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Training in different types of organizations: differences and dynamics in the organization of learning at work

Ferd van der Krogt and John Warmerdam

Abstract This article focuses on differences and dynamics with respect to the organization of learning at work. It starts with a reflection on actual research perspectives on the subject of training in organizations. Four perspectives, which are currently dominant in the educational and social sciences, will be discussed: the structure-oriented approach, the system-oriented approach, the actor-oriented approach and the network approach. The network approach is a particularly promising new development in training research. We will elaborate this approach here and illustrate its potential by applying it to the analysis of training systems in two different types of organizations: bureaucratic and professional organizations. Data from recent case studies demonstrate that these types of organizations show remarkable differences with respect to the basic processes of their training systems: the shaping of training policies, the development of training programmes and the execution of training activities. In practice, training systems are much more organization-specific than training literature usually suggests. A network approach to training can provide a better understanding of the backgrounds of this organizational variety.

Keywords Learning in organizations, organization of training, training network, work and training

Perspectives on training in organizations

Qualification problems in organizations have attracted increased scientific interest over the past few years, in educational research as well as in the labour and organization sciences. Several different theoretical perspectives have been developed in these disciplines. Here, we will discuss three of them: the structure-oriented approach, the system-oriented approach and the actor-oriented approach. These perspectives are rooted in different paradigms and lead to different types of research. They look at qualification problems in a different manner and suggest different ways to deal with them.

Structure-oriented approaches to qualification and training have emerged mainly under the influence of structural-functionalism, which has long been dominant in the organization sciences. Treatises or studies in the tradition of structural-functionalism usually emphasize the structural aspects of training systems and then go on to analyse these structural aspects in the light of the question of what they contribute to the effective functioning of the organization. Within such a perspective, qualification problems are primarily defined as 'training problems' and analysed as deficiencies in the knowledge and skills of those who perform certain functions, deficiencies which, as such, are dysfunctional for the effective progress of the processes in the organization.
Managers, so runs the conclusion, should strive to remedy such skill deficiencies. This can be done by means of training, with the objective of raising the skills and knowledge of function performers to the level that is required for that function. If no appropriate training facilities are available, they will (have to) be developed from scratch. In this perspective, then, training is primarily seen as a 'tool of management', an instrument for solving skill deficiencies by adapting employees' qualifications to job requirements. Qualification research inspired by this perspective tends to focus on two types of questions: first, how can employees' qualifications be raised to and maintained at certain levels? and, second, how can adequate and effective training facilities be developed and put into action to realize this objective?

In research on vocational and corporate training, in particular within the educational sciences, the functionalist perspective is a widely used frame of reference. We find it for instance in the work of Eurich (1985) on 'corporate classrooms', London (1989) on the management of training and Carnevale, Gainer and Villet (1990) on the strategic role of training in enterprises.

In system-oriented approaches to qualification problems, learning and training in an organization are not studied as isolated (pedagogical) phenomena, but are 'placed in their environment'. System approaches apply the principles of general systems theory to learning and training activities in organizations. They have introduced the notion of a 'training system' as a parallel to well-established concepts such as 'production system' and 'information system'. A training system is seen as one of the subsystems which constitute an organization and is defined as a body of facilities, policies and activities aimed at enhancing the qualification of the members of the organization.

Van der Krogt (1995) draws a distinction between three central processes within a training system, or, as he calls it, a learning system: the qualification of members of the organization, i.e. the execution of learning activities, the development of training programmes and the shaping of a training policy. The qualification of the members of the organization is the 'primary process' of the training system. Organization members (input) go through this process (throughput) and are 'processed' to become better qualified organization members (output). This primary process is supported by the two flanking processes of the development of training programmes and of a training policy. The systems approach does not see qualification problems only as training problems but defines them in a broader sense as problems of tuning: training facilities – i.e. the learning situations and programmes in the organization – are not sufficiently geared to the demands of the training system's environment, i.e. the work process and the organization as a whole. By broadening the definition of problems, the systems approach also broadens the range of possible solutions. Solutions are not sought only in an improvement in the structure of the training system itself, as in the functionalist approach, but also in an improvement of the relationship between the training system and its environment, i.e. the labour process and the organization context.

An important question raised time and time again within a systems approach is how the development of qualifications of employees can be optimally geared to the development process of the organization as a whole. Many studies on training as an instrument of 'human resource development' use a systems perspective, either explicitly or implicitly (e.g. Nadler and Wiggs, 1986; McLagan, 1989). Also, studies on training-needs assessment, training effectiveness and transfer of training often apply the systems approach (e.g. Wexley and Latham, 1981; Rossett, 1987; Robinson and Robinson, 1989). A third research strand in which the systems approach is used very explicitly is
Training in different types of organizations

research on the interrelations between the educational system and its 'environment', the employment system (Bertrand et al., 1994; King et al., 1994; Rauner et al., 1994).

