Although the *perceived future utility* was globally higher than the *perceived immediate utility*, that was not the case for specific levels of motivation, namely at low levels of motivation. The hypothesis of equality of these two perceptions was rejected at higher levels of motivation (namely when

the motivation was 8 and 9) (columns 5 and 6 in Table 1). Specifically, the Wilcoxon (1945) test rejected the hypothesis of the *perceived future utility* being equal to the *perceived immediate utility* when *final motivation* was 8 or 9, which represented almost 49% of the sample, but did not reject that hypotheses at other levels of motivation. For instance, when the trainees reported a *final motivation* of 5, they were predicting that the *future utility* would be higher than the *immediate utility*, but the difference was not statistically significant (column 6 in Table 1).

Expectations of Future and Immediate Utility

At the beginning of the course, we asked the trainees to rate their *expectations* about the *utility* of the course. The expectation of *future utility* had the higher average (8.03), followed by *immediate utility* (7.87) (columns 7 and 8 in Table 1). Yet, the expected utility of the course to the current job was rated lower (6.88). When comparing immediate, future and job-related utility, the Friedman (1940) test rejected the hypothesis of these three types of expectations being equal. In this way, the *future utility* in other contexts was the main motivational driver. The *expectancy of future utility* was globally higher than the *immediate utility* but only confirmed at high levels of final motivation (columns 9 and 10 in Table 1).

The Disconfirmation of Expectations and its Effect in Motivation

Column 11 in Table 1 compares the *perceptions* of *future utility* the trainees had at the end of the course (column 3 in Table 1) with the *expectations* of *future utility* they had at the beginning of the course (column 7 in Table 1). The p-value of that difference is in column 12. The *final motivation* was low when the *perceptions* of *future utility* were lower than initially expected. At higher levels of final motivation (equal to 8 or higher, which represents 67.2% of the cases), the *perceptions of future utility* were statistically higher than initially expected (Columns 11 and 12 in Table 1). This is consistent with a reaction of satisfaction and a confirmation of expectations (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980).

Immediate utility had a similar pattern: *final motivation* was low when the *perceptions* of *immediate utility* (column 4 in Table 1) were lower than initially expected (column 8 in Table 1) and high when the *perceived immediate utility* surpassed the initial expectations (columns 13 and 14 in Table 1). The *expectations of immediate utility* were confirmed at moderate levels of final motivation (between 5 and 7) (Column 13 in Table 1). At these levels of final motivation, the perceptions can be considered similar to the expectations (Column 14 in Table 1). The hypothesis of the *perceptions of immediate utility* being equal to the *expectations of immediate utility* was re-

jected at very low levels of *final motivation*. That hypothesis was also reject at high levels (9 or 10) of *final motivation*, which represented 42.6% of the cases. In these latter cases expectations were surpassed.

In this way, at higher levels of *final motivation*, the initial expectations, both on *immediate* and *future utility*, were confirmed and exceeded, which, in turn, helps justify that motivation.

The Perceptions of Violation of the Psychological Contract and the Loss of *Utility* in the Absence of Training

The decision to attend a course to suppress current needs or solve a current problem was more common in scenarios of *self-initiative* and personal *financial sacrifice*, i.e., in situations where the trainee had the idea to attend the course and paid for it. In this scenario, 26% of the trainees reported that the training was intended to suppress current needs, while 73.91% claimed that it aimed at improving existing competences that could be helpful in the future. In the opposite scenario, when the company had suggested the course and had paid for it, only 15.38% of the trainees reported intentions of suppression current needs and 84.62% opted for an improvement and long-term investment in skills.

To understand better the attitudes of the trainees in the *presence* or *absence* of training provided by the company, we asked the trainees why they felt more motivated when the company provided them training. The answers of those who felt more motivated were mainly related to immediate job impact: those who felt motivated with the training programs provided by their company claimed that it was justified by the performance improvements obtained (73%), i.e., because the course would have an *immediate utility*. Those who did not feel motivated said it was because the course would not have any impact or utility (63.9%) on their current job.

To test if the individuals perceived training as an element of their *psychological contract* with the company and if they perceived the lack of opportunities for training as a violation of that contract, we asked them what they felt when no training was provided. 60.53% of the respondents said that they felt uncomfortable if the company did not provide training. Of those, 56% claimed that the reason was that they might need it in the future. The absence of training was considered a discomfort factor due to the perceived loss of future utility and the perception of a broken promise.

Motivation, Perceptions and Expectations of Future and Immediate Utility		Table 1												
		At the end of the course		At the beginning of the course				Disconfirmation of expectations						
	Percentage of cases	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11) = (3) - (7)	(12)	(13) = (4) - (8)	(14)
	Final motivation	(1)												
1	.30%		4.00	8.50		1.00	7.60	9.50		1.20	-3.60			
2	1.48%		3.00	4.00		0.30	7.20	7.80		0.40			-3.80	0.07
3	0.59%		5.00	2.50	0.50	1.00	6.94	7.60		1.00	-2.20		-2.60	0.03
4	2.96%		6.29	5.88	0.41	0.10	7.29	7.06		0.20	-0.65		-1.18	0.06
5	5.03%		7.03	6.97	0.06	0.70	7.73	6.81		0.01	-0.26		0.16	0.92
6	9.17%		7.76	7.56	0.20	0.20	8.03	7.67		0.30	0.02		-0.11	0.72
7	13.31%		8.49	8.16	0.33	0.01	8.38	7.91		0.01	0.47		0.25	0.18
8	24.56%		9.55	8.69	0.24	0.01	8.65	8.06		0.01	0.55		0.63	0.00
9	24.26%		9.47	9.47	0.08	0.47	8.03	8.45		0.01	0.90		1.02	0.00
10	18.34%													
Total	100%		8.23	8.03	0.20	0.00	8.03	7.87	0.16	0.00	0.24		0.21	0.00

