Haute Ecole

Groupe ICHEC – ECAM – ISFSC

Enseignement supérieur de type long de niveau universitaire

How can companies influence training's effectiveness in order to increase employee's productivity: the case of BESIX

Thesis presented by:

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To obtain the degree of:

Master's degree in Management Science

Academic year 2020-2021

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SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

Nowadays, companies around the world all face challenges to thrive in their market. Each one develops its own strategy to break-even, and outpace its competitors. In this context, as “training is a tool that can help in gaining competitive advantages” (Kulkarni, 2013), the workforce can play a key role in companies’ strategy as is the common denominator to all organizations. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to explore theory to try understanding how companies can design training programs that will increase their employee’s productivity. First of all, history is of the utmost importance in this context because organizations can learn from the past, and observe how gradually this thematic has gained ground, decade after decade. After that, the emphasis is set firstly on theory by defining how organizations can set up effective training programs, and then, on explaining the effects of training on employee’s performance. To conclude, BESIX’s training and development strategy will be observed to see what is currently in place, and what could be missing, so as to come up with realistic and useful recommendations.

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"None of us got to where we are alone. Whether the assistance we received was obvious or subtle, acknowledging someone's help is a big part of understanding the importance of saying thank you."

Harvey Mackay

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General Introduction

While companies around the world want to be strong and viable in their market they also face increased competition due to globalization, changes in technology, political and economic environments (Evans, Pucik & Barsoux 2002). Of course, financial viability is essential for a company to thrive, otherwise the company will not be able to deliver its output to the society. But in order to face all these challenges, what do companies rely on? Their manpower. Million (2017) argues that “manpower affects everything in a business from production to client relationships. Without adequate and supportive manpower, a business will never be successful” and nowadays companies are aware of it.

The above findings were made during my personal experience at BESIX, which did not appear to have an adequate training program for its employees, especially when they join the company. Indeed, despite a multitude of tools at their disposal, it is still complicated to invest in the search for training, given their daily workload. I quickly realized that defining a training strategy is only the beginning; ensuring that it is effective for the organization is an ongoing challenge that must be constantly adapted.

Based on these different observations, I decided that the objective of my thesis will be to identify the elements to be considered for the elaboration of an efficient training and development program, but also to think further, and see if other elements could not also be considered in order to increase the productivity of BESIX employees. The final objective will be to provide strategic and operational recommendations that BESIX can implement to improve its productivity through a training and development program. Therefore, the research question of this thesis is:

“How can companies influence training’s effectiveness in order to increase employee’s productivity: the case of BESIX”

To address this question, we will discuss the concepts of training and development programs, and then consider what, beyond training, could increase the productivity of these trained employees. I have chosen to address these two topics together because I am deeply convinced that they are inseparable when it comes to implementing an effective training program in a company. Furthermore, as companies face increasing competitive pressures, employees are becoming a strategic element in differentiating themselves from their competitors.

In addition, having had the opportunity to explore the business world from a theoretical perspective after five years of training at ICHEC, I wondered how much importance was given to the human element in a company's race for profitability. I was therefore motivated to address this subject in order to demonstrate that a company's employees are its essential component in order to achieve its objectives.

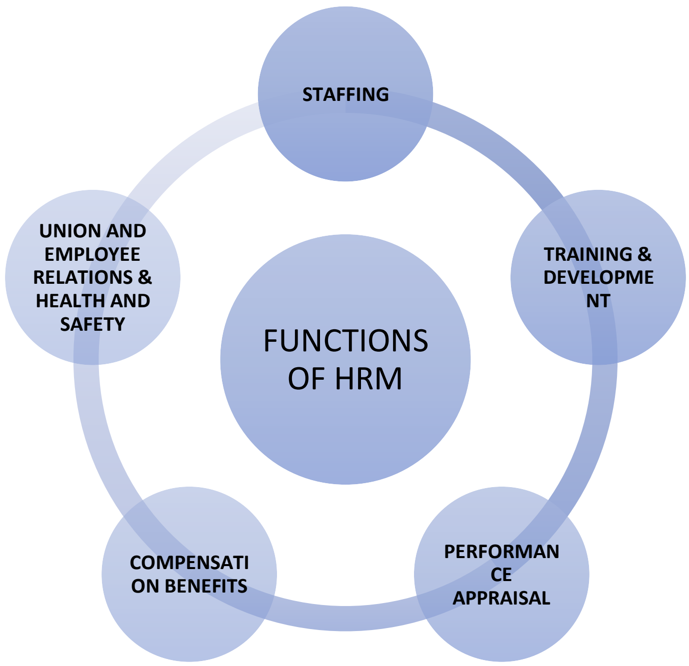
PART 1: Literature review

CHAPTER 1: THE FIVE CORE FUNCTIONS OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

If we want to understand what incentivizes a company to invest in training for its employees, it is important to first look into which kind of activities an HR-department has to deal with in the day-to-day operations.

One of the core functions of a company is human resource management (or HRM). According to Flippo (1980) , HRM can be explained as "*planning, organizing, directing, controlling of procurement, development, compensation, integration, maintenance and separation of human resources to the end that individual, organizational and social objectives are achieved*." Therefore, we can summarize this by saying that the role of HRM is to find, maintain and utilize the right workforce in order to meet the company's objectives. In 2011, Briscoe et al. (2011) came up with a proposition of the core HRM functions, which are the following: staffing, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and benefits, and finally union and employee relationship as well as health and safety

Figure 1: The five core functions of Human Resource Management



Source: Briscoe, D., Schuler, R. and Tarique, I. (2011). *International Human Resource Management: Policies and Practices for Multinational Enterprises (Global HRM)* (4th Edition). London: Routledge.

1.1. Staffing

The process of finding the right staff can vary a lot in function of criteria such as local regulations, the business model of the company or even in function of the economic conjuncture. As hiring staff will imply a lot of costs and obligations for the chief of the company, this task must be done very carefully. Indeed, the purpose of the company is to find the person that matches the position but also the one who fits with the organization values and beliefs. In order to do so, the HRM must write and post job vacancies, screen applicants through interviews, conduct assessments, advise managers on hiring decisions and organize the final stages for the entry of the new employees. But this process is also faced with many challenges, one of them being that the company must have a solid knowledge of what they need at that moment and what they will need in the future to maintain their business viable. Therefore, the HR partner must work hand in hand with the line-managers and/or supervisors.

1.2. Training and development

The idea behind the process of training and development is to give an orientation to the employee's career. It's a continuous process which will last the whole period the employee will work within the company. It will of course begin on the very first day of their entry. To organize training and development, there are various possibilities, such as organizing teambuilding activities for the newcomers in order to strengthen the relationship between employer and employees. But the main objective of training is to improve the employee's skills in order to prepare them for future professional development opportunities. In that way, the employee will be able to take on additional responsibilities and thus climb up the ladder.

But we must not lose sight of the fact that this process can and should be built by both parties to make sure that they go along with each other's objectives and that they still want to go in the same direction.

1.3. Performance appraisal

Taken separately, performance and appraisal have both their own meaning. In the context of HRM, performance refers to the productivity of employees in the workplace. Productivity is related to both effectiveness and efficiency and the equilibrium between the two is the cost. Efficiency helps have a clear overview of what inputs are needed in order to achieve the desired outputs. On the other hand, appraisal is typically the assessment, the evaluation that a certain behavior yields. This is usually done by someone who has a deeper knowledge on the field. Beach (1980) stated that "*performance appraisal is the systematic evaluation of the individual with respect to his or her performance on the job and his or her potential for development*". Performance appraisals are needed in organizations, not only because they help the manager to monitor the employee's performance, but because it is a great support to make decisions regarding selection, training, promotion, wage, etc. Moreover, when done accurately, an appraisal helps identify what is done properly in the company, what is not and the reasons for such performance.

1.4. Compensation and benefits

Compensation and benefits are another component of the company's HRM strategy. Indeed, it is one argument companies can put forward during the recruitment phase that aims at convincing the candidates to come and work for them. Compensations and benefits are, once again, a very wide concept that ranges from a business model to another. But the scheme also varies according to the type of employee. In fact, an entry-level position will not be offered in the same scheme as a senior member of the company. As it plays a big role in the remuneration of the employee, it influences the relationship between the employer that retains the workforce and the employee that feels rewarded. The compensation and benefits scheme can take the form of group benefit plans, mobility packages with a company car or a public transportation subscription or even extra insurance packages such as dental or life insurances.

1.1. Union and employee relations & health and safety

A study published in 2019 by the University of Oxford concluded that « *happy workers are 13% more productive* » (Bellet, C., De Neve, J.-E., & Ward, G. 2019). It is quite clear that ensuring a good relation between the employees and the company is one of the most importants roles of the HR department. Indeed, it is the relationships with the employees that enable a company to thrive because it involves all the above concepts. Therefore, the challenge in the HR department is of the utmost importance. In order to establish a good working sphere, the HR department may work on solutions to enhance employee recognition, development ….

In addition to what the companies may implement to ensure a good working atmosphere, they are to abide by the regulations of the country they have established their activities. In Belgium, several rules shape the professional sector. Actually, Belgium is known for its fairly extensive protective labour laws; It is therefore safe to say that companies who want to enter the Belgian market must be very careful. One other aspect of the Belgian professional world is that union power is very strong. Therefore, companies must also take this aspect in consideration to avoid hindrances caused by strikes, for example.

1.1. Conclusion of HRM components

In a nutshell, what we can say is that HRM functions are all interconnected. In fact, Schuler (1992) came up with the concept of strategic human resource management which he described as « all those activities affecting the behavior of individuals in their efforts to formulate and implement the strategic needs of businesses » while more recently, Bratton and Gold (2017) stated that "strategic human resource management is the process of linking the human reproduce function with the strategic objectives of the organization in order to improve performance."

Altogether, HRM functions give a direction to the company's strategy which serves as the window shop for (potential) employees and more generally, stakeholders. The strategy defines the company's actions and how it tries to deal with its environment. To draw up a strategy linked to its business model that will boost employee satisfaction and performance, companies have a great deal of maneuverability. But defining an effective one is not so easy. Indeed, many factors must be taken into consideration. For example, understanding what the company wants to reach in the long run but also considering external factors such as shifts in market conditions, labor markets and regulations, and international competition are vital so as to have a fit between the company's values and the implemented strategies. That way, they will be able to come up with an effective management of human resources, and thus, turn it into a competitive advantage.

CHAPTER 2: TRAINING WITHIN THE CORE FUNCTIONS OF HRM

1. What is training

There is an enormous amount of literature devoted to defining what a training is. Indeed, throughout the years, many definitions have emerged across the world; It is a concept that is as broad as deep. Among the previously-enumerated five core competencies of HRM, training and development will be found.

In fact, according to Dessler (2013), a training is "the process of teaching new or existing employees, the basic skills they need to carry on their work", while Decenzo and Robbins (2000) argue that a training is "learning experience, in that, it seeks a relatively permanent change in an individual that will improve his ability to perform on the job". But the notion of training is not new; indeed, in 1984, Filippo stated that "training is the act of increasing knowledge and skill of an employee for doing a particular job". And later, in 1999, Abiodun said that "Training is a systematic development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by employees to perform adequately on a given task or job. It can take place in a number of ways, on the job or off the job; in the organization or outside organization".

We can clearly observe that all the definitions stated by researchers coming from different parts of the world tend to converge in the same direction; one can therefore undeniably agree on the fact that the component at the center of the concept of training is the employee. And this goes along with what Cole (2004) stated: "Human resources are the most dynamic of all the organization's resources and therefore they need considerable attention from the organization's management, if the human resources are to realize their full potential in their work."

1.1. Historical review and evolution of training over time

To understand the concept of training in all its complexity, it is important to trace its evolution over time and, more specifically, the way it has been anchored in the daily life of companies over the years. And training has changed a lot through time because the nature of work has shifted dramatically, particularly "over the last century, when machines have replaced workers in many tasks" (Djankov & Saliola, 2018). However, on balance, Frey and Rahbari (2016) argue that "technology has created more jobs than it has displaced". If the technological aspect of work has changed, so have the lifestyle and the rights of the labor force.

Furthermore, let us not forget that many historical events also took place in the 20th century such as the First and the Second World Wars, the Great Depression, and later, the Gulf Wars. All of this inevitably changed the world, and the professional world has not been spared. In fact, retracing all that has had an impact on the evolution of the working world would be an endless job. Yet, we can observe an upward trend in the rise of training literature over the years. This may lead us to believe that it is a stopic which increasingly interests companies.

To set a relevant timeline of trainings-related articles, I will mainly focus on the ones published during the 20th century until nowadays.

1917 to 1959: the first traces of literature

The first piece of literature dedicated to training in the 20th century was published just after the first World War, in 1918, by Geissler where he shares his thoughts about the need for technically trained consulting psychologists. In his mind, it was needed to come up with a uniformed training path for consulting psychologists so that all the professionals share a common background. In order to do that, he suggested a general undergraduate course in colleges that could be then followed by a more in depth professional course at the university. With this common training for all consulting psychologists, he also came up with the idea of subdividing the topic into various fields of specialization such as commerce, education, law, or even mental hygiene.

Later, up to the 40's, most of the literature published aimed at defining what should be taught by the means of training. Among others, authors such as Sibley and Stogdill proposed in 1936, a method for training clinical psychologists by setting up an abstract gathering all clinical re-education techniques on cards while in 1918 Sturdevant focused on detailing a sales training for employees at the American Steel & Wire Company**.** The two authors focused on the training course developed with the objective of training the workforce to go in the same direction by teaching each business unit techniques of specialization, and finally, to give the employees a better understanding of the business challenges the company faces. The training was made only for employees and it was delivered by supervisors. In 2007, Kraiger and Ford stated that training was "once conducted almost exclusively on-the-job by supervisors", confirming the strategy of the American Steel & Wire Company.

As from the forties, published articles tended to start addressing the factors that would enhance training success. That is why, in 1943, Lawshe and Thornton started analyzing the improvement of the qualification of the same group of naval electrical trainees before and after having followed a training. During this decade, a growing interest for the measurement of the progress made by trainees can also be witnessed. In 1946, Kellogg decided to take a look at data gathered from a survey to study the progress in the development of flying skills.

During the last decade of the above studied period, research continued to dig into « human relations » but an up-going trend in the development of supervisory skills and attitudes could also be observed. Indeed, in 1959, Lawshe, Bolda and Brune released an article that was aimed at understanding the effects of exposures to role playing for supervisory positions. The goal was to show how effective role playing is as a tool in management human relations training. How learning is transferred also started to become a hot topic. Authors wanted to highlight the extent to which the learning of a response in a certain situation or task would influence the response of another one. In 1957, Benschoter and Charles compared the retention by students, three years after instruction was made, of learning in a classroom environment and learning via television-making it the first piece of research dedicated to studying the effects of distance learning. This study concluded that " that (…) long-term retention of (…) material learned by television (…) is as good as that learned by traditional means (...)" (Benschoter & Charles, 1957, p. 254).

1960's and 1970's: when the theory becomes clearer

Many articles released during that decade were more oriented to the study of specific cases rather than developing a general and comprehensive theory. Some studies focused on comparing the effects of different training methods and approaches like the one conducted by Siegel, Richlin and Federman in 1960. Their goal was to compare the knowledge acquired by two different groups of trainees to see to which extent short specialized training programs were enough. The first group consisted of graduates of several specialized training programs while the second one consisted of those having received broader training. Others wanted to address factors that allow training success.

But the turning point of the literature of this decade is in 1971 when Friedlander and Greenberg looked into what makes a training program effective. With their research, they concluded that the organizational climate in which the training was conducted is important in order for it to be successful. We can also mention the appearance of some literature dedicated to the effects of team training efficiency with the publication of Naylor and Briggs in 1965.

1980's: the trainee within training

The decade 70-80 marked the beginning of the recognition of the trainee within the training. Indeed, authors started placing emphasis on trainees' approach and response to learning. In 1989, Kanfer and Ackerman addressed concepts such as the cognitive abilities or self-regulatory processes of motivation of the trainees during skill acquisition. That same year, Latham, G. P., & Frayne, C. A. conducted a study that shows that after having received training, employees who perceive self-efficacy tend to have the highest scores of job-attendance.

Moreover, some authors such as Baldwin and Ford in their article published in the journal Personnel Psychology in 1988 or Goldstein in 1980 went the extra mile to analyze the transfer of knowledge to the trainee (e.g. skills learned applied to specific people and/or situations) so as to improve the efficiency of workplace training and ensure a maintenance of the added value brought about by the training.

Training in Context 1990's

The 90's was the decade when the emphasis was set on understanding the extent to which training shaped the trainee. Several studies then analyze in depth the factors that influence the employees' participation in development activities such as training. In 1993, Noe and Wilk came to the conclusion that the employee's motivation to learn was closely influenced by their perceptions of the work environment.

The year after, Maurer and Tarulli (1994) even go the extra mile in their research and investigate not only how the perceived environment but also how the perceived outcome, and personal variables in relationships contribute to the will of employees to take part in development activities. What is Interesting is that the concept of « workers' personal values » became a source of interest for the researchers, while it had never been previously mentioned. Finally, they came up with the conclusion that a possibly determining important role that divergences in values may influence in a development context. This provides precious tools for designers of successful training programs because it highlights the importance to consider individual values when setting up a training program.

Going the extra mile: 2000's to nowadays

The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century are characterized by the « dot-com bubble »; a period of huge growth when companies started to realize how the use and integrate the internet into their business model would bring a whole new way of doing business. That period of transformation in the beginning of the century still shows the magnitude of its power because it continues to shape our daily lives, more than 20 years later. The reality is that the labor force has changed along with the development of technology; the way companies develop training must therefore take this phenomenon into consideration. Because the internet seeped its way into our lives, the access to information became within everyone's reach. Before, employees would rely on experienced supervisors to pass them the necessary knowledge and skills whereas nowadays, everyone who wants to develop their understanding of a specific topic, can access the relevant information online.

And the research starting from the beginning of the 21st century did not escape this tendency. Indeed, the studies focused on the trainee more than ever before. The individual was put in all types of situations to try to understand what drives them. In 2002, Gully, Payne, Koles and Whiteman addressed the impact of error training and individual differences on outcomes and came up with interesting findings: the effectiveness of error training is positively correlated with the trainee's cognitive ability. Year after year, the internet gained ground in all the layers of life while, researchers also began to take a look at what organizations could implement to improve training engagement. That is why, in 2009, Orvis, Fisher and Wasserman (2009) tried to study the extent to which tools influence learning in an e-learning environment.

