Erasmus+

Erasmus+ EACEA

Grant Agreement Number: **2018-1-EL01-KA202-047904**

Project Duration: **24 months**

Employer/end user handbook

Table of Contents

Introduction

Front office employees perform numerous tasks and duties during customer service procedures (before, during and after the transaction). Many of these tasks, described in DACUM workshop section below, entail routine processes, cognitive effort and exploitation of basic domain knowledge.

Customers with different cultural, historical, linguistic background, as is the case of Third Country Nationals, constitute by definition one "dynamic element" of the customer service context able to alter the whole mind-set and the terms under which the service is provided.

Thus, the context in which Post Office's employees are called to perform their tasks is perceived (primarily by the employee and secondary by Third Country National -TCN) as being dynamic, difficult by its definition (due to the absence of basic linguistic and social skills both from employees and TCNs) and complex by nature especially in situations where "legal aspects" emerged during employees-customer's transactions.

In these exceptionally ill-structured dynamic situations individual (employee) decision making is often being compromised due to the absence of what Holyoak (1991), describes as "*adaptive expertise", "adaptability" or "Adaptive Performance"* (Kozlowski, DeShon, 2001).

Form and individual point of view, Hatano and Inagaki (1986), as they are cited by Arment and Reed (2013) used the terms "Adaptive Experts" and "Routine Experts", so as to contrast two different ways of conducting daily tasks and solving problems.

Particularly "Routine Expert" is by definition a lifelong learner (just as the Adaptive Expert as well) who increasingly becomes adept at performing a **specific set of skills in response to familiar challenges** (Bransford et al., 2003). Routine Expert's efficiency becomes possible due to the situational characteristics of tasks being performed which present little to no variability thus allowing routine experts to perform at a high level provided that the environment is stable enough (Arment S., et al., 2013)

On the other hand, individuals with adaptive expertise can not only work efficiently, but also demonstrate the ability to be flexible and innovative in their application of procedural knowledge (Katano & Inagaki, 1986).

In a nutshell, adaptive experts present a more flexible orientation to problem solving and knowledge construction, whereas routine experts tend towards familiar approaches to new situations. Depicted graphically, the trajectory towards adaptive expertise lies within the "optimal adaptability corridor" (Figure 1) whereby innovation and efficiency have a positive

relationship and equally important presence in learning. In that representation a routine expert resides in the higher areas to the efficiency dimension whereas an adaptive expert lies in high in both dimensions (efficiency and innovation) and this position enables him/her to select between routine and adaptive approaches and explain and justify those decisions (Bransford et al., 2004).

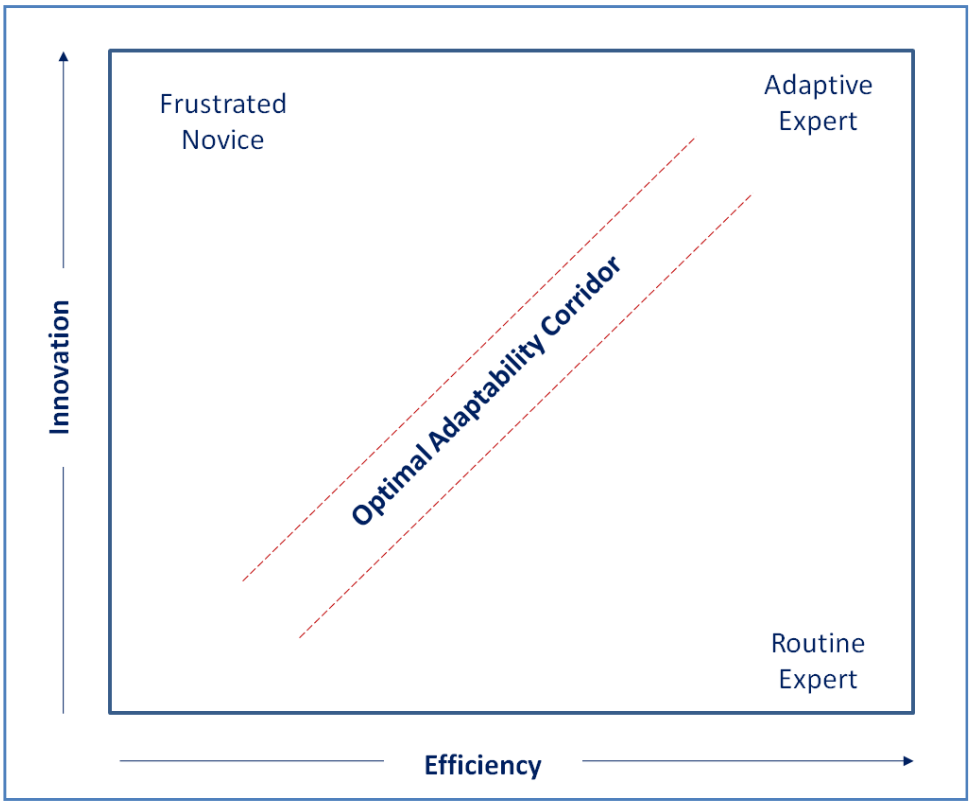


Figure 1 – The trajectory towards adaptive expertise (Bransford et al., 2004)

It goes without saying that *"Adaptability"* is based primarily on the foundations of "*domain knowledge*" and "*routine expertise*" which usually operate as *"secure guidelines"* for the employees to perform their daily duties with the highest standards of performance, it is the acquisition of **adaptive performance skills** (Kozlowski, DeShon, 2001) **or adaptability skills (though the appropriate training strategy)** that drives this performance beyond the well known limits of the ordinary basic customer service skills especially in Dynamic Decision Making environments.

These Dynamic Decision Making contexts usually call for more than just *"a static and routine application of well-embedded knowledge"* in the domain of customer service.

To that end the **core concept of our training strategy** is not just a simple **"skill replication"** strategic alternative of well-embedded knowledge but instead is underpinned

on "**the generalization"** of basic knowledge and skills acquired in the training process **"to difficult, complex and dynamic situations".**

By the same token, the process of adaptive performance skills acquisition requires active cognitive monitoring which constitutes a comprehension of the *conceptual structure of the problem domain*. The conceptual understanding of a problem's structure, in turn, demands mindful processing and the ability of the employee to recognize any shifts in the (customer service) situation that might call for adaptability (Kozlowski, DeShon, 2001).

Methodological Foundations of CULMED

Various definitions have been used to define the training process. Wilson & Cole (1993) describe training as "an Instruction" which, contrary to education, *"emphasizes job-specific, near-transfer learning objectives, traditionally skills-based instruction, and usually focusing on various areas (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, Skills & Performance, Evaluation, Learning).* (Usha Valli Somasundaram, Toby Marshall Egan, 2004). Beardwell and Holden (2001) define training as *"…planned process that is used to change attitudes, knowledge, skills and behavior through the learning experience in order to achieve effective performance in a specific activity or range of activities".* Other researchers (Armstrong, 2001) describe training as being a formal and systematic, through learning, modifier of behavior which *"occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience". Through learning, "the development (of the learner) is improving individual performance in their present roles and preparing them for greater responsibilities in the future"* , thus adding elements of social cognitive theory of self-regulation (self-monitoring, self-reactive influences, self-efficacy mechanisms) (Bandura, 1991).

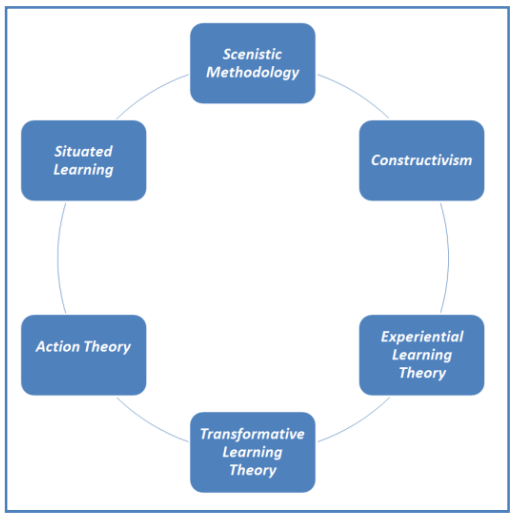


Figure 2-Training Methodologies & Theories of CULMED

Based on the previous definitions, where training process has been conceived as *"an Institution for accelerating knowledge and skills acquisition, altering behavior, enhance development and prepare learners for greater self-achievements"*, the core idea of Cultural Mediators training programme has been designed, implemented and further developed upon six (6) core elements (as they are depicted in figure 2).

(a) The ***"Scenistic Methodology"*** , "exploiting", as Paul (2010) describes *"…a specific set of training processes focusing on* ***situations, events, case-studies, and narratives furnishing specific settings for performance issues, needs, deficiencies and scripted actions for particular situations****".*

(b) The ***Constructivism***, which details the perspective that knowledge and skills can be improved in different ways without necessarily any one ideal solution (Jonassen, 1991). Constructivism is placed near to the situated and scenistic methods as it emphasizes comprehensible real-world functions in organizational environments. In skills moulding in a specific environment, the various aspects of performance need to be defined, demonstrated,

and comprehended (Jonassen, 1994). This will enable people and groups to pinpoint gaps and deficiencies in performance in a specific skill area. This type of **dynamic social participation** should also accelerate the learning process.

