Is popularity of training programs reflected in performance improvements? A case of Mexican public financial institution

Mayra Alcázar
Universidad La Salle, México

Martin Flegl
Universidad La Salle, México

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Abstract

Nowadays, talent management is crucial for organizations to remain competitive and successful. Organizations must pay higher attention to a training of their employees to attract highly skilled talents. However, due to high costs of training programs, organizations need to control and demonstrate their added value. In this case, it is very important to understand employees' characteristics to create adequate training program systems. In this article, employees' preferences over training programs are analyzed in a Mexican public financial institution. Further, the article seeks to discover whether training program popularity is reflected in improvements of employees' competences. The results indicate that female training policies should be linked more to soft skills training, whereas training policies for males should be linked more to hard skills. Results also indicate that there is no relationship between training course preferences and employees' performance and the effect is near to zero or negative.

Keywords: *Analytical Hierarchy Process; Communication skills, Performance improvements; Redaction skills, Training evaluation, Talent management.*

¿Es popularidad de programas de formación reflejada en mejoras de rendimiento? Un caso de una institución financiera pública mexicana

Resumen

Hoy en día, la gestión del talento es crucial para que las organizaciones sigan competitivas y exitosas. Las organizaciones deben prestar mayor atención a la capacitación de sus empleados para atraer talentos altamente calificados. Sin embargo, debido a los altos costos de los programas de capacitación, las organizaciones necesitan controlar y demostrar su valor agregado. En este caso, es muy importante comprender las características de los empleados para crear sistemas de programas de capacitación adecuados. En este artículo, se analizan las preferencias de los empleados sobre los programas de capacitación en una institución financiera pública mexicana. Además, el artículo busca descubrir si la popularidad del programa de capacitación se refleja en las mejoras de las competencias de los empleados. Los

resultados indican que las políticas de capacitación para mujeres deberían estar más vinculadas a la capacitación de habilidades blandas, mientras que las políticas de capacitación para hombres deberían estar más vinculadas a las habilidades duras. Los resultados también indican, que no existe una relación entre las preferencias del curso de capacitación y el desempeño de los empleados y el efecto es cercano a cero o negativo.

Palabras claves: *Analytical Hierarchy Process; Habilidades de comunicación, Mejoras de rendimiento; Habilidades de redacción, Evaluación de formación, Gestión del talento.*

1 Introduction

In the current context, where "knowledge has become the fundamental economic resource of modern society" (Drucker, 1969:371), Human Resources (HR) are no longer perceived as an area that generates costs within an organization. Rather, organizations are rediscovering human capital as their critical resource and even more when the rapid change in technological developments requires a "continuous learning philosophy" (Goldstein and Ford, 2002: 14). Because of this, HR have become a strategic partner, whose leaders share a table with the CEOs in order to help them lead the organization, having as one of its main tasks the development of talents. It is in this context where a concept like Talent Management (TM) gains relevance as a "business strategy for the success and long-term survival of the organization" (Turner and Kalman, 2015: 28).

Talent Management can be understood as a group of processes to attract, develop, motivate and retain employees to make them perform better (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Swailes and Blackburn, 2016). In this sense, "employee training and development has become one of the key aspects in improving employee performance in organizations, thus leading to improved organizational performance and growth" (Mpofu and Hlatywayo, 2015: 133). As Farndale et al. (2014) pointed out, talent management is a strategic resource integration including proactive identification, development and strategic deployment of key employees with a high potential. What is more, talent management is crucial for organizations to remain competitive (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Goldstein and Ford, 2002; Huselid, Beatty and Becker, 2005). In this sense, talent management is a process through which it is possible to ensure that organizations have employees of required quantity and quality in accordance with current and future priorities of the organization (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Wellins, Smith and Erker, 2009).

However, although we are living in a time where "training systems are viewed by both, organizations and individual as a positive step in providing skills and opportunities" (Goldstein and Ford, 2002: 11), training within the talent management is an important challenge for organizations in their way to success (Fajčíková, Urbancová and Kučírková, 2018), as training activities have a positive impact on the performance of individual, teams and organizations (Aguinis and Kraige, 2009; Edgar and Geare, 2005). Training programs have become an enormous business in terms of both the amount of effort expended and the money spent (Goldstein and Ford, 2002), becoming an expense that not all companies are willing to assume when the benefit is not evident on a daily basis.

