CHAPTER 3

INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PROCESSES AND TOOLS –
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH
IN PESCARA PRISON

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1. Foreword

In this chapter, first of all we sketch the general outline of the research on the topic of training needs analysis among the prison population (sphere and methodology, phases, purpose, research tools, section 2).

Then we set out to study the training demand, both of the single prisoners and of the prison administration, starting from an overview of the definitions offered by the scientific literature on Training Needs Analysis. As a result, we analyse individual training demand as the expression of a need linked to a particular context, to be combined at macro level (mission of the prison administration) and micro level (single prisoners expressing needs with regard to their re-education programme and the support and guidance this requires), in observance of the contextual restrictions (section 3). In particular, as far as processes are concerned (section 4), we will focus on pertinent approaches suited to the context in question (section 5), as well as some training need (‘demand’) analysis techniques and tools found in the scientific literature coming mainly from Anglo-American sources (sections 6, 7 and 8).

Lastly, in section 9 we set out the empirical findings on the training needs management process within Pescara prison in the period when the research was carried out (2013–2015).

The hope is that the indications gathered during the research can contribute to the open consultation on prison reform underway in Italy, which the Stati Generali dell’esecuzione penale¹, promoted by the Ministry of Justice, are currently working on.

* The chapter is the result of the joint work of the two authors, but paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 were edited by Francesca Torlone and paragraph 9 by Stefania Basilisco.

¹ In particular the reference is to Roundtable 9 on ‘Education, Culture and Sport’, <https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_2_19.wp> (01/16).
2. Pebble Research

2.1 Sphere and Methodology of the Research

A transformative methodological approach was adopted. The aim of the research was not just to understand the situations and phenomena subject to the study, but also to introduce change, both with regard to the single inmates involved in learning pathways and the prison organisation generating, managing and monitoring these changes in order to implement re-education processes for the prisoners. The subject of our study refers to the analysis, survey and interpretation of the individual training needs emerging in four prison settings in Cyprus, Greece (Korydallos), Italy (Pescara) and Romania (Buzias) and the definition of educational programmes that can provide suitable and appropriate answers (also with the use of new technologies). In particular, this chapter deals with the survey context of Pescara prison.

Owing to the importance of the topics tackled and the complexity both of the subject matter and the context of the investigation, careful reflection was required right from the start as to which research strategies to use.

In all four countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Romania), the fieldwork was preceded by a survey of the context — consisting of study and analysis of the literature and previous field research carried out at national and international level. This was performed in the period from 2013 to 2015, following an integrated approach which combined quantitative (questionnaires compiled by the single inmates) and qualitative research tools (focus groups aimed at the prison staff or the prison director, school teachers, inmates, volunteers, prison education officers and prisoner representatives; semi-structured interviews carried out with the single inmates on several occasions during the research).

The various phases of the research programme involved the direct participation and involvement of different levels of prison staff (prison director, prison education officers, school teachers, volunteers, IT technicians and accounts officer), the pilot group of inmates involved in the experiment, and researchers. The specific research actions were drawn up, adapted and tested during the various meetings and joint participation opportunities. This ranged right from the first draft research proposal, to the formulation of individual spheres of interest, which went hand in hand with defining the inmates’ personal and professional growth objectives, as well as selecting the survey tools, and reading, interpreting and returning the results. The ongoing shared engagement in the research programme and results, within such a complex context, led to moments of self-diagnosis and fostered and sparked processes of cultural and organisational change.

The research can be classed as ‘action-research’, since it is a systematic study that manages to combine action (that is, ‘scientific study’ of
the initial problem) and reflection (that is, analysis of the components in question), both of which with the aim of sparking processes of transformation and improvement in the persons and contexts involved. In this sense, the research fuels the educational action while it is being carried out and at the same time the educational action fuels the research. The transformations were evident in improvements and changes to prison administration practices, the introduction of innovations on one hand (e.g. activation of the Pebble Lab which led to changes in the inmates’ and prison staff’s day-to-day activities), and the more widespread understanding of them within the organisation on the other. In this sense, the research featured

- a high level of collaboration;
- on-site realisation;
- regular, cyclical use of feedback;
- participation;
- a ‘learning’ aspect, enabling alterations and changes to be made to tools and techniques as the research was being carried out, in order to stick more closely to the initial research goals;
- the study of particularly complex phenomena (e.g. individuals’ representation and expression of their training needs in order to build a pathway aimed at re-education, rehabilitation and re-entry into employment);
- an eclectic methodology.

The style of the research was ‘evidence-based’. This gave the possibility to use the empirical evidence and knowledge accumulated in the surveyed settings to orient the educational choices made by the researchers and prison administrators.

2.2 The Research Phases

The research was divided into several phases. They were:

- **Phase 1. Outline of the goals.** In this phase we pinpointed the general question and the correlated specific questions. The general question concerns the identification of regulations, procedures, methods, processes and techniques that foster people’s growth and the services existing for that purpose. In particular, we looked into how the educational activities can better fit the demand for growth and re-education expressed by the inmates, along with that of the prison administration (in the persons of the prison director and the prison education officers). To this end we studied how the set of factors forming the learning potential contained in the prison setting (in particular in those activities and procedures defined centrally and by each single penal institute) could be used, as well as the sustainability of the training demand in the particular con-
text where it arises and is satisfied. With regard to this goal, we studied training needs analysis methods, techniques, tools and procedures, adapted to fit the context, as well as what educational response could be given to this demand, also through new technologies (e-learning).

