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Training managers: a case study of a French corporate university

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Abstract:
This paper will analyze the learning design from the learning designers' and trainers' point of view. Focusing on the training system, we use a threefold model: "ideational", "functional" and "experienced" dimensions of a training system.

In the French public mail company, training for all managers is provided by a department of the Corporate University: the "School of Managers". How has the project evolved since the original plan? If there are some gaps, how can we analyze the fact that, when it comes to innovation, "things never go exactly as planned"? Using interviews with designers and trainers involved in this project (N=7), we present the results of a discourse analysis performed with computer-assisted software. Answering the main goals of the research, the results will help us to better understand the prior ideas of the people in charge of the original system about (a) professionalization of managers, and (b) emotional and socioaffective dimensions of learning.

Keywords: Vocational education and training, apparatus, emotion, managers, learning design.

Introduction

Skill development is hugely important for the Human Resources department at La *Poste Courrier*, one of the main postal operators in Europe. The aim of their HR policy and more generally of their corporate policy is to develop their workers' employability, meet the challenges of the present and best prepare for the future in order to ensure the growth of new postal offers while at the same time improving working conditions and improving the economic performance of the business.

In 2009, a special entity, the *École des Managers*, or School of Managers was created to assist managers as the business underwent change, in particular the increase in the size of the sorting centres and the new, expanded role and implemented practices that the managers there have to play. The School of Managers was focused on creating, putting into place and evaluating a training programme for managers at La Poste.

These training programmes take into account managers' experience and focus on workplace situations for learning. This position means the programme has to look at the complete human being and understand learning in various dimensions – cognition, conation and emotion (Barbier & Galatanu, 1998). The study of the training courses presented herein is part of a doctoral research project examining the emotional and socioaffective dimensions of the training these managers receive.

In this paper, we will look at how these issues are taken into account in the development and implementation of these training courses, from the point of view of the designers and trainers. We will not examine here the learners' point of view. The context for this study will be briefly presented to highlight how original the School of Manager's educational project is (École des Managers, 2009). The theoretical framework for the analysis of the training "system", proposed by Albero (2010a, 2011), will then be reviewed. Two types of data will be used to

illustrate the theoretical basis: observing participation and the analysis of semi-structured interviews. All of this data will allow us to answer the following questions: How do the designers and trainers view the emotional and socioaffective dimensions in professional training? How are they taken into account during the design and implementation of the training system? What differences are there between the system as it was originally designed and the system as it is implemented?

Context of the Study: training managers at La Poste

La Poste is seeking to decentralize its organization with the goal of delegating greater power to the field in order to meet the strategic, human, financial and legal aims of the business. The organisational model is intended to be both top-down and bottom-up. The decentralization they are seeking should be taken on board by the employees, starting with the current organi culture: the slogan used widely in the company is "La Poste of tomorrow is built by the postal workers[1] of today". Faced with the changes of decentralization, the School of Managers works with managers in their new roles and on their position with regard to their superiors, the people under them, their peers and their work environment. Since 2009, more than 3000 managers have been through this training.

The School of Managers is currently located in the La Poste corporate university, which is responsible for training all postal workers in La Poste, meaning nearly 150,000 people. Up until 1991, the training departments remained attached to the ideals of teaching, school and managers, all notions that belonged to the bureaucratic, governmental structure in place. This is because La Poste in France was a public administration up until 1991. Since 1991, La Poste has been moving towards a private business model (reflected in its current status as a *Société Anonyme*, or public limited company) while still retaining its particular culture. As for the new training policies and the "manager factory", "adult education" for the company's managers is now called "continuous professional education for managers" (Cristol, 2011;

Wildemeersch & Salling Olesen, 2012). At the organisational level, institutionalizing these changes, the term Corporate University (*Université d'Entreprise*) was first used beginning in 1994 and became official in 2005. In the courses, the "professional positioning" has become a more important concept than the "organisational culture". In terms of pedagogy, the methods used focus on action, interaction, games and experiential education. In addition, the School of Managers' pedagogical project includes emotions as one of the elements that encourage learning and in particular memorization.