Unlike the structural or system approaches, both of which give precedence to the organization as a whole, the actor-oriented approach takes as its point of departure the constituent parts of the organization or, more precisely, the different actors who jointly constitute an organization. The actor-oriented approach puts people back into the spotlight and looks primarily at the interests, orientations, strategies and interactions of the different actors within and around an organization. In an actor approach, qualification problems are primarily conceptualized as problems of organizational politics. They are seen as manifestations of the continuous 'game' that goes on in an organization, in which different actors, with different positions, interests and action theories, seek to influence and use the rules, facilities, systems and processes in and around the organization in such a way as to achieve as favourable a result as possible for themselves. From this perspective, qualification problems are considered as social constructions. Qualifications and training provisions are analysed as political instruments which the actors can put into action to reorganize organizational practice in a direction more in accordance with their own interests. In this approach, training systems always form an integral part of the organization games which the actors play in order maximally to safeguard their interests. A central question in research from an actor-oriented perspective is according to which mechanism qualifications and training provisions legitimate and reproduce the existing power relations within an organization. Another central question is how the political activities of organizational actors around qualification problems can be tuned in such a way that the internal and external cohesion of the organization remains intact. Thus far, the actor-oriented perspective is mainly applied within sociologically inspired qualification studies, for instance studies on the skilling/deskilling debate in the tradition of vocational pedagogics (Rauner, 1992), occupational sociology (Geurts, 1988) and labour process theory (Wood, 1989). Elements of it can also be found in research on the role of training in technological and organizational innovation (Bjerknes, Ehn and Kyng, 1987; Naschold, 1992). A third application of the actor-oriented perspective can be found in accounts of experiments and projects designed to improve the 'learning potential' of the workplace (Berggren, 1989; Banke et al., 1991; Nyhan, 1991; Sattelberger, 1991; Stahl et al., 1993; Peters, 1994).

A network approach to training

In this article we will try to explore the application of a fourth approach in organization theory to the field of training: the network approach (cf. Marsden and Lin, 1982; Powell, 1990). In our view this is a very promising approach. With a network approach training systems can be considered as dynamic networks of interaction between different actors or interest groups within and around the organization. As such the approach offers the opportunity to integrate elements of functionalist and system-oriented approaches to training within an actor-oriented perspective. In a network approach, organizations are seen as composed of social actors – individuals, groups and bodies – which interact and carry out different kinds of activities in variable relationships (compare Lammers, 1993). Such relationships are by no means always pleasant and peaceful – clashes of interests and conflicts are relatively normal occurrences alongside constructive co-operation and compromise. Training and work, two main fields of activities of actors, are both considered to be organized within a
network of interaction: the labour network and the training network. These networks can be more or less tightly knit, more or less structured, more or less durable, more or less connected with and tuned to each other. Both networks, in their turn, are seen as component parts of one comprehensive network, the organization network, in which actors seek to realize their own goals and interests (actor strategies) while simultaneously working towards joint goals and interests (network strategy). The network approach is primarily an interactionist perspective. It does look at structural and systemic aspects of training (learning situations, provisions, rules and regulations, feedback and feed-forward procedures) but it puts these in an overall actor-oriented frame of reference. Training systems have a certain durability, so it presumes, but fundamentally they are unstable and dynamic because actors actively operate within and with the structures they encounter.

From this point of view, a training network can be seen as a composition of actors which interact and together, in variable relationships, undertake activities to generate learning processes. Van der Krogt (1995) has identified five aspects which are central to a training network:

- the actors, that is to say the different agencies and bodies which constitute the network; actors are not only trainers and teachers, but also managers, workers, staff people, courseware designers, etc. (Nyhan, 1991);
- organizational structure, that is to say the distribution of positions, tasks and responsibilities among the actors involved in training activities; different actors can take different roles within the network;
- the content structure, that is to say the whole complex of learning situations which can be used to develop training programmes aimed at improving the qualifications of the members of the organization; this contains not only formal, but also informal learning situations, as, for instance, the opportunities for learning at the workplace (Watkins and Marsick, 1992);
- the culture, that is to say the values and behavioural rules which guide the actions of those involved in the learning activities; where these get concrete shape in policy visions, procedures and measures one can also speak of the ‘learning climate’ of the network;
- the main processes of the learning system: raising the qualifications of organization members, i.e. the execution of training activities, the development of training programmes and the shaping of a training policy; here, these processes are distinguished analytically; in practice, a distinction is often hard to make.

The structural and cultural aspects give the network a certain durability, which guarantees that the main processes pass off according to relative stable lines. In this sense a ‘systemic’ character can be ascribed to the network. However, the ‘system’ is not a pre-existing institution, but is reproduced time and time again within the interactions between the actors involved. Continuously, actors in variable relationships give a new form to the main processes of the training system. Continuously, they have the opportunity to change their relationships and, within those changed relationships, to decide to organize these processes in a different way. That makes existing structures fundamentally unstable and dynamic. Training networks do have structures, but these structures are of a transitional kind. They are continuously put into action and put at stake within the interplay of forces constituted by the actors involved in the network.
Training in different types of organizations

A network approach, applied to the field of training, centres on the premise that actors, continuously engaging in variable relationships, jointly shape the main processes of the training system. A second important premise is the idea that these actors do so within variably structured organizational contexts and that within this organizational context the labour network is the most important element. A third, related premise is the assumption that there is a connection between training networks and labour networks, in the sense that the basic characteristics of the labour network will largely determine the essential characteristics of the learning network. The fourth central premise is that three characteristics of the labour network are of primary importance: the content of work, the relationships between the central actors in the work process and the dominant actors’ conceptions of the relationships between work and learning. From these premises follows a fifth assumption, namely that changes in the training network can be explained at least partly by changes in the network of labour or, vice versa, that changes in the labour network will induce corresponding changes in the network of training. Figure 1 presents a schematic of these basic premises of this application of the network approach to training.