Due to high costs of the training programs, organizations need to control and demonstrate their added value (Goldstein and Ford, 2002). According to Aguinis and Kraige (2009), U.S. organizations

alone spend more than $126 billion annually on employee training and development. Most of the money in training is spent on developing technical skills (due to its importance to get specialized employees) and management-supervisory skills, which helps to develop leaders with the capacity to impact the business outcomes through producing extraordinary bottom-line results (Goldstein and Ford, 2002). Nevertheless, talent training must not only build new capabilities, but also continue to support and strengthen already gained capabilities (Joyce and Slocum, 2012). For the public sector, having training programs that ensure an adequate level of effectiveness becomes a matter of national interest because of the fact that the public treasury is at stake. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate training programs regarding employees' gender, generation or even their hierarchical level (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Festing and Schäfer, 2014; Neber, 2004). Ignorance of different characteristics can lead to employees' frustration, greater tensions among employees and malfunctioned training programs (Gursoy, Chi and Karadag, 2013). Understanding different employees' characteristics can lead to a development of new motivational strategies, add or remove benefits, redesign compensation packages and develop human resources policies that satisfy employees' needs (Egri and Ralston, 2004; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2005). It is crucial for companies to understand employees' values and preferences as these are the key motivational factors that influence an individual's work attitude and behavior (Chiang and Jang, 2008; King, Murillo and Lee, 2017). Thus, talent training should have strategic focus in any organization to ensure executive leadership creating right organizational cultures to achieve their objectives (Joyce and Slocum, 2012).

It is known that well-conceived training programs are beneficial to meet the organizations' goals (Goldstein and Ford, 2002). The most effective programs are those that include cognitive and interpersonal skills (Aguinis and Kraige, 2009). However, how to know when we have a well-conceived training program? Aguinis and Kraige (2009) state that training effects on performance may be subtle, though measurable. Goldstein and Ford (2002: 11) agree and add that "training systems need to be more carefully evaluated to ensure that they are meeting the expectations of both the organizations and the individual trainees". However, according to Aguinis and Kraige (2009), fewer than 5% of all programs are assessed in terms of their financial benefits. In this way it is necessary to implement training evaluation as a "systematic investigation of whether a training program resulted in knowledge, skills or affective changes in learners" (Aguinis and Kraige, 2009: 453) and "leads to a meaningful change in the work environment" (Goldstein and Ford, 2002: 22). However, it is difficult to have a reliable training evaluation when organizations do not have the necessary tools to choose the right program based on previous experiences and hard data.

Commonly, "many organizations do not collect the information to determine the usefulness of their own instructional programs. Their techniques remain unevaluated limiting to the trainee reactions that are written at the end of the course" (Goldstein and Ford, 2002: 10). Although "training evaluation is a critical component of analyzing, designing, developing, and implementing an effective training programme" (Farjad, 2012: 2838), organizations fail to capitalize on the opportunity that talent management can bring them as they usually overlook its importance (Joyce and Slocum, 2012). Therefore, the objective of this article is to reveal the relationship that exists between training programs, their popularity and employees' performance improvements in a case Mexican public

financial institution. As a secondary objective, the article aims to investigate whether differences in popularity and performance improvements exist regarding employees' gender.

The article is divided as follows: First, we introduce the concept of talent management and its impact on organizations. Second, we describe the methodology used for the analysis. In the third part, we present the achieved results followed by an adequate discussion over the impact of the results. We conclude the article with several final remarks and possible areas for future research.

2 Materials and methods

Data

This analysis includes training program evaluations from 397 employees from a Mexican public financial institution. At the end of 2018, 3,292 employees worked in the institution. However, the sample includes only employees who took at least one of the 14 internal training programs during 2018. As some employees took more than one training program, the final size of the sample includes 425 employees' responses. These training programs aimed on developing employees' competences. Moreover, the employees had to complete a Reaction survey (program perception evaluation right after the last session of the training) and a Learning evaluation (final exam about the gained knowledge). Out of the 425 employees, 184 (43.294%) were females and 241 (56.706%) were males. Table 1 presents all 14 training courses and number of employees taken these.

Out of these 14 training programs, ten were open to all employees of the institution regardless of their position: Individual change adaptation (Cambiar a la velocidad del cambio); Non-verbal communication program (Comunicación no verbal); Effective communication in organizations (Comunicación organizacional efectiva); Teamwork program (El camino de vuelta al equipo); Analytical thinking (Pensamiento analítico); Planning, controlling and monitoring program (Planeación, control y seguimiento); Argumentative redaction skills (Redacción argumentative); Orthography workshop (Taller de ortografía); Redaction workshop (Taller de redacción); and Speaking in public skills program (Taller para hablar en público). On the other hand, there were four programs aimed only at the management personnel: Feedback developing skills program (El arte de la retroalimentación); Change management program (Gestión del cambio); Developing managerial skills (Programa de mandos medios), which is a program for developing the managerial skills of the first-line managers and middle managers; and Executive leadership program (Programa Directivo de Liderazgo) which aims on developing the managerial skills of the top managers.

The employees were asked to evaluate in the Reaction survey every training program they took on a principal scale 1-5, where 1 meant "poor"; 2 "fair"; 3 "good"; 4 "very good" and 5 "excellent". They evaluated aspects of instructor's abilities, course quality, course material, logistics and course applicability (Table 3). Each course evaluation was obtained as average from all individual evaluations separately for each criterion (sub-criterion). Analytic Hierarchy Process methodology was then used to create evaluation scales and to compute each course overall evaluation (preference).

