TTnet workshop:
'Open and distance learning and the professionalisation of trainers'
Rome, 18 and 19 November 1999

Final Report

The Rome workshop was one of the thematic workshops that have organised by the TTnet since June 1998.

After examining factors in the development of the training function and innovation as a transferable practice, studying the development of the tutoring function and of transformations in the training function linked to new information and communication technologies, the Rome workshop was entirely devoted to examining issues relating to open and distance learning schemes in relation to the professionalisation of trainers.

The workshop brought together experts and practitioners to consider a dual question:

a) how does the use of educational technologies in training radically change the functions of trainers (through the new tasks that they create for trainers and the new competences they generate)?

b) How does the use of new educational technologies for the training of trainers facilitate the development of those new competences? In other words, does the use educational technologies for training trainers contribute to the emergence of a new model for the professionalisation of trainers, and if so, under what conditions and within what limits?

The workshop was organised as a series of thematic contributions intended to place the question in context from several different angles:

- the typologies of open and distance learning and their impact on trainers' competences;

- the specificities of training design and pedagogical methodology incorporating information and communication technologies;

- key questions for trainers in the Community context leading to common work priorities and cooperation proposals.

We will not go into the workshop in detail here but rather limit ourselves to four main themes:

1. open and distance learning schemes and their impact on the training process;
2. a reconfiguration of the roles and profiles of trainers;
3. 'horizontal' competences for trainers;
4. training and the professionalisation of the trainers.

1. Open and distance learning schemes and their impact on the training process

1.1. Definition of open and distance learning schemes

The growing number of technical options available has led to fresh training responses to the needs of individuals and organisations, which are themselves developing rapidly. Those new responses go hand-in-hand with the changes already highlighted at previous workshops held by the network: integration of training into the work situation, customisation of training courses, changing work organisation and production methods, etc.

The introduction by Michel Tetart (coordinator of the network for workshops on customised education – APP, France) illustrated the variety of open and distance training methods:
-    correspondence courses, which are the oldest form;
-    courses broadcast by radio or television;
-    teletraining tools (video-conferences, CD-ROM);
-    tools based on real and virtual resource centres;
-    online intranet and internet self-training schemes;
-    virtual campuses.

Luciano Battezzati (head of the New Media unit of Isvor-Fiat in Italy) presented an analysis of distance training schemes, distinguishing the various technologies according to methods of managing the learning process and the nature of the communication process between the various partners:
-    tele-learning, when the face-to-face relationship between the trainer and learner is re-created thanks to communication tools despite the distance involved (video-conference or business television);
-    self-learning, when the learner does not interact directly with trainers;
-    cooperative learning, based on interactivity at three levels: between trainer and learner, between learners themselves, and between the learner and his work environment.

The experiences presented at the Rome workshop demonstrate that in order to be effective, open and distance learning must be hybrid systems combining multiple education resources to offer differentiated training to learners: real and virtual resource centres, assisted or non-assisted self-learning, forming groups with other learners, training in the workplace, pedagogical support from an on-site trainer or a remote 'tutor', video-conferences, etc. This is the case, for example, with the 450 customised education workshop in France (*Ateliers de pedagogie personnalisee* - APP) or the Isvor-Fiat resource centres in Italy.

1.2. A new way of thinking introduced by data processing

New technologies are bringing about a revolution in the way we think, changing our spatial and temporal points of reference and, consequently, our learning processes. A computer is more than a mechanical tool; it is a tool for rationalising thought, whose own logic influences the user's system of thought and imposes its mode of expression through standardised formats. This new approach must be taken into account by trainers when organising and designing their training response.

New educational technologies call into question the traditional forms of unity of time, place and action. They multiply space and time and also fragment them:
- they expand the space dedicated to training, which transcends the 'classroom' to merge with the learners' workplace, workstation, or the private space when learners or trainers use their equipment at home;
- technical performance opens the way to 'just-in-time' exchanges and fragments learning time according to the availability and abilities of the learner: training is carried out over a variable period of time, both in work time and in leisure time.

1.3. The emergence of informal training practices

The fragmentation of equipment, place and time is blurring the frontiers between training, information, communication and production. Hitherto informal resources are being used for training. Jean Mallet, professor at the University of Provence, points out that new missions and functions are tending more and more to integrate training and professional practices, exploiting synergies of real and not deferred time, with informal training practices more integrated in teamwork, management practices, and in the staff training and tutoring function.

On the basis of intranets and various platforms (Lotus Learningspace for example), major enterprises (Fiat, France Telecom, Thomson) are developing 'knowledge management', a structured system for sharing individual and collective knowledge that was hitherto informal or implicit. Knowledge management is at the intersection of total quality management, data processing and information services and forward management of posts and skills. It can be characterised according to three principles:
- to identify, accumulate and share changing knowledge,
- to encourage the emergence of individual and collective knowledge,
- to make the tacit explicit, and the explicit tacit.

1.4. Customisation of the learning process

The complexity of schemes refocuses the training process on the learner: the learner alone is able to organise the resources made available to him and re-establish the coherence of the various places and times by becoming henceforth the 'owner of his knowledge'.

