

Axfoundation's comment

Many companies with supply chains in China want to ensure good working conditions. They make demands through codes of conduct and follow them up by factory inspections, so-called audits. However, experience and research show that code and control are not enough. Audits provide a snapshot of the situation on the factory floor and rarely capture the basic problems (which are often invisible to the eye) and do not strengthen the employees. Buying companies need to act proactively so that employees are empowered to influence the working conditions.

A key to change is knowledge. Education on rights and on-the-job-training for better skills and leadership can change structures and lead to gradual, sustainable improvements. But how to measure the impact? It requires patience and time, and once done it's still difficult to deduce sporadic indications to the actual education effort.

This report is our attempt to evaluate the training efforts undertaken at a number of factories in China between 2014 and 2017. For this task, Raoul Wallenberg Institute was assigned and their China expert Malin Oud is the main author of the report.

The assessed training is run by the small Swedish company QuizRR whose founders have extensive experience in supply chain management and training efforts at factories in Asia. Their digital solution is scalable and is based on short films with follow-up quiz questions. Based on Axfoundation's role as accelerator for new solutions to sustainability issues, we have subsidized QuizRR user licenses to six companies in the Axel Johnson Group since 2014. We have also collaborated in the development of QuizRR for Thailand, focusing on ethical recruitment of migrant workers. QuizRR also has two additional modules that deal with transparent payroll and employee representation, as described in more detail in the report.

However, this evaluation is based on QuizRR Rights and Responsibilities, the basic module. We wanted to know if the training had given any measurable results and possible effects. The study is qualitative and based on a variety of interviews with different stakeholders. It contains learning that we believe more stakeholders can benefit from.

Examples of positive findings are that employees testify that they gained new knowledge, which led to concrete improvements in the factory floor. The evaluation also points to challenges. The political situation in China is not favorable for human rights. Surveillance is increasing. Freedom of association and freedom of speech is not allowed. Companies that choose to trade in China must be aware of these limitations and their implications on the factories. On the other hand, within the limits that are possible, trade gives access to new knowledge and new channels to communicate and conduct dialogue. QuizRR builds on the potential that supplier-buyer relationships create.

Six factories have been assessed in the huge production market called China. QuizRR is operating on more than 200 factories and even if that too is relatively small scale, we are convinced individual efforts can lead to transformative change in the long run. It requires perseverance and joint efforts, as reflected in the recommendations of the report.

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Viveka Risberg, Program Director at Axfoundation, Nov 2018