Beyond the semantic, institutional and pedagogical changes, the most important change was from initial, obligatory employee training after they successfully completed a competitive, national test – meaning they became civil servants after an internship period – to a "lifelong learning" approach. Up until then, training went with beginning a job and made it possible to transmit a particular culture from the top down. Now training methods and their aims are much more varied – face-to-face 'classroom' courses, blended learning, adapting to a position, skill development, etc. In this context, the fact that the School of Managers takes emotions into consideration represents a clear break with the traditional pedagogical models that formerly underlay training policy, design and implementation.

However, the change, like all innovations in training, has not gone without a hitch and modifications have been made between the initial intentions, the training's implementation and its current form. The School of Managers did indeed develop an ambitious project for the business, considering its past. But how has the project evolved since its earliest design? To what extent have emotional and socioaffective dimensions been taken into account in developing and implementing the project? More generally, what differences do we see between the initial project and the current reality?

Theoretical framework: emotions and training systems

The School of Managers here will be examined as a "system" in the sense used by Albero (*dispositif* in French often translated in Foucault's work by *apparatus*), in terms of technical organization and the strategic implementation of resources for a specific goal (Albero, Linard & Robin, 2009; Albero, 2010a, 2010b). Agamben (2007), like Foucault, defines the "system" as (a) "a heterogeneous series that includes almost every thing, both discursive and otherwise […]; (b) The system always has a concrete strategic function and is always within a structured power relationship […]; (c) as such, it is the result of the combination of power relations and knowledge" (Agamben, 2007, pp. 10-11).

The use of the term system is justified by the mechanisms, the procedures and the ends-means relation that serves as a logical control of action, all of which "give the training course the status of an engineered thing with a highly technical connotation" (Albero, 2011, p. 59). On one hand, technique is to be considered a part of culture; on the other hand, according to the Heideggerian approach, technique should also be considered in an ontological way, in relation to the "being" rather than existence, and also in relation to "technical action" (Albero, 2010b). It is the relationship between technical action and being that needs to be elucidated here, in order to understand the gap between the innovation sought and how that innovation is implemented, between prescribed activity, real activity and the reality of the activity (Clot, 1999). In other words, by analysing the system in its two-fold "technical" and "social" dimension as well as on different "ideational, functional and experienced" levels we can observe and understand why, between the plan and the implementation, when it comes to innovating in professional training just as in other fields, "things never go exactly as planned" (Albero, 2011).

With this in mind, the study of the system is organised along three lines (Albero, 2010a). The first, the "ideational dimension" includes the guiding values and the principles and goals of the system. The examination here sheds light on the School of Managers' ideas, principles,

models and values. The second dimension of the system is the "design references". This means studying how the ideals are implemented, that is to say how the ideals are translated into action by operators, in our case the design and implementing of the training system and how this system is rolled out through the decision makers and how it functions. The third line is the experience of the people who go through this system. Every person interprets the situations experienced subjectively given his/her character, life experience, needs, explicit goals or implicit aims and even how they view others as they try to "work together" (Albero, 2010a). In this paper, we will only discuss the experience of designers and trainers; we will not go into the learners' experience, which will be dealt with in another portion of the research that is currently under way.

Concerning the specific role of emotions in this training system, the emotional and socioaffective dimensions will be dealt with here as "adaptive phenomena" and include subjective feelings, psycho-physiological responses and a cognitive evaluation, as well as a behavioural dimension and expressive aspects (Channouf & Rouan, 2002; Sander & Scherer, 2009). They are often brief and changing; they could be compared here with a physical "gesture" which the body makes for itself and others to see (Dumouchel, 1999). In this bio-psycho-sociological view, emotions and feelings are seen as an individual and a social phenomenon of adaptation. Lastly, the role of speech and verbalisation should be considered in terms of emotional manifestations as they allow us to understand ourselves and others (Averil & Rodis, 1998).

