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Quality of lifelong education. Monitoring vs. evaluation. Case study

Introduction – quality requirements concerning lifelong learning

Government-defined requirements

Polish authorities have defined requirements concerning quality of teaching and quality monitoring at higher education institutions by legal acts, which are binding for both public-funded and private-owned institutions. The most important act is the Law on Higher Education of 2005, amended several times by the parliament (recently in 2012)¹. Since 2002, broadly defined quality of operations of higher education institutions is supervised by the Polish Accreditation Committee². Functioning of a double – internal and external – evaluation system is believed to be indispensable for an efficient system of higher education³.

In its now binding version, the Act defines the strict quality requirements and expressly stretches them to include post-graduate studies and training held by higher education institutions. Quality is assessed based on the planned education effects, included in the graduates' pro-

¹ Act of the 27th July 2005 Higher Education Law (Journal of Laws No. 164, item 1365, later amended), consolidated text: isap.sejm.gov.pl/Download?id=WDU20051641365&type=3 (26.06.2013).

² www.pka.edu.pl/index.php?page=historia (30.06.2013).

³ *Ewaluacja a jakość kształcenia w szkole wyższej*, red. A. Brzezińska, J. Brzeziński, A. Elias, Wydawnictwo Szkoły Wyższej Psychologii Społecznej Academica, Warszawa 2004, s. 98.

file. The effects must include knowledge, skills and social competences⁴. Such effects need to be defined, assessed and monitored for post-graduate studies as well. This reflects the Polish authorities' perception of importance of lifelong learning.

Obligatory quality assessment

One of the quality improvement methods provided for in the Act on Higher Education is the obligation for all higher education institutions to monitor professional careers of their alumni⁵. Results of such monitoring should be applied to modify studies' curricula and to compare education effects with the demand at the labour market⁶.

Another important component of assessment concerns opinions of the participants/graduates themselves. As higher education institutions are legally obliged to assess curricula and lecturers, there are questionnaire surveys conducted among students during the course and upon graduation. This monitoring method provides the organiser of studies or training with immediate feedback about the curriculum, but with time, graduates often have further reflections. This is why it is important to supplement monitoring results with relevant evaluation surveys held 1–5 years after completion of the course.

Quality as seen by participants of training or studies

Linkage of quality assessment and such objective factors as actual professional achievements is an attempt to „counteract personal bias”⁷: if a participant or graduate assesses the course, they present their per-

⁴ Regulation by the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the 2nd November 2011 on National Qualification Framework for Higher Education (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 253, item 1520).

⁵ Act of the 27th July 2005 Higher Education Law.

⁶ Regulation by the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the 5th October 2011 on conditions of organisation of studies at specific subjects and levels (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 243, item 1445).

⁷ C.A. Wedemayer, *Evaluation of Continuing Education Programs*, „American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education” 1969, No. 5, v. 33.

sonal feelings, dependent on whether liked the lecturer, on their mood etc. The risk of the negative impact of subjectivism has been long discussed in theory of education⁸.

However, participants' attitudes are also important, because they affect the graduates' willingness to continue education. This is why it is necessary to strike a compromise between the demand on the employees' side – what types and content of courses they find valuable and interesting, and the employers' demand – what sort of skills are needed at the labour market. To measure the former element, monitoring questionnaires and follow-up evaluation are excellent methods. Below, we discuss an example of such a monitoring & evaluation survey in the case of an EU-funded training project.

Monitoring and evaluation in EU-funded training

Description of the project

The project „Educating for Work” („Kształcimy dla pracy”) was implemented by Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa we Wrocławiu (WSH), a private-owned higher education institution. It was funded entirely by the European Social Fund and the public contribution within the Polish „Human Capital” Operational Programme, priority axis „Science and Higher Education” and submeasure „Strengthening and development of didactic potential of universities”. The project lasted 24 months, starting in October 2009 and ending in September 2011⁹.

The project's main focus was on three different domains:

- introduction of a distance learning system at the school,
- courses and foreign training for the faculty,
- second-cycle studies and post-graduate training for graduates.

In all, the project provided 6 training courses in 2 subjects for at least 144 persons. Overall, 166 persons started the courses and 146 persons completed them, which means the completion rate 87,95% and achievement of 101,39% of the predefined indicator. As the offered

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ „Educating for Work”, Application for Funding, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2011.

programmes were actually training and not full post-graduate studies, the completion criteria were easy to achieve for the participants, because they relied on attendance.