- **Phase 2. Collection and study of the scientific literature.** The collection and study of the sector literature helped
  - define the ‘knowledge gaps’ linked to the analysis of individuals and organisations’ training needs and to the preparation of responses to these needs;
  - perfect the theoretical foundations for the on-site testing, also with relation to the specific prison context;
  - define the models to use for the research design, management, analysis, reporting and impact.

- **Phase 3. Review of the research design.** This phase consisted of putting together the overall research design, while making adjustments to processes, techniques and tools in order to achieve the specific goals. The educational action was built up on the evidence found during the research, and ‘transformed’ in line with it.

- **Phase 4. Definition of the tools.** Prior to defining the research tools, indicators and descriptors were singled out to keep under observation. They were used to form questionnaires, outlines for conducting focus groups, outlines for semi-structured interviews, etc.

- **Phase 5. Experimentation.** The experimentation involved processes and tools that needed to be adopted to achieve the research goals. The definition, implementation, experimentation and evaluation phases were carried out in sequence, in order to realise the transformations that the research set out to make. The experimentation phase began by identifying the professional figures who perform educational functions for the inmates. Therefore, the target was broad and varied. They were given ‘training’ sessions to share methods, tools, approaches and procedures that could be used with the single inmates. This was followed by the selection of the pilot group of inmates to involve in the learning pathway that was drawn up and monitored during the research. In every country, the pilot group consisted of 15-20 inmates, who were also selected on the basis of their penitentiary histories and sentencing (e.g. inmates with a long prison sentence were preferred over others in order, in theory, to guarantee continuity and regularity).

- **Phase 6. Collection of the empirical data.** The data collection phase was in preparation for the next phase.

- **Phase 7. Analysis of the empirical data.** The analysis performed was qualitative, supported by quantitative data from the sample.

- **Phase 8. Drafting of this research report.**
2.3 Subject of the Research

The research examined the training needs analysis and interpretation processes which take place in the prison context (excluding specific institutions, such as high security prisons, etc.). We found and analysed the training demand relating to the following main areas: language literacy, digital skills, mathematics, finance and budget management. Further, nevertheless recurrent demand was found pertaining to other areas (e.g. communication, English as a foreign language, Spanish and conflict management).

2.4 The Research Tools

Table 1 shows the tools drawn up and used during the research in order to explore the training needs analysis processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Indicators used</th>
<th>Purpose of the tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs Assessment Tool</td>
<td>- Entry level</td>
<td>To test the skills possessed by every single inmate before starting the learning pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline for conducting individual TNA (Training Needs Analysis) interview</td>
<td>- Training subject/contents</td>
<td>To make a prior analysis of the training needs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Expected level of achievement</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Reasons for requesting the training (personal interest, also for better job prospects in the mid- to long term; to improve performance levels in activities performed in the institute)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- New behaviour and knowledge expected by the participant at the end of the training</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Blended method (classroom, distance learning, incorporated with the context)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Organisational and logistical indications (compatibility with the correctional plan underway)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Learning Plan</td>
<td>- Initial entry level (beginner, intermediate, advanced)</td>
<td>To record the potential growth and improvement of the single inmates with regard to the re-educational goals drawn up by the prison administration as part of the correctional programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tool Indicators used Purpose of the tool

<table>
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| Customer satisfaction         | - Correspondence of the learning pathway with the correctional programme and own growth and improvement goals  
- Suitability of the various professional figures for the educational function performed  
- Suitability of the logistical aspects (e.g. Pebble lab access timetable compatible with other correctional activities, interviews, etc.)  
- Suitability of the teaching material  
- Correspondence of the level of achievement  
- ….                                                                                      | Individual assessment of the learning pathway and materials provided (online platform, etc.) |
| e-learning contents           | - Training goals                                                                                  | Assessment of pertinence, quality and benefit with regard to the training demand expressed |
|                               | - Expected results                                                                                 |                                                                                      |
|                               | - Training contents                                                                                |                                                                                      |
|                               | - Programme                                                                                       |                                                                                      |

### 3. General Definitions of Training Needs Analysis

#### 3.1 Introduction on Terms

The scientific literature offers a wide variety of definitions of TNA (Training Needs Analysis). In some cases, it is interpreted as *Training Needs Analysis*, in others as *Training Needs Assessment*, or, acronyms aside, other labels used are *Pre-Training Assessment, Front End Analysis, Problem Analysis*, or simply *Analysis* (Rossett, 1987).

Other authors (Eraut, 2007; Craig, 1994) instead consider reference to LNA–*Learning Needs Analysis* to be more appropriate in consideration of the changes prompted as the consequence of the educational action and the central position of the *learner/employee* (rather than *employer*) in the activated learning processes (these authors refer in particular to the change processes prompted in the organisational contexts).

In any case, all the terms mentioned refer to a systematic data collection process, activated by the organisation, for the analysis of needs and/or problems in achieving the growth objectives set out by the prison administration for each inmate within the correctional programme. In this frame, placing inmates (singularly or in groups) on learning and growth pathways (Chiu *et al.*, 1999) appears a pertinent response to the ‘problem’
or demand expressed by each one. It is obvious that for us these processes are not just restricted to structured education and training, but the set of activity systems that generate learning in the contexts under examination.

Among the various terms proposed, in this work we adopt the one most commonly used in organisations: *Training Needs Analysis* (herein-after TNA).