Training Programs	Males	Females	General
Analytical thinking	41 (17.012%)	33 (17.935%)	74 (17.412%)
Argumentative redaction skills	10 (4.149%)	8 (4.348%)	18 (4.235%)
Change management	6 (2.490%)	5 (2.717%)	11 (2.588%)
Developing managerial skills	22 (9.129%)	11 (05.978%)	33 (7.765%)
Effective communication in organizations	12 (4.979%)	8 (4.348%)	20 (4.706%)
Executive leadership	16 (6.639%)	9 (4.891%)	25 (5.882%)
Feedback developing skills	17 (7.054%)	9 (4.891%)	26 (6.118%)
Individual change adaptation	15 (6.224%)	29 (15.761%)	44 (10.353%)
Non-verbal communication	15 (6.224%)	14 (7.609%)	29 (6.824%)
Orthography workshop	7 (2.905%)	7 (3.804%)	14 (3.294%)
Planning, controlling and monitoring	43 (17.842%)	28 (15.217%)	71 (16.706%)
Redaction workshop	4 (1.660%)	3 (1.630%)	7 (1.647%)
Speaking in public skills	14 (5.809%)	5 (2.717%)	19 (4.471%)
Teamwork	19 (7.884%)	15 (8.152%)	34 (8.000%)
Total	241 (56.706%)	184 (43.294%)	425 (100.000%)

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the sample

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

Analytic Hierarchy Process was developed by Saaty (1977, 1980) and works with both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of preferences. To obtain criteria priorities, pairwise comparisons based on the fundamental verbal/numerical 1-9 scale is required (Table 5). The number of necessary comparisons for each comparison matrix is $n(n-1)/2$, where n is the number of criteria. Each criterion gains a geometric mean of its comparisons, which are then normalized.

An important requirement is to test consistency of our stated preferences, as human-made decisions can be mutually inconsistent because of the human nature. The most commonly used method for consistency check was developed by Saaty (1977), who proposed a consistency index (*CI*) related to eigenvalue method. *CI* is obtained as

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{\max} - n}{n-1}, \tag{1}$$

where $\lambda_{\max}$ is the maximal eigenvalue of the pairwise comparison matrix. The consistency ratio (*CR*) is given by

$$CR = \frac{CI}{RI}, \tag{2}$$

where *CR* is the random index obtained in Table 2.

n	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	.58	.9	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49

Table 2: AHP - Random indices (Saaty, 1977)

The priorities are considered consistent if the consistency ration is less than 10%. Super Decisions software is used to count the criteria preferences and to test consistency of the preferences.

Criteria importance

To evaluate training courses, following criteria were selected (Table 3): Course applicability, Instructor's abilities, Course quality, Course material and Logistics of the course. Then eight experts from Human Resources working in the financial institution were asked to express their opinion over the importance of these criteria. These experts evaluated each criterion answering the question: "how important is this criterion to develop employee's competences?" using a scale 1-5, where 1 meant – "Unimportant", 2 – "Somewhat important", 3 – "Quite important", 4 - "Very important" and 5 "Extremely important". To obtain an individual evaluation of each criterion, averages from the experts' opinions were calculated. The importance of each criterion was then computed using the AHP methodology and the linear scale 1-9. The highest importance was given to "Course applicability" (37.600%), followed by "Instructor's abilities" (21.467%) and "Course quality" (21.467%), "Couse material" (12.089%) and "Logistics" (7.378%), where the inconsistency of this evaluation was .739% (far below the limit of 10%). Moreover, most of the principal criteria include sub-criteria. The experts also evaluated preferences inside each sub-criterion using the same methodology. Table 3 shows the preferences of all criteria and sub-criteria. The final AHP structure of the model is presented in Figure 3.

To analyze training programs popularity, in the first phase, course evaluations based on employees' responses in the Reaction survey were considered to obtain the general result. Then, two more models were constructed to reflect gender differences over the training programs popularity. These two models used the same methodology as in the case of the general result, only distinct samples for each gender were used (Table 1). Second, to demonstrate the relationship between the training course popularity and employees' performance improvements, results from the first phase and results from the Learning evaluation were put together. First, general result of this relationship was obtained, then the analysis was divided considering the gender perspective as in the first phase.

Criteria/sub-criteria	Expert's average evaluation	Importance
Course applicability	4.750	37.600%
Instructor's abilities	4.125	21.467%
Dominance of the topic	4.500	66.667%
Group control	4.000	33.333%
Course quality	4.000	21.467%
Course Content	4.000	66.667%
Profundity level	3.625	33.333%
Course material	3.875	12.089%
Usefulness of the material	3.375	50.000%
Quality of the material	3.625	50.000%
Logistics	3.125	7.378%
Course schedule	3.625	66.667%
Classroom equipment	3.250	33.333%
		Inconsistency: 0.739%

Table 3: Criteria importance (Own calculation)

III RESULTS

The results are divided into two basic parts. First, results related to course popularity are presented and discussed considering general and gender point of view. In addition, obtained differences between these models are discussed as well. Second, the relation between training programs popularity and their effectiveness in employees' performance improvement are analyzed. Similarly, gender perspective is taken into consideration.