In conformity with the European and Polish rules and requirements, the project was continuously monitored by a dedicated monitoring specialist. The participants answered a set of questions at the beginning of the training, which allowed for verifying their expectations and attitudes, as well as reasons for their interest in lifelong learning; and then they were asked to answer a similar questionnaire at the end of the course. These baseline and completion questionnaires were filled in by all the participants. During the training, there were also monitoring questionnaires to verify quality of particular subjects and work of particular lecturers. In this case, it was not obligatory for participants to fill in the questionnaires.

The post-completion evaluation was held in September and October 2012, i.e. between 15 and 28 months after the final training sessions. The participants were asked by previous employees of the project via e-mails to fill in an online questionnaire and to assess their current situation and the impact of the training on their professional and private lives.

High Level Manager

Description of the course

This post-graduate course was dedicated to women in order to enhance gender equality at the Polish labour market in accordance to the European Union's horizontal policy, set out in article 16 of the Regulation 1083/2006¹⁰. There were four editions held: two between January and July 2010 and two between January and July 2011. A total of 112 ladies started the course, among them 60 aged above 45 and 12 disabled persons (Fig. 1). All of them held university-level diplomas.

¹⁰ Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, Official Journal of the European Union L 210/25.

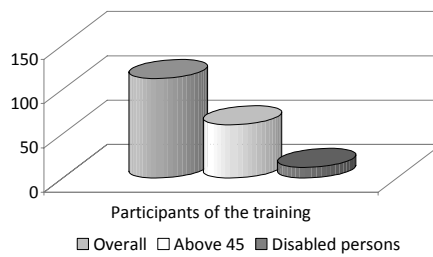


Figure 1. Participants of the „High-Level Manager” training (n = 112)

Out of them, 56 persons submitted the evaluation questionnaire 1–2 years later, so the response ratio was 50%. As many as 37 of them were aged over 45 by then and 4 of them were disabled (Fig. 2). Therefore, it should be stressed out that the discussed results show responses of this group who were willing to cooperate with the project team further and that ladies above 45 were over-represented in the respondents’ group.

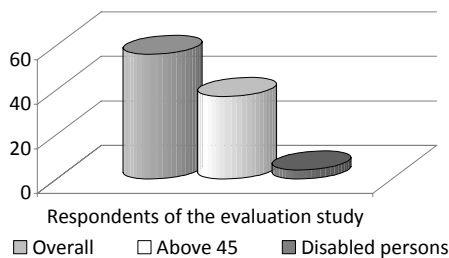


Figure 2. Respondents of the evaluation study (n = 56)

The course included 120 hours of training, covering 10 subjects:

- roles, duties and responsibilities of a high-level manager,
- leadership and management – modern situation, concepts and changes,
- controlling and managerial accounting. Management Information System,
- success factors for management staff – differences between genders,
- staff recruitment and selection. Talent management,

- public presentation and media relations training. Emotion and stress management,
- e-economy, e-commerce,
- value management at enterprises,
- managerial coaching,
- corporate management in the context of sustainable development policies¹¹.

Monitoring. The participants' opinions expressed during the training

In monitoring questionnaires, filled in during the training itself, each course was assessed at its last session for usefulness and clarity of its contents. The lowest grade was 1 and the highest – 5. The participants assessed all the courses very highly, the lowest average result being almost 4,50. The exact results are shown in Fig. 3¹².

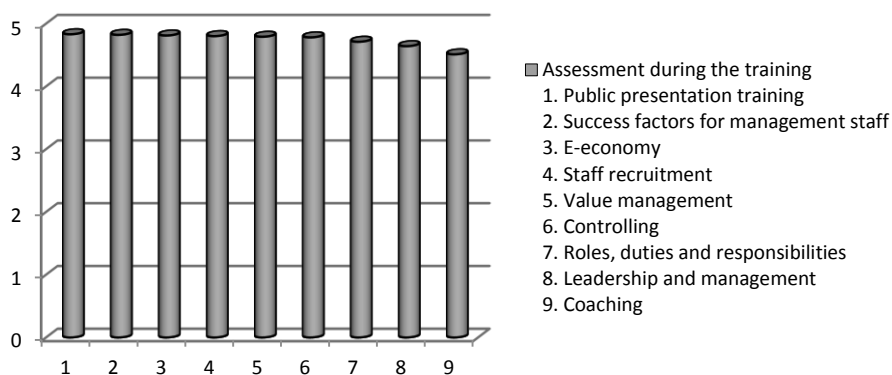


Figure 3. Assessment of particular subjects in monitoring questionnaires

At the last session of the whole training each participant (including persons who had not completed the course) was asked personally or via

¹¹ www.kdp.handlowa.eu (14.05.2013).