The emotional and socioaffective dimensions, little examined in research on adult education and even less in workplace training, are often suspected of being counterproductive to the "rationality" of learning. In terms of methodology, the difficulty of capturing emotions – and because of their nature, controlling them – limits the extent to which they can be considered when studying adult education, particularly within an organization. The role they play is

therefore often ignored despite the fact that numerous authors in different fields stress the very weighty even determining role, in some cases, that emotions play in human conduct (Damasio, 2010; Darwin, 1981; Gardner, 1983; Le Breton, 1998). We could not possibly examine all the causes and characteristics here, so we will limit ourselves in this paper to studying how they are taken into account (or rather not) in the training system proposed by the School of Managers, from the point of view of the designers and the trainers in particular.

Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

To answer the questions originally posed about the changes in manager training at La Poste and how emotional and socioaffective dimensions were included in designing and implementing the training, we established a protocol for gathering and analysing data.

As for gathering data, the presence of a doctoral student (S. Mallard) at various committees, meetings and discussions with the School of Managers team can be considered a "pre-existing detail" (Van Der Maren, 2003), which exists independently of the research. The researcher's positions shifts between "participating observation" and "observing participation" (Soulé, 2007): participation in the team (meetings and other discussions), training development activities, etc. For all of these activities, the doctoral student's research gave a justifiable reason for his presence.

In addition, a series of semi-structured interviews (7 in all) was held between March and April 2013 with different people from the School of Managers; all of them were involved in developing the course and three of them also implement it as trainers. The interview chart was drawn up based on Albero, Linard & Robin (2009) with a view to describing and analysing the design of "innovative" training systems. These interviews were transcribed and analysed using the text analysis software Alceste[2], and the detailed analysis reports were interpreted.

To start, the software breaks down the text to be analysed (all of the interviews) into relatively homogeneous fragments called "context units". Then, the software seeks to classify them hierarchically; the fragments are divided into two distinct "classes" according to the vocabulary used. The fragments in the larger of the two classifications are then distributed again until two new classifications are found. This distribution and classification operation continues until a stable number of classifications is achieved (Kalampalikis & Moscovici, 2005). In the end, each lexical classification is described using a specific term and includes "reduced forms". These make it possible to understand the signifiers behind the words, or the "sound-image" to use Saussure's terms (1975).

In this case, analysis of the interviews yielded five lexical classifications (1) participants' emotions and subjectivity; (2) trainers' interpersonal skills in managing emotions; (3) implicit or explicit theories included in the design; (4) necessary questioning of the issue of emotions in the design; (5) the role of emotions in learning activities. The data in these five classes adds to, supports or calls into question the data from the "observing participation" mentioned above.

Results: what the system designers and instructors say

In the first lexical classification "participants' emotions and subjectivity", there is a high chi-squared value for adjectives and adverbs, meaning a high occurrence rate or a high co-occurrence of these terms. They are used to describe the properties of nouns or nuance the meaning of verbs, respectively. They provide the precision in discourse that socioaffective and emotional dimensions require. This classification is a set of words that describe the dimensions mentioned in the interviews; emotions are therefore "subjective" and "individual" according to one of the people interviewed[3]. The reduced forms found here are for the majority produced by men while there is a significant lack of them from women and the trainers (negative chi-squared value). These forms are used for the majority by the designers

in connection with their role in the design, thus removed from the "manager learners". For them, the ideas of "enjoyment", "emotion" and "feelings" are very subjective and related to the individual, to every subject and for that reason, it would be difficult to qualify these subjective dimensions for someone else. Moreover, as one of the subjects interviewed stated, there are different ways of imagining training. One way would be to "follow the objectives in a concrete way", but "disconnecting the human aspect" and leaving aside any emotional dimension. The second way would be to take into account the "individual's subjectivity". In order to do that, they would have to constantly ask a question that is almost impossible to answer: "does the way I am designing this bring out particular emotions?" In the designers' view, the emotional experience is subjective and constitutes a challenge when designing a system. However, this classification does not reflect the discourses in their entirety because it is the most isolated of the classifications and is significantly more represented in the discourse of one designer in particular.

