

The survey at the CEFIL : a meaningful moment in the training process

The CEFIL is the INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economics Studies) training center in Libourne, near Bordeaux France. It's a training school for controllers/inspectors (intermediate management staff) recruited through competitive examinations.

This programme lasts one year altogether which includes six months in Libourne. The aims are :

- to facilitate integration into the Institute ;
- to promote versatility by expanding computer, statistical and economic skills ;
- to enhance written and oral communication in the INSEE's fields of competence.

The chosen approach is based on :

- confrontation with professional situations ;
- use of group work ;
- integrated courses.

A real survey sponsored by a local partner is also carried out as part of the training period in Libourne.

This training was applied when the CEFIL was created, ten years ago, as had been advised by the Canada Statistics. I thank them for that.

The outlines

The aim of that survey is mainly pedagogical. It means putting into practice knowledges and skills.

The training at the CEFIL is divided in two periods :

- knowledge and competencies are acquired during the first three months (especially statistics, data processing, written and oral communication, but also, through team works, skill development in organization and team leadership) ;
- their implementation during the three following months. They are dedicated to the complete achievement of the entire survey, from the meeting with the partners up to the presentation of the work and its results.

During this period, students are gathered in team of fifteen students under the responsibility of one trainer.

A survey with partners

The surveys deal with households as well as businesses. The orders come from public or private partners. They emanate from the services of different statistical ministries such as Agriculture, Industry and so on...) but also from townhalls or administrative services. So they deal with very varied subjects, from day care for young children up to the management of small and medium local enterprises.

A convention is concluded with the partner. The fees are taken in charge by the CEFIL, except the mailing costs paid by partners.

Strong obligations

Duties are of different types :

- the delays : the students have to do everything within three months : make the partners express their expectations, build up the set of questions, test it, prepare the mailing process, tape data, control them, draw conclusions from the results, draw up synthetic documents and present the results orally. The natural tendency is to share the tasks, some students preparing the mailing, others making the tables and charts, others writing a part of the report while others still write other parts ;
- the availability of the trainers: during the survey, the trainers have to be available to satisfy the students' concerns ;
- the partner : carrying out a survey for an external partner is both motivating and stressing for students ; they are learning and yet they have to be professional in front of the partner ;
- team work : survey team gathers 12 to 15 students in average. Because of the size of these groups, conflicts may happen due to the delays and the wish to supplying a produce of quality. Sometimes, it is necessary to have a large team, for example to do the mailing or tape data ; some other times to be in number is a difficulty, particularly during the writing : in a real professional situation, only one or two persons write together, never fifteen. Fortunately there are several documents to write.

A necessary preparation

The preparation for the survey is executed in three directions : the trainers, the partners and the students. It requires planned logistic :

- the CEFIL trainers are managers from the INSEE whose initial training is statistical and economic. The survey requires that trainers receive a previous training to drive the teamwork. The trainer must be able to realize risks very quickly and to react accordingly. This duty is not a usual function in their teaching. So it is a difficulty.

Moreover, the teachers should have several documents at their disposal to help them as and when the different steps of the survey take place. It means : realization calendar, description of the trainer's tasks, instructions to give the students gradually,

documents to help them to draw up a questionnaire, set patterns for questionnaire and methodological notes, standard letters, ... The CEFIL chose to invest fully : one of the members of the teaching team was relieved from teaching during the survey to gather and to build several of these papers, and to be the referent for the other teachers during that period.

- the partners : the first step is to find partners. A meeting between on the one hand the partner and on the other hand the CEFIL manager and the teacher is essential. It's important to remind the pedagogical aim of the survey, to know the partner's real expectations and to define the field of the survey. It is also necessary to check that the survey basis are available and to specify the material conditions of the survey realization.

- the students : if the survey allows to put the acquired knowledge and abilities into practice, it is also useful to bring new instructions. These are closely connected with different phases of the survey :

- o introduction to the management of a project so that students build the previsionnal planning of the operations with the required dates ;
- o learning how to be a good listener during the first meeting partner-students : the partner explains his needs to the students who question him to understand his expectations. The students write down the order and make it ratify by the partner during their second meeting;
- o learning how to conceive a questionnaire : beyond the theory, the students receive the help of a specialist who drives them from the very beginning down to the final document ;
- o learning about the mailshot before the mailing ;
- o presentation of the pools methods ;
- o training to screen mask to capture the data (during the "slack" periods, after the mailing but before the returning of the questionnaires) ;
- o learning about the quality and data control from a file full of anomalies found during real surveys (sensitization done before receiving the questionnaires) ;
- o additionnal information about Word to do the page lay-out of documents (during the writing) ;
- o training with Power-Point just before the oral presentation in front of the partner and his hosts.

An indispensable follow-up

The use of data processing to manage a project is not sufficient ; meetings after the training are essential. It is an illusion to believe that the students are able to get organized by themselves ; we have to remember that some of them have never worked before they arrive at the CEFIL and many have never led a project. Theses gatherings have for object to organize the team work, to decide the casting : who does what ? when ? how ? and to spot it. They take place on a steady rhythm. They are done in the presence of the CEFIL manager, who is the contracting authority, and the trainer ; the students intervene as organizer or as recorder. At every gathering, the organizer and the recorder change, so that a maximum of students can play the different parts. This is important to reduce the leading role that some of them can take naturally. These meetings come in complement of continous exchanges between the

teacher and his students' group. The coordination of the team work is probably the main difficulty. Another difficulty is that the trainer is together the technical adviser and the teacher.

An increasing requirement

For the first time this year, and in spite of shorter delays because of holidays, a synthetic document of four pages was required from the students in more of the usual report and of the usual methodologic note. They were not obliged to do it ; it was only suggested but, at the end, every group made it.

Positive results

The result is positive both for the students and the partners.

For the students, it is during the survey period that they develop their self-sufficiency since they organize all the operations, even the logistic ones (reproduction of questionnaire, car reservations for the tests, ...) .

It is the period they prefer : it is different from the usual training because they are in a professional position where they are the actors and where they are responsible.

This is not done without difficulties because they have to work in group and consequently they have to learn to know each other, to accept the other, and to decide together with an obligation of result at the end.

For the partners, judging by their repeated requests, they are satisfied and they base their decisions on the results of the survey.

Questions for the future

Even if the final result is very positive, some questions remained :

- how to develop the transfer of competencies between the students ?
- is it necessary to increase the survey period ?
- to what extent should the students be accompanied?
- how to deal with more numerous classes ?