¹² One subject (Corporate management in the context of sustainable development policies) is not considered, because only 4 hours were dedicated to this issue and therefore its assessment is irrelevant.

e-mail to fill in a final questionnaire. The most important questions concerned overall satisfaction and the content of the training. The final questionnaires were submitted by 106 women (all of those who completed the course and none of those who resigned).



Figure 4. Overall satisfaction at the end of the training (n = 106)

Figure 4 shows that as many as 96,2% of participants were satisfied (either fully or rather satisfied) with the training and only one person in all four editions felt definitely disappointed at the end of the training. 91,5% of the participants found the content of the training relevant to their knowledge and needs (Fig. 5).

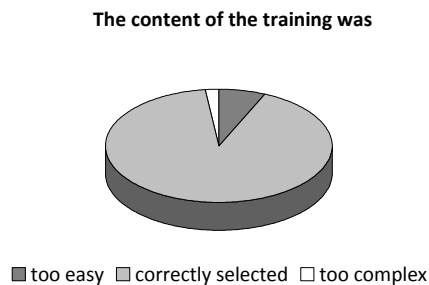


Figure 5. Assessment of the content of the training (n = 106)

Evaluation. The participants' opinions expressed after the training

The overall satisfaction expressed by the participants in the evaluation study was similar to the one reported right after the training. The respondents answered questions on whether they remembered being satisfied with the training at the moment of completion (Fig. 6) and whether they remained satisfied at the time of the evaluation (Fig. 7). The numbers were almost identical: out of 56 ladies, 53 reported being satisfied, making the satisfaction rate similar than in 2010 and 2011 (95% vs. 96%).

Were you satisfied with the training at the moment you completed it?

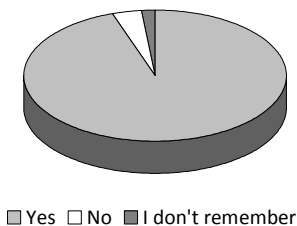


Figure 6. Overall satisfaction at the end of the training as reported 15–27 months later (n = 56)

Are you satisfied with the training now?

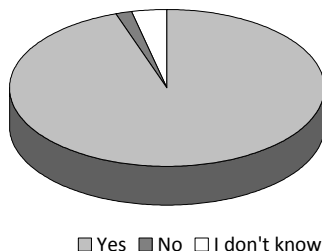


Figure 7. Overall satisfaction 15–27 month after the end of the training (n = 56)

However, the answers to questions concerning particular subjects showed a slight decrease in evaluation for all analysed courses but one (Fig. 8).

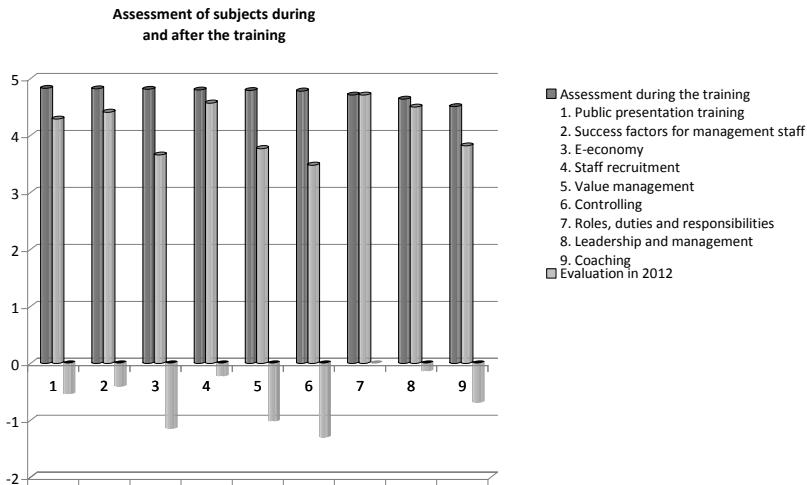
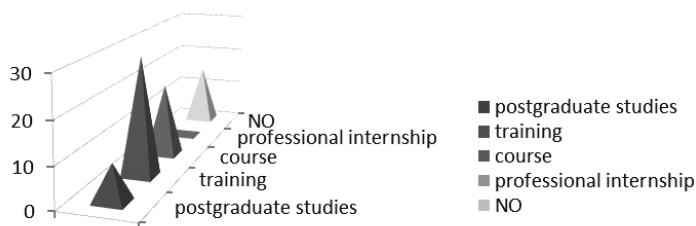