The second classification, known as "trainers' interpersonal skills in managing emotions" is the most well represented in our study (47% of all of the context units) and includes a set of adverbs, nouns and words indicating a spatial relationship. This classification specifies the context for the training's implemented as a combination of a particular time and place ("moment" and words indicating a spatial relationship) and persons ("people") which needs to be a "true" or real experience (very frequent occurrence), described by one of the subjects as "being a part of real life". Here, managing emotions in a training course depends upon a certain skill on the part of the trainer: an emotional know-how, being able to create relations, to make them make sense. One person spoke of the trainer as the keystone, i.e. the one element that brings together different parts and makes the construction (in the architectural sense) hold together. In other words, the trainer creates cohesion for multiple dimensions, including emotions, in learning. This know-how is distinct from what is required when

designing a training system. In this classification there is a distinction and even perhaps opposition between the statements by trainers and designers (significant presence and absence, respectively). At certain points, the designers even distance themselves – they are not the ones implementing it and, in their opinion, the system that they designed and constructed has less influence on how the participants in the training system learn than the trainer's technical knowledge. Some say there is almost a separation or independence between the two levels, designing and implementing training systems. How do these two activities overlap and complement each other? From an organizational point of view, development and implementation are two separate entities. This classification poses the question of creating learning resources and the resources (human, technical or other) that need to be mobilized to foster an emotional climate that facilitates managers' learning. In other words, they implicitly ask "how do you create a climate that fosters learning?". The significant absence of intensity markers shows perhaps the trainers' inability to describe the "ingredients" that encourage a "good" emotional atmosphere in the training room. The participating observation confirms these elements and highlights the wide range of practices and diversity in how trainers take emotions into account in training. The observations also show how important the spatial arrangement for the training area and the use of space and resources are, and these depend heavily on the trainer.

The third classification corresponds to the "theories included in the design", which is closest to the second classification ("trainers' interpersonal skills in managing emotions"), contains the following vocabulary: "framework, concept, start, limit". There is a significant presence of the French auxiliary verbs "to be" and "to have" and interjections. There is a significant absence of modal verbs, adjectives, adverbs, modal markers and person markers. This classification includes a somewhat nebulous subject. Some of those interviewed noted that the framework for the School of Managers' pedagogical project seemed "fuzzy" and "informal"

for the designers because it is not specific enough or shared broadly enough. In addition, some of the participants regretted that they had no chance to discuss the theoretical references used (called the "framework" in the interview), or the theories put forward: this lack of dialogue is even likened to "censorship" by one of the people interviewed. For another person, the pedagogical project is seen as being related to the political orientations of the business, at least as he understands them. There may also be differences in different participants' perceptions. The theories about management and the pedagogy were not discussed within the group and were selected outside of the group of system designers. Concerning emotions, no theory held by designers was discussed because emotions constituted a "non-subject". Lastly, on the implementation side of things, the participating observation found that the trainers each created their own individual definition of what a La Poste manager should be, based on their own personal and professional experience, sometimes even as a former manager or sometimes from more "private" theoretical knowledge. But in general, no one was able to answer the question "What makes a La Poste manager?". It is the same for the question of experiential learning or learning from experience – according to the results from the participating observation neither the designers nor the trainers agreed upon a single view. Experience was considered at best something that shapes an adult and the trainers work *de facto* in experiential education. Others feel that experiential education is more a form of "feedback on experience" provided by managers.

The fourth classification, concerning a "necessary questioning of the issue of emotions in the design", closest to classification 1 ("participants' emotions and subjectivity") and furthest from classification 3 ("theories included in the design"), includes modal verbs, person markers, modal markers and markers for intensity. Conversely, adjectives and nouns are significantly absent. The questions that all of these people were asked concerned a particular subject, emotions, which was not brought up during the design and yet was implicitly

included ("we have the elements in mind"). For two of the people participating in the project, the subject of emotions, although it was not explicitly present when developing the course, was nonetheless clearly included. For one of the people interviewed, the fact that they cooperated on developing the project ("being together" and "doing together") helped to "include emotions". The selection of those who played a role seems to be another implicit factor in the project – everyone who helped design the system was chosen for their "individual" profile, their individuality and the sensitivity they would in their own way include in the design.