(c) the **Experiential Learning Theory** which constitutes one multidisciplinary theory of experiential learning based on constructivism and uses psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and cognitive sciences to gain a greater insight into the learning process (Carver, 1996).

(d) The **Transformative Learning Theory** combined with scenistic methods enables and encourages trainees to **participate actively in shaping the content and application of learning activities.** To that end, the active participation of Learners discourages passive training practices and in turn empowers the active involvement of individuals in the training decision making processes, thus enhancing self-regulation and meta-cognitive skills (Kozlowski, DeShon, 2001).

(e) The **Action Theory**, which as described by Michael Frese (2007), attempts to explain how learning is **regulated** and how people can **change their behavior** to **dynamically meet objectives in normal and/or unusual situations.** Situated and scenistic learning methods involve novel situations and require trainees to be creative to some extent. Contrary to many cognitive and information processing theories, action theory is linked to behavior and specific working contexts and outcomes. It is also concerned with the processes involved in the interaction between environmental inputs and behavior in the one hand and how cognition regulates behavior and performance on the other hand (Paul, 2010). According to Salisbury (2008), action theory is a systematic tool for understanding how knowledge of cognitive processes in a performance situation is regulated by using the focus, sequence, action structure components (Frese, 2007) and the foundations of the theory which interact dynamically. The action structure is the most important component in relation to scenistic processes. Through sensitivity to the complexity of the learning process, instructors can manage learner expectations to reduce information overload. After trainees feel more comfortable with the scenistic model, they often try to apply it to other problems in the workplace (Paul, 2010).

In line with the above, we argue that scenistic methodology is the most **appropriate methodology for programmes (such as CULMED) that foster team training** in their curricula and embolden among others the **active learning element** of cognitive individual processes.

(g) The **Situated Learning:** The theoretical and conceptual foundations of CULMED training programme were based on a mixture of various theories and practices with particular emphasis on the **Situated Learning /Cognition** which is one of the most important features of the scenistic method. In view of the above, tailor-made training material (case studies, storytelling, role playing etc) **situated the learners in their daily business context** were planned, created, developed and implemented**.** To that end, training activities were shared and *"were"*, to some extent, as (Milhem W. et.al, 2014) define, *"…actively created in cooperation with other trainees working together to identify and resolve issues"* . The overall training material, being one of the key factors of our training methodology, was built around the needs, wants, affects, and emotions of the two "transactional poles" of the customer service "dipole"; the **Third Country National** and the **Front Office Employee.**

The Training Blueprint of CULMED

The CULMED's training framework was structured around four (4) basic educational axes: **Legal Framework, Communication, Language of TCN, Cultural and historical background of the countries of TCNs** which had been indicated by:

(a) the results of the Training Needs Analysis and the relevant researches and interviews conducted by EKKE

(b) the 2-days DACUM workshop (organized and implemented by postal partners in Athens and Bucharest) and the 1-day virtual e-validation workshop among postal partners and

(c) thorough desktop research regarding other active training curricula relevant to the Institution of Intercultural Mediation.

By further capitalizing upon those findings, the project team decided to enrich the content of the curriculum by exploring additional training programmes relevant to cultural mediation with slight discrepancies in their structures so as to support and ameliorate the CULMED training design.

Finally, project's research activities pointed out specific learning elements to be included in CULMED's Curriculum as regards: Soft skills, team building, collaboration, cooperation, and ICT skills, adaptive performance skills and self-regulation capacity which we had not initially include in the Curriculum.

The abovementioned logic was thought of as being capable to support future interventions at three levels:

- Level 1: At the individual level wherein the interventions are expected to alter perceptions and behaviors of the PO employees towards TCN
- Level 2: At the learner's self-regulation process regarding the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, abilities and their respective application in the daily working environment not just under the identity of front office employee, but with the capacity of cultural mediator in the postal sector
- Level 3: At operational level of the Post Office wherein the standard procedures followed by the "Cultural mediator in the Postal Sector" should be adapted to the situation and satisfy the needs and expectations of TCNs

Among others the final version of the CULMED's blueprint was inspired by the occupational profile of "Cultural Mediators in the Postal Sector" which was carried out during the "2-days DACUM workshop" took place in Athens and in Bucharest and during the validation

e-workshop conducted among the postal partners, taking its final form in the below depicted baseline diagram (see picture 1).

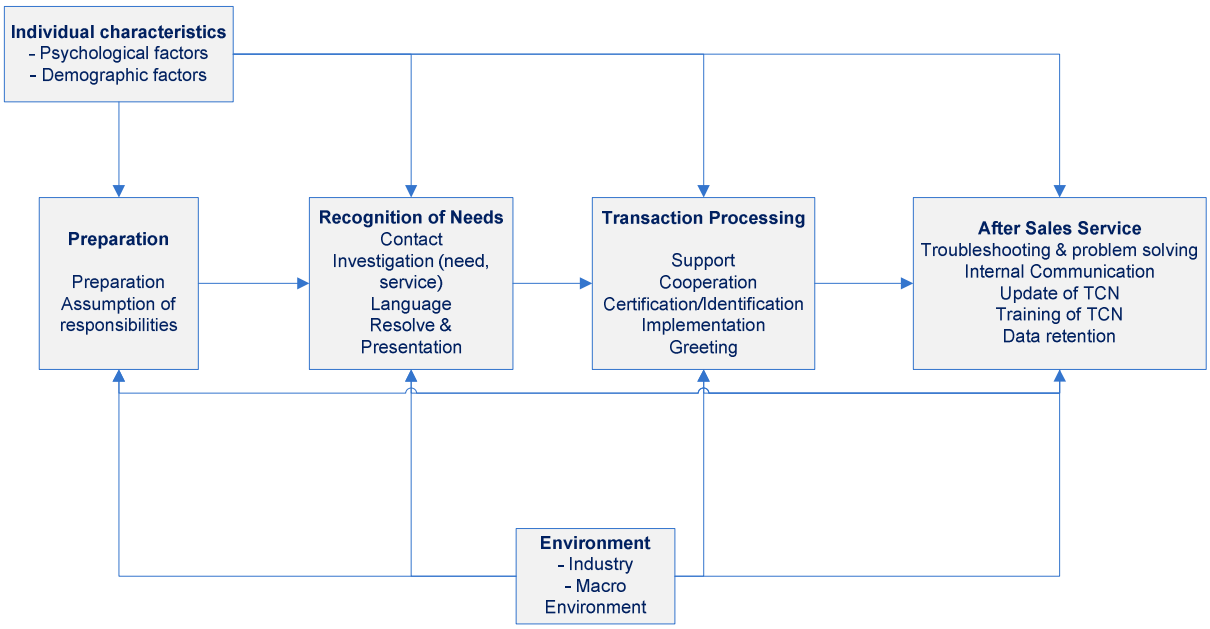


Figure 3-Blueprint of the training programme "Cultural Mediators in the Postal Sector"

In fact, the program does not focus on the assimilation by the participants of a new task or duty, but primarily on the behavior of the Cultural Mediator of the postal industry as well as on the understanding of the dynamics of cultural mediation and its related processes.

To that end, the context of service provided to TCN in the Post Office is by far one of the most Dynamic Decision Making (DDM) learning processes where participants deal with dynamic situations instead of routine and static application of well-learned knowledge (Kozlowski S. et al., 2001).

CULMED Training Programme, one way or another, deals with the key issue of *"Learner's "adaptability".* During the programme, learners are going to participate and will be exposed to a cognitive process of understanding cultural peculiarities and will develop a positive predisposition for the cultural mediation as an institution of modern society.

In this sense, CULMED provides participants (trainers and trainees) with the capability to go beyond a **simple "skill replication" by cultivating their ability to generalize knowledge and skills (acquired during the training) to situations difficult, complex and dynamic in nature as it is the ones that emerge during transactions with TCN. This training strategy has its foundation on the Adaptive Performance Skills (Holyoak, 1991)**

The pedagogical dimension of the educational process is mainly based on the constructivist approach and the Kolb learning cycle (Figure 4).