Finally, the scope of training has also been completely revised. It is very recently, in 2009 that Aguinis, H., & Kraiger, K. started considering what training and development could bring not only to companies, but more broadly, to individuals and groups, organizations, and finally, our society. The concept of « cross-training » was also raised by Marks, M. A., Sabella, M. J., Burke, C. S., & Zaccaro, S. J. in 2002 by looking at the bringing of team-interaction on coordination, and performance.

Now that we have contextualized the research made since the beginning of the 20th century, let us focus on the scope of training, from what it concretely is to the goals they want to achieve, the design of training programs, and the different methods and techniques for it to be effective.

2. What is training and development, benefits and deterrents

Training is very important to give an evolution perspective not only to the employee but also the organization. Indeed, by figuring out how to organize and facilitate learning and development, companies will transfer knowledge, skills, and abilities to the work force leading to an enhanced job performance.

2.1. Training and development: the same but different

While training mainly focuses on enhancing the skills and the knowledge of a certain group through learning activities aimed at improving their performance, development is linked with the growth of individuals within the organization itself, by climbing up the professional ladder. In fact, training is more dedicated to the preparation of the employee to take on new job duties whereas development induces a notion of future goals and achievements.

That is why in the view of Briscoe, Schuler, and Tarique (2011) of the five core functions of HRM, training and development are combined. Their will is to show the evolution, not only in terms of skills and knowledge, but also in terms of long run perspectives of the organization's employees. Nevertheless, the fact that they are used together does not mean that they are the same. Indeed, discrepancies exist between the two notions. Typically, training has definite and quantifiable purposes such as enhancing one's mastery of a certain computer program, or, like Sturdevant (1918), teaching a specific technique to intensify the manpower's productivity in its own business unit. It is rather a short-run process. On the contrary, developmental programs are more focused on developing a personality in the long-run as they mainly address less measurable (soft) skills that are useful not only in the workplace, but also in daily life. We can name examples such as leadership skills and time management.

2.2. Pro's and Con's

After having reviewed some literature devoted to explaining what training and development is, it is important to understand the profits for organizations to invest in delivering training programs in their business model. In 2002, Cole came up with a proposition of what organization could benefit by setting up such programs that could be summarized in four main points:

- ✔ **Lower cost of production** – By enhancing personnel's skills, risks of failure are diminished and so is the consumption of resources. Therefore, they perform better and increase their productivity. In the end, it also allows the organization to reach an optimum utilization of the human resources at their disposal.

- ✔ **Lower turnover** – The workforce that receives training feels a sense of security at the workplace. It contributes to reducing the labor turnover and absenteeism and boosting the quality of the output delivered.

- ✔ **Change management** – As the professional world is constantly changing, providing training to the personnel gives them a better understanding of the required type of skills over time to keep up with shifts in the sector; as a consequence, they feel involved in the reality and the complexity of the challenges faced by the organization.

- ✔ **Provide recognition** – employees who follow training are given higher responsibilities and, sometimes, it also paves the way to a future promotion or an increase in salary.

To sum up, a distinction can also be made between what employees and organizations will benefit by embracing training. Firstly, employees are able to develop their skills that will come in handy in the course of their career, allowing them to climb up the ladder by mastering a broad knowledge of their position. Moreover, training also enables the employee boost their performance. By learning how to deal with a new tool or how to react in concrete situation, they will feel rewarded and their satisfaction towards the organization will soar. On the other hand, the organizations also benefit from trained employees because they will help to reach new goals and expand their market by mastering the field of activity. Furthermore, the organization's performance will also be improved as they will be able to better master their human resource, by reaching an optimum level of allocation. And finally, as the organization will give perspective to them by making such training available to them, the employees will feel recognized. Training thus provides an actual win-win.

Figure 2: Training benefits for employee and organizations

Source: Jehanzeb, K., and Bashir, N. A. (2013). Training and Development Program and its Benefits to Employee and Organization: A Conceptual Study. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 5 (2), 243-153. https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/EJBM/article/view/3947

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that there are also deterrents in the chief of organizations.

According to a report published in *Training Magazine,* in 2020, in the USA, the average company spent approximately $1,100 per employee on training costs (ELM Learning, 2021). Indeed, even if it is $175 less per person in comparison with the figures of 2019, it still represents a high cost for companies. Moreover, organizations should not lose sight of the fact that there is always a risk that an employee who has received training, quits their job, which would prevent a reasonable return on investment. Furthermore, companies must also take into consideration that there are an infinite number of ways to provide training. However, it is important to make sure that the training given is relevant to the company's objectives. Therefore, knowing your business model is essential before embarking on this type of investment. Otherwise, such a huge financial investment could be wasted.

3. Designing an effective training and development campaign

This part will be devoted to explaining how organizations design and implement effective training programs within their business. To this end, policies, procedures, principles, and norms must be considered. Organizations may want to carry out such programs for numerous reasons; to be sure that the workforce remains up-to-date regarding the changes of the market, for example. The objective is to provide all the tools to the workforce to improve their performance. But we must never lose sight of the fact that designing and implementing training programs is a continuous process which must always be adapted to the reality of the market, but also to the response from the trainees themselves.

3.1. To what end?

Such programs can only be implemented if clear objectives are disclosed. Indeed, knowing the final objective is of the utmost importance to be able identify what should be executed. Also, one must not forget that every organization is different, even if they operate in the same sector. The values, the culture, the structure, and the management style, are different criteria that enable a company to distinguish itself from the competition.

But in the context of training programs, companies all share the same objective: enhance the skills of their workforce so that they are able to perform their tasks skillfully and behave in such a way that they are fully committed to contribute to the growth of the organization. There may be several reasons why employees need to attend a training program. Indeed, training programs can aim at sensitizing employees regarding the goals and the objectives pursued. In fact, by integrating them into the process, they will be able to understand the purpose of following the training. Another objective of such programs can the improvement of knowledge of some employees. Because every organization is different, one can possess the skills and experience but still not be able to perform well. In this case, training programs can help them understand the specific processes inherent to the company.

3.2. Design phase: the steps of an effective training program

According TalenTeam (2019), the path from design to the implementation of training programs within organizations can be summarized in the following steps.

3.2.1. Defining the needs, a whole strategy

As mentioned, training and development programs are a solution for organizations that want to boost their business' performance and their employees' satisfaction towards the company. But for such programs to be effective, a deep analysis of what kind of skills and / or knowledge must be improved and of the goals the company wants to reach in the future must be duly conducted. Indeed, both needs and goals will help the company measure the scope of the program that best suits their business model. It is indeed by spotting correctly the needs that a company will reach its goals.

For companies, being able to optimize their human resource capital at the maximum is the objective. In fact, an optimal allocation of this factor is beneficial for the organization that wants its employees to bring them the best "return on investment", but also for the employees who feel recognized within the organization by being given the opportunity and the trust to gain knowledge and climb up the ladder. Alternatively, it might also improve the employee's work experience because providing them training on both soft skills and training to gain knowledge on new fields, will help them develop their personality. This can potentially improve retention, and therefore, make the company save up money on recruitment procedures.

Nowadays, most companies face fierce competition in their markets and monopolistic positions are becoming increasingly rare. Therefore, finding ways to differentiate themselves from the competition is becoming paramount. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the last two decades have been characterized by the "dot-com bubble", where technology has profoundly changed all aspects of life. That is why companies are increasingly willing to adapt themselves to new structures, cultures, and even, new methods to boost their performance to be able to respond to quick evolving changes in the economic context. And in order to do so, people must acquire new skills, knowledge, and understandings of the environment they are part of. Therefore, training and development programs must attempt to provide the workforce with the necessary competencies for them to be capable of reaching higher levels of performance. If we look at Boydell's (1990) findings, to identify training needs, one must answer the following questions:

- Where do you want your business to go in the future?
- What kind of skills and knowledge are needed to get there?
- Which kind of skills does your workforce already possess within the business and which ones are missing?

That is why managers must also take part in the project. They are the ones responsible for spotting their employees' skills and find the best alternatives for them to develop the ones that are missing. Of course, we cannot lose sight of the fact that training cannot be considered as the only way to boost an organization's performance. But in 2019, Wingard stated that "Once they [generation Z] move into the job market, employers who provide educational opportunities will stand out. High quality workplace training offerings (...) will satisfy their desire for career advancement (...)" (Wingard, 2019). We can therefore conclude that training and development programs will become the norm, and if companies do not jump the bandwagon, they will probably be losing a lot.

To assess the needs in terms of training and development correctly, three different types of assessments can be foreseen: the organizational, occupational and individual assessments.

- Organizational assessment: This kind of assessment is devoted to determining the skills, knowledge and abilities the company lacks to meet its goals. Broadly speaking, it looks at the way the company handles its weaknesses and emphasizes its strengths. The organization's processes and structure such as the work environment are reviewed. Thanks to this assessment, recommendations can be suggested and action plans designed to reach the organization's goals.

- Occupational (task) assessment. This sort of assessment analyzes the specific tasks, skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to best perform the tasks employees are entrusted with within the company. A close look at the daily tasks of the workers helps to figure out what is lacking and what is being done well.

- Individual assessment: Individual assessments consider each employee's performance individually to identify what kind of training is needed for which person. (University of Kansas, 2018)

By applying, at first, an organizational assessment to the training and development scheme within a company, it is possible to take future trends into consideration and draw up a strategic plan to correctly determine the needs. Moreover, it also helps staying up-to-date regarding the changes in the sector by comparing the findings to what is done by other companies and thus, obtaining more accurate data for the occupational and individual assessments.

3.2.1.1. The gap analysis

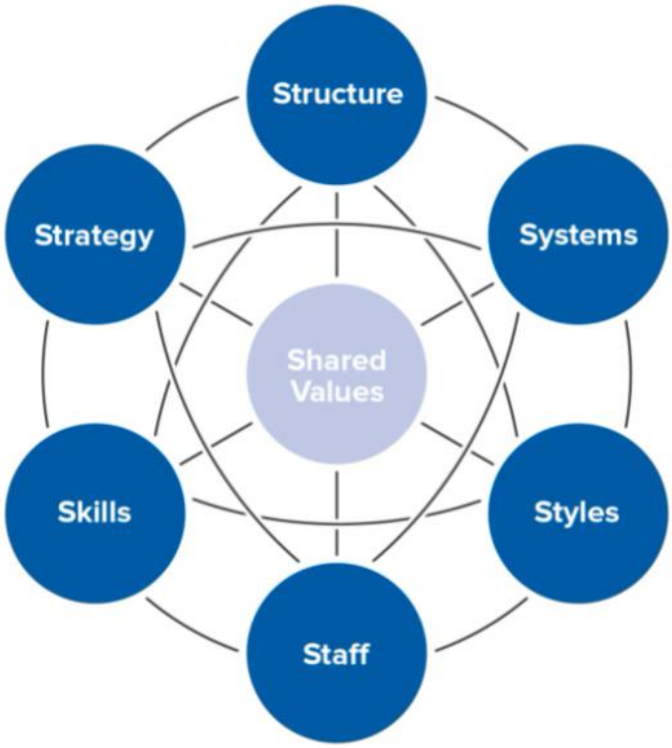
Many other approaches can be considered in order to determine the needs in terms of training within a company; Performing a "gap analysis" can be one of them. A gap analysis is a comparison of the same business under two different points of views. By taking a look at the current situation of the company in terms of skills and knowledge the employees already possess and then a view at what is required to meet the desired future objectives. To conduct an effective gap analysis, one should start by establishing specific targets by taking into consideration the organization's mission statement, strategic goals and improvement objectives. After that, one should focus on the current business processes in place by looking at how resources are being allocated to reach performance. Finally, comes the comparison between the present situation and the goals it wants to reach. Thanks to all these steps, designing a clear-cut plan that depicts the procedures to follow in order to fill the gap is now possible. (Sales, 2014).

3.2.1.2. The McKinsey 7 S model

This framework is used to look into the business' organizational structure by scrutinizing 7 internal factors divided into two different categories. Strategy, structure, systems are considered as "hard" elements of the framework because they are quite easy to identify, the managing team can influence these three components directly because they are tangible. On the other hand, staff, style, skills, and finally, shared values are considered as "soft elements'' because they are more influenced by the organization's structure. Therefore, they are less tangible and harder to determine. While looking at the seven elements of the framework, various questions must be answered in order for it to be effective:

The first step of this model is called, **strategy,** which consists in having a look at how resources and capabilities are being allocated to meet the different objectives. More concretely, you try to identify if a plan has been developed by the organization to distinguish itself from competition and thrive in its market. Then, **structure** also comes under scrutiny by looking at the way business units are articulated. You also want to know how the accountability hierarchy is set up. The structure echoes the organization's chart. After that, a focus is set on **systems** where you look if the company has come up with procedures and processes that explain the decision making, enabling it to ensure progress. It determines the way the company does business in its market. Then, soft elements are analyzed like the **shared values** which are the values and norms the company is built upon. They are studied to understand what influences the employees and the company's behavior. They are at the basis of the company; they therefore reflect its image towards the customers. Subsequently, **style** refers to the way each level of decision interacts with each other, and what actions are taken to meet the goals. It reflects the management style of the organization's managers. **Staff** then shows what type of profiles the company is made up of in order to know what the company is capable of doing. Finally, **skills** relate to the abilities of the employees of the organization, including their skills and knowledge.

Figure 3: The McKinsey 7s model



Source: McKinsey. (2018, February 9). *Enduring Ideas: The 7-S Framework*. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/enduring-ideas-the-7-s-framework

By following this framework, organizations will be able to notice which business unit is successful, and the ones who are not. Ultimately, the managing team will be able to look at all the levels of strategy of the organization and identify what needs to be completed in place in order to align all the components to meet the desired goals or – in other words -, how to bridge the gaps between desired goals or standards and the actual level of performance.

3.2.2. Defining the objectives

As mentioned before, for a training program to be effective, the objectives must be aligned with the needs identified during the first step. Once formulated, it will be much easier to define what must be implemented in terms of targets to reach, and thus, in terms of skills and knowledge to be trained. These can also help stakeholders to have a clear view on the direction and the actions the organization will undertake in the future. Of course, the main objective which is common to each training program is to enhance the skills, the knowledge of the employees and their attitude towards the organization; these benefits will in turn, improve their performance and reach higher outputs. The objectives can be technically-oriented (e.g. improving one's mastery of a computer program or a business'-sales strategy) or more personal, such as training focused on the development of interpersonal or decision-making skills. All of these combined, will help the workforce to perform together and reach to the objectives set by the organization.

An interesting formula used to follow to define the goals that must be reached within an organization is the SMART proposition, which was first developed by Doran in 1981. The idea behind this acronym is to analyze if the desired objectives answer positively to the five key-words: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound. This can be applied to all objectives, no matter the context, which makes it a great tool; if developed properly, it can be understood by everybody. In the context of training, SMART can be applied in the following way:

- ✔ Specific – In the way that enough details must be provided regarding the objective that wants to be achieved. As a result, there will be no room for interpretation, and the trainees will know exactly what they are expected to reach. To specify a proposition, one can, for example, set figures which increase the level of employees who master the excel-program.

- ✔ Measurable – The progress of the objective set must be measurable so as to be able to see the change that occurred throughout the process. To make sure of the quantifiably, one can ask itself if the progress of the objectives can be measured on a scale from 1 to 10.

- ✔ Achievable – This adjective conveys the idea to keep the goal within the organization's reach. There is no need to set objectives based on things that are unattainable e.g., having your staff work 15 hours a day.

- ✔ Realistic – Setting a goal that is not too high from the start is also essential. Asking the workforce to reach skyrocketing levels of performance at once might indeed discourage them. The company must therefore begin by setting an objective that the employee will be able to reach at the end of the training.

- ✔ Time bound – A last move is to establish a clear timeframe for the objective to be reached so that employees know what targets they are expected to attain throughout the whole process.

Banathy (1968, pp 24-26) also came up with the KSA-acronym which stands for knowledge, skills and attitude. In his book, he argued that "*We can say that the purpose of education is to impart specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes—in other words, the purpose around which the system is to grow is instruction. On the other hand, we can propose that the purpose of education is to ensure the attainment of specified knowledge, skills, and attitudes—thus, learning, is the purpose around which the system* *is to grow.*" Therefore, this tool can help organizations set its training objectives. Indeed, in a learning context, observing the evolution of the knowledge, skills, and attitude of the trainees can specify the objectives of the organization.

3.2.3. Methods & techniques

Nowadays, with technology becoming the norm, there is an infinity of ways to design training programs. Still, some key elements such as the number of trainees, their current level of knowledge, or even the timeframe can influence the design phase, and must, consequently, be considered. After having determined the needs and the goals, it is much easier to focus on the elaboration of the program itself as the structure's basis has been laid. Therefore, it will be possible to determine which kind of training suits the organization best. To do that, managers must identify correctly what they want to improve while the designers must come up with the best learning framework. It is together that training designers and managers should work to prompt employee's commitment and therefore, the success of the program.

First of all, organizations should consider whether they want to provide the training on the job or off the job. While on-the-job training is given in the same working environment as usual, off the job training aims at taking the workforce away from their comfort zone to immerse them completely in a learning environment. From a financial perspective, it is the on the job method that is less costly. Indeed, Armstrong (1988) argues that on-the-job training may consist of teaching by more experienced people or trainers at the desk. Thus, because no displacement is required, the trainee will still be working, with the guidance of an experienced employee or a supervisor that will teach him the skills. Hence, regular work will not be interrupted. This is also interesting because the employee is directly immersed in the context. As a result, reproducing what he learned will be even easier. This helps to measure concretely the progression. On the other hand, it is quite complicated to implement because the person who will guide the trainee must be available during the whole process. Internships and student jobs are a good example of on the job training. In fact, most of the time, interns are trained directly by their experienced peers or by a supervisor, and become after that, autonomous with time. On the contrary, off-the-job training is conducted away from the workplace and is generally dispensed to employees that have no knowledge of the working environment of the organization. Moreover, it is generally preferred when a large group must be trained. It is generally the costliest option because external stakeholders must be consulted such as external trainers or even platforms which offer online training. This learning method often proves to be effective because external trainers have been trained not only to understand the material, but also to teach it, unlike experienced colleagues or supervisors who may not be able to pass on their knowledge so easily. Finally, we can sum up both methods by saying that on-the-job training is more practice-oriented whereas off the job training focuses more on a theoretical approach. (Vasanthi & Rabiyathul Basariya, 2019, p. 672)

Furthermore, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which began in 2020, learning at all levels has been profoundly impacted. Whether for students, or organizations, all the teaching methods and procedures developed up to then had to be reviewed. Online learning appeared as the common solution for educational institutions and organizations to keep up with the delivery of learning contents. Online learning, also called e-learning, is a termination that refers to the utilization of digital tools to transfer knowledge. As such, the pandemic served as a powerful experiment to demonstrate the potential of online learning tools, but it also shed a light on its limitations regarding the access to digital equipment, and on the difficulty to transfer knowledge digitally. Still, proof that online training gained ground during the pandemic is that "In the Flemish Region of Belgium, the number of participants in online training provided by the Public Employment Service (VDAB) in the second half of March 2020 was four times as high as in the same period last year[1]" (OECD, 2020). But for online learning to be effective, organizations must be sure that the content can be delivered as rigorously as during a live session. Indeed, trainers should also be given the opportunity to master computer tools. Furthermore, we should not forget that not everyone possesses the basic digital skills allowing them to take part in such training. From a financial point of view, digitizing training may also be interesting for organizations. Indeed, it is by far less expensive than organizing physical learning where all the trainees must come together in a training room while the trainer may have to instruct the same training several times.