Figure 8. Assessment of particular subjects. Comparison of monitoring and evaluation data

The decrease is specially marked for hard skills courses (e-economy and e-commerce, value management at enterprises, controlling and accounting) as compared to soft skills courses. This shows a shift in satisfaction: the participants were still satisfied with the training, but they realised the level of usefulness of discussed issues for their professional life.

Still, all the respondents remained persuaded that lifelong learning was important for a person's professional as well as personal development and this attitude was reflected in their further activities: only 15 of the respondents (26,79%) did not take part in any sort of teaching programme and for the number of answers given by the remaining 41 ladies given a ratio of almost 1.4 programmes per participant within 15–27 months (Fig. 9).



Did you undertake other lifelong learning activities after completion of the training?

Figure 9. Further lifelong learning activities of the respondents

Surprisingly, when asked which form of lifelong learning is the most useful for adaptation at the labour market, the respondents indicated training and courses more often than practical internships (Fig. 10). This may be due to their satisfaction with the „High-Level Manager” training or else to overrepresentation of middle-aged woman, who are less willing to undertake unpaid work.

What form of lifelong learning is the most useful at the labour market?

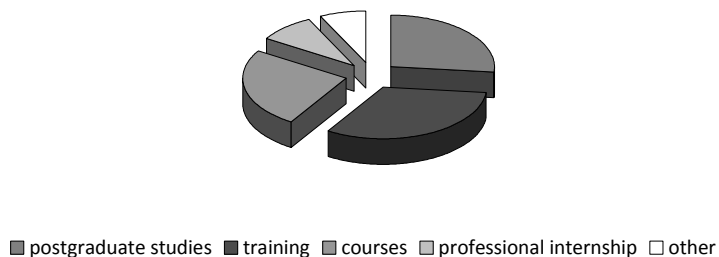


Figure 10. Assessment of usefulness of forms of lifelong learning

Introduction to MBA

Description of the course

The purpose of the training was to promote lifelong learning and the concept of MBA studies. The whole programme was organised in English, so knowledge of English was required at the recruitment process, but a dedicated course of Business English was included in the curriculum, as well. The recruitment scheme provided preferential conditions for persons above 45 years of age and disabled persons.

In all, 54 people were enrolled for two editions (one in March–July 2010 and the other in March–July 2011), with only 6 of them above 45 years of age and 1 disabled person (Fig. 13). This rate – much lower than in the case of the other training – may be related to lower knowledge of English among middle-aged and disabled people related to their lower participation in education and labour market in all¹³, as well as their reluctance to take part in a course associated with prestigious MBA studies. The completion ratio was lower than with the „High Level Manager”: 81,48% (44 persons graduated from the course).

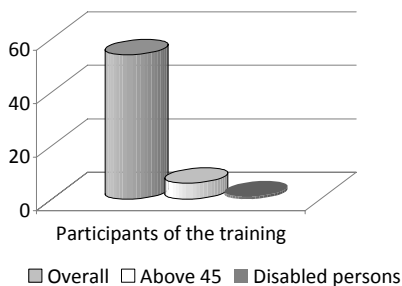


Figure 11. Participants of the „Introduction to MBA” training (n = 54)

The response to the evaluation questionnaire sent 15–27 months after the training was equal in relative numbers (47,73%), but this signifies a quite low absolute number of respondents (21 out of 44). The only disabled participant provided the questionnaire and meanwhile the

¹³ www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl/ (6.06.2013).

middle-aged participants were underrepresented in the evaluation study (Fig. 12).