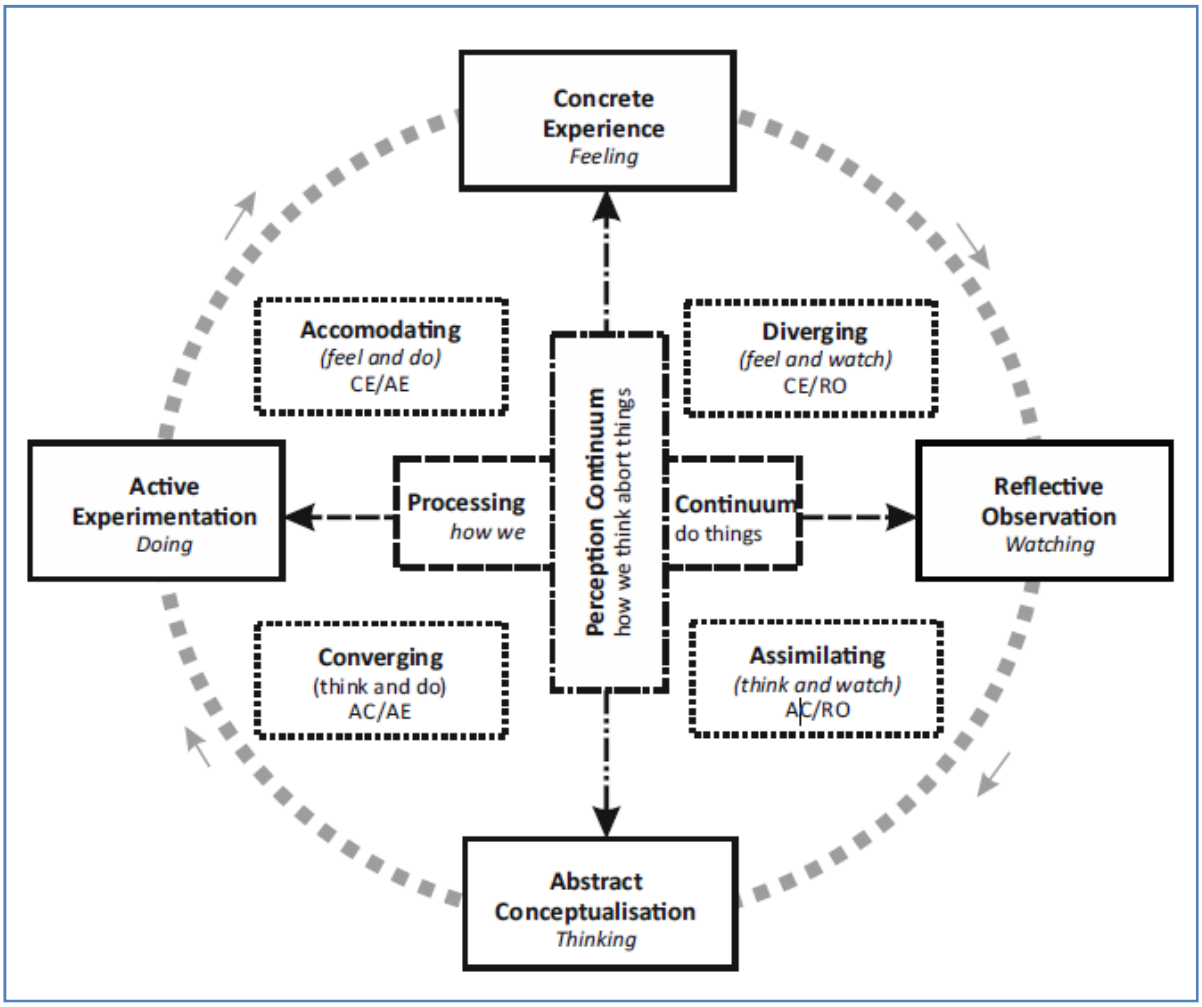


Figure 4-Kolb learning cycle

As Kolb's describes in the experiential learning theory (ELT), *"learning is not just a cyclical process but instead it is a space (of cyclical form) where the learner* ***comes in direct contact with all the basic dimensions of learning"***, put it in another way, learning is a "cycle" of experiences, reflection, thought and action, where direct or specific experiences lead to observations and reflections.

These reflections are assimilated into abstract concepts with implications for action, which the learner can try, actively experiment with, which in turn allows the construction of new experiences.

The cycle is structured in four stages of learning which can be interpreted as an iterative training cycle:

- (CE - Concrete Experience) → Feel
- (RO - Reflective Observation) → Watch
- (AC - Abstract Conceptualization) → Think
- (AE - Active Experimentation) → Do

Two points need to be emphasized:

- First, often, learners are required to "go through" the whole four stages of the cycle several times in order to fully understand the fundamental principles of the model,.
- Second, it is an iterative cycle characterized by a gradual/incremental progression in the process of conceptualizing, understanding and distinguishing the problem being analyzed. That is, each interaction leads to a better and deeper acquisition of concepts.

In addition, this model offers both a way of understanding the different forms of learning of individuals as well as an explanation of an experiential learning cycle for learners and trainers.

Based on the Kolb's methodology the training program for intercultural mediators in the postal industry focuses primarily on training methodologies that highlight: *diversity, inclusion, empathy, and group learning,* which constitute key factors that influence participants in their day-to-day tasks both as professionals and as individuals.

The experiential activities and training techniques were selected from a comprehensive portfolio of methodologies such as:

"ice-breaking exercises, game theory games, painting, outdoor activities, round table, lectures, pair work, case studies, discussion, demonstration, local tour, practice, group discussion, dialogue group, problem solving, map creation / graphs, quizzes, experiential exercises, role playing, dramatization, storytelling, presentation, questionnaire, material review, action plan, guided imagination, associations, counseling, e-learning, etc."

The delivery of training itself is considered innovative in terms of the selected learning methodologies, since the trainees - instead of passively attending theoretical lectures, enable themselves in active learning cognitive processing by connecting the theory convey to them during the debriefing sessions, by the trainers, with their participation in earlier relevant experiential exercises and group activities (correlation of experience with theory)

Specifically, during "team work challenges" and then the debriefing sessions, the learners have the opportunity to express their creativity, to get in touch with their inner feelings and

thoughts, to improve their interpersonal relationships, to realize the impact of stereotypes and the importance of team spirit and team learning in the workplace (see Figure 3)

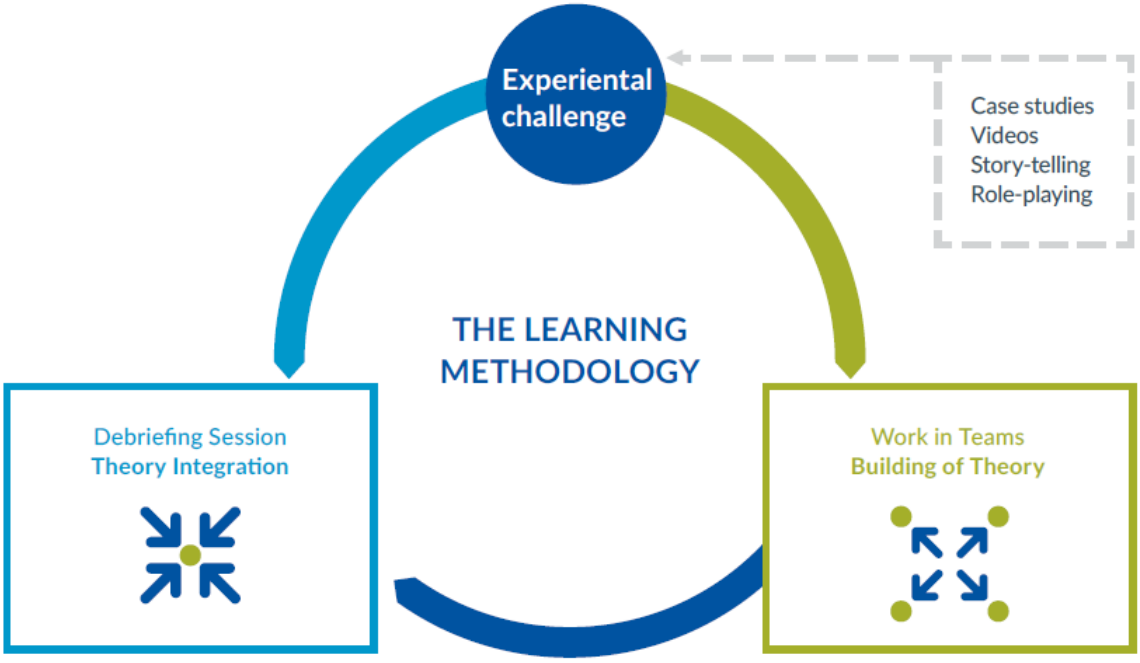


Figure 5-Training Methodology of CULMED

CULMED Curriculum Design

CULMED Curriculum Design process consists of gathering and recording valid information through the DACUM (**D**eveloping **A** **Cu**rriculu**m**) process. DACUM process, in turn, is based on three assumptions as follows (Hamiza W., 2011):

1: Expert workers can define and describe their job more accurately than anyone else;

2: Any job can be effectively described in terms of the tasks that successful workers in that occupation perform;

3: In order to be performed correctly, all tasks demand certain knowledge and attitudes from workers.