According to Serrat (2017), organizations should overcome three main challenges while designing training programs:

1. The cost of developing (or purchasing) software applications, and after that, their running costs
2. The lack of time to devote to workplace learning and formulate and maintain e-learning solutions
3. Content issues – quality content is not available on the market or is not suited for e-learning and must therefore be developed.

To overcome the three above-mentionned points, extensive research and careful planning will help circumscribe requirements and surmount these barriers (Serrat, 2017, p. 947).

[1] In the period 14 to 30March 2020, 18663 requests for participation in free online training programs were received, compared to 5145 in the same period last year (https://www.hildecrevits.be/nieuws/aantal-aanvragen-online-opleidingen-vdab-piekt/).

3.2.4. Implementing training programs

The implementation phase begins when it is ready to be launched within the organization. At that moment, comes the whole process of convincing the targeted people of the importance and benefits for them. Indeed, training programs will only be successful if people take actively part in it. Yet, the implementation phase is not a smooth process and should not be neglected; it is the managers who will have to show up to motivate and explain to the workforce the need to follow such programs. But managers already have their own tasks and dealing with the implementation of training programs could be perceived as a heavy task. On top of that, managing a schedule and trying to fit in time for training can be very complicated. That's why it's important to convince employees of the usefulness of such programs.

In order to properly manage this process, it is ideal to put in place policies that define the main lines such setting, for instance, the minimum number of hours of training that an employee must take per year, or, in the case of mandatory training, define precise dates by which they must be completed. This strategy will ensure that there is a mandatory aspect that would regulate the implementation of the training program. Armstrong & Stephens (2005) argued that “policies are formulated to provide guides to action and to set limits to decision making; what should be done in certain circumstances and how particular requirements and issues must be dealt with”. This could be applied in a human resource context, with training programs. Indeed, it would enable all the involved parties to understand the goals, the expectations, but also the limits so as to leave no room for interpretation.

Finally, the best way to implement a training program in the daily life of a company is to use the communication tools that will reach most employees; intranet, internal mails, and even, the company’s social networks.

3.2.5. Monitoring and Evaluation

When the workforce is involved in any kind of learning process, the organization delivering it must make every effort to be able measure the evolution, both in terms of skills and knowledge gained. Even though evaluation is the last stage of the training process, it must be included in all the phases so that organizations can draw conclusions.

Kuche, Puli, Guniganti and Puli (2011) stated that “evaluation is the fundamental aspect of good program management at all levels.”. They have identified three different stages that demonstrate how evaluation is, indeed, present in all the steps of training:

1. **Before the training** – The level of knowledge and skills of the (future) trainees is assessed to determine what content should be taught. In the beginning, trainees see this process as a waste of time because they are not aware of the objectives and learning outcomes pursued by the organization. Thus, it is the organization's role to ensure that they communicate clearly what they are aiming at through the training program. After that, trainees should be consulted to identify what kind of learning method is the most appealing to them and the most applicable to their expectations, so that the training's outcome is positive.

2. **During the training** – Content is delivered and the progression / assimilation is periodically monitored.

3. **After the training** – The final performance is monitored to observe if the training was effective.

As we can see, the evaluation phase is of the utmost importance for companies to be able to monitor the evolution made by its workforce after having followed a training program. Furthermore, it can help them understand which kind of training is effective and which kind is not. In fact, evaluation is not only good for the organization, but for the learner too. Indeed, it is very important to take a close look at the trainee's response after having followed a training. Ensuring that there is proper feedback on what the trainee has liked, but also disliked about the learning process can help the organization to spot what works well, and what should be improved to reach its objectives. But collecting feedback from the trainees is not enough. To go the extra mile and be sure to collect information in the most objective way possible, managers and more experienced colleagues can also be added in the evaluation path of training. They are the ones who will be capable of identifying on the job, if the training has improved the skills and knowledge of the trainee, and hence, make the bridge between theory and practice.

Finally, when a trainee has completed its training, managers and more experienced colleagues could provide follow-up after to ensure that the trainee can put what they have learned into practice in the context of his function. Subsequently, yhe trainee would be able to use the knowledge acquired in the best way possible, and therefore, get the best from it. Moreover, the follow-up could be considered as reassuring for the trainee; learning during training is, of course, beneficial, but as each company is different by its procedures, its culture, or even its values, being able to transpose the acquired knowledge in context is a harder challenge.

To measure a training program (positive - or negative) outcome, Kuche, Puli, Guniganti and Puli (2011) have identified three methods: observation, questionnaire, interview.

1. **Observations** – Trainees' behavior at work is observed closely before, during and after the training. More precisely, it is the behavior regarding the skill or knowledge that will be developed through the program that will be monitored. This way, it will help the observer to be able to have a clear view of what has changed - positively or negatively.

2. **Questionnaires** – Multiple choice and / or rating scale questionnaires regarding specific skills, knowledge, and behaviors are given to trainees, trainers, and managers to appreciate the progress made.

3. **Interviews** – They can be structured or unstructured. Structured interviews are conducted by the means of precise questions while unstructured interviews are based on sharing freely thoughts and remarks; they evolve in function of the interests of both parties. No matter how they take place, interviews give the opportunity to spot the trainee's feelings regarding the program followed.

3.2.5.1. Kirkpatrick's evaluation model for training: present and future

To evaluate the effectiveness of a training program, many approaches can be foreseen. One might want to assess how well trainees are able to restore what they learned, whereas one might prefer looking at how they put the newly acquired knowledge into practice. Others might also hesitate between the two previously cited examples. Fortunately, Kirkpatrick (1994) came up with a model in four levels to analyze and evaluate the outcomes of training and educational programs. His idea is to study the effectiveness of such programs by looking at them from four different perspectives, namely: Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results. These levels start with measuring how participants react to the training, then analyzing if the content of the training is understood before monitoring the utilization of learning outcomes; and lastly, determining if the material had a positive impact on the business. Kirkpatrick also argues that each level influences the next one. In fact, evaluation must start from the first step (Reaction) to be able to provide enough data and resources to proceed through the 2nd, 3rd and 4th steps. Consequently, the succession of data gathered through each stage helps the organization to base its analysis on more accurate measurement every time.

STEP 1: REACTION

This first step is defined by Kirkpatrick (1994) as « the participants' reactions to a training event. It is basically a measure of (internal) customer satisfaction." This first step is necessary in order to understand how the trainee experienced the training, and thus, be able to spot what did not go very well to improve the model for future use. Furthermore, collecting participant's reactions may show whether they are willing to take part in future training or not. "Even though an optimistic reaction does not ensure learning, an unfavorable one definitely makes it less likely that the user will pay attention to the training" (Kurt, S., 2018). To evaluate this first step, trainees usually fill "smile sheets", more commonly known today as "evaluation sheets", where they answer general questions to figure out if they enjoyed the program and if they found the content delivered useful.

For the information gathered by the means of "smile sheets" imagined by D. Kirkpatrick not to be too vague, the questions should not be too trainer-centered. Indeed, the risk is that these smile sheets could fail to complete their objective if they collect information to help the trainers instead of the trainees. To avoid such inefficiencies, the review should be based on the trainees themselves because they are the ones who have been through the learning process. Thanks to a well-constructed smile sheet, valuable data can be collected, and therefore improve the training program. Additionally, it can help demonstrate to the trainees the added-value brought by the program. As explained before, each step should normally provide precious information to build the following one. To be able to do so, smile sheets must be constructed exclusively around the trainee. Hence, it will be possible to fully take the trainee in consideration and make them want to attend the training to learn new skills and knowledge so as to better perform their jobs (enhances step 3: Behavior) and then, make them want to do their bit, not only to the organization, but also to their own career path (enhances step 4: Results). (see Appendix I: Difference between trainer and learner-centered smile sheets)

STEP 2: LEARNING

The second step of the process is devoted to the learning content itself. There is a desire to see whether the trainee did develop new skills, knowledge, attitudes or not. This way, the organization can assess the increase in the trainee's expertise. Kirkpatrick defined learning as "the degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training" (Kirkpatrick Partners, n.d.). To measure if step 2 has been successfully completed, (in)formal tests can be conducted, so as self or team-assessment. For the progress to be clearly observable, tests must be completed before and after the training program.

It is important that the organizations do not lose sight of the fact that this second step can deliver precious data if approached in the right way. In fact, it might be interesting to dig deeper and wonder if the trainee will be able to correctly transfer what they had learnt in his job position. It is a very good start to consider the trainee's progress, but for the second step to be comprehensive and to get the most out of it, organizations should also consider confidence and dedication to apply what the trainee has absorbed. By taking all the dimensions of Kirkpatrick's proposition, organizations will be capable of reaching better outputs on steps three and four. The goal of step two is to ensure that the trainee completes the training program and is able to say "I believe I can successfully apply this in my job".

Nevertheless, learning is not a one-sided process; in order to deliver accurate data valuable to the next steps of the model, the trainee must also be fully committed. That is where "confidence and commitment" from Kirkpatrick's original definition takes its full meaning. In fact, Kirkpatrick & Kayser Kirkpatrick (2016) found situations where the success of the second relied exclusively on the trainee.

Confidence relates to how comfortable is the trainee feels at ease with the new skills and knowledge he learned during the workshop, and how confident he feels about applying it. It is argued that some trainees might not want to use the new acquired knowledge for various reasons: lack of clarity regarding what is expected on the job, unsupportive - or even demoralizing superiors – or company cultures that do not hold people accountable among others. To prevent trainees from adopting such behaviors when they get back to work, trainers should carefully address this directly during the learning process. According to Kirkpatrick & Kayser Kirkpatrick (2016), trainers have different ways to enhance trainees' confidence:

1. Go beyond just teaching skills and knowledge. Consider moments to talk about how it will be like to implement these on the job, if the trainees have any concerns, discuss with them to find solutions.

2. In the evaluation of the training program, a question about confidence can be included to measure how certain the trainee is that he will be able to apply the newly acquired skills and knowledge on the job. If such confidence-related questions tend to be negatively answered by the trainees, engage with them to understand what their feeling is, and suggest ways to solve the problem.

3. If a company's culture and/or environment-related questions are answered negatively, it goes beyond the trainer's role to design, develop, and deliver. In that kind of situation, it is more related to step three (behavior). Nevertheless, the trainer can still go to the workplace and see what prevents the trainees from evolving, to make suggestions to the managers.

STEP 3: BEHAVIOR

The third step of Kirkpatrick's model is defined as "the degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job" (Kirkpatrick Partners, n.d.) and is considered as the most important. Indeed, it is during this step that will be measured how the trainee applies the skills and knowledge developed thanks to the training program. It is the most important step because it makes it possible to assess if the training has been fruitful, but it is also important to mention that assessing behavioral changes is very complicated. On the one hand, it might take some time for the trainee to apply their newly learned skills on the job. Therefore, it might be quite complicated to know when to start this evaluation. On the other hand, imposing change after having acquired new skills might be difficult and require the support of superiors to introduce new logistics within the organization – which might unveil issues. If the trainee learned new skills but can't put them to good use in the organization, it could mean that the processes and cultural values of the organization are rigid, and not open to change. Hence, the utmost importance that the organization sets "processes and systems that reinforce, encourage and reward performance of critical behaviors on the job" (Kirkpatrick Partners, n.d.). A possible way to assess the third step of the model is to implement 360° feedbacks which will be further developed.

STEP 4: RESULTS

The fourth and last step is explained by Kirkpatrick Partners (n.d.) as "the degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training and the support and accountability package", or in other word, what overall impact the training has had on the organization. This step aims at assessing whether the original goals have been reached by the means of the training program. Several internal KPIs can be studied such as a lowering in expenses, an increase in sales, or a decrease in the number of accidents in the workplace, in function of what the training program originally had to improve. What is more, the fourth step finally enables the company to follow a clear measurement plan that defines the goals, measures the outcomes and identifies improvement areas.

To conclude, just like the previously cited proposition of Kuche, Puli, Guniganti and Puli (2011) that shows that evaluation is essential throughout the whole training process, Kirkpatrick's model can also be applied before, during, and after the program to show its value to the business. It can also be noted that Kirkpatrick's model includes all the stakeholders in its analysis. Indeed, he takes a look at the work environment as a whole because it is aimed at understanding how well trainees have acquired the knowledge, how they retained it and delivered it back on the job, and finally, how the training has increased the productivity in the workplace. Moreover, the interconnected steps of this model make it possible to analyze data at each level, and to evaluate how dependent each component is regarding one another. Implementing Kirkpatrick's model can be beneficial for companies, not only in the short, but also in the long run because this allows them to see the evolution in terms of needs, and to adapt their learning program based on reliable past data.

As a matter of conclusion, Kirkpatrick's model can help companies identify clearly if the training has been fruitful for the trained employee. The model is applied before the training even begins and goes up to the measure of the results on-the-job. Of course, applying all the steps of such a model can be quite complicated, and financially constraining.

4. Intermediary conclusion chapter 2

This second theoretical chapter was devoted to understanding training and development programs. By first defining the concepts in all their complexity and then addressing their general evolution over the last century, I have been able to observe that, although the history of training and development programs may seem simplistic and monotonous, it is actually very important to understand what inspired authors and therefore, organizations in the past, to be able to master the challenges that will arise in the future. Thereafter, I have briefly identified the advantages and disadvantages of training and development programs that organizations face when implementing them. And finally, based on theoretical models such as the McKinsey 7s and the Kirkpatrick's, I have determined the steps to follow to design an effective training and development program.

CHAPTER 3: EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON EMPLOYEE'S PRODUCTIVITY

After having gone through the main concepts of training and development, I will try to define the second part of my subject which is related to the employee's productivity. The aim of this part will be to understand what performance is, and more precisely, in the organizational context after having followed a training program. After that, I will try to focus on explaining how organizations can monitor the change in performance and, most importantly, how to measure it. The objectives of understanding performance in the context of training will also be highlighted so as to demonstrate the added-value of training on employee's performance. Finally, I will try to explore some ways to enhance performance during training programs so that organizations are aware of what has to be taken into consideration while implementing such programs.

1. Performance and productivity

1.1. What is productivity

Productivity traditionally relates to the measure of efficiency or the output obtained per unit of input invested. From an historical perspective, the notion of productivity first appeared in the 19th century to measure agricultural production. Information gathered over the year helped farmers determine how to optimize their plantations. Nowadays, in the business context, productivity is mostly used as a quantitative KPI; it measures the work completed and the quality of the work delivered. Usually, it is translated into numbers such as hours worked, or money invested. Organizations seek to achieve a negative relationship between the two: they want to reach the highest levels of productivity with the least investment of resources. (Shinnan, 2019).

1.2. What is performance

First of all, it is important to understand what performance is, and then, to put it in the business context. Indeed, performance can be understood differently depending on the matter; it is a term subject to interpretation. Actually, the notion of performance can be observed in all aspects of life, in private, or in the professional world, where everything can be measured with performance as an indicator. The Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines performance as "how well a person, machine, etc. does a piece of work or an activity", suggesting that it is not only subject to measure for individuals, or groups, but also for machines, giving it a very broad scope. That's why it is interesting to dig deeper rather than just taking an overly generalized definition.

In the business context, and more precisely, in the context of training, performance relates to how the organization's employees contribute to achieving the goals established by the organization. More precisely, in 2005, Conti argued that “training [can be] defined as a factor on enhancing the present or future performance of employees through increasing their ability to perform via learning or changing their attitude that lead to increase their skills and knowledge”. The idea of performance when related to training is to see how the learner has acquired new skills and knowledge that will be beneficial for its function within the organization. Therefore, we can consider it as a KPI that will give an organization insight to see whether the current strategy is effective to reach the goals. Yet, we must not forget that performance not only relates to tangible and measurable KPIs, but to abstract concepts such as communication, punctuality, and even to one’s willingness to work in teams. Both tangible and intangible aspects of performance are important because they have an impact on the overall performance.

In conclusion, even if the term performance is understood by everybody, the difference resides in what the performance is related to. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance to consider it in the right context. Yet, we can observe that it is quite difficult to give a clear and irrevocable definition of what performance is because it is a concept that depends greatly on the objectives pursued by the organization, and on the implication of the workforce.

1.3. Not the same, but almost…

Although productivity and performance are two terms that are very similar, there is a subtle difference between the two concepts that must not be overlooked. Performance depends greatly on the employee’s implication towards work. Organizations can set up training programs to enhance performance, but they will only be effective provided employees play along. In turn, productivity is much more explicit and can be seen as a unit of measurement of work effectiveness as it can measure work completed by the means of concrete figures.

To sum up, the link between productivity and performance resides in the fact that by assessing employee’s performance, organizations are able to influence their productivity. This goes along with HRMinds (2019) who argued that “to increase the productivity, performance must be improved in the right direction”, suggesting a positive correlation between the two concepts. We can therefore come to the conclusion that “organizations strive to maximize their productivity to achieve their goals by improving the performance in the right direction” (HRMinds, 2019). As performance is more related to attitudes and behaviors towards work in general, organizations that give importance to it will be able to make their employees feel more comfortable in the workplace, and therefore perform better.

2. How and why measure performance: performance appraisal

Now that we are aware of both the definition of "performance" and the importance of the concept, it might be interesting to look into the way organizations can utilize performance to guide their training and development programs.