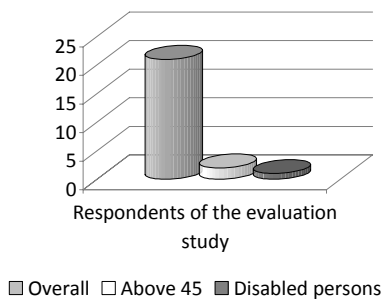


Figure 12. Respondents of the evaluation study (n = 21)

Interpretation of the results is more difficult also, because of significant differences in content between the two editions of the training (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Curriculum of the „Introduction to MBA” training

Subject	Number of hours I edition	Number of hours II edition
Introduction to MBA	4	4
English for Business	46	30
Essential Business Skills – Communication	24	24
Essential Business Skills – Management	24	36
Introduction to Business Law	18	–
Marketing Management	–	22
MBA at WSH	4	4

Monitoring. The participants’ opinions expressed during the training

Persons who graduated from the „Introduction to MBA” were obliged to fill in the final monitoring questionnaire as well. Their overall satisfaction was markedly lower than in the case of the other training (Fig. 13) with less than a half of the graduates declaring the training „decidedly satisfying”.

Did the training satisfy your expectations?

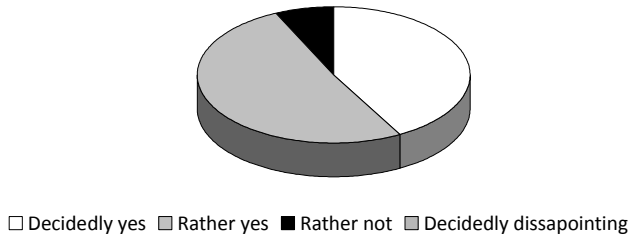


Figure 13. Overall satisfaction at the end of the training (n = 44)

Similarly, assessment of the content of the training was less favourable (Fig. 14). Only a little over 75% of the graduates deemed it correct.

The content of the training was

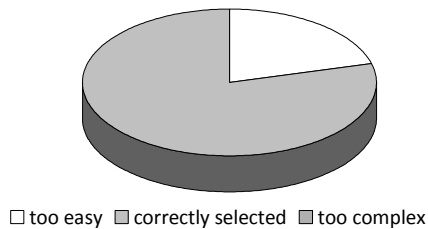


Figure 14. Assessment of the content of the training (n = 44)

In the case of particular subjects, the participants' contentment was quite variable, ranging from 3,36 to 4,92 out of 5 (Fig. 15). It should be stressed, however, that the worst-assessed subject of Introduction to Business Law was withdrawn from the curriculum of the second edition.

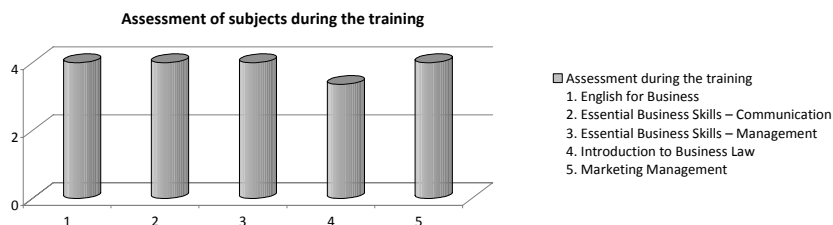
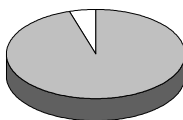


Figure 15. Assessment of particular subjects in monitoring questionnaires¹⁴

Evaluation. The participants' opinions expressed after the training

Almost all respondents of this group remembered being satisfied with the training at the moment of completing it (Fig. 16), but after 15–27 months they found it more difficult to assess their contentment with having participated in „Introduction to MBA” (Fig. 17).

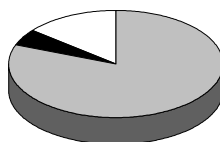
**Were you satisfied with the training
at the moment you completed it?**



■ Yes □ No ■ I don't remember

Figure 16. Overall satisfaction at the end of the training as reported 15–27 months later (n = 21)

Are you satisfied with the training now?



■ Yes ■ No □ I don't know

Figure 17. Overall satisfaction 15–27 month after the end of the training (n = 21)

¹⁴ The two 4-hour subjects were not assessed at the monitoring study. For the subjects held only at a single edition, the n number is respectively lower.

A very significant decrease was noted in evaluation of all the assessed courses within the training (reduction ranging from 7% up to 34% – Fig. 18).