Customisation of the learning process might lead one to think of open and distance learning tools merely as self-training tools. The discussions that took place in the workshop underline three major risks in this regard:

- **rapid drop-out from training** because very few people are actually capable of training themselves, explains professor Pellerey: either they are unable to overcome the difficulties set or they are not motivated enough, an opinion confirmed by the experience of Simon Walker (mentor in cyberspace in the United Kingdom). The experiences of participants (Denmark, Norway, United Kingdom) all confirm the need to construct a support network to motivate users throughout their training, for example by organising groups of trainees at the beginning of the course;
- **the illusion that everything can be learned without others**; this might be true for acquiring knowledge but it is practically impossible for competences;
- **a possible confusion between information and training**, with the risk that training is confined solely to the consultation of databases.

The ability to respond to a set problem in real time (synchronous mode) or in delayed time (asynchronous mode) requires trainers to resolve two new problems:

- to measure and respect the optimum delay between the question set and the response given;
- to maintain the quality of a training response that the learner expects to be ever more rapid.

Resolving this paradox between expected speed and the time needed for maturity of thought in a learning process should provide key answers for redefining the limits between information and training.

1.5. An economic approach for a necessarily cooperative process

Bringing a large number of training responses to the largest possible number of learners leads training to take the economic approach of any professional sector which expands its product for a large numbers of users: training is considered in terms quantity, cost, profitability, quality approach, standardisation, etc.

All players in the training process (learners, trainers, technicians, data-processors, graphic designers, the designers of training tools, managers) now operate

interdependently. Trainers can no longer think of themselves as independent artisans but as players in complex systems in which everyone plays a specific role. The experience of the customised education workshops in France (Michel Tetart) also involves peripheral functions: for example those of the administrative secretaries of the resource centre in receiving learners and managing their courses.

2.   A reconfiguration of trainers' roles and profiles

The round-table discussion lead by Fulvio Penner (head of the training of trainers unit of ISFOL) highlighted the new configurations of training functions that can be found in the various national contexts[1]. The occupational family 'trainers' was examined here from various aspects: those who plan, design, manage and supply training activities, in companies and in training organisations.

2.1.   New families of occupations in companies

Using as a starting point the case of enterprises and organisations experiencing significant changes in work organisation, Jeanne Mallet identified three families of training occupation:
-    a multi-level family which is developing distance resources centres for assisted self-training, in particular for technical and/or formalised training courses (accounting, legislation, etc.); it structures training online by bringing together online experts in content and training coordinators specialising in the field of learning in question;
-    a family of occupations centred on coordinating the process of change: 'architects' coordinators interested in the dynamics of emerging competences and/or individual and collective knowledge coordinate actual and virtual working meetings, intranet networks, etc.
-    a family of experts in education and the structuring of knowledge based on numerous intranet sites and the multi-media function.

2.2.   From the dissemination of knowledge to mediation functions

The cooperative process developed in open and distance learning is changing traditional roles: the trainer is no longer at the centre of a knowledge that he distributes, but rather he is becoming one source of knowledge among others. Knowledge is being organised in networks, each point of which can be the epicentre without ever being so in absolute terms; knowledge is the object of an exchange.

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[1]   See the results of the European project DITRA steered by VDAB in Belgium (http://www5.vdab.be/vdab/europe/ditra), the contributions of Denmark, France, Ireland (Adapt project 'Trainers Network'), Netherlands, Norway.

The various experiences presented in the Rome workshop allow us to outline standard profiles which are evolving from knowledge dissemination to functions involving mediation between the learner and knowledge, making trainers 'managers of knowledge and of learners' of pathways':

- the conceptualised 'content expert' currently remains the predominant profile; he knows the target group, its needs, and the learning processes. He intervenes directly among learners but also in the design of learning tools;
- the 'trainer/tutor' ('coordinator', 'coach') in resource centres assists and advises learners in their customised training. His sphere of action is more restricted but he must have considerable knowledge in the disciplines related to his speciality;
- the mentor (distance tutor) has the task of supporting students in their courses, but he is not physically present in the resource centres; he gives customised advice to learners;
- the expert in technology and communication designs and adapts training programmes. This network architect, system designer, plans and manages the entire process.

2.3. Resistance from and identity crisis of trainers

These changes of role, which are often rapid, provoke stiff resistance. Among trainers this resistance takes various forms:

- it reveals an identity crisis when new technologies are seen as competition, replacing trainers; resistance from trainers reflects fear of loss of control and legitimacy;
- it expresses a cultural resistance to working in networks among trainers 'with little or no training in sharing tools, equipment';
- it conceals a lack of knowledge about technology, which is undoubtedly a temporary situation, in so far as the majority of active trainers have not yet themselves been trained by the new education technologies. This situation should disappear with future generations.

3. Horizontal competences for trainers

Whatever changes are taking place, experts agree that the use of new educational technologies is rooted in a foundation of 'traditional' competences supplemented by specific and 'horizontal' competences.