DACUM process for CULMED Training Programme was designed in accordance with the guidelines of the DACUM handbook (Norton R., 1997) and it was described as a well-defined systematic process which analyzes a **job** by capturing the major occupational **duties**, and their related **tasks.**

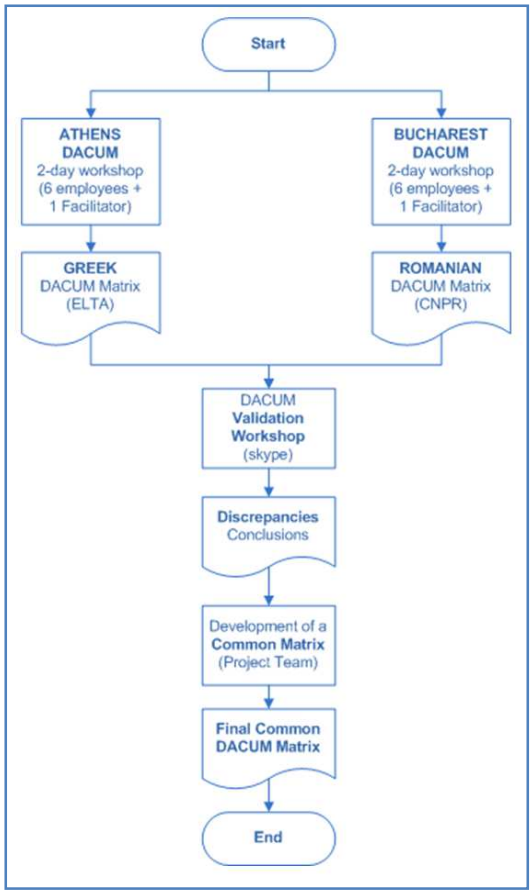


Figure 6-Flow chart of CULMED DACUM

The process, as was the case with CULMED, encompassed two (2) end-users' workshops and one (1) experts' validation session in which any findings and/or discrepancies revealed (during the 2 end-users workshops were incorporated accordingly.

The overall process design is depicted in Figure 6. In detail, during the two, run in parallel, **"2-day" workshops (held in Athens and Bucharest)** a focus group of 6 high-performing incumbent workers (per workshop) coordinated by one facilitator (per postal organization) provided valid information about a specific job and skills needed by a person, who performs that particular job. Specifically, they identified related duties, tasks, knowledge and skills needed for the execution of the tasks.

They proceeded on by further elaborating upon necessary traits required by the front office employee during the performance of duties/tasks. During the DACUM sessions additional

occupational requirements, tools, supplies & materials were gathered so as to facilitate the development of two (2), in total, occupational profiles of "**Cultural Mediator in the Postal Sector", one (1) per Postal Operator (see figure 7).**

Figure 7-Experienced employees during DACUM workshop (Athens)

Further on during the **Validation Workshop which took place after the conclusion of the DACUM sessions,** experts from Hellenic Post (ELTA) and Posta Romana (CNPR), via Skype, provided the required validation based on the information given by employees of DACUM workshops.

Upon its completion and based on the conclusion of the experts, project team proceeded on with the necessary fine-tuning so as to create the **"Common DACUM Matrix"**. To that end, the **Common DACUM Matrix** encompassed all relevant data from the 2 DACUM workshops (Greek and Romanian) along with the final remarks of the experts (Validation workshop) and in this sense **it can be perceived as the common ground of the two DACUMs and the experts' opinion on the mater.**

At the end of the process, the output was the **Final Common DACUM Matrix,** depicted in the tables below.

DACUM Research Chart for Cultural Mediator in the Postal Sector – Job Profile

DUTIES	TASKS					
A-PREPARATION OF MY WORKPLACE	A1-Have a professional, clean and neat appearance	A2-Ensure a balanced mental and psychological work environment	A3-Unlock and restart my cashier's office			
B-WELCOMING-GETTING TO KNOW THE CUSTOMER	B1-Decoding the Customer (Through customer behavior and non-verbal messages)	B2-Indentifying Customer Need(s) (By asking the right questions)	B3-Decoding Customer's Cultural Background (Create customer profile)	B4-Use of "sign language" when serving TCN[1]	B5-Suggest the appropriate service	B6-Present the right product/service
C-DURING THE TRANSACTION-WITH THE CUSTOMER	C1-Assist the customer in successfully completing the transaction	C2-Support in form filling	C3-Entry Customer data in close collaboration with IT	C4-Obtain relative information for Certification (Identification) of the customer [2]	C5-Complete the request and farewell the customer	
D-AFTER SALES *** have to get customer's consent on a GDPR special form**	D1- Define & analyze problems If the transaction does not proceed	D2-Solve[3] the problem in the "boundaries" of the post office	D3- Collaborate with the competent department(s) to solve the problem(s)	D4-Inform politely the customer about the current status of his/her case	D5-"Educate" the customer about the service provided	D6-Keep customer data for future reference[4]

General knowledge and skills	Behavior of a worker
• Excellent knowledge of internal curricula and procedures • Excellent knowledge of products and services • Excellent knowledge in handling the technical equipment (used to carry out postal transactions) • Knowledge of foreign languages • Knowledge of basic cultural differences (e.g gestures, manners, etc.) • Knowledge of human rights • General knowledge about services that a third-country national may need (shelter, medical care, authorities etc) • Knowledge of basic psycho-social aspects relevant to 3rd country nationals	• Accessible - friendly • Professional • Polite • Eager • Fond of learning • Cooperative • Keep a neat and clean appearance • Be a team player • Positive thinking - attitude • Patient and tolerant • Polite • Effective • Understanding - Respecting diversity • Non-biased, Open-minded • Trustworthy • Willing
Tools, Equipment, Supplies and Materials	**Future Trends and Concerns**
• Post offices must be fully equipped with printed materials needed to run transactions • Post offices must be equipped with well-functioned technical equipment (PC's Printers, Scanners etc) • Forms and leaflets must be translated in foreign languages • • Software for translation • Functional tools • Full range of selling products • Support from headquarters • Effective Call Center • Updated mechanical equipment • Internal curricula must be comprehensive	• Continuous job training in: - Customer Support - Sales techniques - GDPR - Security Issues (e.g Fire Safety) - First Aid Training - IT Skills • Postal workers must be well trained in customer service techniques. • Postal workers must be familiar with basic PRACTICAL issues dealing with store and customer safety,(e.g use of a fire extinguisher, first aid)

According to the initial Training Needs Analysis the CULMED training programme had been organized in (5) Modules:

1. English Language,

2. Basic Terminology In The Most Commonly Spoken Language Of Third Country Nationals,

3. Cultural And Historical Background Of Third Country Nationals,

4. Legal And Postal Framework For Servicing Third Country Nationals,

5. Conflict Resolution-Body Language) constituting the "baseline" curriculum.

However, based on the results of the DACUM process depicted in the final DACUM Matrix, the findings of the Tanning Needs Assessment (conducted by EKKE) and the preliminary desktop research for similar curriculums (conducted by ELTA), we came up with the idea even more critical skills such as, ICT skills, team building skills, adaptive performance skills, collaboration, coordination and self-regulation capabilities should be incorporated into the curriculum.

CULMED's DACUM process provided us with the opportunity to further elaborate on and work towards the direction of the optimum designing of the Training Program. During this process cycle we decided to change its structure by merging modules, altering the sequence of the delivery of the programme and adding up new set of training elements either in the form of module or as key training methodologies (project, role playing etc).

Specifically:

Firstly, we altered the sequence of the delivery of the training by introducing at the beginning of the Training Programme the Module: Legal & Postal Framework for Servicing Third Country Nationals as vital component of the program and prerequisite for learners prior to their active cognitive, behavioral and affective involvement in the training process.

To that end the final sequence of the programme was:

- Module 1. Legal And Postal Framework For Servicing Third Country Nationals
- Module 2. Conflict Resolution-Body Language
- Module 3. Cultural And Historical Background Of Third Country Nationals

Secondly, we came up with an integrated solution for the last Module 4 *"Cultural and historical background of Third Country Nationals"* in which we challenge their cognitive capacity in terms of attention focus, affect and behavior by introducing them in a more active learning perspective by delegating learners within a "team-based" context, to conduct research, to collect and insert information regarding history, culture, policy of the most prominent ethnicities of TCN aiming at cultivating positive emotions (empathy, respect, patience, tolerance, neutrality) toward Third Country Nationals.

The concrete challenge consisted of three key elements:

(a) The implementation of a team-based project where learners instructed to prepare a word document, which will include information about "Cultural And Historical Background of Countries (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, Syria) of Third Country Nationals" (i.e. texts, graphs, tables with data etc), by exploiting postage stamps so as to present historical events, places, personalities, retrieving information and data from internet sources and organized them in windows files.

(b) The preparation of PPT presentation of their project (1 ppt per team).

(c) The presentation of their project PPT to the classroom using soft skill acquired during their training (body language, communication skills, etc).

The duration of the entire process was set up to 3 hours and the final products were reviewed against quality standards based on already existing standards (similar projects which had been prepared by CULMED Team so as to work as point of reference).

To succeed in the said challenge learners should exploit, during the 3 hours endeavor, at least the (2) key methodologies of project and mentoring.

Specifically:

(a) **Project,** whereby learners organized and worked together as a project team to attain a concrete objective, within a specific time frame, and predefined quality standards.