DISCUSSION

Our research let us conclude that what motivated the learners for training were long-term, rather than short-term, *ends-in-view*. The trainees valued the anticipated results of the training programs because they felt that they were useful and could bring them some kind of utility. The trainees had long-term expectations of improvement and enhancement: their motivation was not related to the restoration of lost skills nor was it a short-term response to current and immediate needs, but a step towards long-term ends. The expectations of the trainees were focused on the future utility of the course, which is consistent with the long-term motivation. The positive reinforcement of competences is a more long-term strategy than the *restorative* tactics of suppressing existing needs. This may suggest that the trainees are more conscious of the need to plan in advance their lifelong training efforts and create sustainable competences than look for training programs only when there is a urgent need to suppress training needs. This sits closer to a long-term *just-in-case* strategy rather than to a short-term *just-in-time* response to current problems or difficulties, contrary to what we would expect in short-term online courses. Even so, this was consistent with the higher expectations and perceptions of *future utility*. Like expectations, the trainees' perceptions were higher regarding the *future utility* of the course than the *immediate utility*. In the analyzed sample, whenever the *perceptions* of *future utility* were higher than expected, there were higher levels of *final motivation*. In other words, higher levels of *final motivation* were obtained at higher levels of *future utility* and when expectations regarding that utility were surpassed.

We were expecting that companies would be more interested in suppressing current performance needs and would neglect the investment on skills that the workers might need in the future, as, most probably, they would not work for them in the long-run. The low job-related utility of the courses suggests that the training was not job related and that the trainees could be considering the course to get prepared to apply to a new job or function in the future. It also suggests that the course was a benefit offered by the company, not to improve performance but to avoid the violation of the psychological contract.

Although the expectations of the trainees were not related to the current job, they expected that the company would keep providing them with training. The absence of training was perceived as a violation of the *psychological contract*, due to the loss of the *future utility* of the course. Assuming that, in the future, the trainees would not be working for the company, the perceived loss of *future utility* when no training is provided, and the consequent decrease in motivation, can be interpreted as the breakdown of an

expectation and a violation of one of the clauses, or promises, of the psychological contract.

It was not clear for us the contribution of the offering of training to the psychological contract, as that offering was considered a motivation factor, due to the immediate utility of the training. Yet, the absence of training made the trainees become unmotivated, not because they needed it to perform better but because it corresponded to a promise that was not kept. In other words, the lack of training was a discomfort factor due to the perceived loss of future utility agreed in the psychological contract.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of our study suggest changes in the way training courses are planned and positioned in the market. For instance, most training companies and trainers take for granted that the trainees intend to improve their current performance by relating the course topics to their current job. Yet, as we have discussed, job related utility was not as relevant in the analyzed sample, even in the cases when the training initiative came from the company the trainee worked for and the company made the financial effort, paying the registration fee.

The lower relatedness of the training course with the current job has serious implications in the training strategies. Specifically, training companies and trainers usually assume that the trainees want to see some applicability of what they are learning in their working contexts. Yet, without diagnosing the kind of expectations of the trainees, the pedagogical strategy may be directed to the current job, while the trainees are expecting something different.

Moreover, this suggests that even short-term e-learning courses cannot be assumed as just-in-time training and that training companies should survey the expectations of their trainees. It also suggests that changes may be welcomed in terms of pedagogical and marketing strategy, namely in the definition of target markets and target customers, cross-selling efforts, career planning, training counseling, and pedagogical activities, among other issues.

The conclusions of our research can inspire training managers to survey the trainees' expectations and use them as additional input in the process of training design. Knowing and discussing the trainees' perceptions of potential and expected outcomes can provide guidance to training companies and trainers regarding the way the courses are planned and conducted. It can also help nourish the labor relation and maximize the benefits of training for both parts of a labor contract.

We suggest that expectations on immediate and future utility should be measured at the beginning of the courses. Moreover, reactions of utility should also be measured at the end of the courses and compared with the initial expectations. The comparison of these reactions with the expectations and the connection with the significance given to the psychological contract should be included in the studies about the reactions of the trainees to the training courses.

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Appendix 1

The value of a course comes, essentially, from:

- The job opportunities that the training course provides
- The price paid and the financial sacrifice made
- The personal and professional status provided by the training course
- The self-fulfillment provided by the training course
- The experience provided by the training course
- The utility that the course has for you
- The excellence or quality of the training course

You decided to attend this course:

- Because of the effects that this training course can bring (for instance, new job opportunities)
- For other reasons (for instance, because you like attending training courses)

You decided to attend this course:

- To suppress current difficulties, to find a new job, or solve a current problem
- To progress and increase my skills in general

Do you feel that you have some sort of agreement with your company that includes you receiving training, even if it does not improve your performance?

Yes

No

Do you feel more motivated when your company provides you training courses?

Yes

No

If you said yes, please state your reasons:

My performance improves

My general knowledge improves

My job satisfaction improves

If you said no, please state your reasons:

There are no changes in my job after the training ends

I do not receive job opportunities after the course

The courses have no utility in my function

It provokes job dissatisfaction

Does your motivation decrease when your company does not provide you training courses?

Yes

No

If you said yes, please state your reasons:

I may need it in the future

I really needed it

It is a legal right that I have

If you said no, please state your reasons:

I pay for the courses myself

I'm not a demanding person

My current job does not require training

Training is not a solution for current job problems

Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest value, please rate:

Your expectations of immediate utility of the course _____

Your expectations of future utility of the course _____

Appendix 2

Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest value, please rate:

Your current motivation with the course _____

Your perception of immediate utility of the course _____

Your perception of future utility of the course _____