3.1. The heart of an occupation: pedagogical expertise and the structuring of training

The Rome workshop underlined that lengthy training practice in the presence of learners is essential for a distance trainer. Whatever the training medium,

according to professor Pellerey, the trainer remains guarantor of the coherence between the objective set and the results obtained. It is for him to choose:

- a pedagogical model that structures knowledge and contents, with reference to theoretical models;
- a typology of training situations;
- assessment processes and methods, the best assessment being a measure of the effect on users.

Finally, the trainer is responsible for the quality of the relationship between himself and the learners and between the learners themselves.

Competences relevant to the structuring of training are brought into use to construct complex but transparent systems, to take account of management costs and the political and strategic issues surrounding the new information and communication technologies. The contributions by Denmark and Norway demonstrate that the success of those schemes is based on the ability of designers to anticipate and formalise from the outset an entire training path punctuated by very specific objectives. Unlike a 'traditional' course, it is impossible to adjust the content *en route*. Only very specific formalisation of all the stages in the training processes can guarantee that learners will be able to position themselves in the process at any given time.

3.2. Specific competences linked to new technologies

New competences linked to new technologies are developing. Thus, trainers must:

- have a very good grasp of technology and be practised in the use of multi-media tools used so that they can inform and advise learners about the technological equipment they need;
- master on-screen communication methods; adaptation of training content, hypertext links, compliance with ergonomic rules on reading from the screen, design of a scenario, mastery of imaging and audio techniques for trainers, designing multi-media tools (CD-ROM or online training);
- master written communication, the principle means of communication between the trainer and the learner;
- provide methodological support to the learner to enable him to choose resources, organise those resources and prioritise them.

3.3. 'Horizontal' competences

Horizontal competences are essential for the proper use of the new educational technologies:

- to be a vector for social competences: the trainer must be able to work in teams and in networks so as to activate the triple cooperative dimension of the training process (between trainers and learners, between learners

themselves, between the various trainers) and constantly foster the motivation of learners;

- have organisational and planning skills because new technologies demand considerable ability to plan ahead;
- to be able to think systematically and globally so as to organise the learning path of each learner while at the same time taking into account the stakes of the many partners in these complex schemes.

4. Training and the professionalisation of trainers in the Community context

In the Member States the training of trainers has already incorporated new educational technologies but more often than not on an experimental rather than systematic basis, except for in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

4.1. The added value of information and communication technologies in the training of trainers for the professionalisation process

The Rome workshop provided some answers to the question:

- the chance of overcoming the reactions mentioned above by placing them in a practical situation. Such is the case with two continuing training experiences intended to make trainers more aware of and then specialise in the use of new technologies: the Italian national IT network FADOL (15 000 trainers trained between now and the end of 2001), supported by the ESF, and the French AUTOFOD scheme (2000 trainers between now and the end of 2000), supported by the Community ADAPT programme. Initially, using new technologies in their most functional aspect (communication and information) facilitates their adoption;
- the trainer's experimentation with and awareness of the self-training processes that he is to develop among target publics, an interest stressed by the Irish network. Research conducted by Simon Walker (United Kingdom) into the use of the CD-ROM Mentor in Cyberspace, designed by the University of Greenwich to train university tutors (mentors) to do their job, is a good illustration of the difficulties experienced by mentors in training themselves alone and of the successive modifications made to the tool so that it would be used;
- the definition of a wider competence profile that emerges from the traditional field of training; such is the case with training established in partnership between the polytechnic school of Turin and the Fiat Centre, Melfi, to train tutors using video-conferencing;
- awareness of the necessarily cooperative dimension to the training process, for the purposes of a customised training of learners.

4.2. Other professionalisation strategies

With regard to the use of technologies, training is not the only aspect of the professionalisation of trainers. When they do not have access to formal training, they invent new strategies for constructing knowledge: benchmarking, meeting and exchanging practices with other trainers and other groups, working in networks, use of multi-media tools, first as a communication tool and then as a training tool and finally the sharing or redistributing of tasks within the same work organisation.

In conclusion, some Community perspectives

The Rome workshop highlighted the topicality and relevance in various Member States of discussion of open and distance learning schemes and their impact on the training processes, as well as on the professionalisation of trainers.

Although not all countries have developed such schemes at the same rate, it is clear that new technologies are irreversibly transforming training processes into complex systems: they go hand-in-hand with the strong rise in the economic dimension to training, they mark breaks with earlier learning processes, they impose new configurations in which trainers must reposition themselves. They also accentuate the distinction between large and small enterprises and risk constituting factors that exclude certain groups that do not have access to them.

The Rome workshop could only make a start on examining these changes: the new technologies are tools whose technical functions are known but not yet their limits. They are far from being totally integrated into the training of trainers. Nevertheless, the discussions identified common concerns:
- How can trainers' resistance to new technologies be overcome?
- Where does the responsibility of individuals in collective organisations fit in to these changes, in terms of work organisation, distribution of tasks?
- What are the characteristics of open and distance learning training scheme design?
- How can we develop among actors the networking and knowledge-sharing culture that will be the characteristic feature of training tomorrow?

The cooperative way in which the TTnet network functions is an advantage for initiating Community discussion about those points. It is proposed to encourage exchanges among the various national TTnet networks in order to support as far as possible trainers in these processes of change.