General model

The general model includes all the employees who answered the satisfaction survey of the training programs, regardless of their gender, in order to have a complete view of the highest and lowest preferred training programs. The most preferred training program, according to the responses, is the Speaking in public skills program with a preference of 100%[1], followed by Individual change adaptation (83.6%) and Teamwork program (79.87%). On the other hand, the least preferred training programs are the Change management program (6.9%), followed by Effective communication in organizations (12.2%), and Planning, controlling and monitoring program (20.7%). As the average evaluation is 44.979%, we can see that there are huge differences between the most and least preferred

1 For the results, we use the ideal scores from Super Decisions. In this case, the best evaluated training program is evaluated as 100%, and the other programs correspondingly. We see the ideal scores more suitable as they enable us to see the proportional difference among the alternatives.

programs. Thus, employees evaluated some training programs as poor or fair considering the Likert scale. This may be a valuable information for the Human Resources department in order to modify training strategies. Table 4 shows the achieved scores for all 14 training programs.

Training program	General score	General position	Female score	Female position	Male score	Male position
Analytical thinking	43.038%	8	48.064%	6	34.710%	9
Argumentative redaction skills	59.497%	4	45.153%	8	70.452%	5
Change management	6.912%	14	10.922%	14	7.699%	14
Developing managerial skills	45.094%	6	46.809%	7	50.468%	7
Effective communication in organizations	12.233%	13	26.669%	11	10.378%	13
Executive leadership	44.944%	7	26.821%	10	70.170%	6
Feedback developing skills	23.034%	10	36.925%	9	19.695%	12
Individual change adaptation	83.554%	2	79.883%	2	89.381%	2
Non-verbal communication	39.642%	9	72.640%	3	21.830%	11
Orthography workshop	48.892%	5	60.102%	5	42.466%	8
Planning, controlling and monitoring	20.705%	12	18.969%	12	27.191%	10
Redaction workshop	22.290%	11	13.442%	13	77.494%	3
Speaking in public skills	100.000%	1	100.000%	1	100.000%	1
Teamwork	79.874%	3	64.538%	4	77.121%	4
Average	44.979%	-	46.496%	-	49.932%	-

Table 4: Training programs preferences (Own elaboration)

According to the results, one specific pattern (group) among the preferred and non-preferred programs cannot be identified as the top- and worst-evaluated programs cover several skills (competences). Contents of the most preferred courses are mainly related to improvement of communication and teamwork skills. More less the same situation occurs for the least preferred courses. What is more, there are several interesting contradictions. For example, considering writing skills, employees preferred the Argumentative redaction skills program and the Orthography workshop (ranked in the fourth and fifth position with score 59.5% and 48.89% respectively). However, they do not prefer the Redaction workshop (ranked in the 11th position with score 22.3%), despite that these three training programs have the same purpose of improving writing and communications skills (Table 4). Therefore, there should be some aspect that influences their preferences, such as the quality of the instructor, the period they took the course, or the optional/obligatory status of the course may have affected their evaluation. However, these aspects were not a part of the model and, thus, their effect could not be evaluated in this analysis. Similarly, employees prefer a program that helps them to improve their communication skill in public (Speaking in public skills program). On the other hand, they do not prefer the following programs: Non-verbal communication program (39.64%), Feedback developing skills program (23.03%), and Effective communication in organizations (12.23%), which

all are about communication skills. Finally, there are two programs focused on change management: Individual change adaptation (83.55%), which is highly preferred compare to the Change management program (6.91%). The first one aims at non-management personnel and is about how to adapt to changes, whereas the second one is addressed to management personnel and its main objective is to give tools for planning and implementing changes in the Organization. Further analysis should investigate reasons of these contradictory results.

Gender differences

The general model gave us the overall perception about the training programs preferences. However, to secure that the training fulfills its objective, it is important that these training programs satisfy precisely employees' needs. Therefore, it is important to consider employees' gender as there seems to be differences in their preferences, either for a biological or for a sociocultural reason manifested until adolescence or early adulthood, in which individuals' expectation, beliefs and attitudes induce them to perceive the tasks in question as being more congenial to an specific gender (Caplan et al, 1997: 15). Table 4 includes results separately for females and males.

In case of females, the three most important courses are: Speaking in public skills program (100%), followed by change management program Individual change adaptation (79.883%) and Non-verbal communication (72.640%). On the other hand, the three least preferred courses are Planning, controlling and monitoring program (18.969%), followed by Redaction workshop (13.442%) and leadership program focused on Change management (10.922%). Several similarities between the general model and the female model can be observed. We can see that in both models the Speaking in public skills program is the most preferred program (100%), followed by the change management program Individual change adaptation which is preferred a bit lower by females (-3.671%). However, a significant difference occurs in case of the third most preferred course. Females prefer Non-verbal communication training program (72.640%), which preference is higher by +32.998% resulting in the highest positive difference between Female and general models (Figure 1). The same situation occurs with the least preferred courses: Planning, controlling and monitoring program, which females prefer only 1.736% less, and the Change management leadership program, which females slightly prefer more by 4.010%. These two programs are in 12th and 14th position respectively (Table 4 and Figure 1). The highest negative difference can be observed in case of the Executive leadership program, which females prefer significantly less (-18.123%) compare to the general model, followed by Teamwork program (-15.335%) and Argumentative redaction skills (-14.344%).