### 3.2 TNA in the Prison Setting

The definitions of TNA are either generic, or concern a specific sphere of interventions and the respective functions in question. In this latter case, the reference is to those who define TNA as a consultation (Dahiya *et al*., 2011) and systematic exploration of the human resources management policies and their development potential (e.g. Sweeney, 1999), and a process to identify performance conditions and training needs, in order to improve individual productivity (Miller and Osinski, 1996). In the penitentiary field, we believe that productivity can still be an analysis indicator, if referred to the ways in which the inmate performs the activities (inside and outside the prison walls) and the results obtained.

In terms of the *Instructional System Design* guiding the analysis process, the need is considered as the source of information required for all of the consequent training programme, which is ongoing and constantly under adaptation (Goldstein, 1993).

### 3.3 Training Needs Analysis

Some definitions found in the specialised literature associate the definition of training demand with the function of TNA: for example, Goldstein (1993) defines TNA as a process aimed at providing answers in the training sphere through the identification of

- the area or sector where the educational intervention is needed,
- the person whose competences and knowledge need to be boosted,
- the contents and subjects to be dealt with.

Following the Kaufman model, we identified further functions of TNA (Rossett, 1987: 15) with respect to the individual. They correspond to the collection and analysis of information on:

- optimum performances/knowledge for the single inmates,
- the single inmates’ current performance/knowledge.

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2 *Instructional System Design* (Gagné, 1965) is the field of investigation that deals with defining the rules for choosing the most fitting education methods while taking the ‘learning conditions’ and different types of learning into account.
• observation by the (internal and external) staff on behaviour, activities, etc. which can demonstrate the inmates’ training needs (for Italy the reference is to scientific observation as per art. 28 of presidential decree no. 230 dated 30.6.2000),
• existent problems and respective causes,
• solutions put forward by the penitentiary institute’s group of observers.

The attention can also be placed on the organisational dimension, namely the correctional programme that the prison administration draws up with a team of experts to trace the single inmates’ rehabilitation and re-education pathways. In this sense, TNA is identified as a process – constantly underway – that helps collect data and information on the training needs, and is instrumental to planning and developing the correctional programme.

While on one hand TNA has the function of identifying a training need or gap – depending on which definition you prefer – to put together one or more ad hoc intervention ‘packages’ (reactive approach to solve the problem or satisfy the need found, McArdle, 1998: 4), on the other the training cannot make up for all the ‘performance deficiencies’, whose solution is in no way correlated to the acquisition and increase in competences. Nevertheless, when it is, the strategic function of TNA is to propose necessary and pertinent investments in training, which can value the human capital and motivate the inmates to build their own growth pathways.

Hence, the functions of TNA can be summed up as follows:
• to align the training with the correctional programme,
• to provide the basis for the choice of pertinent training actions to fill the ‘gap’ found or to (help) satisfy the problems in the performance of services inside or outside the institute.

3.4 The Inmates’ Training Demand

The micro dimension allows us to explore the specific and singular aspects of the potential participants, as regards their growth possibilities and prospects of filling their shortcomings and gaps so that they can meet the performance requests made by the penitentiary institute and the world of work.

In the micro dimension, it becomes essential for the single people to take account of their prospects and training requirements and to express them in the manner that best reflects their needs. Sharing learning goals, results and expected behaviour with the single inmates encourages and motivates them not just to take part, but above all to learn and take the training to heart, so that they immediately transfer it to work practices
(inside and outside the prison) and the actions of their everyday lives. An aspect subject to a different mode of investigation concerns the inmates’ participation in building their training course, which gives them the perception of having more control over their growth process (Ford and Kraiger, 1995), the goals to achieve and the educational actions to do so, which they themselves have planned. The greater the involvement in the planning phase (needs analysis included), the greater the motivation to assess the efficacy of the interventions that the single inmates have built together with the prison staff and external experts (e.g. who are part of the Correctional and Observation Group – Gruppo di Osservazione e Trattamento-G.O.T. – following art. 29, clause 2 of presidential decree no. 230 dated 30.6.2000) as part of their personal growth and re-education programmes. In this view, it becomes essential to (re)build the legal, penitentiary, social, professional and educational history of each inmate (e.g. activities carried out, interpersonal relationships, disciplinary sanctions, unlawful behaviour, critical events occurring during activities, perception by others, etc.) so as to set out an authentic pathway, with shared expectations and goals, and consistent phases, schedules and targets, to be pursued within the penitentiary institute supporting and sponsoring the pathway.

3.5 The Training Gap and TNA

In general terms, the definitions link TNA to the analysis of a need (or gap) arising from a ‘gap in results’ that needs to be overcome (Kaufman, 1982; Kaufman et al., 1979). The data taken into consideration concerns the competences, knowledge, skills and aptitudes currently possessed and performances currently achieved by the single inmates, and those that they ideally need to possess in order to improve current performances or correct aspects of their character, attitudes, professionalism or personality (Figure 1). This must be accompanied by a priority assessment, also in consideration of the available resources.

Figure 1 – Data underlying the training gap.

In mathematical terms, we can interpret Kaufman’s thinking with the following formula (Rossett, 1987: 16) which highlights the «gap» to be filled with educational interventions (Figure 2):

\[
\text{Current results (Current performance on the job)} \quad \text{Gap} \quad \text{Desired results (Optimal performance\&knowledge)}
\]

\[
\text{Actual needs}
\]
Figure 2 – Training Needs Equation (Wright and Geroy, 1992 in Jamil and Md Som, 2006:18).

\[
\frac{\text{Optimal/Expected performance / Knowledge / Behaviour}}{\text{Current performance / Knowledge / Behaviour}} = \text{Performance/Behaviour need}
\]

The training action is called upon to intervene in order to satisfy the need\(^3\) (more than the want), as drawn up by the expert ‘observers’ inside the prison setting, and eliminate the gap between the inmates’ current and the optimal state of knowledge and behaviour and accompany them in the transition towards the growth and rehabilitation goals.