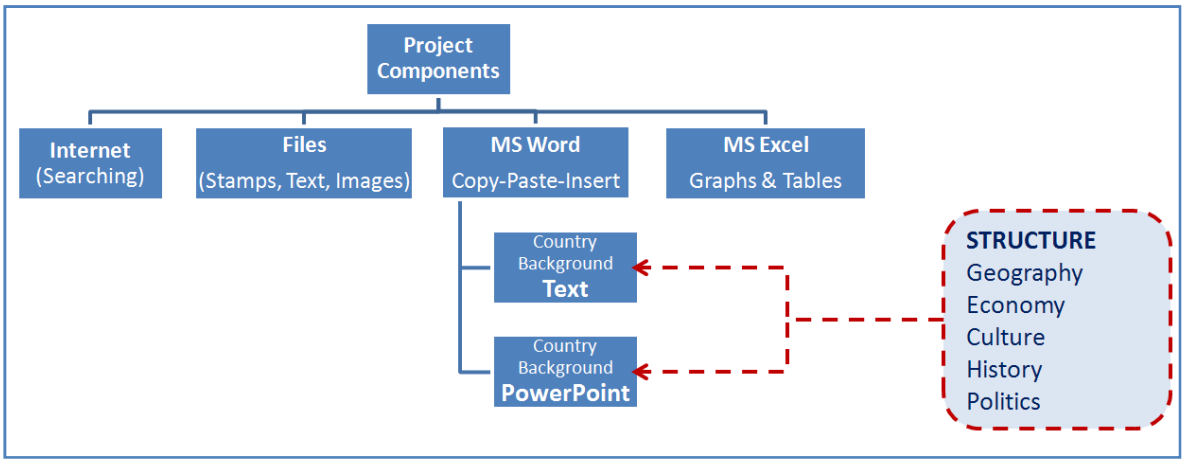


Figure 8- Project oriented methodology

(b) **Mentoring** since learners during the phase of their endeavor via the project methodology were guided by an experienced "team facilitator" who assisted them in a dynamic ICT skills acquisition and in problem solving situation as regards the quality of data retrieved through various web sources.

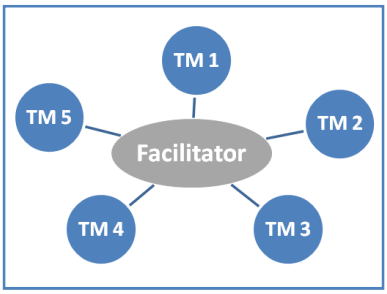


Figure 9-Mentoring during the project session

Thirdly, we merged the linguistic skills (English and Arabic) reducing the total number of modules and transformed the linguistic module into "multiple transversal interventions" throughout the whole training process.

Specifically, we used the active learning framework and introduced learners with Arabic Postal words and social dialogues via the role playing technique during the entire learning process.

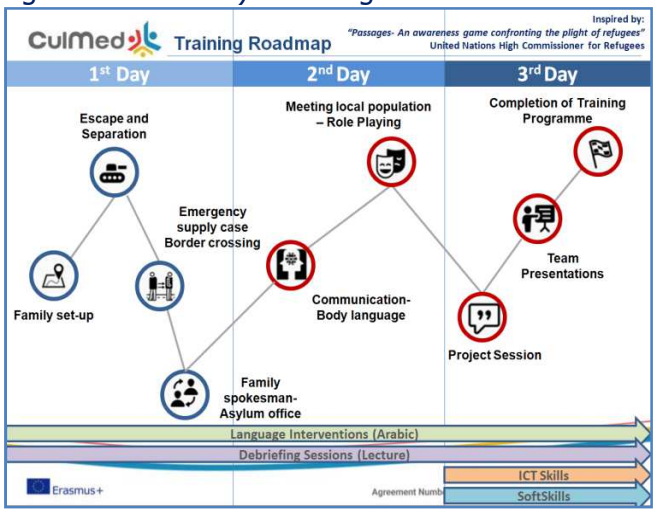


Figure 10-Training roadmap and linguistic interventions

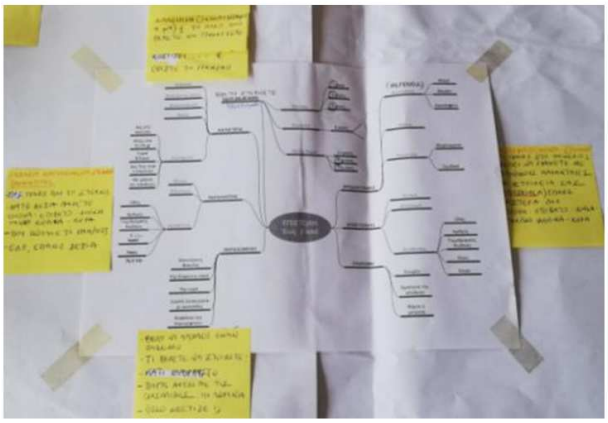
The collection of words and phrased upon which were built the linguistic interventions needs a special reference and for that purpose it is presented in the next section *"Postal Arabic Words and Phrases"*.

Postal Arabic Words & Phrases

A special reference should be made regarding the preliminary design and the implementation of the Arabic linguistic *"horizontal interventions".*

Initially, by using Mind mapping which according to Buzan T. constitutes *"A method of accessing intelligence, allowing rapid expansion and exploration of an idea in note form"* and generates visualized structure and classified ideas as a form of problem solving or decision making, CULMED team succeeded to identify a set of the most commonly used words and phrases during fundamental transactions in the post office in various types service (parcel, money, letter). Upon its completion critical, for elementary sentence formation, words was listed and raked by our external expert (a well-experienced cultural mediator).

That ranking list (selected Arabic vocabulary) shaped the baseline list upon which CULMED team used its creativity and innovativeness to create the *"Arabic word board" cognitive supportive tool.*

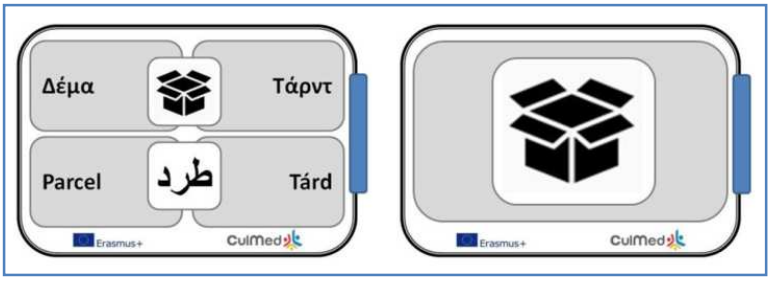


Mind Map

ENGLISH WORD	Arabic word
Sender	المرسل
Recipient/ Addressee	المستلم
Address	عنوان
Post office	مكتب البريد
Send	إرسال
Pay	دفع
Today	اليوم
Tomorrow	غدا
Week	إسبوع
How much?	كم
Yes	نعم
No	لا
Thank you	شكرا
Sorry	آسف
(Postage) stamp	طابع
Weight	وزن
Inquiry	طلب
Change	تغيير
Delivery	توصيل
Damage	ضرر
Time	وقت
Bulky	ضخم
Bulk	حجم
Payment	دفع
Complain	شكوى
Number	رقم
package	طرد
arrived	وصل
how?	كيف
Evidence	وصل
welcome	هلا
not allowed	ممنوع
Inquiry	طلب
colleague	زميل
transfer	حوالة

Selected Arabic Vocabulary

Figure 11-Mind map and key Arabic Postal Words

Being the product of a sequential designing process (Mind Mapping → Ranking → Arabic word board) 

"Arabic word board" could be perceived either as a **hand-on cognitive tool** that facilitates the linguistic and enhances the cognitive capacity of the Learner (by supporting the overwhelmed working memory of the Front-Office employee) or as a **card game** among colleagues.

Based on its dynamic design it can be further developed with more words and categories (see indicative color in the right hand side of the card – bleu, for instance, indicates that the world "tard" is a postal world, or green represents a social word, etc.

Training Strategy of CULMED

According to Bahlis and Tourville (2005) there are **six different strategies,** whereby the first three strategies focus on benefit and value creation of the Training Programme while the other three are perceived as cost minimization strategies**:**

Align Training with Mission Goals, Improve Employee's Performance, Reduce Time to Competency, Choose the Correct Combination of Delivery Options, Consider Internal Versus External Options, Duplicate Effective Training Programs and Identify Issues

The delivery of the CULMED Training Programme exploits the appropriate (optimum) mix of the above strategies in such a way that enables training program's overall effectiveness. Specifically, during the **front-end planning stage** of the project we choose to apply **different mix of strategies for each stage of the project's life cycle**.

During the initiation stage of the project (IO1)

At the first stage of the project we used the **"Align Training with Mission Goals" Strategy (or Alignment Strategy).** In this stage, we highlighted the positive associations of learning, development, motivation and organizational performance (Niazi, 2011), we focused on any explicit or implicit links between training objectives, performance and mission of the company.

For that purpose we have chosen a sample of 10 well-experienced post office employees and 2 executives. All the participants provided us with useful insights regarding the tasks needed to accomplish their daily business objectives as well as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) needed to perform effectively those functions.