Finally, the fifth classification covers the "role of emotions in learning activities" and shows a high presence of verbs, adjectives and adverbs and a significant absence of "*-ment*" adverbs (French suffix corresponding to "-ly" adverbs in English) and nouns. In other words, the people interviewed are talking about action, and more specifically learning activities ("finding out", "memorizing", "inciting", "making possible", etc.) that can encourage emotional and socioaffective dimensions. Here, the activities that incorporate the most emotions are those most often cited by the people interviewed. In this classification, the learners also make their entrance (the term "intern" although its use is relative). The notion of "trust" is highlighted because it is a requisite, according to the subjects interviewed, for expressing emotions in a group. In response to the question they were asked, the interviewees particularly associated emotions with memorisation (which is part of the pedagogical project). However, the responses were much broader and took into account emotions both in the system's design and its implementation. The question the interviewer asked was clearly seeking to find examples of activities using emotions. The way the training is organised into seminars and modules would seem to make it "fertile" ground for taking the emotional dimensions into account. Some seminars (the "first" one in particular) encourage emotions being taken into account. However, one of the people interviewed held a different view; in his opinion emotion is

precisely "what's missing" in the system. The only emotions present in this system were expressed during the design phase and not in its implementation; that was in the debate in which each person hoped to put in place their chosen theory. Classification 5 seems to be the most distant from the others and illustrates for some examples of how the pedagogical activity includes emotions, or quite the contrary, for others, how subjectivity and emotions are missing. There is then a tension here between two opposite views.

To summarize, according to classification 1, the issue of emotions is an individual question. However, it is up to the trainer to manage this emotional dimension in the training situation (indicated in classification 2). Although, as indicated in classification 4, emotions were implicitly included in the development (presence of verbs and absence of tool-words), class 5 includes a certain number of examples in which emotions were gradually taken into account.

Discussion and openness

From the five lexical classifications given by the Alceste analysis, two major views take shape: the first concerns designers and the second the trainers who implement the system. Everyone makes a distinction among teaching activities according to the "emotional level". While Isen (1987) finds that emotion is "intimately" tied to cognition, the interviewees, for the most part, separate cognition and emotion. Thus for the system's designers as well as for the trainers, cognition excludes emotion and emotion excludes cognition.

The diagram below shows the tensions between (a) the designed forms, from design to implementation and (b) the degree of subjectivity. The first axis could be described as the designed axis and the second one as the subjectivity axis. This allows us to examine the learning activities (analysis of practices, skills portfolio, games, etc.) that are implemented according to the views of the designers and the designer-instructors. What is designed to have a high emotional content does not necessarily have that content in practice and vice versa.

Lastly, a certain number of activities, such as those arranged on the diagram and some that are included in the course, either may not be cited or may not be known to the subjects interviewed given that not everyone is aware of the end result or the pedagogical process and everything that "really" happens during the training.