In case of males, the three most important courses are speech abilities workshop: Speaking in public skills program (100%), followed by Teamwork program (89.381%) and the Redaction workshop (77.494%). In the other hand, the least preferred courses are Feedback developing skills program (19.695%), followed by the Effective communication in organizations (10.378%) and the Change management program (7.699%). The main similarity between the general model and the male model is that the Speaking in public skills program is the highly preferred program (100%). The same situation occurs with the less preferred course where the leadership program focused in Change management

is ranked in the last position. Compare to the general model, it can be observed that male employees highly prefer the Redaction workshop (+55.203%), while they prefer less the Non-verbal communication program (-17.812%) (Figure 1). This result is in complete opposite compare to both the general and the female model. Female employees tend notably more towards the communication programs such as the Non-verbal communication program (+50.810%), Feedback developing skills program (+17.231%) and the Effective communication in organizations (+16.290%). On the other hand, males tend more to the Redaction workshop (+64.052%), and the Executive leadership program (+43.349%).

Name	General score	Female vs. General	Male vs. General	Female vs. Male
Analytical thinking	43.038%	5.026%	-8.329%	13.354%
Argumentative redaction skills	59.497%	-14.344%	10.955%	-25.299%
Change management	6.912%	4.010%	0.787%	3.223%
Developing managerial skills	45.094%	1.715%	5.374%	-3.659%
Effective communication in organizations	12.233%	14.436%	-1.854%	16.290%
Executive leadership	44.944%	-18.123%	25.226%	-43.349%
Feedback developing skills	23.034%	13.891%	-3.340%	17.231%
Individual change adaptation	83.554%	-3.671%	5.826%	-9.498%
Non-verbal communication	39.642%	32.998%	-17.812%	50.810%
Orthography workshop	48.892%	11.210%	-6.426%	17.636%
Planning, controlling and monitoring	20.705%	-1.736%	6.485%	-8.222%
Redaction workshop	22.290%	-8.849%	55.203%	-64.052%
Speaking in public skills	100.000%	0.000%	0.000%	0.000%
Teamwork	79.874%	-15.385%	-2.753%	-12.582%

Figure 1: Differences between training courses preferences regarding gender

Relationship between course popularity and performance improvements

As Goldstein and Ford (2002) pointed out, organizations need to control and demonstrate added value of the offered training programs, mainly due to their high costs. The analysis of programs preference (popularity) among the employees might be the first step. However, the programs popularity may reflect different factors, such as ease/difficulty, length and/or applicability of a program, as well as lecturer personality and experience (Cidral et al., 2018; González-Gómez et al., 2012). The fundamental objective of training programs is to improve employees' competences (skills) and, consequently, their working performance. Therefore, it is crucial for HR to analyze whether programs popularity is reflected in improvements in employees' performance.

Figure 2 shows a relationship between the popularity (horizontal axe) and performance improvements (vertical axe). Data for the performance improvements were collected from the Learning evaluation each employee took after the completion of a training program. We can see that there is rather a negative effect of most training programs on the performance or the effect is close to zero. The average change in the performance is negative -.076 pts (SD .205). Moreover, there is no relationship between the popularity and the performance improvements as the correlation is -.034. The most popular training program Speaking in public resulted in performance decrease of -.022 pts, whereas the Orthography workshop (5th most popular) resulted in the highest improvements of +.288 pts. On

the other hand, Executive leadership (7th most popular) showed the highest decrease in performance -.590 pts.

Similarly, as in the case of the program popularity, the effect of the training on the performance improvements can be analyzed considering employees' gender. Figure 4 presents results for females, whereas Figure 5 presents results for males. In both cases, the effect is similar to the general model and no relationship can be observed. In case of females, most of the training programs have negative effect on the performance improvements (only three programs resulted in improvements). Speaking in public skills training resulted in minor improvements of +.023 pts, whereas the 2nd most preferred program Individual change adaptation resulted in significant drop of -.387 pts and the 3rd most preferred program Non-verbal communication ensued in drop of -206 pts. On the other hand, the highest improvements can be observed in Orthography workshop +.440 pts. The average change in the performance is -.038 pts (SD .231) with low level of correlation -.241.