So, according to the network perspective, a crucial role in the interconnection of the two networks is played by the dominant actors in the labour network. It is primarily through their orientations and activities that changes in work are transmitted to the network of training.

Research in different types of organizations

In the following discussion we will explore the opportunities of a network approach by applying it in an analysis of training in different types of organizations: bureaucratic and professional organizations (Mintzberg, 1989). These types of organizations differ in the way the labour network is organized and a central question of our research was whether these differences are reflected in the training networks. A second leading question was if and how changes occurring in the labour network affected the training networks in these different organization settings.

We analysed comparatively case studies of two bureaucratic organizations in the food-processing industry, a dairy produce company and a vegetable-processing company (described in Feijen, 1993), and two professional organizations providing probation and after-care services (described in Van der Krogt and Warmerdam, 1993).
The two food companies and the two service organizations resemble each other very close in terms of the environmental characteristics regarding the work and training systems (size, financial position, products, production processes, company structure, technology, staff structure). The data in the case studies were collected by means of document analysis, interviews with managers, staff executives, trainers and personnel officers, (group) interviews and questionnaires from the employees.

In the following paragraphs we explore the differences and dynamics in the training networks of these different types of organizations. In each case, the exploration proceeds along the same line of analysis. First, the labour networks in the organizations are briefly described: the content of work, the relations between the main actors, the conceptions of the actors about the relationships between work and learning. Then, the characteristics of the training networks are described: their content structure, organizational structure and the main processes. These are interpreted as reflecting the basic characteristics of the network of labour. Finally, the main tendencies of change in the labour network are identified and analysed in terms of their consequences for the content and organization of the training network. The goal of this final analysis is to illustrate the dynamic character of training in organizations. The main points of the analyses are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

**Work and training in bureaucratic organizations**

**Labour networks in the food-processing companies**

The labour network of the food-processing companies is characterized by the dominance of routine jobs. The work process is broken down into individual, short-cycle jobs (conveyor belt work) in a profoundly hierarchical staff-line organization. Work in the production departments is to a great extent standardized, with planning and preparation taken care of by lower management staff, which normally leaves operators on the line little room for independent decisions about work tempo, order or method. Only in non-routine situations, for instance, when working with unusual recipes or in the case of machine malfunction, are operators expected – within certain limits – to take decisions themselves. In both organizations, attempts have recently been made to give production-line workers more responsibility and to create more flexible work units by integrating jobs and broadening functions (see below). Nevertheless, the work process as such remains highly structured and the organization remains highly hierarchical.

The dominant actors in the labour network are the department managers and the line foremen. They are primarily responsible for planning, actual production and quality control in their departments, for co-ordination with other departments and for personnel management and guidance. As a consequence of their position in the work process, the department managers are also dominant actors in the field of training, since they largely determine the limiting conditions with regard to training content and participation. They do so on the basis of an adaptation-oriented qualification concept, in which training is primarily seen as an instrument for teaching employees the skills and attitudes which they need for the proper functioning of the production processes. In this perspective, training should be organized in conformity with the principles which govern the work organization: pre-designed by experts; course subject matter supplied in small portions and structured in accordance with the structure of the work processes; adequate prior planning, scrupulous monitoring during the training process and external testing of results afterwards. This perspective is evident in the training network, generally
### Table 1 Work and training in the food-processing companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional situation</th>
<th>Tendencies of change</th>
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**Labour network:**
- short-cycle, routine jobs
- in a Taylorist organization of work
- within a hierarchic staff-line company structure
- with top-down decision making by plant and unit managers
- within the framework of top management policies

**Role of actors:**
- plant and unit managers: 'adjusting skills to actual task requirements'
- top managers: 'adjusting jobs and skills to new organization'
- workers: 'adjusting skills to actual task requirements'
- on-the-job trainers at plant level: 'developing jobs and skills, as part of organization development process'

**relations:**
- dominant role of plant and unit management
- support role for training experts
- passive role of workers and lower management

**dominant practice:**
- adaptation-oriented qualification strategy
- task-oriented learning network
- dominant concept: 'learning by training and instruction'

**Training network:**
- explicit training policy planning (isolated, by experts)
- adaptation of externally developed learning programmes to internal goals, by on-the-job trainers at plant level
- co-ordination of learning activities by on-the-job trainers
- linear coupling of basic processes of training policy development, course programme design and implementation of training courses
- regulation of training activities by bureaucratic, formal instruments, like plans, procedures, facilities

**content structure:**
- strongly structured network of learning situations
- with many formal learning situations (short courses)
- mainly within the company and on-the-job
- which provide task and function specific skilling

**organization:**
- strong increase of product development and differentiation
- introduction of many new technologies
- growing complexity of product, process and information technology
- organization development within the framework of quality improvement
- functional flexibilization within the production units