2.1. What is performance appraisal

In 1982, Carroll and Schneier defined performance appraisal as "the process of identifying, observing, measuring, and developing human performance in organization". This definition is very interesting because it stresses the fact that appraisal is a key component that plays a role in improving performance in an organization, which is in line with what we have already demonstrated earlier. Moreover, it gives a broad overview of what performance appraisal should aim at. It should **identify** the improvement of the trainee who followed a training program. In other words, it must focus on the skills and knowledge acquired. It must also **observe** how the trainee is able to apply the knowledge acquired during the training in the workplace. After that, it implies that managers must **measure** how these newly acquired skills contribute to improve the employee's performance. And finally, **develop** the employee who followed the training because performance appraisal is not only about judging the present, but also focusing on the future to ensure that the employee remains in line with the objectives of the company.

Simply put, performance appraisal encompasses a variety of methods that are used to regularly evaluate the performance of employees and their contribution to the company. These appraisals can take place at fixed moments during the year (annually, quarterly, …), or at specific moments in time, after an employee followed a training, for example. The goal is to look if the workforce skills and knowledge are still up-to-date and relevant to the reality of the sector in which the organization evolves, and if not, develop strategies to address the problem. Also, it enables the employees to have a clear overview on their work, and understand the actions in their regard, namely a promotion, a training program, or, in the worst case, a dismissal.

2.2. Origins and history

Although the first traces of performance appraisal appear around the early 20th century with Taylor's study of Time and Motion, it is around the Second World War that performance appraisal really becomes an HRM tool to measure work performance. And Dulewicz (1989) stated that making judgments about the performance of the people you work with is an unconscious human predisposition. We can therefore assume that if there is no structured performance appraisal procedure, human habits will take over, and (un)fair judgment will appear arbitrarily, on all levels of the hierarchy. At first, the basic idea behind this concept was to justify the salary of the workers. And this used to be applied quite severely; if the performance of a worker was judged to be insufficient, a reduction in salary was generally applied, and the opposite was also the case in the event of a great performance. These were the only means of motivation that were considered by organizations to reward their employees. Unlike nowadays, development opportunities were little, or not at all considered. As the years went by, researchers found that workers that were paid the same salary could have different levels of motivation, and thus, performance, suggesting that money could not be the only effective tool for motivation and performance enhancement. These researches paved the way to considering other sources of motivation for workers, leading to nowadays' range of different means of performance measurement tools.

2.3. Objectives and benefits

Islam (2006) identified two main objectives of performance appraisal, he stated that "the basic objectives of performance evaluations are two-fold: firstly, to reward employees for meeting organizational objectives and secondly to identify which objectives are not met and to develop action plans to ensure they are achieved in future". In his mind, this process is therefore useful for both the worker and the organization. Indeed, evaluation moments allow both parties to meet in a dedicated session to discuss topics that they would not have had time to address in a work context. Effective performance appraisal systems are beneficial in the way that they enable the organization to focus on goals by first identifying the gaps, and then bridging them with concrete action plans. Put another way, by taking time in the present, organizations will be able to improve their future performance. Broadly speaking, performance appraisal's objectives can be summarized in four components but for the purpose of my study, I will only address the first one: motivation and satisfaction.

Performance appraisal plays a key role in enhancing the employee's **motivation and satisfaction** as it recognizes its implication in its work. Heneman, R.L., Greenberger, D.B. & Anonyou C., (1989) conducted a study demonstrating the Matthew Effect during performance appraisal. Their idea was to observe the reaction of two different groups regarding recognition from their superiors. The "*ingroupers"* were always put forward by their superiors, whether their performance was good or bad. When it was good, the superiors congratulated them for what they called, their efforts and abilities. On the contrary, when their performance was poor, their superiors would find excuses to reassure them that bad luck or bad timing were responsible for the failure. The others were called the "*outgroupers"*; when their performance was good, their efforts and abilities were hardly recognized. On the other hand, when they performed poorly, superiors claimed that this was due to their laziness and incompetence. This difference in recognition showed an interesting correlation: the workers who were recognized by the hierarchy tended to constantly improve their performance while the ones who were not, tended to produce ever worse performance. Around the same time, Gabris, G.T. & Mitchell, K., (1989) went the extra mile and conducted a similar case study where they questioned the workforce of an organization where performance was evaluated 3 times a year. The workforce was also split between ingroupers and outgroupers.

Table 1: *Results case study "The impact of merit raise scores on employee attitudes; the Matthew effect of performance appraisal"*

	INGROUPERS	OUTGROUPERS
Is the appraisal system fair and equitable?	**YES 63%** NO 37%	YES 5% **NO 95%**
Do you feel listened to by the superiors?	**YES 69%** NO 31%	YES 5% **NO 95%**
Are the supervisors supportive?	YES 50% NO 50%	YES 0% **NO 100%**

Source: Gabris, G. T., & Mitchell, K. (1988). The impact of merit raise scores on employee attitudes: The Matthew Effect of performance appraisal. *Public Personnel Management, 17*(4), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1177/009102608801700403

The results obtained highlight a clear trend: frustration arises among the group whose efforts and performance are not recognized; they tend to be frustrated and unanimously consider that their superiors are not listening to them. This obviously reflects the power of recognition on an employee's commitment and performance.

2.4. Processes and methods

2.4.1. Management by objectives, or MBO

This assessment method was first outlined in the literature by Peter Drucker (1954) and defined as a system that aims at strengthening the performance by gathering managers and employees working hand in hand to define challenging objectives to be reached within a certain timeframe. When they are set, the two parts meet to evaluate constantly the progress made so as to be sure that the goals are reachable. A good measurement unit for the MBO is the SMART method explained earlier in this paper. Indeed, as only two levels of management that are close to each other work together, it is easy to identify the goals while remaining realistic. With MBO, success is rewarded in the form of salary increases or even promotions.

Drury (2021), broke down the MBO appraisal method into 5 steps:

1. Based on the mission and vision of the company, managers and employees determine the goals.
2. The SMART-method is used to translate the goals into concrete actions.
3. Emphasize on individual objectives. After setting the general objective with the employees, establishing individual objectives for each employee so as to motivate them.
4. Monitor the achievements regularly to perceive what has been achieved since the beginning and what is yet to be achieved.
5. Evaluate the progress made at the end of the agreed period in order to find out whether the objectives were achieved. A clear feedback must be given to the employees and rewards must be given out to those who have reached the goals.

The advantage of this kind of performance assessment method is that it directly involves two levels of management, which reduces the number of deciders while increasing the focus on the objectives. Still according to the theory, since the trainee is directly included in the goal setting process, it increases their commitment, and thus, the likelihood of achieving the goal. Indeed, it is possible for them to project and define the necessary efforts themselves.

Finally, one must keep in mind that this type of performance appraisal method is not ideal for all levels of management. It can be implemented for senior managers who already have a deep knowledge of the company, its challenges, strengths and weaknesses. But it does not guarantee success; actually, if the goal setting process is not done properly, or if the top management is not committed enough to the project, it may simply result in failure.

2.4.2. 360-degree feedback

The 360-degree feedback method is a feedback process which gathers perceptions about a person’s behavior and its impact from the point of view of its professional circle, namely from its supervisors, managers, peers, and even, from its customers.

This feedback method is said to be effective because it mixes the perspective of all the people who interact with the trainee, on a daily basis; it therefore reduces the risk of bias and allows having an overview of the progress made. Finally, it is also a good tool for the trainee as the latter becomes able to understand the impact of their work on the individuals he collaborates with since the feedback is collected from other people of higher, equal or lower rank than him/her in the hierarchy. Still, it must be stressed that the feedback must be honest and devoid of clemency, otherwise this method could prove to be totally ineffective

Stakeholders who take part in 360-degree feedback:

I. The trainee himself: self-assessment – A self- assessment questionnaire must be filled in by the person who is being assessed. The goal is that the trainee takes a look at their evolution in order to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Yet, there is a risk of bias and clemency if the trainee is not fully aware of what goals they had to reach.

II. The supervisors/managers: managerial review - This level of appraisal is almost always part of the traditional appraisals. The supervisors rate the trainee's performance by also taking into consideration the opinion of the team or the line manager.

III. Peer's review - Including peers completely overturns the traditional models. Thanks to this, the trainee's ability to work within a team, and the way they take initiative are analyzed. This level of review can be effective if peers do not let their personal feelings, such as friendship, or animosity, interfere.

IV. Customers' review: Customers can be considered externally as well as internally. In fact, external customers are the ones outside of the organization who interact with the person assessed on a regular basis; here the transfer of goods/services goes from the company to someone who is not part of it. On the other hand, internal customers are the ones inside the company who will enjoy the trainee's output. We can cite the work delivered by an IT team inside a company as an example: internal customers – who are the peers in this context – can call on the IT technician to solve a problem and evaluate its service afterwards.

It is also relevant to mention that 360-degree feedback is not only meant for employees. Indeed, Subordinates Appraising Manager (SAM) is a method of performance evaluation reversed in the hierarchical sense since it is the employees who will evaluate their superior. It is a method that has gained ground in organizations since the beginning of the 21st century. Of course, this kind of method is still debated, as one can easily imagine that some employees are afraid of possible reprisals in case of negative feedback.

However, it should be noted that SAM is beneficial, when applied in a healthy organizational context, because it allows employees to have power and therefore to take part in the life of the company. It also enables them to express themselves freely and in a less conventional way. This method is all the more important if we take a look at the study conducted by Monster which revealed that among 6,700 respondents, 40% of them believe that the biggest stressor at work is the relationship with the supervisor. 42 percent of them even confessed having already purposely changed jobs due to a stressful work environment (Weinstein, 2021).

In May 2016, at the 19th Eurasian Business and Economics Society conference held in Istanbul, Kaya, Aydin and Durgut presented a study they conducted on the topic of 360-degree feedback. This study was carried out by observing 50 employees of a private bank. They compared the feedback results before the training and one month after the training in order to understand the added value of this type of method. This study gathered feedback from managers, colleagues and direct clients and resulted in some 900 surveys. First of all, the study outlined a clear improvement in the employee's development in all the groups of participants, regardless of their function when comparing the results of the first feedback and the results of the second.

The authors thus came to the conclusion that in the context of performance evaluation, 360-degree feedback is a tool of choice as it gathers opinions from different points of view; they observed that it could yield unprejudiced results in comparison to traditional methods. The final conclusion of the study is that the 360-degree feedback is relevant for assessing training performance as its results were described as "positive and significant". Even though the researchers unanimously agreed on the fact that this is an effective method to measure training effectiveness, they did add a nuance to their conclusion. They point out that 360-degree feedback is a method that requires more time and effort than traditional evaluation methods (Kaya, Aydin, and Durgut, 2016).

2.4.3. Assessment Center method

This method appeared in the thirties and was developed by the German Army. Thornton and Rupp (2006) defined the assessment center method as a Human Resource Management (HRM) process to assess and develop the workforce's abilities that are relevant to organizational effectiveness. Nevertheless, this method can also be adapted for recruiting and hiring personnel. This form of assessment requires the trainee to take on tests, exercises, and even assignments that will put them in specific situations where they will be able to demonstrate what they have learned. Assessment centers aim at evaluating interpersonal, intellectual, organizational skills, but also motivation.

According to Bianco (n.d.), assessment centers must be designed in clear steps. First of all, it is important to mention that companies rating their personnel's performance must absolutely design the assessment center with a specific purpose; it must rely on the **objectives** the organization wants to reach, but also specifically target the persons who will be assessed in function of their position and level of knowledge. After having correctly identified the objectives, a **job analysis** must be conducted. To do so, one must take a look at the job position skills, qualities, attributes, motivation, knowledge, and tasks so as to be able to see what is required to perform well. This analysis is useful for building **situational exercises** that will help observe the behavior of the respondents, evaluate their effectiveness on the job, and finally, give feedback. Then, situational exercises can be designed. Their aim is to be specific and put the respondent in context to observe its reaction. Generally, the exercises require writing reports, making oral presentations, or taking personality tests

The problem with assessment centers is that they are intended to evaluate performance, and therefore, in a way, to establish a ranking. Employees who would be negatively judged could be demotivated or even feel like failures, which would be counterproductive. To counter this, organizations can provide a developmental nuance to their assessment centers by simply giving feedback on performance and advice on how to improve their weaknesses. This could help employees to focus on the positive aspect of the process and therefore to participate fully (Bianco, n.d.).

We can conclude that assessment centers prove to be successful for measuring employee's performance in the sense that it gives the observer a clear view of how the employee will apply the skills learned on the job. From the trainee's perspective, assessment centers also give them an insight of what it will be like to deal with the newly acquired knowledge, and spotting their strengths and weaknesses.

3. Intermediary conclusion chapter 3

The third and last chapter of my theoretical part was dedicated to identifying the second central theme of my research question: the effect of training and development programs on employee's productivity. After carefully analyzing all the data collected through this chapter, we see that productivity and employee performance are intrinsically related, and that a mechanism for evaluating the performance of employees in an organization has revealed effects on the productivity of companies.

PART 2: Practical approach

Introduction

After considering the theoretical aspect of the importance of a training and development strategy within organizations, and having understood that performance appraisal can be a huge success factor, it is time to approach the practical aspect by observing, in the field, the training and development program of a real company. More precisely, this part will be devoted to trying to understand how companies can implement certain mechanisms that will benefit them in terms of productivity, and that will also benefit the trained employees. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that a well-developed training and development strategy is beneficial to all the participants.

To do so, I chose to explore the training and development strategy of the company where I did my internship, BESIX, which is a Belgian company active in the construction sector. More specifically, BESIX takes part in large-scale construction projects, both on land and at sea, on several continents. Since the creation of the company in 1909 under the name of "Société belge des Bétons", BESIX has come a long way by expanding its market internationally thanks to its numerous subsidiaries such as Six Construct in the Middle East, or BESIX Watpac in Australia and New Zealand. BESIX has taken part in the creation of several notable projects around the globe such as the world's tallest tower, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, and in Belgium, projects such as the creation of the new headquarters of the BNP bank in the center of Brussels. I wanted to intern at BESIX because I wanted to understand how such a big company is able to manage the multiple challenges in its field of activity, and propose training alternatives that are effective in increasing productivity.

That is why I chose to take a look at the company from different perspectives to understand its challenges, and then, to come up with realistic and useful recommendations that will hopefully help it to improve its training and development strategy.

CHAPTER 1: PRESENTATION OF BESIX

1. The company

1.1. History

Nowadays' BESIX Group was founded in 1909 by the Stulemeijer family under the name "Société Belge des Bétons" and became quite quickly an important name in the world of construction around the world. Its success is based on its relationship with its clients, the accuracy of its contracts, and most importantly, the quality of its projects (BESIX Group, 2021). This aspect is further enhanced by the fact that BESIX Group always tries to be the best partner; either as employer, partner, or construction company. Its core value is respect, and they believe it is what differentiates them from their competitors. It is their experience in engineering and project roll-out in different environments and circumstances that has formed the strong and solid core of the company and has enabled the company to become today a global Belgian multi-service group active in the construction, engineering, real estate development and concessions sector across the world.

Figure 4: BESIX GROUP'S timeline

Source: BESIX Group. (n.d.). *Histoire*. besix.com. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from https://www.besix.com/fr/about/history

1.2. Organizational Chart

The mother company BESIX Group owns several subsidiaries, notably NV BESIX SA, the largest one. It offers services in the different stages of construction projects. In addition to NV BESIX SA and its other subsidiaries, BESIX Infra, Cobelba, Jacques Delens, Socogetra, Van den Berg, Vanhout, Wust, Franki Foundations, Lux TP, BESIX RED, in the Benelux and in France, BESIX Group operates in Northern and Eastern Europe, North and Central Africa and the Middle East through its subsidiary Six Construct, as well as in Canada and Australia. Managing the collaboration of all these entities around the world requires a strong goal to hold on to; the company is driven by its purpose of excel in creating sustainable solutions for a better world and its vision of a good business is to develop multi services to create value for the clients, whilst incorporating the evolving expectations of the end users and building on strong partnership with all stakeholders.

Figure 5: BESIX international inking

Source: BESIX GROUP. (2020, April). *BESIX GROUP: Activity Report 2019*. https://annualreport.besix.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/200513_BESIX-AR-2019-EN-00-FULL.pdf

1.3. Values and Core competencies

The values of the company are "**Excellence, Co creation, Respect, Passion, Unity**" and they can be paralleled with the five strategic core competencies which are Flexibility, Result-oriented, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Teamwork most commonly known in the company as the FRIET model. According to BESIX (2021), the model can be detailed as follows:

The first core competency of the model is **flexibility** as the company expects its employees to be effective in managing uncertain and complicated situations as well as the simultaneous management of multiple tasks and responsibilities. While doing so, they must remain open minded to the way others work and embrace new opportunities. The expectation of flexibility is related to the ability to work efficiently in a constantly changing environment and to flexibly respond to new opportunities and business developments in the benefit of the organisation.

After that, being **result-oriented** is very important to work for BESIX. This capacity can be achieved by setting challenging goals, and always be willing to reach, and even surpass them. Moreover, it is essential that employees demonstrate concern for the objectives of the company by taking part in the goal setting process.

Innovation must not be put aside given the market in which the company evolves. Being innovative echoes to applying original thinking, initiating, managing, and energizing change processes. Employees are also expected to be curious about developments in their industry as it is up to them to show initiative and introduce new inventive solutions to perform their tasks.

Entrepreneurship is applied in the business' context by actively and enthusiastically attempting to influence events, seek opportunities to originate action, take action without being told or before the situation requires it, anticipate situations rather than react to them and approach work in an optimistic manner. Moreover, it is expected from the employees that they do more than what is required or expected in their job: taking unrequested actions that will improve or enhance the products and services proposed by the company is insdeed strongly encouraged.

Teamwork can be approached from two different points of view. From an employee perspective, it is vital for the organization to be willing to work together as it maintains the ability and the desire to work with colleagues from different backgrounds and cultures to achieve shared goals. On the other side, team leaders must foster a work environment in which individuals feel free to work together with others and to share information and ideas in a context of mutual respect and trust.