4. Phases of the Training Needs Analysis Process

To understand the training need as a whole, it is necessary to perform analyses and observation involving the prison director, prison guards, volunteers, medical and nursing staff, surveillance magistrate and whoever else accompanies the inmates in their day-to-day actions and occupations in the prison environment. They help identify the right solution for the single inmates’ training needs during the implementation phase of the correctional programme. From the careful analysis of the inmates as they perform their day-to-day activities, inside and outside the walls, elements are acquired to assess the size of the demand connected to a problem, in terms of a gap’ or performance problems (Figure 3) and the inmates’ more or less explicitly demonstrated and expressed aspirations to develop/acquire competences.

Figure 3 – Mathematical representation of the analysis of the problem generating the demand.

\[
\text{Analysis of the performance desired/expected by the prison administration with regard to the correctional programme drawn up} + \text{Analysis of the single inmates’ current performance} = \text{Size of the single inmates’ problem}
\]

\(^3\) Here is the definition of need and need assessment provided by the founder of needs assessment (Kaufman, 1998: 87): «Needs assessment is the formal process of identifying needs as gaps between current and desired results, placing those needs in priority order based on the cost to meet each need versus the cost for ignoring it, and selecting the most important needs (problems or opportunities) for reduction or elimination». 
Therefore, the process goes through phases of needs definition – framed within precise macro priorities – and problem generation, originating from one or more specific causes (lack of knowledge, motivation, maladjustment, etc.) (Figure 4). The instructional designer and developer are called upon to package the most suitable solution to these problems in a systematic and structured (and not haphazard) manner (Al-Khayyat and Elgamal, 1997).

Figure 4 – The phases in the training needs analysis process.

Learning need ➔ Priority ➔ Problem ➔ Cause ➔ Solution

5. From a Needs-Centred to Problem-Centred Approach

By framing training as a consumer good, some authors (Federighi, 2006) propose a education consumption process model prompted by the appearance of a problem (which generates a need perceived by the person in question), expressed in the demand to obtain a good (training). The process results in the consumption of one or more (formal, informal or ‘embedded’) educational events to satisfy the consciously and reasonably expressed demand to improve personal and professional living conditions. The transformation resulting from taking part in the educational event is depicted with respect to the problem that generated the need (e.g. the need to learn a language no longer exists at the end of a course, or it still exists but with a different intensity, dimension or characteristics). Further developments arise from the transformative process (new problems generating further needs or stabilisation of the balance prior to the appearance of the problem). In this model (Figure 5), the need is linked to a problem which follows from the inmates’ reflection and desire to make changes to their personal, social and working conditions (e.g. desire to understand the legal provisions issued during their prison lives so that they themselves can evaluate whether they are grounded or legitimate).

Figure 5 – Components of the education consumption process (Federighi, 2006: 55).

Problem ➔ Need ➔ Demand ➔ Learning event ➔ Change ➔ Development

6. How to Conduct TNA – Some Models

The model by McGehee and Tayer (1961) suggests three necessary and mutually dependent levels so that the training needs analysis is not left to chance, but can be part of the same pathway followed by each inmate’s correctional programme:
• Organisation and implemented organisational changes (reference to the penitentiary institution’s mission as such),
• Single inmate (reference to progress made by the single inmates with regard to their correctional plans),
• Activities, including professional activities, offered during the correctional activities (reference to the inmates’ performances in terms of competences, aptitudes, behaviour and skills used during the correctional programme).

The identification and analysis of the inmates’ training needs make up the most important phase in the whole cycle, as its pertinence and quality depend on this (Goldstein and Ford, 2002).

All the same, the empirical research shows that training needs analysis is often ignored, not considered or omitted, or done on a random or one-off basis (e.g. Mahler and Monroe, 1952 in Moore and Dutton, 1978). In some cases it is even performed in a harmful way, not so much with regard to formal interventions, but to the informal and unstructured ones.

7. Tools and Instruments for the TNA

For the purpose of this research, some tools used in empirical research performed in various organisational contexts were selected as a guideline. From the more dated ones gathered by Moore and Dutton (1978), the scientific literature offers a range of available tools to find training needs (see Table 2), used over an extended length of time (Jamil and Md Som, 2006). These are:
• Direct observation,
• Questionnaires,
• Semi-structured interviews,
• Consultations, meetings, interviews (individual and group),
• Consultation of the specialised literature on techniques, methods of use and empirical evidence on effects and efficacy,
• Focus groups,
• Tests/forms,
• Job descriptions,
• Performance or, for some (Gilbert, 1978), performer assessments,
• Brainstorming,
• Analysis of selected samples.