**more steering of learning activities by top management**
- stronger position of on-the-job trainers *vis-a-vis* unit management
- greater involvement of lower management and workers in the preparation, the design and the implementation of training programmes

**relations:**
- introduction of elements of a strategy of parallel development of skills and jobs
- introduction of elements of a person-oriented learning network
- additional concept: 'learning by participating in job development'

**organization:**
- more integral policy planning
- more internal and participative development of learning programmes
- co-ordination by trainers, together with bosses and unit managers
- besides linear also parallel coupling of processes of training policy development, design of training programmes and execution of training courses
- within an overall bureaucratic framework also more informal regulation of relations, in particular on shopfloor level
Ferd van der Krogt and John Warmerdam characterized by a high degree of formalization, a structure which conforms to the structure of the work processes, subject matter which is oriented towards the internal company environment and relatively hierarchical procedures for policy and programme development. To some extent, the managers' perspective is counterbalanced by the perspective of other dominant parties in the training network: the training officials at the production plants. They are primarily responsible for the content and co-ordination of training activities. Their qualification concepts partly correspond to those of the department managers: in their view, too, training activities should primarily be geared to the objectives of the organization. However, in the recent past they have also introduced some new concepts of learning in the context of a functional flexibilization strategy, concepts which leave more room for an interaction between organization development and qualification development (see below). To some extent, the new concepts run counter to the 'Taylorist' training tradition in these companies. Nevertheless, the primary orientation of these new forms of on-the-job training remains that of adaptation.

Training networks in the food-processing companies

An important organizational feature of the training networks in the food-processing companies is that they are largely localized within the companies themselves. Both the dairy produce and the vegetable-processing company employ specialized executives in their production companies who are responsible for primary and further in-service training (on-the-job training consultants). These consultants develop, carry out and co-ordinate training activities within the financial and educational criteria of the training policy set out by the central company management. The training consultants work in close collaboration with the plant and department managers of the production companies, i.e. the people who are ultimately responsible for the quality and degree of training of their staff.

In both companies, the leading role in policy development in the field of training is played by the training staff. It is their responsibility to initiate and co-ordinate training activities within the frameworks outlined by central management with regard to company strategy and organization (quality-enhancement, cost awareness, client-orientedness, efficiency). In consultation with plant and department managers, they draw up a training plan which is confirmed by the central personnel department, central management and works council. Employees can also apply for courses on their own accord. Their wishes are discussed by the trainer and plant manager and, if they mesh with the possibilities of the company, included in the training participation plans. Together with the plant managers, the local training staff carry the primary responsibility for the correct implementation of these training plans.

In the development of the training programmes too, it is the trainers who play the leading role, especially in the case of internal company training courses. Normally, trainers operate in a fairly standard way: needs assessment at the start, definition of training goals, design of a curriculum, implementation of the course, and, sometimes, a course evaluation at the end. Sometimes, the trainers co-operate with external consultants and trainers employed by the educational institutes in the food-processing industry. These institutes are called upon to take care of primary vocational training for new employees and, sometimes, to develop additional in-house training programmes for current staff. Normally, the on-the-job trainers are solely responsible for the programme design and they do the work themselves. Other actors, i.e. the workers and foremen,
play a largely passive role, in the sense that they do little else besides 'consuming' instructions and practical assignments designed by the trainers. Recent initiatives, however, in the field of organization development and functional flexibilization have in both companies led to interesting attempts to give executive staff and lower management a greater role in the development and implementation of training programmes (see below).

From the point of view of content, the training networks in the two food-processing companies have a rigid structure. For the most part, learning is organized by means of short-term training programmes of on-the-job training and instruction, tailor-made for certain categories of jobs or employees and offered to these employees in a rather coercive manner. In this regard, the structure of the course supply in the vegetable-processing company is highly illustrative. It consists of the following training categories (see Feijen, 1993):

- introductory courses for newly hired employees, introducing newcomers to the company and the work being done in the various departments;
- internal basic courses, aimed at providing operators and maintenance mechanics, in particular, with basic knowledge of the vital production technologies, such as microbiology and process technology;
- internal courses in specific problem areas, aimed at giving operators and mechanics instruction with regard to certain widely used but 'problematic' techniques, such as sterilization or TIG-welding;
- line courses for employees working on the production or packing lines, aimed at enhancing their understanding of the different phases of the production process, the organization of the line and the departments involved;
- 'certification per function' courses: modular, job-oriented training courses for machine operators, aimed at broadening their qualification (machine handling plus some maintenance and malfunction repair), standardizing machine handling and work procedures in conformity with the specifications supplied by management and the production technology department;
- courses in the framework of what is called the 'experimental specialist scenario': training courses for maintenance mechanics, aimed at creating all-round line specialists within the production technology department.

The course supply in the dairy produce company consists of similar types of courses. In this company, however, the different individual courses are more closely connected with longer-term training trajectories. Courses here are also directed more towards technological than towards organizational innovation.