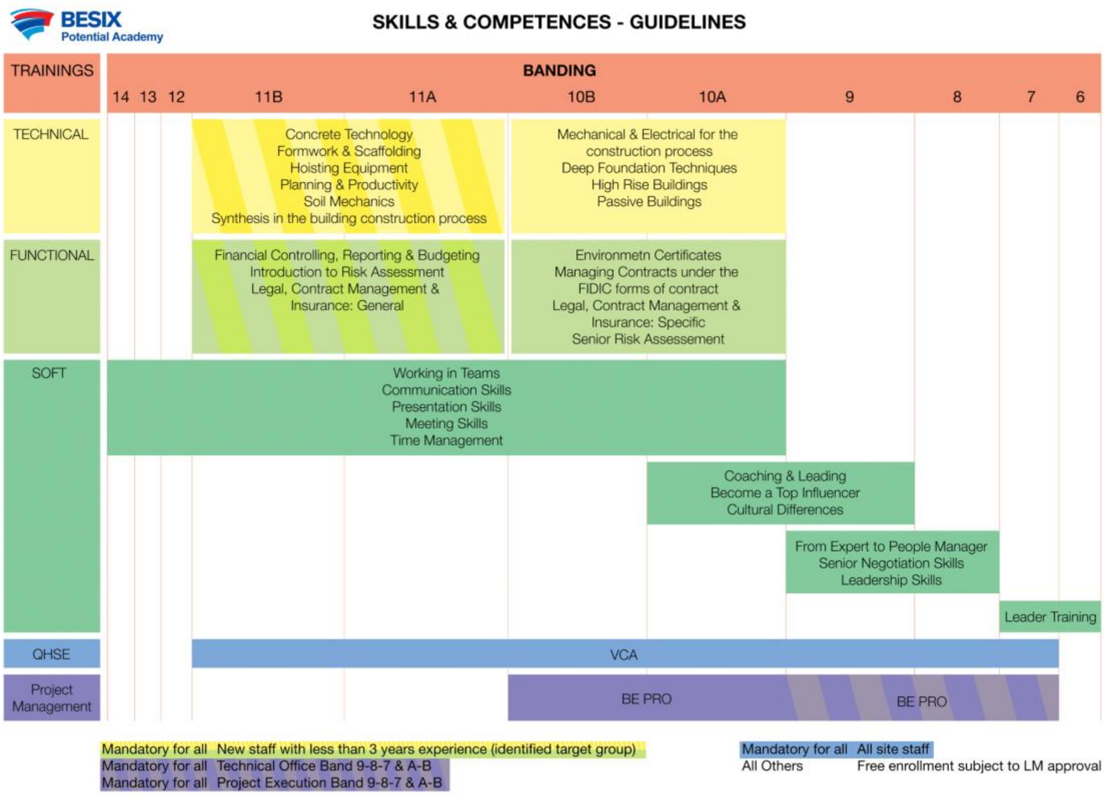
Finally, **RESPECT** is the founding value which links the other values to the above mentioned competencies. Rik Vandenberghe, CEO of the BESIX Group stated that "Respect is the foundation of our business relationships. It is the cornerstone that strengthens the harmony of teams, partnerships and allows us to manage relationships. It improves our personal fulfillment and professional efficiency, whether this relation is hierarchical, commercial or peer-to-peer. I personally count on all of you to actively participate in this campaign. Our challenge? Maintaining a fulfilling work atmosphere."

2. Current training program at BESIX

This part will be dedicated to explaining the current possibilities in terms of training and development at BESIX. I will first take a look at what can be done internally, and then I will focus on the external training programs that are proposed. The objective is to get a clear overview of how the organization is consistent with what they aim at. Moreover, it will give an insight of what works well and what could be improved. The emphasis will also be set on the difference of department between employees so as to understand if the perspectives are different, and see what is offered to who.

Development is seen as a key cornerstone for the success of the company. That is why the BESIX Group wants to ensure that employees of all levels receive the training they need to support them in their development in terms of career, knowledge, and competence. All training participations are added automatically in the employee's internal CV. But in order to explore what is currently in place for the group's employees in terms of training, we will start by observing the diagram of the internal "Learning and Development journey at BESIX":

Figure 6: Learning and Development journey at BESIX



Source: BESIX Potential Academy (2014). Skills & Competences – Guidelines [Learning and development brochure]. Brussels: BESIX.

2.1. Competency banding

To understand how training and development opportunities are proposed to each employee, it is important to first go through the classification system between the employees of the group: The competency banding.

In 2010, the BESIX Group introduced a new job grading system developed inhouse for employees based on competencies (known as the Competency Banding or "the Banding"). The goal of this new job grading model was to apply a standard, easily understandable and transparent for all employees that help them find out more about training opportunities and career steps. This new model is based on three concepts: competencies, job families, and bands.

By **competencies**, the organization refers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes of employees in relation to their function within the group. Measuring competencies helps ensure that a job is carried out successfully. In other words, those competencies help achieve the business objectives. Competencies are subdivided in two groups:

- Technical - They are the ones crucial in order to be able to work efficiently. Technical competencies are generally specific to a particular job and relate to the success of its execution. Their good mastery can be evaluated concretely by observing if the tasks are correctly performed on the job. They are therefore skills that can be easily learned/developed. → e.g. technical knowledge of façade structure and finishes)

- Behavioral - These competencies serve to establish a form of growth opportunities in the employee's job. They can be applied to all jobs in the company as they do not refer to a particular department, or function; behavioral competencies emphasize on the person directly, and can be useful in everyday life. → e.g. teamwork, flexibility, customer focus, result-oriented, …

After that, competencies are classified in three different ways:

- Strategic core competencies - They are the specific competencies which an employee must have in order to join and work for BESIX. They are important for all BESIX employees, regardless of business unit, role, qualifications, geographical location or hierarchical level. To be recruited at BESIX, all potential candidates must have these competencies. These core competencies are commonly known in the group as the “FRIET” model.

These are the competencies which are necessary to fit in BESIX’s way of working as they help create a stronger company culture and values.

- Common role competencies - These are the skills that make an employee suited to a particular role – in other words, the qualities that good performers must display and that make them suited to carrying out their role. Common role competencies refer to planning, problem solving, and even analytical skills. These abilities are therefore not the same for all employees: they vary from role to role and from band to band.

- Job-specific competencies – Those competencies are defined by the head of department to complete the already existing common role competencies. They are the ones required for optimal performance in the specific department, or job (e.g. knowledge of the Microsoft AX software).

Enhancing the employee’s competencies is the HR department’s role. Thanks to their performance management approach of “People Coaching”, they are the ones who must set up training programs that will enable employees to master their function, and progress further if they want to.

Job Families refer to jobs that are originally different, but that can be grouped together because they have the same purpose. There are 5 families of jobs that can be divided into two groups:

- Project-based jobs: all the jobs relating to the company’s core business, namely construction and engineering.

- Corporate-based jobs: all the jobs relating to the support of the company’s activity.

Figure 7: Project and Corporate based jobs

PROJECT BASED JOBS				CORPORATE BASED JOBS
1. Project Development	2. Project Management	3. Project Execution	4. Project Support	5. Corporate Functions
Acquisition & Development Estimating Engineering	Technical Office Project Managers	Site Execution Workshop Plant Equipment	DAF HSE	Human Resources ICT -Legal Finance Logistics Purchasing

Source: BESIX Group. (2021). *Job identification*. [Intranet]. Brussels: BESIX.

Bands, as explained above, refers to the term “Banding” which is a horizontal comparison that has been made of all the competencies across all the job families of the group. This results in similar roles from different job families being grouped together, because they apply a similar level of the same competencies, although this sometimes results in a totally different job output. These levels are called “bands”. The result of this horizontal comparison across job families is a hierarchical model expressed in 14 competency bands. The levels range from 14 (lowest) to 1 (highest), determining the tasks, responsibilities, impact on the company, and reporting line.

To move from a band to another, four indicators are considered:

- the competencies or input mastered
- the actual output or performance in the job
- the required output/ responsibilities of the job in a higher band
- seniority in the band

The banding method developed in-house by the HR department allowed a more **individual approach and differentiation** between each employee in regards with pay and performance management. Personal needs and expectations are taken into account so that every employee can take exactly the right steps in their career and achieve their ambitions. The company also believes it can give them a competitive advantage in the area of recruiting as it enables them to position each candidate better in the bands and come up with targeted offers. Banding also makes the **training and development** prospects clearer as they can focus more precisely on the skills each employee must master. Each band has a training path specific to the expectations of the function, in order to allow those who want to, to evolve within the company, and the others to continue to develop the skills necessary for their function. Finally, from an employee perspective, it also enhanced **recognition**. With specific criteria designated for each band, experts are more easily identified and can be offered a promotion or new challenges more quickly.

2.2. Training follow up

2.2.1. Metrilio

“Measure, Analyze, and Grow”

Metrilio is the central platform for managing employee training programs. This platform is dedicated to employee performance monitoring as it allows them to access the catalog of courses provided internally and to request them according to their needs and expectations. On the other hand, it also allows the Line Manager to have an overview of which training is followed by which employee, and above all, to be able to follow the feedback concerning their evolution.

A wide range of approximately 170 different internal training courses is available on Metrilio. One can improve its functional, IT, soft, and technical skills by requesting it via the platform. The training demand must be approved by the Line Manager, and is held provided enough people request it. Some of these courses are also recognized and can lead to certification when successfully completed. This is particularly the case for first aid training, as well as training on safety measures in nuclear power plants or training for manual tasks, such as learning to work with a crane on the construction sites.

Line Managers are required to follow a training called “People Coaching” that will enable them to not only master Metrilio, but also to learn how to set SMART objectives, and to provide feedback. Setting objectives is crucial because it helps employees understand what needs to be done to succeed. It is therefore much easier for them to contribute to the global targets. Moreover, it is also easier for managers to ensure the supervision aspect of their function which is to improve productivity and manage proactivity. According to BESIX’s HR department (2016), setting objectives serve five basic functions:

1. Allow to cascade objectives aligned with the company’s corporate mission
2. Provide guidance and direction → one clear focus
3. Facilitate planning
4. Motivate and inspire employees
5. Help organizations evaluate and control performance

There are two categories of objectives identified by the BESIX HR department: the strategic objectives to reach a goal that is not quantifiable (e.g., boot innovation in the company) and the operational objective whose goals are quantifiable (e.g., generate positive cash flows in 2022). These objectives can be collective if they concern an entire department (e.g. the QHSE department must not record any accidents on construction sites) or individually, if they are intended to improve the performance of a single person.

To set objectives, Line Managers are asked to use the SMART method (which has been explained in the theoretical part) developed by Doran in 1981. Indeed, BESIX's HR department believes that vague objectives lead to vague attempts to achieve them and has, as a result, established its own explanation of the SMART method.

➔ Specific: The 5 W's method can help specify the objectives. By asking yourself **what** is to be done, **who** is involved, **where the** change should happen, **when** will it start/end, and finally, **why** do we need to achieve this, will enable the objective setter to specify its objective.

➔ Measurable: Defining clear KPIs such as a quantity, a cost, or a revenue contribute to making the objective measurable.

➔ Achievable: Ask yourself if the objective is realistic and consider the requirements as well as the availability of resources.

➔ Relevant: Ask yourself if the objective is important, if it does add value to the organization. Indeed, to be meaningful and worthwhile, the objectives must be relevant to the level and priorities of the individual's role.

➔ Time-framed: Ask yourself what are the timeframes in which the objective should be achieved. Clear target dates should be set for achieving work objectives and completing the eventual milestones.

On Metrilio, there is also a "coaching journal" that includes all the training courses that have been taken by the employee. First, the Line Manager defines the objective by briefly describing what is to be achieved. Then, the objective is classified according to its category and importance. Finally, the deadline for achieving the objective is set. It is after this whole process that the Line Manager will have the opportunity to comment on the feedback

Finally, the coaching card is a tool that has been developed to support the feedback process. It reflects the coaching needs based on the inputs of the Line Manager on used competencies and achieved objectives. The card has two axes: one related to the competency level in an employee's current band and job family (input) and one related to the performance on the set objectives (outputs). The position in the card is translated into six different categories, which refer to different coaching needs:

Competency

- *Excels*: Demonstrates, repeatedly, to **excel** in the listed competency and adjacent behavior.
- *Performs*: Demonstrates, repeatedly, to **possess** the listed competency and the adjacent behavior.
- *To develop*: Demonstrates, repeatedly, the **need to further develop** the listed competency and the adjacent behavior before reaching the required level.

Objective

- *Excels:* Has **overachieved** the set objective and displays a high degree of perfection.
- *Performs:* Has **attained** the set objective.
- *To develop*: Objective has **not (or just partially) been met** due to his/her performance.

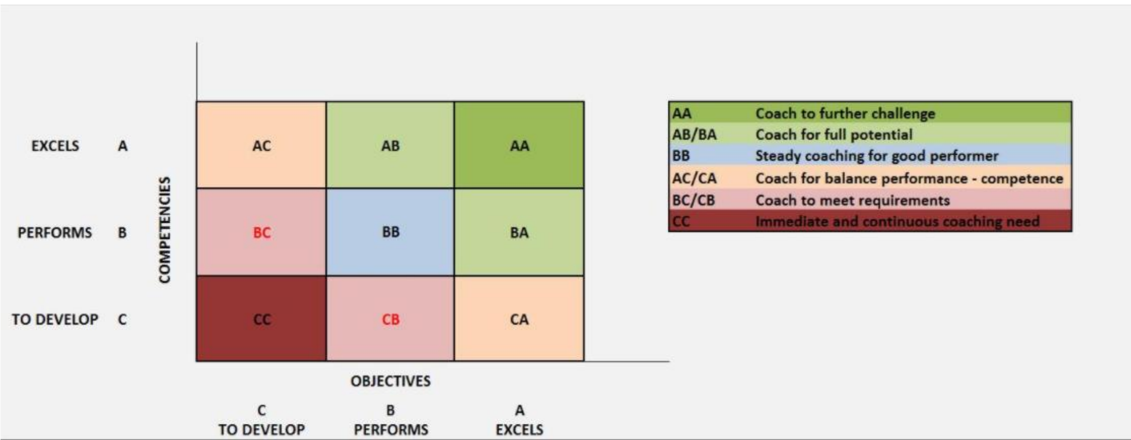
This means that someone in "BB" is an employee who performs well, achieves their objectives according to the expectations and meets the requirements in their current role. They are performing well and therefore need steady coaching by their Line Manager to maintain this good level of performance.

Progress within the Coaching Card is possible thanks to the feedback given from the Line Manager if it is integrated and carefully taken into account the daily work. Other development actions such as participation in training might need to be followed as well. Therefore, it is essential to get this feedback, which starts with adding main tasks and key objectives in the tool, providing the employee's own feedback and then inviting the Line Manager to give and discuss the feedback on the key objectives. During the year, all the feedback on performance and competencies are consolidated in one integrated result in the Coaching Card. The N+1 are able to review it, if needed, at the end of the year. This overview closes the yearly cycle of the performance and career management process which starts over on January 1st of the following year. Besides, official interviews can be performed between January and February of each following year. This is mandatory if the Line Manager changes the result of the Coaching Card at year end.

The major focus at the end is the interaction with the employee in order to give the appropriate coaching so as to achieve the best of his/her ability. Metrilio serves as a real feedback tool for and from employees about their competencies (input) and performance/achieved objectives (output) by creating a coaching dynamic between management and employees.

It is important that the employee takes ownership for getting feedback by triggering the Line Manager; if the line manager is the person who must invest the most in the follow-up process, the employee must also get involved by asking for feedback, for scores of competencies and achievements, and finally, asking for coaching. Based on every input of the Line Manager, the employee's position on the Coaching Card will change or the amount of feedback (positive = green stars/attention points = red triangle) will increase. The employee's position on the coaching card is visible for the Line Manager, N+2, Functional N+1 and our Executive Management throughout the year. All of them can provide the employee with feedback when suitable.

Figure 8: The Coaching Card



Source: BESIX Group. (2021). *The Coaching Card*. [Intranet]. Brussels: BESIX.

2.3. Mandatory training

Mandatory training is to be followed by all the new employees with less than three years of employment, or, in specific context, by all the employees of a department regardless of their seniority. It is the BESIX Academy team that is responsible for developing, in collaboration with trainers, an overall company training for domestic (Belgium) as well as for international offices on a yearly basis. Each mandatory training is therefore organized once a year. But as this list is not comprehensive, the Line Manager might select other training courses if required. It is the management, together with the HR department who decide which training is mandatory and for which group.

2.3.1. Engineering department

As BESIX is active in the construction sector, one of its core functions is the engineering department; it represents the biggest activities of the company. The engineering department is split in two main offices located in Brussels and Dubai. There are approximately ninety engineers and forty designers coming from nineteen different countries. In a sector where clients have ever-increasing expectations, BESIX must absolutely reinvent itself in order to continue to offer quality services that meet high expectations for sustainability, environmental integration, minimal disturbance during construction and future-proofing techniques while keeping the lowest possible transaction costs. This is why emphasis is placed on the development of new technologies such as Virtual Design and Construction (VDC), virtual reality (e.g. use of drones to produce topographical point clouds), and even detailed 3D models. As mentioned, mastering all the new tools is of the utmost importance for construction companies of the scale of BESIX. To be able to do so, young engineers who are at the beginning of their career must follow a specific mandatory training program. Over a period of three years, they must have completed nine different training courses that will enable them to master all the tools the department needs to develop its activities.

2.3.2. QHSE department

Quality, Health, Safety and Environment employees support the group's purpose to excel in creating sustainable solutions for a better world. Most specifically, their objective is to aim at reaching zero HSE incidents, zero non-conformities and continuous improvements in the construction sites to create the best added-value to the employees, clients and all the stakeholders.

To be able meet their targets and remain in line with BESIX's objectives, the QHSE department employees are required to follow training as from band twelve. These training mainly deal with the safety aspect on the building sites, the safety rules and health matters. Some training courses can deliver certificates which attest that a worker knows how to handle a certain machine for example. There is also first aid training (BEPS), which must be taken by most of the construction site employees.

2.4. Optional training

Besides the range of specific training that is mandatory, there are also training that are optional. The desire for them to be optional is due to the fact that the company realized that employees are less likely to stay focused when they are forced to participate in training. Therefore, they can be requested by the employees themselves, at any time, or in consultation with their manager after the annual appraisal in January.

2.5. Internal possibilities

2.5.1. eAcademy

eAcademy is the internal e-learning platform on which all mandatory training courses are posted. This online tool enables employees to follow online courses, prepare for upcoming classes, test their knowledge on various topics. On the portal, there are training courses given by people working at BESIX, but also training courses given by external speakers. This is the case with the Smart Coffee sessions, and the blended learning courses, for example, where the introduction is given online and then the rest of the training is given in a physical classroom.

2.5.2. BE PRO

BE PRO stands for BESIX **E**xperience in **P**roject **R**oll **O**ut. This development guide and handbook explains how BESIX manages all the steps in project management. This platform is based on the combined efforts of many Senior Managers and Specialists of the company. Its purpose is to inform the staff about what BESIX considers to be the key elements in its most important process, namely the project management of their construction sites.