The tools to find qualitative data (observation, interviews, focus groups, consultation of specialised literature) – usually requiring more time and financial resources – require an expert analyst with consolidated communication, listening, interpersonal and observation skills, who can analyse the objective and subjective aspects put across by the specific target group under examination.
# Table 2 – Overview of some TNA tools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey tools</th>
<th>Main Characteristics</th>
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</table>
| Questionnaires (paper or    | These are the most widely used TNA tool owing to their inexpensiveness, straightforwardness, simplicity and ease of use. The questions can be structured (McClelland, 1994) as  
| electronic version using     |  – closed-ended questions  
| software)                    |  – open-ended questions  
|                              |  – multiple choice questions  
|                              |  – assessment questions with a set range of marks  
|                              |  – classification questions  
|                              | With a combination of closed and open-ended questions, it is possible to collect quali-quantitative assessments.  
|                              | The use of questionnaires requires expertise in defining their layout, questions (how many, which and what type), descriptors, distribution, assessment and analysis of the answers provided. At times subsequent integrations are needed to fully understand the performance gap and organisational and individual elements and activities.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Observation                   | It can be used to find gaps in behaviour and hard and soft know-how. The observer's analysis skills influence the results of the observation. Use of observation is recommended in addition to other tools (e.g. questionnaires).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Focus Groups                  | These are group discussions on a specific topic, involving a variable number of people (8-12). They are pertinent (McClelland, 1994) insofar as the people involved in the discussion are in different ways linked to the need and/or individual who will receive the educational intervention (prison administration managers, prison education-correctional officers, school teachers, volunteers involved in educational functions, penitentiary officers, inmates, etc.). The range of people in the group can provide valid cues for reflection on the learning pathway to be implemented (or not) but it could require the group members to possess conflict management skills, empathetic listening and communication competences, and skills in ‘investigating’ the unsaid. In this case, the facilitator is called upon to perform an important role as mediator, to manage the discussion and the active involvement of everyone in the discussion. In this case too, use of a focus group can be accompanied by other training needs survey tools (e.g. questionnaires). |
| Brainstorming                 | This is another example of a group discussion, which can be used to collect a large number and types of input from different figures and departments.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Interviews                    | These provide a large amount of qualitative data (like focus groups and observation), which can integrate any quantitative data collected using other tools before (useful to prepare the questionnaire) or after the interview (useful to confirm, validate and clarify requirements). In order to focus on the inmates' training needs, it is essential for the interviewers to be able to make the necessary information emerge, also in connection with their experiences in prison and penitentiary history. |
| Job descriptions              | These are the description of single components concerning performances and activities linked to a professional profile, if we are dealing with a work task-related training need (inside or outside the penitentiary institution).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
Survey tools | Main Characteristics
---|---
Tests/Forms | They can be used to measure levels of individual knowledge, competences and aptitudes. They highlight if the performance problem is linked to a lack of know-how, technical or behavioural skills and provide valid support in identifying the solution. A limit is whether reliable tests can be drawn up to measure the existent cognitive situation of the individual doing the test (Steadham, 1980 in Goldstein and Ford, 2002).
Documents available within the institution | These documents provide evidence on problematic aspects of the single inmates. They are useful for an in-depth analysis of individual needs: drop-out rate from previous school, training or professional activities, productivity in work experience (inside and outside the prison), individual interests, expert and penitentiary officer reports (correctional team), prison biography, significant elements in their past sentencing, management of moments of daily life in the penitentiary facility (interviews, sports and recreational activities, etc.), etc.

8. The Choice of TNA Tool

The choice of which tool(s) to use to perform TNA depends on criteria concerning the organisation, such as:

- Available resources (human, financial, time),
- Competences (internal or external) in preparing and using the tools,
- Sensitivity of the prison organisation and staff to the topics of re-education and the inmates’ growth,
- Willingness of the decision-makers in the organisation (e.g. management),
- Ability of the organisation to plan and put together TNA with regard to educational actions aimed at inmates’ re-education and rehabilitation,
- Initial skills levels of the inmates,
- Clarity in outlining the overall goals of each inmate’s correctional plan.


In this paper we report on the empirical results of the Pebble – *Prison Education Basic Skills Blended Learning* – research performed by the Italian team in Pescara Prison.

4 Particular reference is made to the results of the Pebble (2013–2015) international research project, on the implementation of innovative basic-level skills learning for the prison population in selected facilities in Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Romania.
The aim of the research was to implement the inmates’ basic competences through a training process ‘integrated’ into the penitentiary context, starting from four topic areas: Italian literacy, mathematics, digital (ICT) and financial skills, while emphasising the learning possibilities offered by prison life.

Analysis was made of the training needs of the single participants in the project and of the context. As a result, it was possible to pinpoint how to put together the learning pathway, by making the most of all the learning opportunities and resources present in the prison; furthermore, it also permitted a wider range of training in areas and topics that were initially not envisaged, using an innovative method based on the use of new technologies and the exploitation of educational elements present in the penitentiary context.

A first level of analysis of the ‘context’ concentrated on surveying the human resources and tools available in Pescara prison and on the ones that needed to be activated to achieve the learning goal.

Analysis of the resources present in Pescara prison context highlighted the following points:

- The workgroup created for the research enabled on-site collaboration and support from the University of Florence,
- The presence of the school and expert teaching staff working in the context also enabled the inclusion of the ‘school component’ and the formal initiatives linked to this component in the tested innovative model,
- The presence of and work with existing training activities (theatre courses, the writing workshop, prison journal, various work activities with production labs, religious courses, etc.) provided support in the experimentation of the model,
- The resources typical of the context – prison guards and legal officers with past experience of working together – were actively involved right from the early stages of planning the training activities to the final moment of assessment and re-planning,
- The presence of volunteers who work in the prison, leading correctional and/or cultural activities, was a key springboard in implementing the model,
- The prison’s consolidated relationships with external partners enabled promotion of the educational component in all work performance-linked activities.