Furthermore, interviews with top executives offered us the opportunity to grasp and further develop a profound understanding of the organizational "collective cognitive constructs" in terms of mission, learning culture, norms and perceptions regarding migration, refugees and third country nationals.

During the planning stage of the project (IO2)

At project's planning stage we need to collect all available delivery options and choose among them the appropriate mix. For that purpose we apply the **"Correct Combination of Delivery Options" Strategy ("Training Mix")** whereby the following step-by-step selection process gives us an important insight into which specific variants should be given the highest priority to deal with the final recommended solution. The said process involves 8 concrete steps as depicted in the picture and described in detail below:

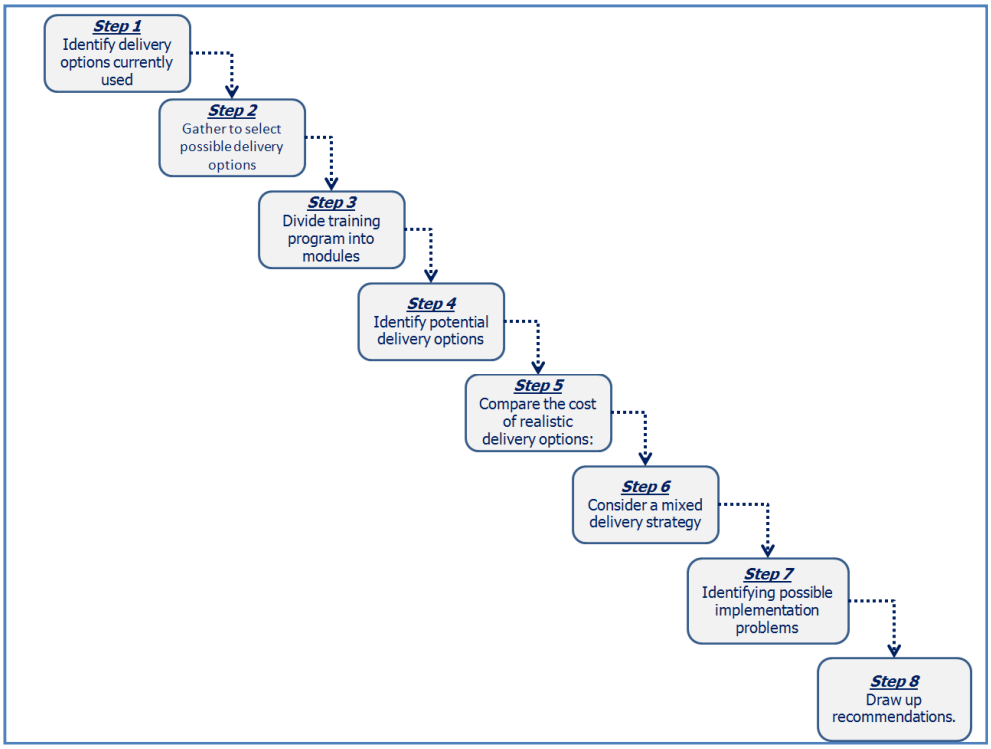


Figure 12-Correct Combination of Delivery Options – step-by-step process (Milhem, W et al., 2014)

Step 1: Identify delivery options currently used by the organization

Based on previous preliminary researches took place in other EU funded projects and from existing experience of ELTA and KEK ELTA, the below mentioned training methodologies are commonly being exploited by all Postal Organizations.

Seminars: This method brings trainees together in small groups for regular meetings, which focus on a specific topic, with trainees being expected to get actively involved (Webster's dictionary, 1992). Seminars help staff to become more familiar with their job functions and more actively involved in them. They also enable them to handle problems that arise on a regular basis (Holladay & Quinones, 2003).

e-learning: This methodology refers to the use of information technology to enhance and support education and learning processes and provides a variety of learning strategies and applications to exchange information and acquire skills (Candice, Sandra & John, 1998; Sife, Lwonga & Sanga, 2007). Practical e-learning enables people to access to computer and internet to access e–learning programs, course material, academic and nonacademic staff and to obtain high quality information and qualifications at an appropriate time and place (Safavi, 2008).

Case Study: On the basis of a real life situation, the group carries out analysis, makes decisions, or solves problems.

Project: Learners prepare and implement a project applying certain procedures, research techniques, principles, skills, knowledge, or attitudes. Project may be "homework" which trainees present the project results in front of the entire group.

Presentation: Trainees individually or in a group present their work (analysis of literature, research, project, practical work, action plan, etc.)

Discussion Groups: Trainees discuss some topics in small groups (e-learning platform's forum section) and come to common answers and solutions. Groups may have the same or different tasks. Groups then report the entire group on their work for the purpose of comparison and discussion.

Brainstorming: Brainstorming is creative idea generation and problem solving technique which provides free environment to present individual ideas, without attracting criticism from any one (Kumbhar, 2018). Every generated idea is recorded and considered as solution to a problem. Brainstorming is a widely used designer-friendly method that has the benefit of being an intuitive and easy way to express and develop thinking based on acquired information and the individual's experience. In this way, as well as increasing the number of concepts, brainstorming can help generating a wider range of design ideas through cognitive stimulation (Kim, Taegyun; McKay, Alison; Thomas, Briony, 2019)

Games: Students take part in a game with certain material or a game with rules, e.g. solving puzzles of different content, 'monopoly' etc., where the content and rules are based on the issues being taught.

Questionnaire: Students fill out questionnaires, assessment scales or tests where they get insight into their own knowledge, attitudes, opinion, potential, etc. in connection with the topic/issue.

Quiz/Test: May be used in different ways: before or after a teaching unit, topic, etc., as a means of evaluation, as a method of reviewing what was learned (summarizing and recapitulation), as a means of familiarizing the group (foreknowledge),

Role-Playing: Students play designed or assigned roles according to own 'scenario', applying real behavior in fictitious situations. Variants: asking students to change roles; taking over the role by another student; ensuring that several participants play the same character according to own scenario.

Step 2:Gathering information on training content, target audience and environmental factors to select possible delivery options

Target audience: Comprise Front Office employees in PO with high concentration of Third Country Nationals, incumbent employees, Managers.

Training Content: Information from existing training curriculum relevant to the training of cultural mediators was collected and compared with the existing CULMED curriculum and any discrepancies (modules that had not been included in CULMED's curriculum after the TNA analysis) incorporated to the training structure of CULMED (specific modules such as: ICT skills, team building skills, adaptive performance skills etc). This activity provided us with useful insights which further exploited during the stage of detailed design of the curriculum of the project.

Step 3: Dividing training programs into modules

Upon the completion of TNA analysis 5 educational axes were revealed and further analyzed to create the detailed design of the CULMED curriculum (Module/Unit structure):

Module 1: English Language

Module 2: Basic Terminology in the Most Commonly Spoken Language of Third Country Language

Module 3: Cultural and Historical Background Of Third Country Nationals

Module 4: Legal and Political Framework for Servicing Third Country National

Module 5: Conflict Resolution - Body Language

4. Identifying potential delivery options

In the following list we have incorporated a number of potential training methodologies, ready to be developed in the CULMED Training Programme. Specifically:

ACTION PLAN : Students individually or in group develop an action plan regarding the application of what was learned by identifying objectives, activities, resources, timeframe, division of tasks and roles.

ANALYSIS: Individually or in groups, students analyze certain material (video-clip, text, story, vocational literature) applying a articular or new strategies, techniques or methods.

ASSOCIATIONS: Students use words, pictures, moves or otherwise state their associations regarding a given topic, statement or notion.

BRAINSTORMING: The individual or group has the possibility to suggest as many ideas as possible, offer answers to the topic, question or problem. In doing so, the following principles apply, depending on the topic and the objectives of activities: non-judgement, 'quantity brings quality', 'whatever comes to mind is good', 'the 'crazier' idea the better', combination and development of ideas.

CASE STUDY: On the basis of a real life situation, the group carries out analysis, makes decisions, or solves problems.

CREATING MAPS/CHARTS/MATRIXES: Key ideas, decisions, certain procedures or operations are labelled, analyzed and associated.

DEBATE: Individuals or groups are assigned different positions in relation to a controversial topic. After the necessary preparation time, opposing parties state their arguments. Possible variant: after some time, participants are required to change positions.

DEMONSTRATION: Students are presented (demonstrated) a technique, procedure or method, or are instructed how to do something and perform in practice. It is usually accompanied by the possibility for participants to test or do it themselves.

DIALOGUE GROUP: Students talk about a topic, problem, idea, task, exchange ideas, starting points, and attitudes. The objective of the activity is not to persuade others about the correctness of your own opinion but to use the exchange in order to get to a solution that everyone will agree to and believe in.

DIARY: Students keep diaries – noting down their own thoughts regarding a topic, problem or task before they move to discussion. This technique helps students to gain insight into their own though process so that they can move to discussion or another type of learning feely and with more confidence.

DISCUSSION GROUP: Students discuss some topics in small groups and come to common answers and solutions. Groups may have the same or different tasks. Groups then report the entire group on their work for the purpose of comparison and discussion.