The e-learning helps broadening the employee’s horizon on the company and aims at becoming the employee’s reference tool to help them chose, prepare, and execute better by getting greater insights on the following topics:

1. The identity of BESIX as a company active in the construction sector at the moment, and what they want to be in the future; in other words, how they do business.
2. BESIX’s expectations towards their employees in terms of implication and behaviors
3. The organization’s definition of success

2.5.3. Languages

Being deeply rooted in Belgium but also present on an international level, BESIX’s daily activities are carried out in three main languages: French, Dutch and English. The richness of our country is also a challenge for the company, as it must get its best people to work together, whether they are trilingual or not. That's why the company emphasizes on language training to give all employees the opportunity to improve their language skills, if their job requires it. To do so, employees have several options:

2.5.4. eLanguages

For employees who prefer to take language courses at their own pace and at a distance, BESIX has teamed up with Altissia, (also) a Belgian platform created in 2005. The "E-learning for all" option enables the employees to access a wide offer to enhance their language skills. All levels are supported by the platform so that no matter the employee's level, whether beginner or intermediate, they will find tools adapted to their level which will allow them to progress without restrictions. Moreover, the content is adapted to the business world with the help of thousands of exercises and interactive videos which will put them in a situation to be able to practice in the most optimal way possible. Furthermore, advice and assistance are provided to guide the employee throughout the learning process. And finally, the employee can take on proficiency tests that assess language skills within the European language level framework.

2.5.5. Instructor-led language courses

If employees prefer to take face-to-face classes, they can choose between two language schools located in several major Belgian cities: Berlitz or CLL (Centre de Langues). These lessons can be taken provided there is a clear business need for the employee to learn the demanded language. Therefore, the request for this type of course must be added through Metrilio, and the Line Manager must approve it. These courses take the form of evening classes for levels up to B1 included as it is generally considered that from a B2 Level (independent user, upper intermediate), one can understand and make oneself understood in a relatively autonomous way, while continuing to improve one's language skills by practicing on the job.

2.5.6. Smart Coffee

Smart Coffee is an opportunity to learn more about a specific topic for example, when the company gets a new contract and employees have to get used to the new expectations or when a new building technique is adopted on the construction site (e.g. Let's talk Concrete session). The aim of Smart Coffee sessions is to include employees in the company's progress. Thus, even if they are not directly concerned by the topic of the session, they will be able to expand their knowledge and better understand the challenges faced by the company, and how to solve them. Employees have the possibility to grab a coffee and join an e-learning session presented by one of their colleagues or an external speaker.

2.5.7. BESIX Potential Academy (BPA)

The BESIX Potential Academy is a project that has been launched internally to promote employees identified as high potentials. Those employees are then divided into two different categories to propose a whole training path that will allow them to further develop their potential through specific programs at renowned Belgian universities and colleges. The Metrilio platform helps identify the “Triple A Potentials'' that will be selected by the BPA thanks to the Coaching Card. Indeed, high Potentials are identified in the system, and some of them are invited if they meet the requirement based on the triple A-rating:

➢ **AMBITION:** The employee should clearly state that **ambition** to progress further in the company, taking on more responsibilities, more deliverables. They should confirm this regularly when asked

➢ **ABILITY:** Does the employee demonstrate on a consistent and long term basis their **ability** (as well on performance as on competency taking into account his level) to **add value** to their project, department, organization?

➢ **ATTITUDE:** The employee should demonstrate a positive **attitude** and competencies, whilst being attentive to feedback, working relations and generally contributing to the engagement of staff.

To conclude, besides the coaching need, the Coaching Card helps provide Executive Management with a continuous overview of the best elements ("AA" = Coach to Further Challenge). Combined with the "A" of Ambition, Triple A Potentials can be identified almost instantly.

BPA1

The BESIX Potential Academy One (BPA1) is intended for young potentials working for the BESIX Group. They are selected according to their performance and ambitions, by the members of the Executive Committee. Participants have the opportunity to follow business courses, in residential seminars, tailored-made for the Group's activity. The program ends with a project presentation of each group to the Executive Committee. The program has been developed in cooperation with the Vlerick Business School.

BPA2

The BESIX Potential Academy Two (BPA2) is intended for mid-career potentials from BESIX, which are selected by the members of the Executive Committee. This program will give the opportunity to the participants to work on a strategic topic during a 3 day residential seminar. The strategic development of the topic will be discussed with the members of the Executive Committee as final input to the seminar. The program has been developed in collaboration with Solvay Brussels School - Economics and Management. Each year, a new topic is chosen by the executive committee. In 2013, the year of launching, Innovation was in the spotlight. The following year, the focus was on entrepreneurship, and in 2015, the selected employees were invited to discuss the topic "result-oriented". (BESIX GROUP, 2020).

These seminars are seen by the employees as “a long term investment”, “an opportunity to create a network”, or even “ a key for the company’s success”. The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the group also shares the same view and stated “I believe the BPA participants have created a team. Participants now have to take action on the conclusions they presented today. From now on they should stick together, find practical solutions and decide who will do what. We are at a crossroad as people in the industry are learning from their mistakes. We have a level of excellence. We just lack innovation”.

2.5.8. Internal Coaching

Internal coaching is a project developed by BESIX to focus on creating an environment that invests in development opportunities for the employees. It is defined as the art and science of guiding purposeful conversation to support and unleash the coachee’s potential. This initiative was taken because numerous studies show that coaching provides an invaluable space for personal development. Therefore the company wanted to extend its development offer with the possibility to have an individual coach. The aim of internal coaching is to help the employee consider a challenge from different perspectives and agree on plans in place to help him reach their goals.

The purpose of this initiative is to offer everybody the possibility to reach one’s full potential – beyond the offer of specific training that each employee must/can already follow – by asking a mentor to pass on their knowledge. Internal coaching is another type of development tool that helps to reach one’s goals through interaction, reflection and discussion.

Internal coaching has been implemented with seven objectives:

1. Establish and take action towards achieving goals
2. Become more self-reliant
3. Gain more job and life satisfaction
4. Contribute more effectively to the team and the organization
5. Take greater responsibility and accountability for actions and commitments
6. Work more easily and productively with others (boss, direct reports, peers)

7. Communicate more effectively

In order to make the most of the potential of this coaching, the internal coach cannot be the employee's Line Manager. It can be, for example, a Senior person from another department / entity who will stimulate the employee to find solutions to reach his goal.

The coach's role is to challenge the coachee by asking him the right questions that will trigger a reflection process that will allow the individual to make the right decisions for his career. To do so, it is mandatory that the coachee remains outside of the decision-making process, under no circumstances may they give their personal opinion so as to stimulate to think "out of the box" and to take risks.

2.6. External possibilities

2.6.1. CEVORA / CEFORA and Ad Hoc providers

CEVORA is an organization that offers training programs dedicated to approximately 55,000 companies operating within the framework of the collective labor agreement 200 (CCP), the construction sector being one of them. This external partnership can come in handy when employees want to follow a training outside the context of BESIX, or when a specific training is not delivered internally. It is also interesting because it brings together employees from companies operating in different sectors, thus broadening their professional horizons. In addition to this, if at some point in time a specific development needs can be fulfilled by a training offer from an external provider, employees can also make a request to the HR department.

2.6.2. Personal Schooling

Personal schooling has been developed to encourage employees to take their development in their own hands. In order to support the personal schooling, a specific procedure has been developed for BESIX domestic and international employees. Schooling types include MBA, special post-university degrees, etc. Are eligible employees who have at least 5 years of seniority, who are at least thirty years old and who have scored an AA, AB, or BA on the Coaching Card at least once in the past two years.

However, the company does not support the entire cost itself. The limit is set at 50%, with a maximum of 10,000 euros. Special clauses are foreseen in the case of personal schooling to protect the employer from any abuse. In case of dismissal for gross misconduct, resignation, a lump sum ranging from 100% to 40% of the costs incurred by the company can be charged to the employee. Also, if the employee fails to attend the required attendance rate or fails to obtain the certification, a fee can be applicable.

Days of absence can of course be scheduled to allow the student employee to prepare for an exam session or to write a thesis. These days are granted according to the department's availability and must not penalize its activities. If the course is held during normal working hours, a special regime can be agreed upon between the employee, its Line Managers, and the HR department but must remain reasonable and practical.

3. Training review and feedback process

At the moment, feedback for participants is given through Metrilio. As soon as a given course comes to an end, an automatic email is sent to the participants to fill in the participation form where they give their impressions about what they liked and disliked, allowing the training team to improve their package for the future. At the manager level, the feedback is, in contrast, not done automatically as it is an optional field. But there is currently a project to send an email for managers to complete the field as from five months after the completion of the training, in order to have time to see the progress made by the employee.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

1. Research question and hypotheses

When I had to think about the research question that would define my thesis, I decided to look back and reflect on all the themes I had the opportunity to address throughout my five years of study. Having mainly dealt with business topics, I realized that, very often, the human aspect was minimized, if not completely absent. During my penultimate year of studies, I had the possibility to take a human resources management course, and throughout that semester, I wondered how companies integrated all these concepts related to the human aspect, within their company, in order to ensure its sustainability. This was the starting point of my reflection on the contribution of training and development programs within companies. Following this, I started my research to find an internship. I had two criteria that were particularly important to me: I wanted to work for a company with a Belgian base, that also had activities abroad. That's why I chose to start an internship with the Belgian construction company BESIX. However, I was aware that just observing the training and development programs would be too superficial; this is why, after my first interview with the person in charge of the training department, I decided to dig deeper in order to understand the mechanisms that the company could put in place in order to improve the productivity of its employees after having followed a training. By putting all these elements together, I was able to define the question that would guide all my research:

"How can companies influence training's effectiveness in order to increase employee's productivity: the case of BESIX"

Through this research question, I seek to demonstrate how companies can increase the productivity of their employees by offering them adapted training and development programs. During my research, I discovered that several steps must be followed when developing a training and development program. The needs and objectives of the company must be well-targeted so that the program can be of real added value for the organization. I also found out that the way performance was evaluated after training could be a factor that increases employee productivity. That is why I decided to research the concept of 360 degree feedback and included it in my interview guide when I conducted my interviews within the company.

All this stream of thought allowed me to base my research within BESIX around two hypotheses which are the following

The training program in place in the company for the newly hired is not effective

During my internship, I worked in the back-office team of the accounting department of NV BESIX SA, the largest subsidiary of BESIX Group, as an accounting officer. This experience allowed me to get in touch with employees from all departments and all hierarchical positions (band). Over the months, I witnessed the recruitment of many people, especially site secretaries, and I noticed that it was never easy for them to take up their position. Indeed, I noticed a lot of inefficiency due to the fact that secretaries often joined the company with theoretical experience from their studies or previous work experience, but without much internal preparation for the tasks and responsibilities of their position. On the contrary, most of the time, the site secretaries had to catch up with their predecessors' undone work, and were therefore overloaded. In terms of training for their position, I observed that the newcomers were trained in the field, with the help of their colleagues, by videoconference for the site secretaries, since the sites were often far apart. I therefore wondered how the induction of newcomers was organized, and more specifically, for the functions of my target group: site secretaries and back-office employees at the company's headquarters.

Effective performance appraisal influences employee’s performance.

During my research on the elements that could influence employee productivity, I discovered that the performance evaluation process could be a factor that leads to better productivity. Indeed, based on the proposal of Islam (2006) which affirms that performance appraisal pursues two main objectives, he stated "the basic objectives of performance evaluations are two-fold: firstly, to reward employees for meeting organizational objectives and secondly to identify which objectives are not met and to develop action plans to ensure they are achieved in future". This means that implementing an effective performance evaluation process after training would improve the achievement of objectives. So, I dug into the topic of 360-degree feedback to understand how employees felt about this method in order to see if it would also contribute to better employee performance.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data collection method and objectives

In order to clarify the theoretical aspects, I developed in the first part of my work, as well as the analysis I made based on my observations during my internship within the company, I decided, in the second part, to conduct, in the second part, a qualitative study within the company in order to understand how the BESIX training and development program was perceived, as well as the way the performance evaluation was conducted. I constructed an interview guide to direct my panel of respondents and to encourage them to share their feelings. All of this was done in order to be able to analyze whether the training and development program and the performance appraisal mechanism are effective and really contribute to better productivity.

Since qualitative studies focus on understanding phenomena and behaviors, the objective of my study is to look for the causes, the foundations of a behavior, an attitude, a perception. The goal of a qualitative study is to answer the "why". This type of study is conducted with a small number of respondents, following a pre-written interview guide. The advantage of qualitative research is that it is flexible enough to accommodate the responses of respondents and to provide rich and comprehensive results (Vandercammen and Gauthy-Sinéchal, 2015). However, it should be kept in mind that qualitative research does not generally provide statistical data, which can make the analysis of the data collected more complicated and subject to interpretation.

2.2. Targeted group

In order to verify my theoretical findings and to be able to confront them with my analysis in the field with my two hypotheses, I decided to target a very specific group within NV BESIX SA, the largest subsidiary of BESIX Group, which deals with the management of all substantial projects, from the phase of obtaining the contract, through its development, its execution, and finally, its delivery. The observed group is composed of five people, three of whom working at the company's headquarters in the finance department, in the back office, one person working as a site secretary and the last one, who started her career within the company as a site secretary, and who was finally transferred to the back office. This person therefore has a global view of the two functions which are very similar. The finance back office employees are the company's point of contact for suppliers who provide services on the various construction sites, as they process payment reminders and weekly payments. The secretaries are the point of contact with the site where the services are provided. They prepare progress reports and forward approved invoices to the back office for payment. Both positions work closely together on a daily basis with the same goal in mind: to ensure the continuity of the suppliers' services on the construction sites.

The target group is in the 40-60 age group, which is ideal for obtaining an objective feeling about the topic under study, since they have all had previous work experience; this allows them to step back and identify the positive and negative points. On the other hand, it is also interesting to mention that their previous work experience was not necessarily in the field of accounting or even construction, which makes their testimony even more complete. The respondents' experience at BESIX ranges from a few months to more than a decade, which allowed me to have a global view of the feelings of the employees interviewed and the evolution of the tools that have been developed over time.

3. Presentation of the interview guide

I decided to conduct individual interviews so that the personal dimension of each respondent would be central to the answer. Indeed, this individual approach allowed me to gather the different reactions of each respondent – sometimes positive, sometimes negative – to the same question in order to identify what is being done well within the company and what could be improved. Finally, individual interviews allow "in-depth" observation of respondents' behaviors.

Before even beginning the qualitative study, I took the time to introduce the topic of my research to the people I interviewed in order to present the general themes, namely training and development programs, digitalization of training, and performance evaluation, without inducing or suggesting anything, in order to avoid biased responses. Although I prepared specific questions to guide the discussion and get answers to my questions, I still emphasized flexibility by guiding respondents when they were lost.

At the beginning of each "theme," I decided to follow the structure of a one-on-one interview suggested by Vandercamen and Gauthy-Sinéchal (2015), who tell us that we should begin with an introductory phase. This step serves to put the respondent in context, and let them say whatever comes to mind; it is important because it puts the interviewee at ease, letting them discuss the themes and concepts they are comfortable with, in order to prevent them from returning to these "safe territories" in the course of the interview, when asked more specific questions.

Then I began the phase of refocusing the subject by introducing a temporal notion into my questions. I decided to start by talking about the beginning of their journey within the company, so that I could then continue and confront them with the evolution of the mechanisms in place over the years.

This phase gave me the opportunity to move on to the third phase suggested by the above-mentioned authors, which consists in going deeper into the theme studied (= the deepening phase). As the respondent is fully immersed in the theme, the restraint he might have had at the beginning of the interview is at its minimum, which makes it the ideal moment to extract a maximum of information from him in relation to his personal opinion, his experience, and his impressions. This allowed me to detect the motivations and obstacles of the respondents regarding the concepts discussed.

Finally, I finished my interview with a concluding phase that allowed me to situate the respondent in relation to the contexts that had been discussed, and then to ask him what else he had to add. This last question is essential because it gives the respondents who were involved throughout the interview the opportunity to confess their desires, and thus to detect what could possibly be implemented within the company.

CHAPTER 3: INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

1. Analysis of my observation on the field

As I see it, the five core competencies that are summarized by the FRIET model are quite demanding on the employees. Obviously, companies have to keep the standards very high in order to be competitive and sustainable in their market, but in the specific case of BESIX, a lot of investment is expected from the employees. Indeed, BESIX expects its employees to undertake training requests themselves. Apart from the end-of-year evaluation, when the supervisor may suggest specific training to the employees, it is always up to them to take the necessary steps with the training department. By drawing a parallel with the FRIET model, we notice that, compared to what is said, the company is not very present to encourage its employees to master the model. The effort is expected almost exclusively from one side, which can be detrimental to the employee's development. Indeed, if the employee is unable to identify the skills he or she lacks, he or she may be at odds with the company's culture, which could lead to a feeling of exclusion, or even the desire to quit in the most extreme cases.

If we take a look at Figure X, which summarizes the planned training by function and band, we see that the only mandatory training is for employees in the QHSE and Engineering departments. In my opinion, this is a weakness in the company's employee training strategy. Indeed, it conveys the idea that only the functions of these departments and bands deserve access to continuous training, which can be perceived as demotivating. Indeed, if training in these two departments is essential, the other departments need it no less. In the accounting department where I had the chance to work during my internship, and more precisely in the back-office team, no training is mandatory. However, we realize that these employees have a real need to train and stay up to date with the latest developments in their sector since they are in charge of the weekly payments of the company's suppliers, it could be interesting to plan a training course for them as well.

By observing the company's internal training platform, Metrilio, I was able to see that it is a very effective tool that allows real monitoring of employees' progress. However, this platform must be used wisely, whether by the supervisor who approves training requests, or by the employees directly. Indeed, this assumes that both parties are involved and take the time to explore the tools made available to them. If the employee must, as previously mentioned, take the time to consult the catalog and participate in the proposed training sessions, the supervisor must, for their part, evaluate their employee's performance in a precise manner in order to be able to identify trends in relation to the Coaching Card. Indeed, this tool allows to evaluate the employee's position in relation to his objectives, and those of the company, of the department, in order to be able to observe which opportunities could be proposed to him in the future, whether it is in terms of training, but also of promotions. Furthermore, the supervisor must be actively involved in the goal setting process of the people they supervise and they must be able to provide appropriate feedback to each employee so that they can also be aware of their performance. The slogan of the platform is indicative of its usefulness: **measuring** the skills acquired during training by the employees will allow the **analysis** of their behavioral evolution within the company, and ultimately, to make them **grow** professionally.