From the start of the project, meetings between the different professional figures were staged to provide integrated information and training on the progress of the project. This way of working proved to be fundamental,

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5 University of Florence Department of Education and Psychology represented by Prof. Paolo Federighi and the research coordinator Dr. Francesca Torlone.
not just so that all the people involved received the same information, but also to boost the personnel’s motivation so that they would perform their job in the best possible way, adding to the project’s success.

9.1 The Self-assessment Questionnaire

The characteristics of the inmate population of Pescara prison were compared with those required of the set of inmates who would begin the training process. As a result, a first group of people were singled out to receive a self-assessment questionnaire. The aim of this questionnaire was to measure the initial motivation levels to begin the Pebble learning pathway.

The questionnaire was given to 30 inmates of Pescara prison. The answers to the questionnaire highlighted the following points:

• All the respondents said they were interested in undertaking a training course to improve their basic competences,

• The declared level of education showed that most of the respondents possessed a low level of schooling (most had completed primary and secondary school), only 4 out of 30 had finished secondary school and only 1 out of 30 had begun a university course,

• In the respondents’ self-assessment of the competences in their possession in the various areas of the project, the results were as follows:
  – most replied that their reading and writing skills in Italian were «sufficient», but all the respondents asked to improve some areas of their Italian language skills (grammar, writing, reading, difficulty in hypothetical sentences, etc.),
  – in mathematics most of the respondents replied that they had low and unsatisfactory skill levels,
  – in computer skills, most classed their skills as seriously lacking (most of the respondents declared that they did not know how to use an email or word processing programme, while wider skills were possessed in surfing the Internet),
  – in the financial and budgeting areas, most of the respondents assessed their competences as unsatisfactory (but not as bad as mathematics) and said that they wanted to improve them, especially the capacity to manage their own economic resources.

• To the question on the usefulness of improving their basic skills the respondents replied that they considered basic skills very useful, also in order to find a job at the end of their sentence,

• Most of the respondents selected the area of information technology as the one in which they felt most need to improve their competences.

The following criteria were identified in order to select the pilot group: age not above 40, end of prison sentence not less than four years away, prior positive experience of a school training course.
The inmates were selected on the basis not only of the willingness expressed, their declared motivations and the personal and legal characteristics found in the observation data, but also on the basis of the questions asked to the prison director, the legal and pedagogical officers and the prison guards.

The following factors were taken into consideration when making the selection:

- Ability to follow the prison rules deduced from the lack or infrequency of disciplinary offences and nevertheless maintaining respectful behaviour towards the staff in the various spheres of prison life, collaborating with the institution and participating in other correctional opportunities,
- Following/having followed a school education course,
- Definitive legal position with a medium to long-term sentence,
- No motions underway for alternative measures,
- No current requests for transfers to other penitentiary institutions.

9.2 The Focus Group and Interviews in Pescara Prison

Fourteen inmates were selected from the first 30 respondents, based on the requirements set out above and on the data collected through the other two analysis tools: the focus group and interviews.

Taking part in the focus group were:

- the Pescara prison director,
- the Pescara prison research project supervisor,
- the legal-pedagogical officer (representing the prison’s education area),
- the head teacher of the school (Istituto Tecnico Statale Atherno – Manthonè),
- the teacher responsible for the school activities in prison,
- the prison’s IT staff,
- 1 inmate selected from those who had replied to the questionnaire on the basis of the motivation shown.

The mixed participation of staff and presence of an inmate were the ‘organisational’ premise for sharing the project goals. What is more, it facilitated the identification of modes of school personnel – prison staff collaboration during the various steps of the training process.

In consideration of the fact that the school emerged as a fundamental resource in the context analysis, teaching proposals were collected during the focus group to implement as part of the Pebble project. Possibilities

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7 In this connection see art. 39 of the penitentiary law and art. 77 of Italian presidential decree no. 230/2000.
were explored to improve the inmates’ education and training, starting from the experience acquired by the school personnel, which was then enriched by data and elements of observation coming from the prison staff8.

The reflection also focused on the prison and school staff’s assessment of the teaching tools and material available for the inmates’ training programmes. The school personnel showed a great deal of open-mindedness towards IT training support, as a result of its previous organisation of IT courses, also to acquire the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)9.

8 Below are some essential points of the focus group, in question form:
• How do the inmates assess the competence level and collaboration of the teachers/trainers/legal-pedagogical officer involved in providing the training activities?
• How and how much can a training programme/course using new technologies to develop basic literacy, numeracy, IT and economic-financial skills change the current condition of the prison population? Are there suggestions to improve the programme planning?
• How can this pathway contribute to helping the prison population in future?
• What motivates the inmates to take part in this kind of programme?
• How do the teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff assess the equipment available in the institute to plan and provide training courses/programmes for the inmates?
• How do the teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff consider/assess the organisational aspects linked to planning and providing training courses/educational programmes in prison?
• How do the teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff consider/assess the educational and training programmes currently on offer in Pescara prison?
• What type of teaching materials are currently used to teach the various disciplines?
• How do the inmates, teachers/trainers, legal-judicial officers and prison staff consider the Pebble research goals (linked to the development of classroom and distance learning in the four topic areas mentioned)?