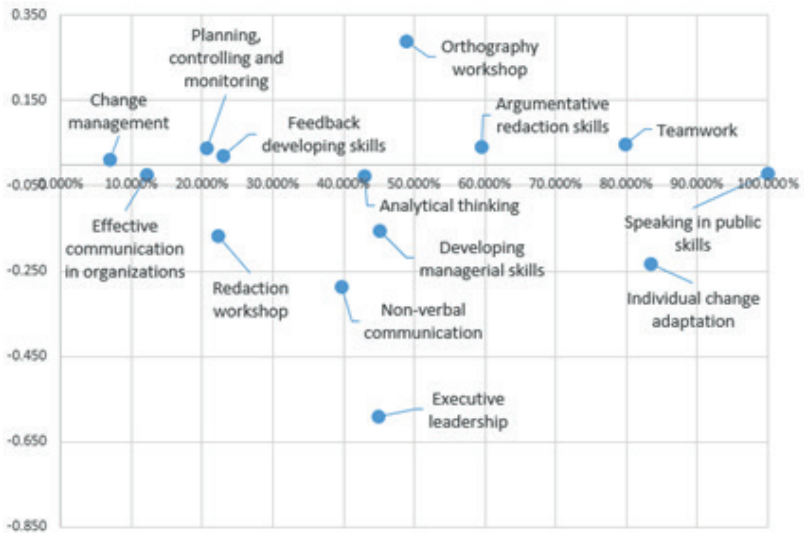

Figure 2: Relationship between program popularity and performance improvements, general model

Finally, the results for males reveal improvements in seven out of 14 training programs (Figure 5). The highest improvement can be spotted in case of Argumentative redaction skills (+.186 pts), whereas the biggest drop is related to Executive leadership (-.804 pts). In the case of this model, the average change is -.091 pts (SD .293) with and weak negative correlation -.189. As in the first part of the results, significant differences between females and males can be observed regarding the performance improvements. For example, the biggest difference occurs for Redaction workshop (.952 pts), which had positive impact on female performance (+.393 pts) although its preference was the 13th highest (Table 4), but negative impact in case of males (-.559 pts) with 3rd highest preference. This difference is quite big if we consider that the Learning evaluation uses scale 1-5 to evaluate employees' competences. Similarly, big difference can be identified in case of Executive leadership (.594) with a higher negative impact on males' performance even though they prefer it as 6th most preferred (Figure 1). Further, both females and males evaluated Individual change adaption program as the 2nd

most popular (females with priority of 79.883%, whereas males with 89.381%). However, this training program had positive effect on males' performance (+.102 pts) but opposite effect on females' performance (-.387 pts).

IV DISCUSSION

Nowadays, it is crucial for organizations to search for possible improvements in order to enhance their performance and remain competitive (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Goldstein and Ford, 2002; Huselid, Beatty and Becker, 2005). It is key for organizations to attract highly skilled employees and/or to create adequate training program systems for their employees. For this purpose, employees' training and development has become one of the key aspects in improving organizational performance and growth (Mpofu and Hlatywayo, 2015). However, it is necessary to differentiate training programs regarding employees' gender or their hierarchical level. Ignoring these differences can lead to employees' frustration, greater tensions among employees and, what is more, malfunctioned training programs (Gursoy, Chi and Karadag, 2013). Results reveal significant differences between the general popularity results and results considering gender. For example, females tend more towards communication training programs (Non-verbal communication program, Feedback developing skills program and Effective communication in organizations), whereas males rather prefer redactions skill programs (Argumentative redaction skills and Redaction workshop) and Executive skills programs. These obtained differences contain valuable information for HR department as training policies can be redesigned or new policies created to enhance effectivity in training scheme planning.

As Aguinis and Kraige (2009) and Edgar and Geare (2005) investigated, correct training programs can have a positive impact not only on the individual performance, but also on teams and the whole organization. Thus, as the results indicate, female training policies should be linked more to soft skills training (teamwork, communication, problem-solving, flexibility, etc.), whereas training policies for males should be linked more to hard skills (such as leadership, empathy and also communication, but in the way of typing, writing and software). However, companies must develop right strategies to ensure that correct skills and competencies are fostered to fulfil specific needs of each position or to promote companies' policies (McCracken, Currie and Harrison, 2016).

For example, the results indicate that Executive leadership program was evaluated as one of the least preferred by females: 26.821% and 10th position compare to 70.170% and 6th position in case of males (Table 4). Women are not often perceived as being suitable for leadership positions (Evans, 2014), mainly due to the gendered assumptions regarding division of labor and role prescriptions (Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018). However, current managerial trends demand more emphatic and emotional intelligence that fit more to female leaderships styles. To increase females' interest in leadership programs, it is necessary to improve the role of leadership mentoring, which would lead to higher interest in such programs (Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018) that would consequently result in higher performance.

One of the main problems of training programs is how to demonstrate their added value. Goldstein and Ford (2002) state that the added value of the training must clear and easily demonstrated. One

of the ways how to demonstrate this, is to analyze improvements in employees' skills/competences. As Heyler and Lee (2014) pointed out training development can range in various ways, from skills essential for specific position to skills related to job effectivity. This may include generic abilities, personal attributes and specific abilities. In addition, companies are more interested in transferable skills (communication, problem-solving and teamwork) and employee's personality over job-oriented skills and knowledge (Huq and Gilbert, 2013; McCracken, Currie and Harrison, 2016). This orientation creates mainly problems in soft-skills training evaluation as these skills are hard to measure. Thus, it is necessary that provided training is well prepared and covers employees' needs (training adequacy). It must be clear what competences are required in each department of the organization (as well as in the organization as a whole) in order to capture current and future priorities of the organization (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Wellins, Smith and Erker, 2009). Training adequacy indicates how well or poorly training is functioning, i.e. whether the provided training is enough to deliver optimal level of skills (Ngai, Cheung and Yuan, 2016).