Tendencies of change

In recent years, some changes in the training networks of both companies have occurred. These changes were mainly brought about by new developments in the network of labour. For some time, both companies have been confronted with increasing competition in their traditional sales markets, to which they have reacted by a strategy of product development and diversification, combined with a policy of quality improvement. Together with the new products, many new technologies entered the companies, which led to growing complexity in production-process technology. In order to make optimal use of the new technology and to heighten quality standards of production, top management of both companies started programmes of organization
development. The main goal of these programmes was the creation of a flexible organization and of a highly motivated and qualified work-force. In the departments we investigated, attempts were made to give production-line workers more responsibility and to create more flexible work units by integrating jobs and broadening functions. Line operators were given responsibility for a number of machines or work stations, for instance, or they were assigned tasks in the field of inspection, maintenance and quality control. New qualification programmes were designed to meet the demands of this new organization of work. The on-the-job trainers were assigned by top management to play a major role in the development process. This strengthened their position in the training network vis-à-vis their main partners, the department managers.

To some extent, the (dominant) managers’ perspective became counterbalanced by the perspective of these on-the-job trainers in the production plants. They introduced some new concepts of training, which leave more room for an interaction between organization development and qualification development and which offer greater opportunities for participants’ own contributions to the training processes. They made some interesting attempts to give executive staff and lower management a greater role in the development and implementation of training programmes. Trainers in the dairy produce company, for instance, introduced a new training concept in the development of a training programme to prepare employees involved in starting up a new plant. It involved a number of steps, the first being a discussion between the plant manager and foremen-to-be about the procedure for starting up the plant. This was followed by a ‘train the trainer’ course for the foremen, who would then assume partial responsibility for training the employees at the new plant. Next, the theoretical component of the training programme was developed. The development and implementation of this component was partly taken care of by specialists in certain techniques within the company. The next step was the practical component of the course, in which employees learnt to operate the new machines. This practical component took place on the job, by having employees take turns at each of the different machines under the supervision of the trained foremen. The last part of the project was the so-called ‘analysis phase’. The aim of this step was to generate a maximum amount of feedback about staff performance (work methods, mistakes, output, etc.) throughout the process of starting up the new plant, to make sure work methods became optimally and uniformly ‘engrained’. Videotaping was one of the means employed here. This whole trajectory was guided, monitored and co-ordinated by the training consultant. At the vegetable-processing company, the involvement of lower management and executive staff is sometimes taken even further. In the line courses and the ‘certification per function’ courses, for instance, a deliberate choice was made to have the production workers develop parts of the course material themselves. Production workers were assembled in small groups and drew up inventories of their own work methods, on the basis of which they discussed descriptions and instructions on the way to operate the various machines in different workplaces. These descriptions and operating instructions were then used as training materials for subsequent theory modules. These theory modules were largely taught by experienced professionals who work at the plant itself (for a more detailed account, see Feijen, 1993).

In these latter examples, the course participants are clearly more involved in the development and implementation of their own training programmes than is customary in the traditional on-the-job training courses in industry. Traditionally, the participants play a largely passive role, in the sense that they do little else besides ‘consuming’ instructions and practical assignments designed by others (trainers). An important
Training in different types of organizations

reason for the departure from established tradition in the examples mentioned above was the attempt, in both companies, to make employees at lower executive levels more versatile and responsible for the work they carry out. For such an attempt to be successful greater staff involvement is required and this, the management expected, could also be achieved by giving them more initiative in their own training courses. So, within the bureaucratic and technocratic training networks of the two food companies the position of the on-the-job trainers was strengthened in the course of the organization development process. They in their turn introduced some new participatory elements in training policy and programme development, which strengthened the position of lower management and the executive staff in the training network. This partly broke through the Taylorist training tradition in the companies. Nevertheless, the primary orientation of these new forms of participatory on-the-job training remains that of adaptation.

Work and training in professional organizations

Labour networks in the probation and after-care services

Unlike in the food processing companies, where the training and labour networks are clearly separated, the two networks are more integrated in the probation and after-care services; the training and labour networks overlap to a great extent. This overlap can largely be explained by the nature of the work network itself. In both agencies, the work network is dominated by professionalism and teamwork. The work process is organized in long-term individual casework trajectories for which the probation workers carry almost exclusive responsibility. The work is carried out in autonomous teams which function in a segmental organization, in which the role of management is virtually restricted to setting the limiting conditions. In principle, this type of work and the corresponding autonomy offer many opportunities for learning, and they are actively made use of in both agencies. As a result, the training networks are characterized by relatively numerous informal and semi-formal training situations with a relatively open profile, either built directly into the work process or linked to certain job responsibilities. In both organizations, the training network is wholly or largely unstructured and largely situated within the organization and the organizational network, i.e. the network formed by the teams and the professionals. Due to the low level of the professional infrastructure, only limited external support in the field of professional training is available.