9 Here is the ECDL project as defined by the school: The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). The European computer driving licence – also known in Italy under the English acronym ECDL, is a certificate that attests to the possession of basic computer skills. This consists of the ability to work on a personal computer using the common applications and basic knowledge of information technology (IT) at the level of general user. ECDL is a programme offered by CEPIIS (Council of European Professional Informatics Societies), the institution that unites the European informatics associations. Italy is one of the member states and it is represented by AICA, the Italian Association for Informatics and Automatic Calculation. It is recognised in 148 countries around the world (the tests are available in 41 different languages), with 24,000 accredited test centres. Outside Europe, the ECDL is known as the International Computer Driving Licence or ICDL. The ‘New ECDL’ proposes new modules and allows greater flexibility as candidates can choose the combination of modules they consider most interesting and useful and ask for a certificate attesting to the exams passed at any time. To be more precise, three types of certifications can be obtained: ECDL Base, ECDL Full Standard and ECDL Profile, based on 17 modules grouped into three categories: Base, Standard and Advanced. ECDL Base includes four modules that supply the basic digital literacy skills and knowledge:
• basic computer concepts,
• fundamental Internet concepts,
• word processing,
• spreadsheets.
The focus group and the meetings between professionals enabled the sharing of important information as well as the joint planning of the research training sessions. This meant that optimal use could be made of the resources present and in particular of the school teachers and prison guards. By combining the interest expressed by the trainees on the use of technological and innovative tools with the trainers’ willingness to use technological tools to support the learning, the prison managed to build a WLG—Web Learning Group, with the support of the TRIO Regione Toscana (Tuscany regional government) computer platform (see further).

The experience gained by the school personnel in the context, not only in the sphere of providing teaching modules but also in other specialised training programmes, as well as the solid involvement of the prison staff, facilitated the construction of a blended and embedded training process. Right from the start, the school permitted basic classroom teaching to be provided on the areas in question, also to the inmates in the Pebble project who were not enrolled on school courses. The school was willing to welcome the Pebble participants on the ECDL training lessons (even without taking the end exam) and supported the inmates in the online training.

The prison guards, IT technicians, volunteers and educators built, managed and monitored the inmates’ testing of educational sessions inside the prison (e.g. by giving them support in using online materials, trying them out together above all in the initial phase of the experiment, observing the inmates’ skills and aptitudes as they grew and changed during the experimentation, observing the impact that these transformations also had on the communication, relational etc. skills inside the prison).

As a result, this highlighted the possibility of creating a circularity between the various correctional activities present in the prison, starting from the training courses dedicated to forming basic skills.

The second phase of surveying the training needs, through the semi-structured interviews, enabled a closer look at the single inmates’ motivations for taking part in the training course. Above all, the interviews provided the opportunity to verify the learning goals and every single participants’ expectations for improvement.

The single inmates’ training needs were interpreted together with the information from the school personnel, the prison staff and the internal ‘observation documents’, deriving from both the personal, legal and personality data and the previous training or work experience in the context.

In particular, in the interview it was possible to find information concerning every participating inmate’s progress in the institute’s ‘correction-
al’ programme\textsuperscript{10}, as regards any existent activities and their consequent willingness to take part in the learning pathway. In the interviews the inmates were able to answer questions on how the prison activities are organised, to talk about their experience in terms of learning, satisfaction and efficacy compared to experiences in other activities, and to express the subjects dealt with in the project they thought they were more interested in and why. In addition, it was asked why they thought it useful to boost their skills in particular areas during their time in prison, in terms of the benefit they deemed could be derived for their activities or work tasks in everyday prison life.

As a result, it was possible to take account of the information provided directly by the people concerned. This information was added to the information from the prison staff and/or found in the observation documents. All this gave quite a clear picture for making the learning plan. However, at pedagogical level, this procedure sparked the participants’ attention, prompting them to reflect on their reasons for learning (starting from the four subject areas) in terms of the improvement in their lives in the prison as well as the effect the improved skills could immediately have on the quality of their lives.

The interviews acted as a tool supporting the inmates’ motivation to participate. The request to provide indications on which experts and professionals would work to build individual learning plans raised the level of attention towards the project. In addition, it provided a positive stimulus in terms of strengthening self-esteem, as the inmates felt they had been ‘called upon’ to contribute to a process usually decided on by the professionals and not explained to the inmates in constructive terms.

On the other hand, for the prison staff, collecting the above information and material was a further tool to get to know the inmates themselves (Ministero della Giustizia–Dipartimento dell’Amministrazione Penitenziaria, 2013; Dipartimento dell’Amministrazione Penitenziaria–Ufficio del Capo Dipartimento, 2011). This is of fundamental importance for the prison’s organisational and correctional processes and its institutional goal, namely the educational purposes of the sentence.

To sum up, the administration of these tools proved useful for various reasons:
• to motivate the inmates to take part in the project,
• to boost their self-esteem and feeling of self-efficacy (also seen in the subsequent quantitative tools administered, which show the positive sensations stemming precisely from this type of intervention),

\textsuperscript{10} For example, question no. 4 of the interview went as follows: «So that we can prepare the training programme that best fits your expectations, we need further information on your life in Pescara prison». 
to provide elements of knowledge on the inmates (Dipartimento dell’Amministrazione Penitenziaria-Ufficio del Capo Dipartimento, 2015; Ministero della Giustizia-Dipartimento dell’Amministrazione Penitenziaria, 2005\textsuperscript{11}). This is not only useful for the prison education officers who draw up the Summary Report as per the internal regulations and circulars – including all the elements of observation of the inmates’ capacity to make use of the correctional opportunities – but also, in general, for drawing up the Information Reports for the Surveillance Magistrate which have to highlight the inmates’ behavioural characteristics. It was also useful for all the prison and security staff. Indeed, the prison as a whole has to provide suitable correctional activities and work together to prevent critical events, including those linked to the phenomenon of self-harming.