Looking at the training catalog, I noticed that there was a wide variety of tools to deliver training. Depending on the objective, the company has adapted its content to get the right message across. If the eAcademy portal is the reference point for mandatory and optional training (external and internal), the BE PRO and BPA / Personal Schooling courses have been set up to train employees with a specific goal. BESIX has been able to distinguish between training courses that are more general in nature and those that are more focused, in order to offer them to a targeted public, which demonstrates a real analysis of the group's different employees. While the BE PRO training aims to train employees to master the skills that BESIX does business with, BPA and personal schooling are training programs that have been designed almost exclusively for the employee. Indeed, these trainings give some of the group's employees the opportunity to study at renowned schools, and in some cases, to obtain a degree, which represents an exceptional opportunity for the selected employees. This shows that the company goes beyond mere training; one feels that the group offers real opportunities to its employees.

At first glance, and based on what I have observed through my experience in the accounting department, in the back-office team, I notice that a lot of things are implemented in order to train the employees. The company offers a multitude of training that aim to improve the personal and professional skills of their workers. However, I still note that these tools are not systematically made equally available to everyone. Indeed, even if most training is accessible to all those who ask for them, I still observe that the emphasis is strongly put on the highest bands and on the QHSE and Engineering departments that have to follow mandatory training. Apart from that, employees with a lower band do not systematically have access to specific training, unless they ask for it. This is particularly the case for back-office employees in the accounting department. Furthermore, it is important to point out that even if they can ask for training on their own initiative, it is difficult for them to dare to take the step, given the heavy workload that is placed on them. In addition, the company expects the employees to take the initiative to apply for training themselves.

To conclude, I see an ambivalence in BESIX's training strategy: while the offer is varied and accessible to all, relying almost exclusively on employees for requests can be inefficient because if employees do not feel comfortable enough for one reason or another, they could go years without any training. In addition, although the Metrilio platform is a great help to have a global follow up of the employee and the evolution of their performance, this box is too often left empty by the line managers, which hinders the evaluation process – as confirmed by Mrs. Floor (head of the Training department). In summary, the training strategy is satisfactory, but there are some areas that need to be improved so that all parties can get the maximum benefit.

2. Analysis of the interview guide

During the construction of my interview guide, I decided to start from my problematic – while observing my theoretical findings and the hypotheses I had selected, which allowed me to identify three sub-themes: the training and development programs, the digitalization, and the elements that can increase the productivity of the employees, including in particular the performance evaluation. Thanks to this, I was able to get the feeling of my target group, and confront it with my personal feeling, which will help me later on to suggest a relevant recommendation to BESIX.

THEME 1: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

For the first set of questions, I began by asking my respondents what came to their mind when I talked about training and development programs. I decided to ask this question in order to put them in the context of my research, and to give them the opportunity to share their preconceptions and ideas before getting to the heart of the matter. Giving the respondents complete freedom, I found that they all agreed that what BESIX offers in terms of training is very varied, and they were generally interested because they perceive these training sessions as an opportunity to stay up to date with the ever-increasing demands of the sector. However, they lament the fact that they do not have the time to take these courses because the workload is too heavy. Yet, Mr. Crane even alluded to the fact that receiving training to master all aspects of her job could improve her well-being at work.

Next, I discussed how the respondents were trained for their current position at BESIX. Whether it was on site for the secretaries, or at the head office for the back office employees, the respondents all summarized their training when they arrived at BESIX with the same expression, "on the job". With the exception of Mr. Wheelbarrow, who had been trained by his predecessor for four days, all the other people had been trained by their colleagues when they arrived. These training sessions ranged from 15 minutes for Ms. Rubble to half a day for Ms. Concrete, which shows the lack of preparation of a clear training path for newcomers. Even though they unanimously felt that they were running behind the information, the respondents were happy to have tools such as video conferencing that made it much easier for them to get in touch with each other to ask questions.

In order to get information about the evolution of these training and development programs, I then asked my panel of respondents if they had noticed any evolution since they joined the company. All of them unanimously agreed that, regardless of their seniority at BESIX, the training program for newcomers has not evolved. It is always the most senior colleagues who take it in turns to train the newcomers; there is no specific training to accompany them. This way of doing things has often given them the feeling of not fully mastering their function, which has generated stress and frustration for some of them. However, Ms. Rubble noted that the open space organization makes it easier to communicate when someone has a question. In addition, although training for new hires is non-existent, all respondents agreed that access to training in general is becoming more accessible, especially with the Metrilio platform – the only difficulty being the workload that prevents them from training for other tasks.

After observing the evolution of the training program, I wanted to know if the respondents had been accompanied during the recruitment process, by a specific follow-up, and if the expectations related to their function had been clearly explained to them. The purpose of this question was to find out if the HR department was present after the employee was hired, and to see if they were able to properly explain to the employee the company's expectations of their job. In general, the HR department itself did not follow up newcomers, and expectations were not clearly communicated at the time of hiring. Employees were selected based on their previous experience, but they did not receive any specific follow-up. Only Mrs. Rubble felt that expectations had been clearly defined. In contrast, Mr. Crane says that to this day, he still doesn't know what is expected of him. He does the tasks he is given on a daily basis, but he feels that the long-term prospects are not really defined.

After identifying the recruitment pathway, I wanted to gather the respondents' opinions on whether they felt that the current training and development program in place allowed them to master their function in an optimal manner. Once again, the respondents all agreed that the current training and development program is not adapted to the reality of their function. There is nothing implemented to teach them: they feel they have to chase information, and there are no clear procedures. Ms. Rubble has taken the initiative to write a procedure for her position so that she can help the next generation of employees, but this is her own initiative.

I also wanted to know if the respondents had ever had the opportunity to attend training at BESIX to understand how the training process works. It was confirmed to me through the interviews that a wide range of training is available to the company's employees, and almost all of them feel that if they asked for it, they received the approval of their line manager without hesitation. However, they claimed that it is up to them to make the explicit request and, as the workload is so heavy, employees have no choice but to take some training outside of work hours, which discouraged them from taking the necessary steps.

I also felt it was important to address the long-term aspect of the training and development program at BESIX. I wanted to find out from the employees interviewed whether they felt that the current offer allowed them to advance in their professional careers. The results show that they feel that there is a lack of long-term support. Although a wide range of training is available, it does not allow growth in a position. In addition, Mr. Crane and Mr. Wheelbarrow, who both have experience as site secretaries, feel that for this particular position, there are few prospects and that there is a certain willingness on the part of the company to confine secretaries to their role.

Observing the degree to which managers encourage employees to take part in training is also important. When I asked the question, I noticed that all the opinions were, in general, mixed. While they all acknowledged that they feel that their supervisor never objects to a request for training, they lament the fact that they have to explicitly request it. If not, they can go for years without any training at all, which limits them to a very specific aspect of their job.

Finally, I concluded the first theme of questions by asking the employees interviewed for their personal opinion on what would motivate them to take part in some training. This was done to understand what would be important to consider, from the employees' point of view, in order to design a training and development program that would motivate them and make them more committed. I noticed that all of them were determined and would like to learn more whether it was to feel better at their job or to open doors for them professionally in the future.

THEME 2: DIGITALIZATION OF TRAINING

With the second theme of questions in my interview guide, I wanted to study the reaction of the respondents to the digitalization of training and the positive contributions it can have on their desire to learn. The purpose of this theme is to detect leads that could help me suggest a recommendation to BESIX, integrating the digital dimension without being excessive.

So I started by asking the employees interviewed if they felt that digitalization had had an impact on training within the company over the years. Respondents unanimously agreed that digitalization has had a positive impact on the company's training program. Indeed, Mr. Crane, who is a site secretary, even noted that without digitization, he would have been unable to train for his position, since he had been trained exclusively by videoconference. From an evolutionary point of view, the respondents note that training used to be organized at the head office, but then it was necessary to go to another company building, located quite far from the head office, which was an obstacle for the majority of them. Recently, the company has been starting to make the most of digital tools, which is an opportunity for respondents in terms of flexibility and also in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it impossible to bring people together in one place. Mr. Hammer even suggests that digitalization is an added value for training in general, but that it should not be limited to this tool. The ideal, according to him, is to adopt a hybrid model mixing face-to-face and online training.

Following this, I wanted to know if the respondents were willing to take online training and all confirmed that they were. Overall, it appears that online training allows a flexibility that is not possible with face-to-face training. However, according to them, certain conditions should be taken into account. First, ensuring that the training modules have an open access, so that they can be taken when they have time. Secondly, these training moments should be integrated during working hours, as respondents consider it very demotivating to have to engage in training after a full day of work. And finally, the person delivering the training should be carefully selected: if the speaker does not have the ability to capture the attention of the audience, online training becomes counterproductive as they cannot train the employees.

And finally, to conclude the digitalization component, I decided to see if employees would like to take part in training their (future) colleagues. Again, the respondents all said that they were willing to contribute to the training because they like to pass on their knowledge and have the desire to train better than the way they had been instructed. They also see videoconferencing as a tool to facilitate this knowledge transfer. However, they are still concerned about the workload.

THEME 3: Performance Evaluation

In view of my theoretical findings that suggest that a well-developed performance assessment process could improve employee performance, I decided to introduce this theme in order to determine the respondents' opinions about the current assessment mechanism and to gather their impressions about a performance assessment method: 360-degree feedback.

To introduce this new theme, I proceeded in the same way as for the first one: I asked my panel of respondents what the concept of performance assessment meant to them. The purpose of this was to get them to say whatever was on their minds without imposing a specific framework in order to familiarize them with the concept and make them feel comfortable. I was able to note that the respondents were referring directly to the performance appraisal system within BESIX. Overall, there was a main difference in the respondents' opinions; while Mr. Hammer described the current process as rewarding since he was offered new goals to achieve, the other respondents unanimously agreed that it was not ideal. In fact, in their opinion, it should be adapted to the reality of their function and offer more long-term objectives. On the other hand, it was mentioned that evaluators should be more informed about the function performed by the person they are evaluating; they felt that their supervisor was not really aware of the reality of their work, and therefore could not provide them with clear and useful advice for future objectives. It is important to note that the respondents were referring to the annual appraisal process that takes place once a year, at the beginning of the year, and not the post-training appraisal process, which never occurred according to them.

Following this, I wanted to know whether a follow-up was planned after a training course, either through the training department and Metrilio, or on the workplace by colleagues. Although the annual evaluation is quite appreciated by the employees interviewed, they all agreed that there is a real lack of follow-up after training. Not all of them had the opportunity to be instructed by the training department, but even after the training, nobody took the time to ask them how they felt. This, in their opinion, is detrimental to goal setting because they don't really know where they stand and when they will grow, for example. Mr. Wheelbarrow even pointed out that before he joined the company, he had read on the website that they were following the FRIET method (mentioned earlier), which he thought was a bit of coaching. But when he started with the company, his view completely changed: he noticed a disconnection between the acronym presented on the website and the reality on the ground. He concluded by saying that at BESIX, you have to find your way by yourself and have strength of character, otherwise it is impossible to manage the pressure generated by this lack of support.

In order to orientate the interviews and to get an initial feeling of the employees' point of view concerning my future recommendation, I decided to discuss the concept of 360-degree feedback with the employees to see if they were familiar with the method, and to gather their opinion on the potential use of this tool in their function. I found that besides Mr. Wheelbarrow, who had already experienced this method through his temp agency, the other respondents had never been exposed to this evaluation process. However, when I presented the idea and the interest of the method to them, they all agreed that it could be a very good alternative to objectivize their performance evaluation. Since they felt that their supervisor has no real knowledge of their job, they were enthusiastic about the idea of getting the opinion of the people who work with them on a daily basis, and who can therefore objectively assess the way they perform their tasks. It has also been reported that this type of feedback could be beneficial in order to follow the employee in the long run.

In order to conclude my third research theme, and thus, my interview guide, I wanted to give everyone another opportunity to note what their personal expectations were in terms of feedback after training. The general ideas that emerged from the interviews were that employees needed recognition for their efforts and that regular performance appraisals could strongly contribute to this. In addition, they regarded the evaluation process as an opportunity to identify opportunities for development and improvement.

3. Conclusion of the analysis of my findings: on the field and qualitative study

Consequently, we can now affirm, following the collection and analysis of all the theoretical and practical data detailed above, that the first hypothesis which stated “the training program in place in the company for the newly hired is not effective” is verified. In fact, the training program of the panel of interviewees turned out to be not effective, if not, non-existent.

I noticed that when they are hired, both the site secretaries and the back-office employees of the accounting department do not have a training course to accompany them during their acclimatization to their new function. However, we can highlight a slight difference between the two positions. Since the back-office employees work in the department at the company's headquarters, they are constantly surrounded by their more experienced colleagues and can therefore benefit from more extensive guidance, since they can ask questions and receive detailed explanations in person. On the contrary, the site secretaries are more on their own since they are the only ones to occupy this function on the site. It is the case of Mrs Crane who did not benefit from any explanation during the first days of her job, except by her other colleagues, by videoconference. Moreover, it should be underlined that she was the one to have taken the lead and asked for help. The case of Ms. Wheelbarrow, who had received a few days of training from her predecessor, is a fortunate exception. In summary, most training was undertaken by some colleagues, which is not optimal given that they are not qualified to teach, even if they are competent for their function. This lack of appropriate training gives newcomers the feeling that they are not accompanied after their recruitment, which leads to a lack of autonomy and creates difficulties within the department, since certain tasks are mastered by only one person.

Furthermore, I found out that the digitization of training is perceived by the respondents as an opportunity to facilitate their access to all employees. However, it seems to me that this tool should not be overused in order to avoid it being counter-productive. The company should therefore manage to find a balance between face-to-face and videoconference training. On the other hand, I notice that the expectations of employees are not clearly explained to them. The prospects of evolution are not discussed enough and this could lead to frustration on the part of employees.

It is also important to mention that the trainings must be requested by at least 8 different people, otherwise they are inevitably cancelled. However, since the training sessions are requested by the employees according to the skill they want to improve, the quota of eight participants is not systematically reached. We can see a lack of organization because this kind of situation could easily be avoided if a clear program was set.

The second hypothesis suggested that effective performance appraisal influences employee performance, and I find that it also holds true. First, theoretically, when we discussed Conti's findings, he stated in 2005 that "training [can be] defined as a factor on enhancing the present or future performance of employees through increasing their ability to perform via learning or changing their attitude that lead to increase their skills and knowledge. This already gave us an initial indication that an adequate training program could improve employee performance. After that, we also discussed the position of HRMinds (2019) that "organizations strive to maximize their productivity to achieve their goals by improving the performance in the right direction". In addition to this, the conclusion of the conference given by Kaya, Aydin, S and Durgut in May 2016 in Istanbul which argues that in the context of performance evaluation, 360-degree feedback is a tool of choice as it gathers opinions from different points of view; they observed that it could yield unprejudiced results in comparison to traditional methods. The final conclusion of the study is that the 360-degree feedback is relevant for assessing training performance as its results were described as "positive and significant". Finally, through the study conducted by Heneman, R.L., Greenberger, D.B. & Anonyou C. in 1989, we found that employees who were evaluated positively, performed more effectively. Putting all these elements together, we can easily conclude that theoretically, all the above sources converge towards the same observation; an effective performance appraisal system can improve the performance of employees in an organization.

In addition, my practical observations and, more specifically, my interview guide, helped me reach the same conclusion. Indeed, the third theme of my interview guide was dedicated to analyze the perception of the respondents regarding the company's performance evaluation mechanism. I particularly focused on the 360°-feedback method, on the one hand, in order to understand if this method was known by the panel of respondents, and on the other hand, to collect their feelings. It turns out that none of the five respondents was familiar with this system, except for Mrs. Wheelbarrow, who unknowingly had already been evaluated by the 360°-feedback method when she left the construction site to join the back-office team at headquarters. This initiative had not been taken by BESIX but by her interim agency.

During the interviews, I asked my panel of respondents if they had ever heard of the 360° feedback method, and they all answered in the negative. This is in line with what Mrs. Floor confirmed to me during my second interview in May 2021, when she stated that the 360° feedback method was not really used even if was is perceived as a good idea. The respondents unanimously thought that the 360° method would be beneficial to them in the process of evaluating their performance, and mainly in the case of training. What emerges from their answers was that this method would make it possible to objectify the evaluation already in place, which is done by the line manager alone. According to their feeling, including more opinions, coming from people with whom the interviewee works on a daily basis, would bring a real added value to the evaluation. Ms. Concrete went even further, stating that her supervisor did not know her job and that she had received a negative evaluation because of this. This example shows that the current evaluation process is not efficient and that the 360° feedback method could be a solution for the company.

PART 3: Recommendation

After exploring various theoretical sources focusing on training programs and performance evaluation methods within organizations, after spending eight months in the back-office team of the accounting department of NV BESIX SA and conducting interviews with a panel of respondents, I was able to study the training process implemented in the company and identify what was working well, and what could be improved. Indeed, throughout my research, I wanted to observe the company's functioning in order to be able to propose a recommendation that could be useful to it.

Starting from my initial problem, which is how can companies influence training's effectiveness in order to increase employee's productivity, I was able to identify two main hypotheses that guided me in my research, namely:

1. *The training program in place in the company for the newly hired is not effective*
2. *Effective performance appraisal influences employee's performance*

Looking closely at all my theoretical and practical findings over the last few months, I came to the conclusion that both hypotheses were true. Unfortunately, I could see from my first days in the company that no specific training path was set up when a new employee joined the team. Indeed, I myself was trained "on the job" by a colleague who showed me the basics of the function. So I wanted to explore this, and dig a little deeper to see if I was an exception, or if this was the norm. Through my interviews with my target audience, I confirmed that there was no training at all to help newcomers master the aspects of their position. In addition to this, I asked myself how companies could improve the productivity of their employees after they had been trained; this was the starting point of my second hypothesis.

Previously, in my theoretical part, I demonstrated that an efficient performance evaluation process contributes to the improvement of employee productivity. Therefore, I immediately made the link between my two hypotheses in order to answer my research question: In order to increase the productivity of newly hired employees, it could be interesting to implement a specific training path from the beginning of their arrival at BESIX. In parallel, thanks to the interviews I conducted, I identified that digitalization could be a source of opportunities for the company to deliver this new training. Obviously, since performance evaluation contributes to better performance, implementing a feedback system after the training of newly hired employees will allow BESIX to accompany and coach them to reach higher levels of performance, and therefore, allow the company to be more productive.