The dominant actors in both the labour network and the training network are the professional executives in the teams. They bear most of the responsibility, both for the organization of their casework as well as for their training activities. They generally identify their own training needs and wishes, formulate their own training objectives, organize their own training situations and training trajectories (formal as well as informal and semi-formal) and monitor and steer the course of their training processes themselves. This is frequently done in consultation with their colleagues. In general, these professionals follow a qualification concept in which qualification enhancement and work (methodology) development are seen as closely interconnected. This concept is based on the assumption that new methods and new services will gradually be introduced into the work programme of the organization via the application of newly acquired professional qualifications and that the organization will adapt itself accordingly. In both agencies, this perspective is largely shared by management, albeit that changes taking place in the environments in which these agencies operate are forcing
### Table 2 Work and training in the probation and after-care services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour network:</th>
<th>Tendencies of change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• professionalism and case work</td>
<td>• pressure of budget reductions and need to limit and prioritize services and clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• in a team organization</td>
<td>• changes in clientele: new groups of clients, new types of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• in a segmentally structured service institution</td>
<td>• introduction of new types of professional methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• with collegiate decision making by groups of professionals</td>
<td>• introduction of new specializations within the teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more hierarchical decision making and more bureaucratic procedures</td>
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</tbody>
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<th>Role of actors:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>orientations:</td>
<td>• more steering by top management on qualification development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• professionals/teams: ‘adjusting skills to new developments in professional field’</td>
<td>• more articulate role for team leaders as intermediates between top and professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• management: ‘developing work, services and organization on the basis of newly acquired competences’</td>
<td>• reduction of autonomy of professionals and teams</td>
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<th>Relations:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• dominance of professionals and teams within both the labour and the learning network</td>
<td>• introduction of elements of an adaptation-oriented qualification strategy</td>
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<td>• role of management: primarily facilitating dominant practice:</td>
<td>• introduction of elements of task- and function-oriented training</td>
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<td>• more active role for team leaders as intermediates between top and professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• pro-active qualification strategy</td>
<td>• additional concepts: ‘learning by teaching and training’ and ‘learning by collective reflection and self-study’</td>
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<td>• profession-oriented learning network</td>
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<td>• dominant concept: ‘learning by personal experience and reflection’</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training network:</th>
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<tr>
<td>organization structure:</td>
<td>• more policy co-ordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• incremental learning policy development, limited policy planning</td>
<td>• more connections between internal self-developed programmes and external supply in professional field</td>
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<tr>
<td>• self-design of learning programmes, sometimes based on external material</td>
<td>• more formal consultation of professionals, team leaders and management to co-ordinate learning activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• co-ordination of learning activities by professional workers themselves, supported by members of the professional field</td>
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<tr>
<td>• no coupling of processes of learning policy development, learning programme development and implementation of activities</td>
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<td>• regulation of learning activities by mutual consultations of professionals within teams and study groups</td>
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<td>content structure:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• unstructured network of learning situations</td>
<td>• introduction of more formal learning situations (courses)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• many informal and semi-formal learning situations, with open profiles</td>
<td>• new forms of learning, like project learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• within organization and organization network, i.e. professional field of professionals and teams</td>
<td>• overall picture: only limited changes</td>
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<td>• which provide skilling in new professional services and methods</td>
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...management to assume a more active role in steering the content and organization of the work performed by the teams. Accordingly, both organizations show increased management efforts to gain more influence over the development of new qualifications, methods and services by using their control over the organizational limiting conditions. Below we will discuss this development in more detail.

Training networks in the probation and after-care services

From the point of view of organization, the training networks in the two probation and after-care services are structured only to a limited extent and are localized largely within the organization and the organizational network, i.e. the networks formed by the teams and professionals. Roles, tasks and responsibilities in the field of training have not been defined explicitly except to a very limited extent. The services have no official in charge of training nor any other specialized expertise in this area. The advancement of professional ability is an integral part of the job package of the probation officers themselves. Some provisions have been made in this area, but they are concerned chiefly with the allocation of training facilities and amenities. Training and other forms of expertise enhancement are not planned; they are accounted for only in a yearly report on the activities that have taken place and the financial means spent on them.

These agencies have virtually no formalized training policies. The probation officers themselves are primarily responsible for their own expertise enhancement; for the most part, they organize their training activities themselves and draw up their own training plans. Plans and activities are usually based on self-experienced deficiencies in knowledge and skills and on self-identified new developments in casework in the field, in the client groups or in the organization. Plans and activities are discussed in the teams and, in some cases, brought into line with colleagues’ training activities. The agency’s policy plans are in fact little else than a record of the activities planned by the workers and teams. In one of the services, such plans are kept in check by the management, mainly due to the limits on training facilities; management has little influence on the content. The management of the other agency does attempt to influence the activities undertaken by the teams and individual workers from the point of view of the work content, for instance by giving extra encouragement and facilities to certain study groups.

The development of training programmes is not formalized to any significant extent either. On the basis of the existing supply of training situations, the probation officers themselves devise a ‘trajectory’ which corresponds to their wishes. In most training situations in the course of this trajectory, it is they themselves who have the greatest influence on what they learn. The working groups and, in particular, project groups which also function as study groups, start off with only a very sketchy ‘training programme’. Objectives are of course agreed upon and activities planned, and arrangements are made with regard to the division of tasks, facilities, feedback, evaluation, etc., but such arrangements are generally of a superficial nature and can easily be adjusted in the course of the ‘ride’. Moreover, such arrangements are made in close mutual consultation between the group members. Thus, programme development of training activities and trajectories within such study groups is by nature open and flexible and largely determined by the participants themselves. It will have become clear that in these probation and after-care services the trainees themselves play a far more active and dominant role in the training network than is the case in the food-processing companies. It is largely they who identify training needs, formulate their...
own training objectives, draw up their own training plans, select and organize their own training situations to suit their needs, and assume responsibility for the application of what they have learned in their own work practice. For the most part they also decide when and for which objectives they call in outside help and select the source of such outside expertise: colleagues, specialists, trainers or advisers. The role of managers is generally confined to providing and monitoring the use of study facilities. In so much as trainers are called in, they function mainly in the role of counsellors or advisers.