DOUBLE GROUPING: Students are divided into small groups. Each member of the group gets certain material which (s)he has to study and then teach other members of the group. Students from each group with the same task should be then associated in expert groups which jointly process the material. Then they go to their respective original groups to teach other members.

DRAMATIZATION: Individuals or small groups play roles in front of everyone on the basis of different or the same scenarios that are given in advance. The entire group will then discuss, analyze or solve the situation.

E-LEARNING: Students use an e-learning program or the internet as a resource or an on-line communication/blog, forum, e-conference.

GAME: Students take part in a game with certain material or a game with rules, e.g. solving puzzles of different content, 'monopoly' etc., where the content and rules are based on the issues being taught.

GUIDED FANTASY: In a relaxed atmosphere, students are invited to imagine themselves in a situation which the trainer guides them through. After that, participants state what they saw, experienced, thought or felt.

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: Students individually complete the task, read materials, keep notes, and provide answers.

LECTURE (mini lesson) : A formal presentation where the trainer or student presents certain information and knowledge linking ideas, topics and facts to the students.

MENTORSHIP: Pairing up a student with another student who has more experience, knowledge and skills regarding the given issue.

OVERVIEW OF THE MATERIAL: Individually or in a group, students read certain materials provided to them during, before or after lessons with a certain task, e.g. to become familiar with the content, to single out two key concepts or new concepts, to come up with a question on the basis of what they read.

PANEL DISCUSSION: Several persons who are familiar with issues and have connections to the topic (e.g. experts in the field, users, and experts of different profiles) state their views, discuss problems and answer students' questions.

PRESENTATION: Students individually or in a group present their work (analysis of literature, research, project, practical work, action plan, etc.)

PROBLEM SOLVING: An identified real problem is solved by applying new knowledge, strategies, procedures, methods, or skills. The task may be solved individually or in a group.

PROJECT: Students prepare and implement a project applying certain procedures, research techniques, principles, skills, knowledge, or attitudes. Project may be 'homework'. Students present the project results in front of the entire group.

PYRAMID: Students get an individual task, then discuss in pairs what they did. Next they draw conclusions in a group of four and at the end, the entire group compares and discusses the results.

QUESTIONNAIRE: Students fill out questionnaires, assessment scales or tests where they get insight into their own knowledge, attitudes, opinion, potential, etc. in connection with the topic/issue.

QUIZ/TEST: May be used in different ways: before or after a teaching unit, topic, etc., as a means of evaluation, as a method of reviewing what was learned (summarizing and recapitulation), as a means of familiarizing the group (foreknowledge),

REPORTING: Establishing a relationship between two students who meet during the training to exchange problems, questions, give suggestions, tasks and guidelines to one another.

ROLE-PLAYING: Students play designed or assigned roles according to own 'scenario', applying real behavior in fictitious situations. Variants: asking students to change roles; taking over the role by another student; ensuring that several participants play the same character according to own scenario.

ROUND TABLE: As part of a small or big group each student states, verbally or in writing (on a shared piece of paper) his/her idea, proposal, answer or solution

SPARING – PARTNER: In a small or big group each student states, verbally or in writing (on a shared piece of paper) his/her own idea, proposal, answer, solution.

STORY: Students tell a specific experience related to the topic. Option: reading a story (from literature or life) linked to the topic.

TABULATION ANALYSIS: Content is classified or synthesized according to a table

TRAVELLING: Students leave the room and 'go out in the world' with a task: to observe or find something or gather information.

WORK IN PAIRS: Students work in pairs exchanging facts, opinions, ideas, and solutions. The participant presents the ideas or proposals of his/her own pair in front of the group.

5. Making a comparison of the cost of realistic delivery options:

The most expensive element among all delivery options was the one that was linked to the intervention of external experts in the domain of Cultural Mediation (The detailed design and delivery of the "3-days experiential training").

6. Considering a mixed delivery strategy

In this section we briefly present the training delivery mix:

a. Team Training: Through team training, people are trained to problem-solve more effectively in groups, where observation and feedback are required during the training process (Rasmussen, 1982; Forbush & Morgan, 2004). Team training is often used in the industrial sector, government, and the army (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Specific team training strategies have been developed such as cross-training, coordination training (Prince & Salas, 1993), leadership training (Tannenbaum et al., 1998), self-correction (Smith-Jentsch et al., 1998), and distributed team training (Dwyer et al., 1999). Evidence shows that team training functions well when it is theoretically driven. It concentrates on the necessary skills, and gives trainees realistic opportunities for feedback (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

b. Mentoring: Training can also be delivered through mentoring. Mentors possess specific knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) in problem solving, conflict resolution, communication, defining objectives and planning (Hartenian, 2003).

c. Simulation: This is a popular way of delivering training and is commonly used by businesses, educational establishments, and military (Jacobs & Dempsey 1993). Many simulators Milhem et al./Journal of Accounting – Business & Management vol. 21 no. 1 (2014) and virtual environments are able to mimic terrain, equipment breakdowns, and movement, as well as vibratory and visual cues (Salas & Cannon- Bowers, 2001).

d. Seminars: These bring trainees together in small groups for regular meetings, which focus on a specific topic, with trainees being expected to get actively involved (Webster's dictionary, 1992). Seminars help staff to become more familiar with their job functions and more actively involved in them. They also enable them to handle problems that arise on a regular basis (Holladay & Quinones, 2003).

e. Field Trips and Tours: These give staff the opportunity to experience situations away from the workplace and to obtain practical information about their job functions (Kaushik,1996). Few organizations use field trips as a component of training due to logistical limitations, shortage of appropriate training materials, and unfamiliarity with the outdoors as a suitable training environment (Mirka, 1970; Fido & Gayford, 1982).

However, they can be useful for increasing motivation, performance and skills. They can help employees to get a more obvious understanding of job requirements (Kaushik, 1996).

f. e-Learning: This refers to the use of information technology to enhance and support education and learning processes and provides a variety of learning strategies and

applications to exchange information and acquire skills (Candice, Sandra & John, 1998; Sife, Lwonga & Sanga, 2007). Practical e-learning enables people to access to computer and internet to access e–learning programs, course material, academic and nonacademic staff and to obtain high quality information and qualifications at an appropriate time and place (Safavi, 2008).

7. Identifying possible implementation problems

The Major problem during the execution stage was the COVID-related issues emerged especially during the delivery of the experiential part of the training process.

8. Drawing up recommendations.

During the excecution stage (IO3)

At this stage of the project and due to the time limitation and the problematic situation that COVID-19 imposed to the project, we decided to use:

(a) The **"Internal Versus External Options" strategy (or "outsourcing or not").** This strategy is worth considering, as at certain times and under certain conditions, as is the case with CULMED, external training consultants can be more cost effective than internal training personnel. During the detailed designed of the 3-days Training Programme we elaborated on the advantages and disadvantages of each training option, we defined requirements, assessed the experience and skills of internal training staff, run through the available material, calculated possible benefits, determined time to achieve competency, calculated potential benefits, made a comparison of costs and draw up recommendations (Bahlis & Tourville, 2005) and at the end we come up with the proposal of the participation of two experts (externals) Cultural Mediators (1 male, 1 female) Arab-speaking. This option considered to be the most efficient in terms of time, cost, and quality of intervention. The two external Cultural Mediators has been chosen as assistants to the project team and its main duties were: (a) the participation in the designing of the training material, and during the implementation of the 3-days Training Programme (b) active involvement in role playing, dramatization and other experiential learning interventions.

(b) the **"Reduce Time to Competency" strategy (or "Fast track training")**

The **Time to Competency (TTC)** strategy means that if it takes a company two years to develop, a new set of vital competences (two years from curriculum to acquisition of competency), then this means that it can introduce a new set of learned and applied skills, in the form of an new or improved service to its customers, **once every two years.**

On the other hand, if its rivals ability to develop this kind of competency reduced in just one year (from curriculum to acquisition of competency), then they are able to enjoy **shorter or Reduced Time to Competency (TTC)**. To that end they can introduce new quality services annually. And by the same token if they are able to introduce new service or products more frequently they will gain more opportunities for performance improvements regarding their services and enjoy significant advantages over its competitors.

As regards the "3-days training", one of the most challenging issues we have to address was to attain the learning objectives relevant to the implementation of:

- the 3rd and 4th educational axes, namely, Arabic – Basic Terminology of the most commonly spoken language of TCN and cultural background of TCN
- the ICT skills and
- soft skills.

During the detailed design stage, preceding the execution stage of the training, we came to realize that the real challenge (and major project risk as well) was not the Training Programme itself but rather the strict limitations that the **reduce time to competency** strategic challenge impose to the project. Strictly speaking competency acquisition by the learner is considered one of the key factors of success of a training programme.