I also noticed through my interviews that all the employees interviewed would be willing to contribute to the training of their colleagues and that they consider digital tools, especially video conferencing, as a very useful tool for training. Therefore, I am convinced that integrating them in this process could be of great added value. Furthermore, when interviewing my target group, I identified a gap in the versatility of the team; I realized that each person was responsible for a specific task, which leads to inefficiency within the group, since if one person is absent, the tasks they undertake on a daily basis cannot be taken over by one of the colleagues. For this reason, integrating already trained colleagues in the training process would allow them to take into account all the dimensions of their function, and not forget anything. On the other hand, since the COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible to work in offices, employees can no longer train "on the workplace" as they used to. Videoconferencing has therefore become a major asset in order to continue training within the company, which is, as I mentioned earlier, seen by employees as a positive thing because they can train while staying at home and without being tied to a specific schedule. However, at the moment, these training sessions are still done at the expense of the trainer's daily tasks: the colleague who trains the newcomer must then inevitably sacrifice their personal duties to train the new entrant.

The starting point of my recommendation is therefore the creation of explanatory videos for all tasks performed by the back office employees and the site secretaries. These videos would be created in consultation with the employees of the two groups mentioned above, the line managers and the training department. The objective is to identify each of the tasks that need to be mastered and to decide who would be able to explain a specific task.

To begin with, in order to design an effective training program, several steps were identified in the theory as essential:

1. Defining the needs

The 7s method proposed by McKinsey can be of great help. The designers of the training program should consider seven steps to define the needs. The strategy consists of observing how resources and capacities are currently allocated in order to achieve the objectives. In the case of the back office and site secretaries, this means seeing how many people make up these two groups, and seeing who knows how to do what. Following this, the structure should also be considered to see who the employees who will benefit from the training will be in contact with on a daily basis. This will ensure that the training will allow the trained employees to meet the expectations of the structure around them. After that, it is the system that is then taken into consideration. By this we mean the procedures that are in place in the department concerned. For example, since some data is confidential (financial data, or construction projects classified as defense), one must be very attentive to the content that will be delivered through these videos. Decision-making must also be addressed at this stage of the model delivered by McKinsey, as everyone will be required to make specific decisions when performing their tasks. After that, we must also analyze the shared values, in order to understand what guides the company on a daily basis to do business. Here, the fourth value of the BESIX Group, "Co-creation", takes on its full meaning, given that it is the employees who have already mastered the function who will participate in the creation of the video capsules. The style refers to the way the different hierarchies work together. In the case of my recommendation, I suggest that the experienced colleagues participate in the creation but that the managers should also be included in the process so that they would be aware of the tasks of their subordinates, as Ms. Concrete revealed in her interview that her superior had no idea of her daily tasks. After that, the staff and their skills would be analyzed to identify the profiles of the employees concerned by the new training, as well as the tasks they master and those they do not.

To facilitate the comparison between the situation before and after the training, it is interesting to perform a gap analysis. This analysis will take into consideration all the above-mentioned points, before and after the employee(s) have been trained. In this way, it will be possible to determine whether the needs were well identified at the outset, and whether they were met by the program that was put in place.

2. Defining the objectives

For the second step of the method suggested by McKinsey, the company should use the proposal of Doran, who in 1981 developed the acronym SMART, which is supposed to help in setting objectives. This should not be a problem, as this method is already used by BESIX at the moment.

3. Defining methods and techniques

First, from a theoretical point of view, it has been observed that the "on the job" training method, which consists of training by an experienced colleague on the job, is considered by Armstrong (1998) to be the most economical method. Based on my own observations, and then through my interviews with my target audience, this is the method that is used to train back-office employees, as well as site secretaries. However, we have noted above that there are a number of obstacles to this method. Briefly, we have discussed the difficulties in terms of the time spent on providing these training, which has to be done at the expense of the execution of daily tasks. We also discussed the fact that these trainings are, in general, not optimal since the trainers are not particularly qualified to transmit knowledge, which caused some negative feedback during my interviews. Coming back to my theoretical findings, we have seen that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the face of the world; BESIX has not been spared and has found itself unable to provide training as they traditionally did. According to a study of the VDAB, published in March 2020, "In the Flemish Region of Belgium, the number of participants in online training provided by the Public Employment Service (VDAB) in the second half of March 2020 was four times as high as in the same period last year", which suggests that the online training to which thousands of people have been forced, has finally opened up the field of possibilities in this area. It is also important to mention that during my interviews, I discussed the alternative of video conferencing training, and the idea was very well received by the respondents.

In my opinion, the logical continuation is to take maximum advantage of the new digital tools available, and to provide, as I suggested earlier in this section, training in the form of training videos, explained by the most qualified employees within BESIX.

4. Implementing training programs: the role of policies

To continue the momentum, the theory also recommends that we consider implementing clear policies to ensure that employees and employers are on the same page throughout the training process. Currently, the company expects its employees to take the lead in requesting training, but I think this should be remedied and managers should be more involved as well. Ideally, training should not be imposed, which could be counterproductive as Mrs. Floor suggested during our interview, unlike a minimum number of training hours per year. This way, the employee would have a quota of hours dedicated to training and could decide which training he or she wants to take. This would also make the manager responsible, as they must first approve the request of his subordinate and then provide feedback. As far as feedback is concerned, this will be discussed later in my recommendation, but I already suggest that feedback from managers should be mandatory and not optional as it is at the moment.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Finally, to complete the design stage of an effective training program, it is recommended to ensure an evaluation and monitoring of the performance of the employees who have taken part in the training. This step can actually be implemented before the training takes place: according to Kuche, Puli, Guniganti and Puli (2011) the knowledge of the trained employee should be assessed before he/she has even started the training in order to define what needs to be taught. Then, during the training, the assimilation of what is learned must also be checked to ensure that the training is effective. And finally, after the training, several methods are suggested to evaluate the performance actually obtained following the training program. For this three-step evaluation, the four authors suggested the use of different methods: observation, questionnaires, and interviews.

An alternative method of measuring the effectiveness of a training program can also be used: the Kirkpatrick evaluation method. This suggests a four-stage model: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. These levels start with measuring how participants react to the training, then analyzing if the content of the training is understood, then monitoring the utilization of learning outcomes on the job, and lastly, determining if the material had a positive impact on the business.

In the specific context of BESIX and the training I suggested earlier, Kirkpatrick's method could be very useful. Theoretically, the reaction step consists in sending a "smile sheet" to the trainee to give feedback on the training he/she has followed. This system is already implemented by the company, as a satisfaction questionnaire is automatically sent to the trainee after the training. However, I deplore the fact that this questionnaire is only sent out for training courses that were attended via the training department. Moreover, these questionnaires do not follow the smile sheet model proposed by Kirkpatrick since the respondents are only asked to comment whereas the author recommends that smile sheets encourage the trainees to talk about what they have learned and how they feel. Finally, in the issue I mentioned, after the training given "on the job" by the experienced colleagues, no satisfaction questionnaire is sent. The Reaction step is therefore partially implemented; the ideal would be to adapt the satisfaction questionnaires into real smile sheets as proposed by Kirkpatrick in order to refocus on the trainee, and to extend their sending to all types of training.

After that, comes the learning stage, which aims to evaluate what the trained employee has actually retained. This can be done in the form of formal or informal tests, but I would recommend team evaluation in order not to stress the trained person. Indeed, in my opinion, after the employee has completed the training, the fellow trainers could assess how the employee is handling the new tasks learned, and assess how confident they are in handling those tasks, by sitting next to the employee and observing them. This step is also present in some way at BESIX but must be requested by the trainee directly. If after the training, there is an aspect that the learner does not master, it is up to him to redirect to their colleagues, which could be complicated if the person feels frustrated, or if they do not dare ask for help.

Next comes the behavior observation stage. This step is currently non-existent at BESIX because it consists of observing the modification of the trained employee's behavior following the training he or she has received. Unfortunately, behavior modification is very difficult to identify, and I think it would be quite difficult to put such a mechanism in place. What could possibly be suggested is to assign a reference person in the team who has direct eye contact with the trained person so that he or she can appreciate his or her evolution. However, even this is difficult to implement, given the existing workload. This may therefore be a limitation of Kirkpatrick's model.

Finally, the results of the employee's training must be monitored. In other words, it must be observed whether the workload visibly decreases within the team thanks to the trainee’s contribution. This is not yet measured precisely, but weekly meetings are held with the team manager to discuss what had been done the previous week. We can therefore consider that the observation of the results can be easily undertaken.

After considering the essential elements for the development of an effective training program, we notice that the last aspect considered is the evaluation of the employees' performance, and more precisely the measurement of it. We therefore explored the methods proposed by Kuche, Puli, Guniganti and Puli (2011), and by Kirkpatrick (1984) leading us to the second part of my recommendation: beyond how to design an effective training program, how to actually improve the performance of employees so that they are more productive.

I have therefore, through my theoretical research, identified several methods of performance evaluation. However, I decided to look at the added value of 360-degree feedback in the context of performance assessment in order to keep in line with what I had suggested in the first part of my recommendation: to integrate the employees as much as possible in the training process. To continue the efforts, after having participated in the training of the newcomers, the more experienced colleagues could be of great help during the performance evaluation process of their colleagues, and more specifically, of the newcomers. As the originators of the training videos, they have extensive knowledge of the job being taught, and as Ms. Concrete and Mr. Crane suggested in their interviews, their supervisors do not have extensive knowledge of their function. They are therefore not, strictly speaking, qualified to evaluate their work on their own, which is an inconsistency because they are supposed to supervise, give constructive feedback, and propose new objectives to their subordinates. It is therefore relevant to ask how these supervisors can objectify their feedback. This is where the 360-degree feedback method comes in. Since it takes into account the opinion of the trainee, the opinion of the supervisors, but also the opinion of the direct colleagues who appreciate the work of the evaluated persons on a daily basis, it allows to get several different opinions, which objectifies the final evaluation. As discovered in the theory, an effective appraisal process, which provides clear feedback and allows for the setting of precise objectives, allows the employee to improve his/her job performance, and therefore increase his/her productivity, since the two are intrinsically linked.

Concretely, my idea is to follow my theoretical findings, while basing myself on my personal experience and the opinions gathered during my interviews in order to ensure a quality follow-up after having received the training previously explained in my recommendation. According to Mrs. Floor (head of the training department), two elements need to be put in place in order for the performance evaluation process as suggested in my recommendation to be feasible. First, make the manager's feedback box on Metrilio mandatory, not optional as it is now. This will obviously require some work to make managers aware of the importance of actively participating in feedback. Secondly, this feedback should be collected after a certain period of time, in order to give the employee time to use the tools he or she has learned to master during training, and for the manager to observe and appreciate the evolution of his or her subordinate. The period suggested by Mrs. Floor is five months after the end of the training, which seems reasonable to me. Once these two conditions have been met, it is possible to extend them to the direct colleagues of the trainee, as suggested by the 360-degree feedback method.

6. Limits

Nevertheless, I am aware that this training video strategy may have some limitations since the shooting of these training videos could take time for the employees involved. On the other hand, the financial aspect is not to be neglected as it will be necessary to call upon a professional team that will have to take care of the editing of these videos in order to make sure that the content is qualitative, and can be easily understood by the employees in training. Despite these limitations, I am convinced that the development of this strategy will be beneficial to the company in the long run; once the videos are made, they will not need to be redone, unless the computer program used is changed. This will be the case towards the end of 2021, as a computer migration to new software is planned, as Mr. Hammer confirmed. This gives the department an opportunity to get organized in advance, and start using this new program on a good basis.

Even more interesting is the fact that, in terms of the time spent on the production of these training videos, the employees who train their colleagues will no longer have to sacrifice the performance of their personal tasks for the benefit of the training, which will be an inevitable time saving in the future. Of course, we can also legitimately ask ourselves if this digital tool will not replace human contact 100%, as Mr. Hammer feared during his interview. Faced with this concern, the only element of response that could be considered is that beyond these videos, the people who made them are always reachable in person. If the trainee has a question or doubt after watching the training, he or she can of course always contact the trainer.

Following this, it is also important to consider the post-training period, and therefore, more precisely, the evaluation of the trained employee's performance after he/she has viewed the training videos. For this, the theory listed above recommends that we base ourselves on Kirkpatrick's findings, which, in the context of my recommendation, will make it possible to introduce a method for evaluating the effectiveness of a training program in a company. However, I note that the third point suggested by the author, "behavior", may be difficult to observe in a company. Indeed, in order to observe the difference in a person's behavior in relation to the tasks he or she performs, it is necessary to have regular contact with the person. This can be quite complicated as a supervisor does not necessarily have the time to keep an eye on all his subordinates, being himself already very busy.

In spite of the above mentioned limitations, I am convinced that my proposal to implement a pre-recorded video training program coupled with a performance evaluation process based on the 360-degree method can be of great added value for the back-office team employees, and the site secretaries, in order to increase their performance, and thus, the overall productivity of BESIX since, after a financial and time investment, the return on investment will be largely positive.

7. Conclusion of the recommendation

Thanks to this training program that will be present to accompany both newcomers, as suggested by my first hypothesis, and employees of the department who do not master all the tasks of the position, the versatility of the two identified teams (employees of the back-office team of the accounting department, and the site secretaries) will be improved. Indeed, each one masters an aspect of the function and will therefore be able to help his colleague to learn through training videos. The content of these videos is decided by following the steps of identifying the needs (McKinsey's 7s method), the objectives, the learning and implementation methods, and finally by implementing a coherent performance evaluation process, which is currently not the case, as I demonstrated with my second hypothesis. Kirkpatrick's method will provide a framework for employee performance evaluation and the 360-degree feedback method will include all parties in order to objectify the evaluation process, and ultimately increase the company's productivity.

"How can companies influence **training's effectiveness** in order to increase **employee's productivity**: the case of BESIX"

Figure 9: Recommendation's summary

Specific training program

- Training program designed in collaboration with the manager, the senior colleagues, and the training department in order to correctly assess the needs and objectives. Training under the form of explanatory videos made by the senior colleagues as they are the ones who know exactly what the tasks envolve, and as they are willing to contribute as discovered through the interviews. The manager has a supervisory role, without really knowing the function in detail.

Digitalisation

- The videos will be made available on the Metrilio catalogue, and accessible from the eAcademy portal. Therefore, the employees will be able to access the videos at any moment, anywhere. Given the pandemic we have been through, this will allow BESIX to continue to offer training to employees without being constrained by sanitary restrictions. In addition, it will prevent trained employees from having to sacrifice their tasks to train newcomers.

Performance Appraisal

- According to Kuche, Puli, Guniganti and Puli (2011), appraisal of employees must take place must begin before starting training, but also during training, and after training is completed. Kirkpatrick's method (1984) suggests considering four steps: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. As discovered theoretically, employee's performance is enhanced when an effective performance appraisal system is in place within the company. I am convinced that the 360-degree feedback can be beneficial for BESIX as it allows the objectivization of the feedback, and a better understanding of what is being done by who.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Through my theoretical research and practical observations, I was able to approach different themes while keeping a critical and objective mind. In spite of the infinite possibilities offered by my topic, I tackled them one after the other in order to focus on what was essential and to be able to conclude with a recommendation answering my initial research question: "How can companies influence training's effectiveness in order to increase employees' productivity: the case of BESIX".

To begin, I decided to introduce my issue with the existing theory. Therefore, in the first chapter, I looked at the context in which training and development programs and performance evaluation operate. In doing so, I came across Briscoe, Schuler, and Tarique's (2011) proposal that suggests that these elements are part of a set of five functions that are referred to as "the five core functions of HRM." This teaches us that training and development programs are processes that are not frozen in time. Rather, they are processes that follow employees individually from their first day with the company to the day they leave, in order to provide them with opportunities to grow both as individuals and as employees within the organization.

I then began writing the second chapter of my thesis, which helped me understand what the term training refers to and the link between training and development. A brief historical introduction taught me that, since the last century, the literature devoted to the study of training and development programs has grown considerably, addressing ever more current topics such as e-learning, for example. After that, the different stages of the elaboration of a training and development program were observed. I learned that it is essential to focus on all the steps in order for the program to be effective and bring real added value to the organization. For each step, theoretical models, such as McKinsey's 7s, or Kirkpatrick's method, were used to give a concrete aspect to the theoretical points developed.

Finally, the third chapter was useful in focusing on the second part of my research question, namely productivity. I first took the time to define the scope of this concept to arrive at the conclusion that it is linked to the performance of employees after they have been trained. This linkage allowed me to understand that after training, it is essential that the organization implements a performance evaluation mechanism to ensure that the training was effective in improving the employees' skills. By returning to my initial research question, I understand that to do this, it is necessary not only to define each step well, but also to go further and ensure a follow-up of the performance of the trained employees in order to identify what has effectively been improved, and to be able to put in place strategies to deal with what has not yet been acquired. Several performance evaluation methods were identified, including the 360-degree feedback method, which allows for the integration of the opinions of people who can appreciate the work done by the trainee on a daily basis. Although I have observed that evaluation can occur at several points in a professional career, it is the post-training evaluation that has fueled my curiosity.

The second part of my thesis was devoted to using all the concrete elements that I was able to gather in the field, from my personal experience, and from the data collection methodology that I followed: the qualitative study with an interview guide. By first identifying the vast training offer of BESIX to its employees, I could notice that a lot of initiatives are put in place, without however being known by the workers. I was also able to note, thanks to my interview guide, that the phenomenon of digitalization of training that I had previously discussed in my theory, was perceived as an opportunity by the employees. Based on these findings, I could respond positively to my two hypotheses: "the training program in place in the company for the newly hired is not effective" and "effective performance appraisal influences employee's performance".

By putting together all my research, findings, and qualitative study, I was able to formulate a useful recommendation to BESIX so that the company can implement an effective training program that will improve the productivity of its employees. My idea is to plan a training and development path for new entrants of the two identified target groups in the form of explanatory videos, made by experienced colleagues. After that, to ensure that productivity really increases, BESIX also needs to ensure a performance evaluation of newcomers based on the 360-degree feedback method.

However, it is important to keep in mind that this proposal, while realistic, obviously has its limitations. Identifying all the steps, in consultation with the training department, managers, and experienced colleagues will inevitably be time consuming. It will also represent a financial investment, as it is necessary to ensure that the material is of high quality. Nevertheless, I am deeply convinced that the efforts required to implement such a recommendation will more than compensate for any efforts made, be they financial or time-related. Furthermore, I sincerely believe that this thesis can constitute a solid basis for further research that would deepen my initial proposal.

Finally, I hope that my thesis, including its limitations, will have satisfied the requirements of ICHEC in terms of scientific research, as well as those of BESIX, and that it will make it possible to bring a first path to solve the identified problems.

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