From the point of view of content, too, the training network in both services remains largely unstructured, being left to lower levels, i.e. the teams themselves. It is characterized by a relatively large number of informal and semi-formal training situations with a rather open profile, aimed at acquiring and enhancing professional service skills, work procedures and treatment methods. In general, there is little coherence between these training situations, i.e. there are few training trajectories or programmes as such. In instances in which training situations are related to each other, such connections are established by the (individual) probation workers themselves.

Within the network, a distinction can be made between several types of training situations:

- training situations at the individual level: moments of explicit reflection, built into the work process itself, in which the probation workers evaluate their own work procedures and treatment methods. Such reflection may take place literally individually, in the form of self-reflection, for instance when a worker comes into contact with a new type of client, experiences problems with certain clients or finds his services have failed to bring about a positive result. It can also take place collectively, for instance in the form of discussions about their experiences between colleagues or mutual consultation about difficult cases; newly employed workers are often given some form of counselling by supervisors;
- training situations in the teams: opportunities for expertise enhancement are often formally included in team procedures, but they also exist in case discussions between worker and team co-ordinator or in structured case discussions with colleagues in the team as a whole. Some teams have recurrent ‘intervision’ meetings; various teams in the two services organized periodic study meetings or study days, for instance about less familiar problems (incest, alcoholism), new services (alternative forms of punishment, work projects) or new administrative procedures (computerization, introduction of policy plans);
- training situations at agency level: one of the services in particular has a large number of work and project groups which have been set up for the purpose of gathering information and knowledge with regard to new types of problems, services or disciplines. Such groups are often composed of workers from different teams, joined by (outside) specialists; the knowledge gathered by these groups is disseminated by the group members among their colleagues in their respective teams;
- training situations in worker, team or agency networks: quite a few probation officers participate in project or study groups outside their own agency, such as regional groups initiated by the police or judicial authorities or national groups initiated by the national probation and after-care association. Such networks, too, are sources of knowledge with regard to relevant new developments which can then be passed on to colleagues within one’s own agency.
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One remarkable feature, in both organizations, is the limited use that is made of the external supply of formal professional education and training opportunities. One would expect such use in professional organizations like the ones concerned. That it is not the case is partly due to the limited degree of institutionalization in the professional field of probation and after-care services. There is no clearly defined professional domain, no strong and recognizable professional association, no specialized professional education, no clearly defined professional ‘body of knowledge’, no scientific discipline which contributes specifically to the field. As far as expertise enhancement is concerned, the services have to rely heavily on their own initiatives. This partly explains why – more than is the case in ‘real’ professions, like medicine, architecture, law – the training networks are situated, in terms of both content and organization, within the agencies themselves.

Tendencies of change

The training networks in the two agencies are relatively stable. In recent years, only little changes have occurred. The main changes are due to the fact that top management wants to get more grip on the activities within the teams, including the activities in the field of training. This self-articulation of management is caused by new developments in the environment of the agencies. For some years, the agencies have been confronted with the dilemma of strong budget cuts on the one hand, and a growing clientele, on the other hand. Moreover, the clientele is becoming increasingly diversified and increasingly difficult to deal with. So, management is under urgent pressure to set policy priorities regarding the organization’s supply of services and to assume a more active role in steering the content and organization of the work performed by the teams in a direction which is compatible with the priorities of the organization as a whole. Accordingly, both organizations show increased management efforts to gain more influence over the development of new qualifications, methods and services by using their control over the organizational limiting conditions. Management has thus strengthened its position as an actor in the field of training.

How this works out can best be seen in one of the agencies. The management of this agency recently tried to give more co-ordination to training activities at the local level, i.e. in the local teams. Several measures were taken. First, a part-time expert was appointed with the task of co-ordinating training activities and developing a training policy plan for the agency as a whole. Second, a system of planning of training activities at team level was introduced. Each team had to develop a training policy and an annual plan of activities for itself. Third, attempts were made to influence the activities undertaken by the teams and individual workers from the point of view of the work content, for instance by giving extra encouragement and facilities to certain study groups, which occupied themselves with themes of high priority in the overall policy of the service. An interesting example of this latter type of measure is a ‘learning project’, which was recently carried out under the auspices of top management. In this learning project, the subject of which was the acquisition of knowledge with regard to different forms of project work, a learning group was formed from workers from different teams as well as middle management. This group defined its own learning objectives (both individual and collective), drew up its own learning plan, consisting of a combination of learning activities (group literature study, collective reflection on workers’ own project practice, study of project work in other organizations, the design of a model project organization, discussing, testing and evaluating this model in one’s own team),
arranged its own financial and organizational facilities, determined the moments at which external support was sought and made its own arrangements for adequate monitoring and evaluation of the trajectory. This project was strongly stimulated by top management because it concerned a new way of working (working in projects), which for top management has a high priority in the years to come. The example demonstrates that management, in trying to get more grip on team activities, takes care that it builds as much as possible upon the established traditions (see Van der Krogt and Warmerdam, 1993).