Our results reveal mainly negative effect of provided training as, in most of the cases, the employees' performance decreased after training (Figure 2, Figure 4 and Figure 5). The reason of this negative effect can have several reasons. First, the list of provided training courses does not cover employees' needs for their positions, which results in poor training adequacy (ineffective training scheme). It is of a high importance for the company to re-evaluate provided training list. Second, current structure of the Learning evaluation is weak and does not permit to establish a direct relation between the performance improvement and a training interventions plan. So, the post-program evaluation does not give accurate information that could help to evaluate training programs beyond the perception of the employees. What is more, there is the risk of subjectivity when evaluating competences in a performance evaluation, as consequence of how managers respond in terms of their cognition, affectivity, and behavior (Fischer, 2010). Because of the structure of the current performance evaluation, it is hard to refer to concrete facts in order to avoid the subjectivity. Subjectivity is naturally included in any decision-making process and its effect can be both positive and negative (depending decision-maker experience). Due to the subjectivity, employees may evaluate ease/difficulty, length and/or applicability of a program, as well as lecturer personality and experience (Cidral et al., 2018; González-Gómez et al., 2012), which results in no relationship between the popularity and the performance improvements (correlation -.034). Finally, it is important to remember that employee training is an investment into the company workforce, which results may not be visible immediately. Moreover, in some cases, trained competence can have visible impact after a combination of several training programs, or after a period of expertise adjustments (experience). However, although the results do not show positive improvements in employees' performance, training has positive impact on the performance of teams and organizations (Aguinis and Kraige, 2009; Edgar and Geare, 2005; Mpofu and Hlatywayo, 2015). This impact may be visible in longer period and not immediately after the training. Therefore, investment in employees' training can establish organizational structure and culture for the success and long-term survival of the organization (Turner and Kalman, 2015) as training can improve its effectivity and profitability. To maximize benefits from training, evaluation of employees' needs must be conducted, and employees must be ready and motivated for training.

Company should demonstrate the value of training before training begins, make sure employees are highly involved and engaged with their job (Aguinis and Kraige, 2009).

Although the post-training evaluation might provide inaccurate results, the results confirm the necessity to adjust training programs to specific group of employees, as there are significant differences in both popularity and performance improvements considering employees' gender. Nevertheless, significant differences may also be found if we analyze training popularity based on generation point of view as each generation has its own characteristics. For example, Baby boomers are characterized as goal-oriented or result/achievement oriented, loyal and accept hierarchical relationship in the workplace (Gursoy, Chi and Karadag, 2013; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2005), employees from Generation X have sense of teamwork, ability to learn new things, adaptive to change, autonomy, flexibility and strong work ethic (Broom, 2010; Hayes et al., 2018), whereas Millennials are highly skilled in information technologies, rate work as less central to their lives, look for flexible workplace and must be satisfied by their job (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010; Smith and Galbraith, 2012).

Work limitations

The presented analysis has several limitations. First, the findings cannot be generalized to the whole analyzed company as we did not receive answers from a representative sample. The analysis can be considered as an introductory study as the sample includes only responses from 397 employees who took at least one of the 14 internal training programs during the last year (this represents only 12.05%). To reach the generalizability of the analysis, extended sample must be used. Second, the analysis refers to a specific Mexican public financial institution and, thus, the achieved result cannot be generalized to other financial institutions (such as private financial institutions). However, the results reflect possible common problems in training, such as its immediate impact on employees' performance and how to measure this impact.

V CONCLUSION

In this article, we analyzed employees' preference across training programs in a Mexican public financial institution and its relationships with performance improvements. The analysis is based on responses from 425 employees who took at least one internal training program aimed on competence development during the last year. These employees evaluated training programs right after the last session of a training considering instructor's abilities, course quality, course material, logistics and course applicability. The most preferred program is Speaking in public skills, followed by Individual change adaptation and Teamwork. What is important, the results indicate significant differences between evaluations from female and male employees. In general, females rather prefer communication training programs, whereas males prefer redactions skill programs.

In the second part of the results, we demonstrated that there is no relationship between training course preferences and employees' performance improvements (measured by competence skills improvements), no matter of employees' gender. In all cases the correlation is weak and, thus, insignificant. Alarming for the financial institution is that, in most cases, the additional training was

not reflected in performance improvements. Majority of the courses has its effect near to zero or negative. Again, we can observe differences in the results between gender. For example, even though both females and males evaluated Individual change adaption program as the 2nd most popular, it had positive effect on males' performance (+.102 pts) but negative effect on females' performance (-.387 pts).

Our findings validate the assumption that planning of training must consider specific characteristics of each employee (such as gender, generation, hierarchical level, etc.) to secure long-term benefits for organizations. Future research can go in two ways: First, the analysis can be extended to a generation point of view as each generation has its own distinctive characteristics. Second, the analysis can focus on improvements of the Learning evaluation related to the gained knowledge. This would enable us to precise the information about the improvements in employees' skills/competences.