9.3 Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

The material collected in these preliminary steps – self-assessment questionnaires, focus groups, interviews – was used in the information and training meetings, which once again saw the participation of ‘mixed’ personnel (school personnel, University of Florence personnel and prison staff from the educational, IT and accounts areas, prison guards). Then it provided the basis to define the Individual Learning Plans.

Indeed, learning plans were created on the basis of the analysis of every inmate’s needs. The plans accounted for the following elements:

- topic areas of interest,
- subjects in each topic area,
- training demand on the basis of the inmates’ self-assessments,
- educational correctional activities already begun and tasks and roles in prison life,
- links expressed between the requested training and improvement of a day-to-day activity inside the prison,
- links expressed between the requested training and the improvement of life prospects once out of prison,
- time available for the training,
- preferences.

The learning plans built for each participating inmate were shared with the school personnel, prison guards and education officers. In addition, they were returned to the single inmates to check if they responded to their expectations.

\textsuperscript{11} See articles 28 and 29 of Italian presidential decree no. 230/200 on the team and scientific observation of the personality.
The learning plan put together accounted for the training requirements expressed by the inmates and the observation data emerging from the prison staff.

For example, some inmates were described by the prison staff as people who spent a lot of time in the ‘common rooms’ partaking in ‘pastimes’ such as cards, table football and chess. This element was taken into account in their learning plans, and emphasis was placed on intervention by the prison workers to help make the game-play a ‘learning’ experience. This type of experience gave the trainers an opportunity to reflect on the fact that the possibility of improving any aspect of people’s lives during imprisonment can help stimulate them to make the most of their personal resources, which can then also be used in other fields.

Furthermore, considering that the inmates’ requests converged with the availability of human resources and tools, the goal to implement basic skills through the use of innovative devices was totally fulfilled. Thanks to the activation of the Web Learning Group, the inmates were able to continue their learning, which had begun face-to-face and at an experiential level, through on-line training.

9.4 The Learning Programme planned in Response to the Training Demand emerging during the Research

The learning pathway planned and activated in response to analysis of the training needs demonstrated by the Pescara prison inmates was structured in three phases. The steps were carried out contemporaneously and managed in consideration of the individual learning goals:

- **face-to-face training**, during which the learning in the indicated topic areas was supported by the school, with teacher-led lessons in the classroom;
- **training in the penitentiary context** thanks to the engagement of the internal staff, prison guards, educational staff and volunteers who stimulated the inmates during the various moments in their prison lives;
- **on-line training**, through the use of the TRIO computer platform. Thanks to the support of the Regione Toscana (Tuscan Regional Government), the prison was able to access the platform for free. With the scientific support of the University of Florence, a selection was made of the resources to provide to the users on the basis of the evidence

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12 In these cases, the prison guards who were normally in greater contact with the inmates in these areas were asked to interact with them during the leisure ‘time’. This time was to provide an extra opportunity for more interpersonal experiences and for them to express their needs, including the need for recreation.

from the individual training demand survey and interpretation phase. The technical staff (from the prison and the platform, who were in constant communication) played an essential role, as did a volunteer who acted as classroom tutor, the school teachers who included the teaching resources in the teacher-led lessons, and the education officers who constantly monitored and gave support to the inmates. In this phase, a fundamental contribution was given by the prison guard personnel, as well as by the education officers: the former gave the inmates support in accessing the platform, while the latter monitored the users’ motivation with some ad hoc interviews to collect the inmates’ experiences of their learning pathways. In addition, on the basis of the needs expressed by the inmates, also relating to the time available to attend the Pebble Web Learning Group (WLG), the prison director gave special service orders which authorised access to the Pebble experimentation lab seven hours a day, from Monday to Friday, so that the inmates could also attend other activities and nevertheless have the possibility of frequenting the WLG.

Subsequently, after the on-line platform had been used effectively, further training needs emerged for the inmates which had not been accounted for initially. As a result, the on-line resources were integrated. Owing to some changes that had happened in their lives, such as being able to have face-to-face meetings or being awarded special permits to see their children, some inmates asked to embark on modules on pedagogy and parenting.

In any case, the possibility of having a wide range of training opportunities boosted the inmates’ increasing learning demand. And thanks to the constantly evolving process of self-analysis, the inmates were always in search of fields in which they could grow and improve.

The inmates’ skills were monitored and observed during the phases of the tested learning model. In addition, there were also moments to share (above all during the individual interviews) the progress that had or had not been made since the beginning of the process.

The last moment of training in this process was the conference La formazione in carcere. Strategie condivise per la crescita e lo sviluppo delle competenze individuali (Education and Training in Prison. Shared strategies for the growth and development of individual competences. Pescara, 17 December 2015), organised by the Pescara prison director and held outside the prison with the participation, among others, of three inmates who illustrated their experiences and made a reflective analysis on the conclusion of their learning pathway.

The results of the research motivated the prison director to extend the WLG on-line training after the end of the Pebble research project, while continuing to use the institute’s resources. This was possible be-
cause the project highlighted that, thanks to the resources present, online training is sustainable inside Pescara prison and that it responds to the inmates’ learning demand.

In conclusion, the experience gained and the empirical results found from the inmates and trainers’ participation in the project had a significant influence on the organisation’s decision to carry on the WLG experience and involve the prison staff in the use and extension of the lab service. Therefore, in this case the management decision was prompted by a bottom-up process starting from the inmates, and concluded by a positive feasibility assessment from the director.

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