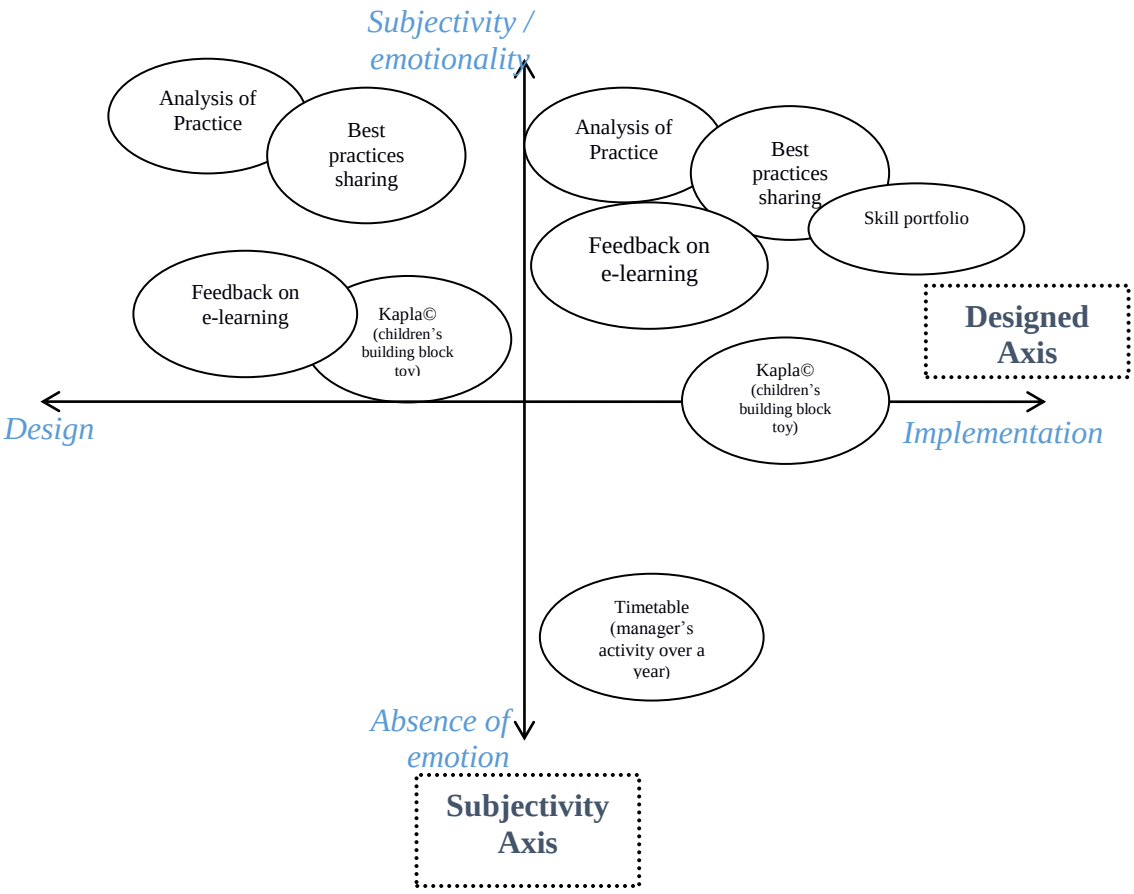


Diagram: Tensions in how emotions are included

Given the different analyses provided by Alceste, and particularly those in the fifth classification, we can infer that the policy and the design, in principle, provide a framework that fosters emotions. Despite that, the positioning of various activities is very approximate. In the interviews, the subjects could not justify why and how the specific activities can encourage emotions. According to the views of the people interviewed, the effectiveness of the system depends principally on the trainer. There was then no connection between the

designers' and the trainers' "design references" (including all the theories put forward, which should also be found in the realization of the system's "ideational dimension"). What is striking for their absence from the interviews is the training group and the learners, for whom the system was in fact created. They only appear in the fifth classification, a small portion of our body of data. The final target is only rarely mentioned in the interviews. Yet while the role of the trainer as a mediator does seem key, the space allowed the learner in the system is every bit as important since they are the key figure in the learning act.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the emotional and socioaffective dimension had never been discussed before the interviews done for this research. Yet this aspect was indeed included in the School of Managers' pedagogical plan. In other words, the plan does not seem to be entirely understood or broadly shared. The lack of a defined theoretical framework, or one that can be defined collectively, seems to be a problem for cooperative work. Working with the threefold approach used by Albero, the ideational dimension, i.e. the guiding values, principles and aims of the system, may not be known or shared by everyone. Similarly, in the development, the "design references" are not sufficiently discussed or even defined according to some of the interviewees.

Concerning the role of the trainers, their freedom in the training activities is subject to the constraints of the design. There are in fact even two sets of constraints – those imposed by trainers based on their "ideals" and that given by the system designers through the "design references" contained within the training system. The differences in the views and by extension the experiences of the people interviewed seem to stem from a difference between the trainers' and designers' "ideational dimension" and the "design references" of the trainers who are called upon to implement the system as constructed.