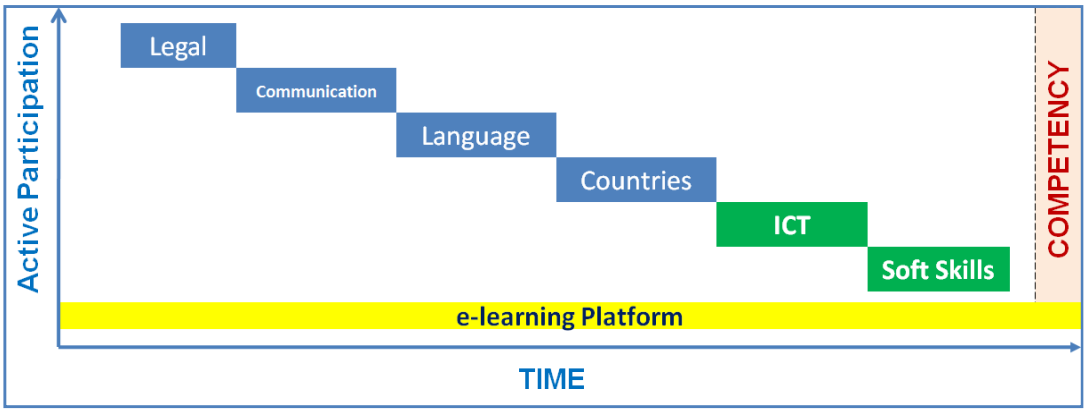


Figure 13-Gantt chart prior to the initiation of "time to competency strategy"

The "Reduce Time to Competency" Strategy that we choose to follow as one of the key training strategies of the programme has as its main objective the prompt development of K-S-As in order to accommodate customer service problems (mainly self-performance problem) regarding TCN and to achieve training and organizational objectives at the same time.

From this perspective, the redesigning and implementation of a "fast track" training programme it is not necessary to follow a progressive, sequential order of delivery based on

a traditional "Finish-to-Start" relationship between the training activities (modules) as the one depicted in the picture above.

Instead, we decided to merge specific training activities that can he applied simultaneously (as is the case of ICT, soft skills) and will respect the critical project management dimensions (time, cost, quality), the basic principles of our chosen methodology and at the end it will transfer knowledge and additional skills (linguistic, ICT and soft) to the learner in order to create more competent front office employees operating in parallel as a cultural mediator in the postal sector.

The acquisition of basic knowledge, necessary linguistic skills (Arabic language), ICT skills, soft skills and cultural skills for successful fulfillment of "everyday" customer service activities in the PO especially towards TCN (transactions, communication, needs analysis of the customer, etc), contribute to the overall quality of the service offered by Postal Organizations.

By the same token, the adoption of more "compatible" behaviors, and attitudes towards TCN (Arabic speaking populations) from the employee's perspective was another major challenge as regards the attainment of the programme's training objectives.

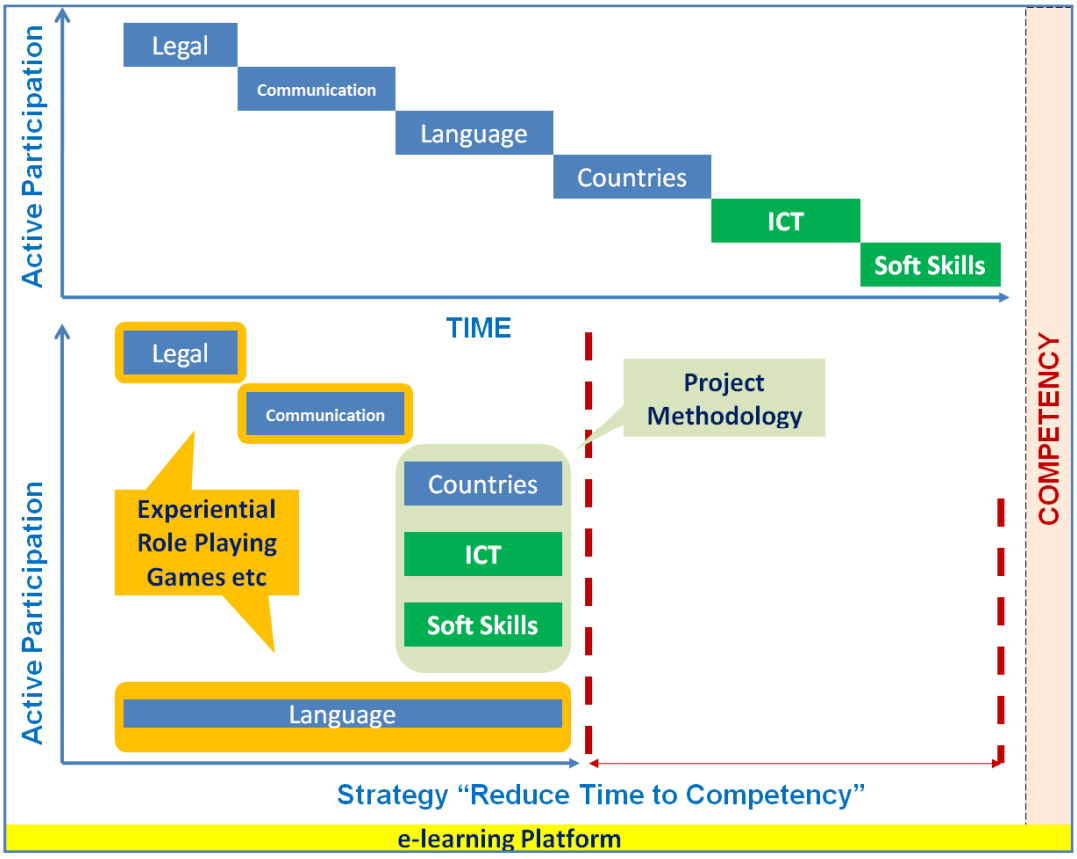


Figure 14-Gantt chart during project execution stage exploiting the "time to competency strategy"

To this end, the implementation of the training process exactly as it was initially designed would create little value especially ***if the learned characteristics are not generalized to the job and not maintained over time*** (Yamnill & McLean, 2001).

In terms of optimum implementation of the said strategy the following steps help us to determine the benefit of reducing time to competency, the feasibility of using alternative delivery systems and, at the end, to choose the delivery option with the greatest impact. Specifically:

1. Identify future gains and list the possible measurable benefits of reducing time to competency.

2. Calculate the potential benefits by calculating the expected minimum and maximum benefits per employee per day due to cutting time to competency.

3. Gather information, particularly related to used curricula, target audience, and environmental factors in order to determine the most effective delivery options.

4. Identify realistic delivery options by analyzing the collected information to find out how effectively the options meet organizational, learning, and learner requirements.

5. Estimate the time taken to accomplish the competency solution and estimate the required time to draw up, develop and deliver the training program for each possible delivery option.

6. Calculate the possible benefits to demonstrate the advantages of cutting time to competency, which are captured by converting time saved into monetary value in relation to organizational expenditure.

7. Calculate and compare the cost of realistic options, with the net benefit of each delivery option being found by subtracting expected cost from potential benefit.

8. Draw up recommendations and make a comparison of the cost and benefit of realistic delivery options to obtain an accurate picture of the most effective alternative (Bahlis & Tourville, 2005).

Conclusions

So if training increases organizational effectiveness, it must be effectively designed and delivered, and it must be transferred to the job.

Transferring of training, consequently, is thought to be the primary leverage point by which training influences organizational-level outcomes (Kozlowski et al., 2000).

The above mentioned step-by-step strategies and methodologies provide an opportunity for those in charge of training to follow a training strategy and to increase efficiency and reduce costs as well as provide performance-based measurements, since **increased performance is one of the most important reasons for conducting training programs**.

These strategies also facilitate the monitoring of progress during the implementation phase of the training process, the achievement of desired outcomes and the avoidance of random training programs and their negative consequences.

References

Bandura A. (1991). Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes 50, 248-287 (1991)*

Hamiza W., Zin W., Yahya N. (2011). Development of Diploma Program in "Sustainable Energy and Power Distribution" via DACUM (2011)

Holyoak, K. J. (1991). Symbolic connectionism: Towards third generation theories of expertise. In Kozlowski S., DeShon R., Davis C. (2001). Developing Adaptive Teams: Training Strategies, Learning Processes, and Performance Adaptability. *Michigan State University*

Norton R. (1977). DACUM HANDBOOK. *Center on Education and Training for Employment. College of Education. The Ohio State University*

Kim, Taegyun; McKay, Alison; Thomas, "A SYSTEMATIC BRAINSTORMING IDEATION METHOD FOR NOVICE DESIGNERS BASED ON SECI THEORY", Briony University of Leeds

Kozlowski S., DeShon R., Davis C. (2001). Developing Adaptive Teams: Training Strategies, Learning Processes, and Performance Adaptability. *Michigan State University*

Kumbhar K. N. (2018). "Brainstorming technique: Innovative Quality Management Tool for Library"

Milhem W., Abushamsieh K., Arostegui M. (2014). Training Strategies, Theories and Types. *Journal of Accounting – Business & Management vol. 21 no. 1 (2014)*

Putman V., Paulus P. (2001). Brainstorming, Brainstorming Rules and Decision Making, *Small Group Research, 32*, 158-205.

Valitovv S. (2016). Case study in professionally-oriented training. *SHS Web of Conferences 26, 01089 (2016)*