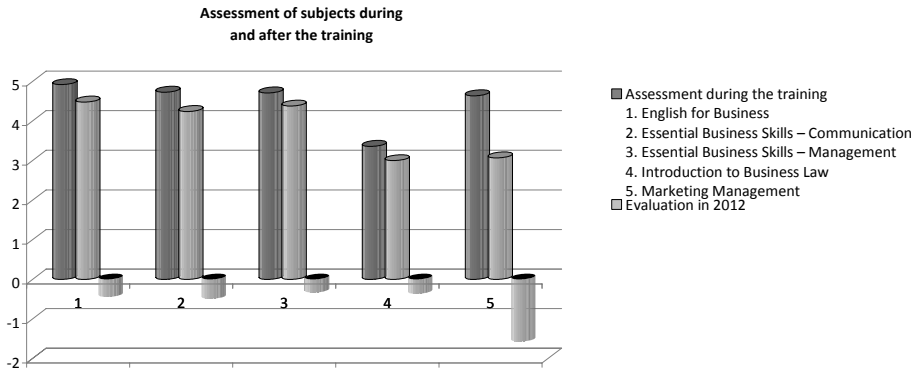


Figure 18. Assessment of particular subjects. Comparison of monitoring and evaluation data

It's clearly visible that more general subjects were assessed higher, while more specific courses got quite low evaluation. This may be related to the participants' expectations concerning more introductory and general character of this training.

Despite the significant differences between the two groups of respondents, the similar level of about 25% failed to continue education after the EU-funded training and for the remaining 15 respondents the average ratio was 1.5 programmes with higher prevalence of training and courses than postgraduate studies (Fig. 19).

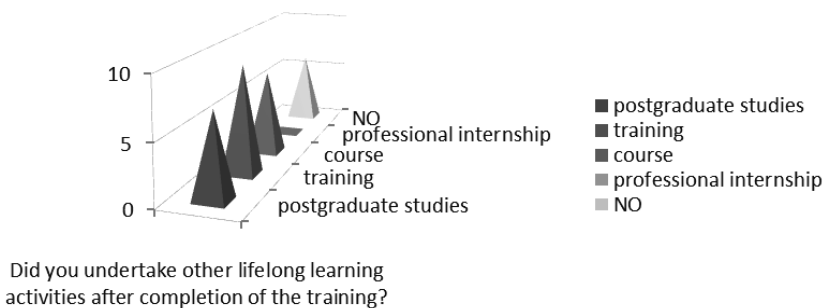


Figure 19. Further lifelong learning activities of the respondents

None of the respondents held a professional internship, but this was not due to their low opinion of this form of lifelong education, because over one third of them indicated internships as the most useful form at the labour market (Fig. 20).

What form of lifelong learning is the most useful at the labour market?

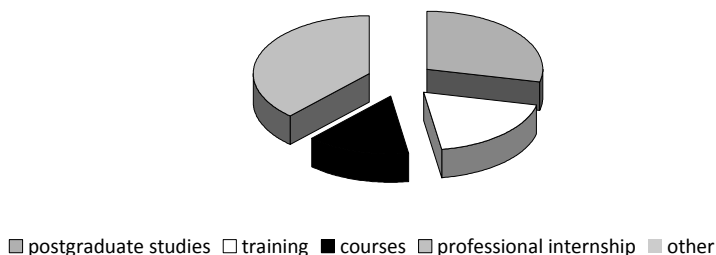


Figure 20. Assessment of usefulness of forms of lifelong learning

Durability of the project

For the participants

When asked about the strengths of the training, great majority of the participants of both trainings indicated that they themselves have gained knowledge and only 5 persons (1 graduate of the „High Level Manager” and 4 graduates of the „Introduction to MBA”) mentioned positive effects on their professional situation (Fig. 21).

In the direct question about practical effect of the training on their professional status, the respondents’ answers were quite ambiguous, although almost half of the respondents declared no effect (Fig. 22). The high number of „I don’t know” answers is remarkable.

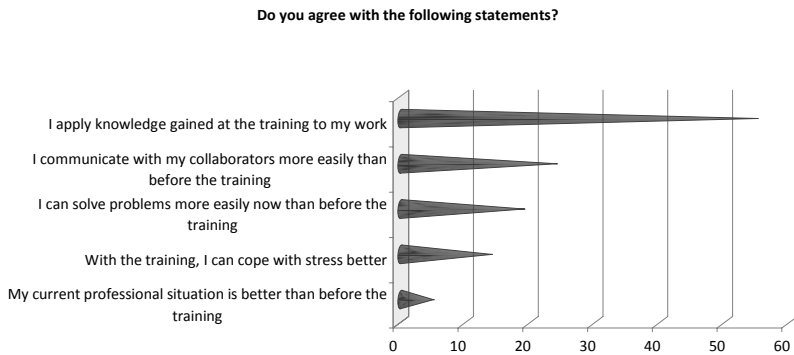


Figure 21. Effects of the training for the participants themselves (117 answers by 77 respondents)

Did the training change your professional status and situation?