To use Austin's terms (1970), creating a system is not at all a "performative utterance": it is not enough to simply write or say something (or even to suppose, on a yet more implicit level),

to cause the trainer and learners to do, think, feel or cause emotions. Constructing the training system is a necessary step that lays the framework and describes it so that the trainers and learners may make use of it. Put differently, the "content of the system" which will be defined here as the ability of the system to welcome and symbolically contain emotional and socioaffective dimensions, is only guaranteed on the condition that the system's policy, design and implementation are articulated and made to be "containers" in their turn. The "ideational dimension", the "design references" and "experience" (every figure interprets the situations they experience differently) seem to be quite mixed up here.

The emotional dimension was not explicitly included in development and implementation and can therefore only partially be part of the training system. To make it so, it would be necessary to include individual and group reflection on the subject during the development phase; a debate concerning the implications of the "cognition, conation and emotion" triptych (Barbier & Galatanu, 1998) certainly seems necessary for including them. If these conditions are met, we feel that the emotional and socioaffective dimensions can foster a system that works as "a space for (re)creation and experiential appropriation (as part of) sharing and exchange" (Klein & Brackelaire, 1999, p. 68), or in a word, with intersubjectivity. The aim would be to develop systems that are "places to create and reclaim experiences, bringing about involvement and integration in social life, 'moving towards the social'" (*ibid*). Emotions, previously defined as physical "gestures" for oneself and for others would then be welcomed within the group and could "anchor" transformations in the "body" (physical or symbolic) of the group and the individual.

In the training that the School of Managers proposes, and according to what the participating observer noted, participants express a strong need to be recognised and appreciated by others. Each participant's job may not be appreciated in their own workplace; then in the training their peers accept it with a range of emotions and more or less verbalised expressions.

Hospitality, i.e. how what is foreign or a stranger is welcomed and especially how emotions are welcomed, must be possible and has to have been the subject of prior preparation during the development of the system. This study then encourages a view that includes "hospitality for the stranger", that is to say "the challenge of moving from *hostis* to *hospes*, from the stranger to simply one not known, and from this unknown to a guest" (Cornu, 2008, p. 26). In other words, the issue is finding how to "make room for the other, for their emotions". In order to connect the "ideational" dimension, the "design references" and later the participants "experience", the design step needs to include a more explicit and more broadly shared theoretical framework. Otherwise, as this study shows, the different views that individuals hold, what is left implicit and the gap between designers and trainers leaves a lot of room for subjectivity and reinterpretation of the role that emotions could (or should?) play in manager training.

In terms of practical steps to take, while the ideals are clearly stated in the School of Managers' policy, it is probably necessary to state these ideals more clearly and to make sure that they are shared more generally by the different figures responsible for policy and especially by those responsible for developing training. For that reason it seems necessary to better define the theoretical framework concerning management, managers and emotions (as shown in diagram); this will make it possible to bring the two extremes of the designed axis in the diagram, design and implementation, closer together. Beyond the "vertical" connection between the ideational, functional and experienced dimensions, it seems a "horizontal" adjustment is necessary. For example, the design references for trainers and designers are different and should probably be discussed. This should be beneficial to constructing a system that "contains" and welcomes what is unknown, strangers and the unknown.

In terms of theoretical implications, while this study does not include participants' experiences, further thesis work will examine their experiences and seek to answer the

following research question: what place and what role do emotions hold in the training context in managers' professional development at La Poste? The differences noted between the interviewees, those responsible for developing and implementing the training, seem to result in part from differences in interpretations, too much left unspoken and ideas and theories that are not shared broadly enough. We may well expect the differences between participants' experiences, those of managers following the training course planned specifically for them, to be even greater.

Endnotes

1. By "postal workers", they are referring to everyone working for La Poste, not simply mail carriers.
2. The software Alceste analyses the data as a "possible discourse". It isolates co-occurrences and "lexical 'worlds" that form the basis of the discourse or represent the speaker's "mental environment" (see: http://www.image-zafar.com/en/alceste-software).
3. Words in quotation marks are from the analysis report produced by Alceste.

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