In sum, the changes in the professional training networks in the probation and after-care agencies are rather limited. Management is tending to get more grip on the activities of the professional workers and tending to become a ‘partner’ in the field of training, but management orientations and professionals’ orientations do not differ so much that this change of balance would cause drastic changes in the content and organization of training. However, certain tendencies towards bureaucratization are visible.

Assessment of the network approach

Now, what can we learn from these case studies? What does the application of network thinking contribute to the understanding of qualification and training in organizations? Considering the cases, we think a network approach provides good opportunities to integrate elements of the more traditional approaches – structural-oriented, system-oriented – within an actor-oriented framework. This allows, first of all, for a more subtly differentiated perspective on the organization of training systems, which brings differences between different types of organizations clearly into the open. The network approach connects the training network with the labour network of an organization and explains the structure and functioning of the training network primarily from the basic characteristics of the labour network: the content of work, the relations between the actors in the work process and the conceptions of the dominant actors regarding the relationship between work and learning. In our view, to look at this connection is essential in order to get a clear understanding of training activities in organizations. The labour networks in the food companies, with their dominance of short-cycle routine jobs, their dominant roles for plant and unit managers and their dominant ‘Taylorist’ adaptation-oriented qualification concepts, generate different training networks than the probation and after-care services, with their labour networks, characterized by professionalism and team work, a dominant role for the professional workers themselves and a dominant prospective qualification concept, which attributes an initiating role to professional qualifications when it comes to innovations in work methods, work processes and organizational structures. With this focus on the differences between organizations, the network approach can put into perspective the ‘one-best-way’ style of thinking, which still dominates many studies on corporate training and human resource development. Increasingly, this functionalist way of thinking and the resulting normative schemes are called into question (see Sleezer, 1993).

So, like the systems approach, the network approach breaks with functionalist one-best-way thinking by setting the training system in its ‘environment’. But, then, the network approach goes a step further and mobilizes both system and environment by stressing the crucial role of actors. This allows for a far more dynamic analysis of qualification and training. Systems are not looked upon in a static, mechanistic way, but
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are conceptualized as continuously evolving networks of interaction. Training networks (and labour networks) are an integral part of the field of forces which actors within and around the organization create to realize their personal and common interests. Training networks are continuously exposed to influences from this field of forces and that makes their structures dynamic. Sometimes, the structures change in a revolutionary way, but most often they evolve slowly, because new actors with new qualification concepts gradually get more space to realize their ideas in practice. We see an example of this dynamic in the food companies, where changes in the labour network (functional flexibilization, organizational development) create a constellation in which the on-the-job trainers are getting more and more influence. They are using this influence to introduce new qualification concepts, which fit closely with their professional habitus.

Another example can be found in one of the probation and after-care services, the southern agency, where top managers used changes in the environment of the labour network (budget cuts, rationalization, new groups of clients) as points of action to reduce the autonomy of the professionals in the field of learning and to channel the learning activities within the teams in a direction more in accordance with the policy priorities of the agency as a whole. In our view, insight into these kinds of processes, i.e. in the dynamics of learning networks, is indispensable for an adequate diagnosis of qualification problems in organizations.

This stressing of dynamics is a typical feature of actor-oriented approaches like the network approach. However, the network approach ‘softens’ a bit the harsh political aspects which are often connected with sociologically inspired actor approaches. It takes account of the political dimension of training but training is not exclusively seen as a political instrument. By stressing the central role of actors’ conceptions in the connection of work and training networks and by stressing interaction processes between actors, i.e. the adjustment of actors’ actions to each other, the network approach puts an emphasis on the communicative aspects of qualification and training activities. Communication is the central process in a network approach. The creation of structures for training and the establishment of relations between training systems and their environment are analysed on the basis of this central perspective.

Conclusions

So, in sum, our conclusion is that application of a network approach in the field of training can contribute new insights to the debate on the relationships between work and learning and that it can, therefore, be fruitfully applied to the analysis of qualification problems in work organizations. It brings about a shift from a static, one-sided, one-best-way perspective on training to a dynamic, multi-faceted approach in which different actors jointly choose to organize training in a variety of manners.

With such an approach we can better understand the variety and dynamics in organizational practice with regard to qualification and training. This, we think, is an essential prerequisite for an adequate solution of qualification problems.

Ferd van der Krogt and John Warmerdam
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Note

1 In English, ‘to qualify’ and ‘qualification’ are not normally used in a dynamic sense, i.e. in the sense of an ongoing process (initiated by the individual, by his superiors or by educators) in
which an individual acquires the knowledge and skills he needs in order to qualify for a certain position. Here, these terms will be used in this dynamic sense, as a 'process or system of qualification'.

References


Bjerkes, G., Ehn, P. and Kyng, M. (eds) (1987). *Berggren, C. (1989) ‘New Production Concepts in Final Position. Here, an individual acquires the knowledge and skills he needs in order to qualify for a certain position. These terms will be used in this dynamic sense, as a ‘process or system of qualification’.*

References


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