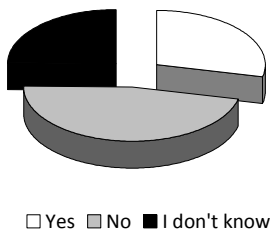


Figure 22. Effects of the training for the participants' professional status (n = 77)

Therefore the satisfying result of the training was perceived by the respondents as rather due to a change in attitudes than actual knowledge (Fig. 23) and noticeable especially in their own feelings rather than practical effects (Fig. 24) with more than a half of the respondents reporting growing professional satisfaction after the training.

Still, those intangible effects are very valued by the respondents, who are persuaded that lifelong learning is important both for the personal and professional development. In the evaluation study all participants (77 persons out of 77) answered „yes” to these two questions. This attitude is also reflected in the will to participate in further educational activities (Fig. 25), declared by almost 90% of the respondents, while only 2 persons answered they don't want to take part in further training.

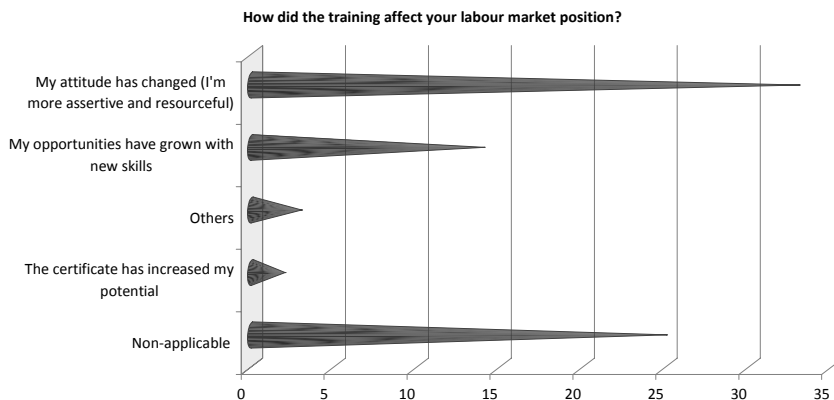


Figure 23. Effects of the training for the participants' labour market position (n = 77).

Has the level of your satisfaction with your work changed after the training?

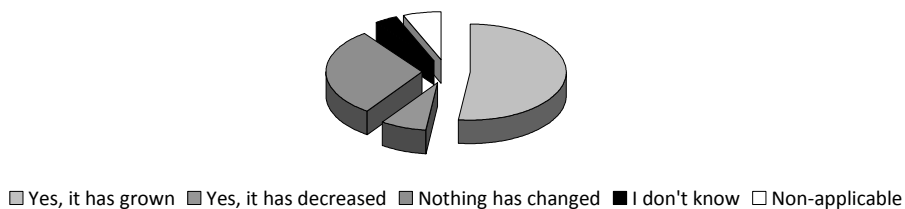


Figure 24. Effects of the training for the participants' professional satisfaction (n = 77)

Do you intend to take part in another training, postgraduate studies or another form of lifelong learning?

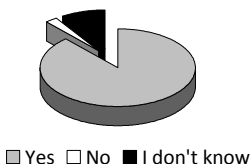


Figure 25. The respondents' plans on further lifelong learning (n = 77)

The project's added value for the beneficiary

In general, the outcome of the project for the beneficiary, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa in the discussed case, can be measured in two main fields of assets and know-how.

The first area of the project, introduction of a distance learning system at the school, brought measurable results in both fields, as the purchased equipment is used by students and faculty and at the same time, WSH has successfully implemented e-learning to all sort of studies it holds. Although the system requires constant improvements, the initial introduction would have been impossible without external funding and the distance learning platform is a source of many advantages for a university, its lecturers and students¹⁵.