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VII. APPENDIX

Intensity of importan-ceon an absolute scale	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective
3	Moderate importance of one over another	Experience and judgement strongly favor one activity over another
5	Essential or strong importance	Experience and judgement strongly favor one activity over another
7	Very strong importance	An activity is strongly favored and its dominance demonstrated in practice
9	Extreme importance	The evidence favoring one activity over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation

Table 5: AHP – fundamental scale (Saaty, 1987: 165)

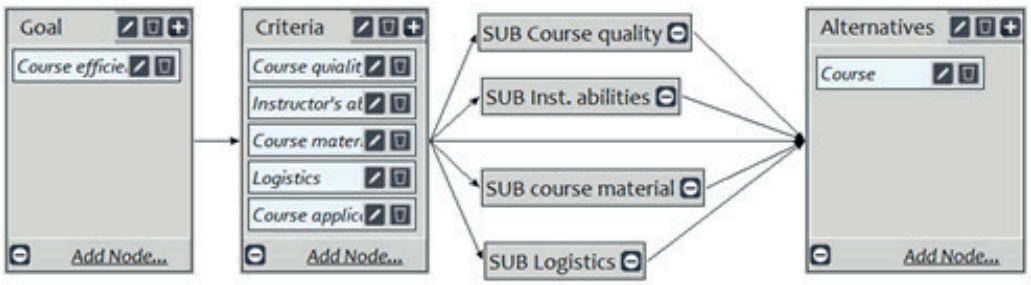

Figure 3: Structure of the AHP Model

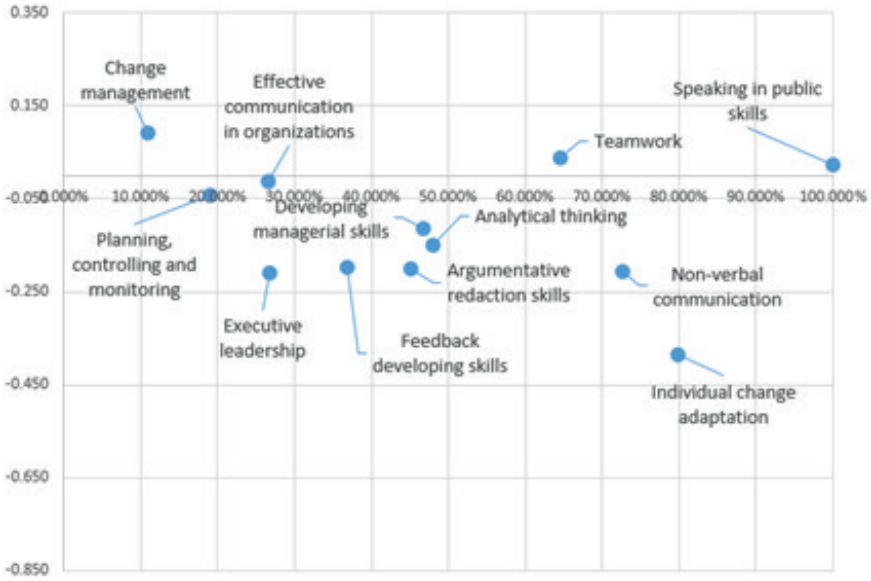

Figure 4: Relationship between program popularity and performance improvements, females

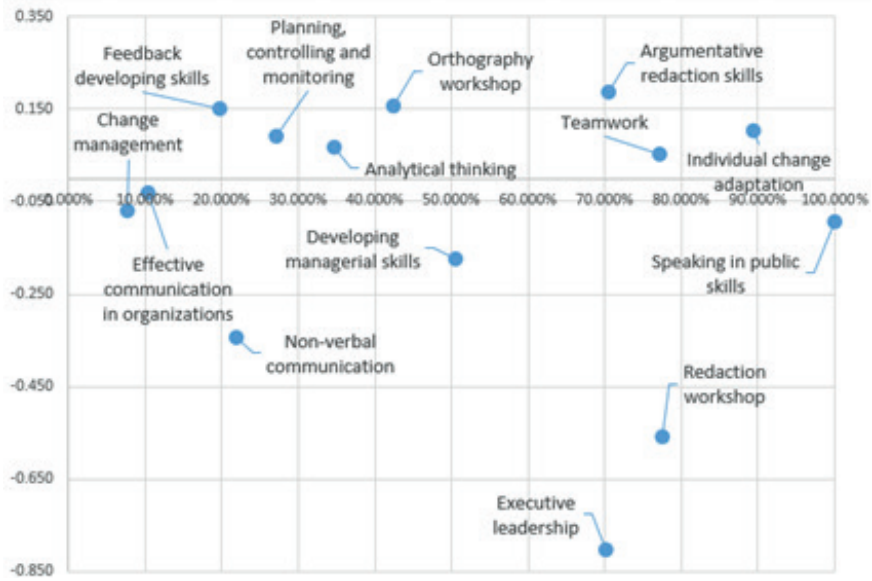

Figure 5: Relationship between program popularity and performance improvements, Males