The second area – courses and foreign training for the faculty – also was a source of added value for WSH, both in terms of a direct gain in the lecturers' skills and thus in the university's market competitiveness, and cooperation with training service providers. This is valid especially for the foreign cooperation, as WSH managed to organise another training for lecturers at the same university in the USA and the scientific cooperation is developing, too¹⁶.

In the case of the third area, second-cycle studies and post-graduate training which was in the main focus of the paper, the visible results concern mainly know-how. None of the programmes was later introduced to the university's regular postgraduate studies' offer, but the experience gained was used for organisation of other programmes, especially the complete MBA curriculum.

It is also worth noting that, considering the decreasing number of high-school graduates in Poland, promotion of lifelong learning is crucial

¹⁵ S. Schott Karr, *Anytime Anyplace Learning*, „Financial Executive”, 2002, t. 18 (8); *No-woczesne kształcenie z wykorzystaniem technik multimedialnych – możliwości i przykłady*, red. J. Olearnik, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2011; *Problemy kształcenia z wykorzystaniem nowych mediów*, red. L. Sieniawski, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 2012.

¹⁶ „Odpowiadamy na wyzwania nowych rynków. Innowacyjna Edukacja Menedżerska”, Application for Funding, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2013; *Współ-praca kobiet i mężczyzn w zarządzaniu – korzyści, problemy i konieczne zmiany*, red. T. Kupczyk, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2013.

for higher-education institutions. The discussed results of monitoring and evaluation studies show that the most important result of such training lies in further enhancement of positive attitudes to lifelong learning rather than in practical economic effects for the participants.

Conclusions – effect of funding on lifelong learning

The similarities and cohesion between the results obtained at the baseline and after 15–27 months shows efficiency of questionnaire monitoring studies. This method is not very precise and provides only declarations of the respondents, however – within those limitations – it offers reliable and valid information that can be reproduced in further research.

This information is useful not only for scientific purposes, but especially for practical reasons for organisers of training and other forms of lifelong learning as it shows preferences of potential users, their expectations and interests. The monitoring data were used during the project to improve further editions and it turns out that the opinions of the respondents did not change extremely after the second thought.

In the case of evaluation of results of an EU-funded project for its beneficiary, the study shows that actual consequences depend on the beneficiary's capability to absorb them rather than on the content of the project itself. This is why the most notable results are brought by operations aimed directly at the beneficiary's functioning.

The results of the study suggest that both monitoring and evaluation are useful for the beneficiary and the organiser. It is not only an obligation but also an opportunity.

Considering the currently decreasing demand for first- and second-cycle studies, universities may use this data to enrich their lifelong learning offer which may become a crucial competitive advantage in the modern Europe. The evaluation of the „Introduction to MBA” and „High-level Manager” trainings shows that this form of education may gain momentum, especially now that it is promoted by authorities. The opinions of the graduates of the training show that skills are the most wanted and needed for the participants. Their professional situation may be strongly affected by attitude shaping within education. Therefore, in lifelong learning individual skills and social competences are equally or more impor-

tant than knowledge gained. Constant monitoring and evaluation may also ensure flexibility of programmes and curricula needed to adapt to the ever-changing environment.

JAKOŚĆ EDUKACJI USTAWICZNEJ. MONITORING A EWALUACJA. STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

Rynek kształcenia ustawicznego oraz społeczne postrzeganie tej idei podlegały silnemu wpływowi ogromnego wsparcia finansowego na szkolenia i inne inwestycje w kapitał ludzki z Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego w latach 2007–2013. Zbliża się koniec tej perspektywy finansowej i trwają negocjacje dotyczące planów na okres 2014–2020, dlatego konieczna jest ocena skuteczności tych wysiłków. W artykule omawiamy wyniki badania empirycznego studium przypadku jednego projektu. Wybrałyśmy ten projekt, ponieważ obie byłyśmy w nim zatrudnione. Artykuł obejmuje porównanie wyników monitoringu w trakcie szkoleń finansowanych przez Unię Europejską oraz danych ewaluacyjnych złożonych przez absolwentów 1–2 lata po ukończeniu szkoleń. Wyniki badań wskazują korzyści ze szkoleń oraz sugerują kierunki rozwoju tego rodzaju szkoleń.

Słowa kluczowe: *kształcenie ustawiczne, projekty dofinansowane z UE, jakość kształcenia, kapitał ludzki, kompetencje społeczne*

Tłumaczenie na język polski Małgorzata Madej