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## The Promises of Communication Training Programs

Through the analysis of the organizations' rhetoric and their educational offers in communication, the first chapter of this book will focus on the ideologization processes at the heart of the efficacy imperative. More specifically, we will examine how the efficacy principle governs the ways in which educational offers in communication are structured, divided, presented and legitimized.

### 1.1. Diversity of structures, diversity of authoritative discourses

Since the implementation of the Lisbon strategy in 2000, followed by the Europe 2020 strategy adopted in 2010, ongoing staff training is considered a major issue in knowledge-based economy within the European Union. It must contribute to economic growth, greater competitiveness accompanied by a quantitative and qualitative improvement in employment and stronger social cohesion<sup>1</sup>.

According to the 2020 Céreq survey (Center for Studies and Research on Qualifications), European firms are increasingly resorting to training: in 2020, 73% of firms in the 28 members of the European Union (EU) organized training programs for at least one member of their staff; they barely amounted to 60% in 2005. In 2020, the highest share of training

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1. Céreq Bref, No. 392, June 2020, p. 1.

companies were settled in Latvia and Norway (99%), and the lowest in Greece (22%). France is at the top of the range (79% of training companies). According to INSEE<sup>2</sup>'s 2022 Training-Employment report, the professional training market in France is dominated by private organizations, which represent approximately 80% of the total turnover (estimated at 15.5 billion euros in 2022). The professional training market in France is a fringe oligopoly: not only is it a highly fragmented market, but it is also a market where the largest turnover is recorded by a small number of actors. France is described as a “monotrainer” country, with professional training programs mainly coming down to short training internships (one to five days), most of which do not lead to any diplomas or certifications

Thus, we face the following paradox: while France comes at the top of EU countries for company expenditure on ongoing staff training and the training rate initiated by firms, it falls at the bottom of the list for the training rate initiated by individuals and leading to a recognized diploma. As a monotrainer, France is caught up not only in a network of practices, but also of actors and institutions, which does little to encourage personal and autonomous initiatives (Fournier 2016, p. 83).

According to the Céreq European survey on professional training conducted in 2020:

Despite the health crisis, three quarters of firms with 10 or more employees trained at least one member of their staff. In contrast, training modalities changed: more firms resorted to self-training, on-the-job training and remote learning, and less to courses or internships. While part of these developments resulted from an adaptation to the sanitary situation, others could be more structural. Despite such transformations, the share of staff trained by means of courses or internships (47%) remained close to its former levels<sup>3</sup>.

While French firms are quite strongly and regularly involved in staff training through the organization of internships, the recourse to other types of training (conferences, seminars, job rotation, on-the-job training) is less

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2. See: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6657644?sommaire=6657784>.

3. Céreq Bref, No. 438–439, May 2023, p. 1.

significant than in other European countries, although training has been on the increase since 2020.

Professional training takes greatly varied forms. In 2016, the Adult Education Survey<sup>4</sup>, conducted by Eurostat in 28 EU countries, distinguished six types of training, divided into three categories: formal, informal and nonformal:

**Formal**

1. Courses and internships followed inside or outside the firm.

**Informal**

2. On-the-job training
3. Training by job rotation
4. Training in a learning circle or project
5. Conferences or seminars

**Nonformal**

6. Self-training

The professional training system in France favors the development of executives from the largest companies and a specific type of format: the internship, and more specifically, internships offered by private training organizations.

Contrary to the usage in educational environments, where an internship is considered as a period of ongoing training in a firm, here the term internship designates the periods during which an employee is absent from the workplace to a follow training program within a group (De Lescure 2017, p. 4).

Philippe Carré, professor at the “Apprenticeship and training” laboratory at Paris X University, explains that the canonical internship model still governs an overwhelming majority of the actions currently seen in adult training. According to him, this educational form is inherited from a historically dated school model whose origins can be traced back to “the transmissive conception” of the high school class and the Ferry laws at the end of the 19th century, or even to the Christian schools of J.B. de La Salle a century earlier (Carré 2016).

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4. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey>.

Among the professional training structures, Precepta Consult, a research and consulting firm belonging to the Xerfi Group, differentiates<sup>5</sup>:

1. “Multi–multi” proposals, standing for multispecialist and multimodal. These organizations are defined by multithematic training offers and by the plurality of intervention modes (internal and external training, e-learning/remote learning). According to the study’s authors, “the strategic priority is to reach a critical national, or even international, size to capture the customers of major accounts”. We may also notice that it is these same organizations which are expanding at a global scale. For example, the two multi–multi organizations that we studied are present in 50 and 7 countries, respectively. In 2022, our largest organization reached a consolidated turnover of 233 million euros, equivalent to 14% growth.

2. “Yield” or multispecialist trainers, such as Orsys, Global Knowledge or Comundi, carry out over 75% of their activity in inter-company training. For the study’s authors, “yield trainers” are the most exposed to the consequences of the economic crisis.

3. The “certifiers” mostly bring together *grandes écoles*. For the study’s authors, their positioning is built upon “excellence” and on more extensive training courses (often leading to certification or diplomas), without neglecting the existence of a varied short training offer, intra- or inter-company.

4. “Training consultants”, such as Krauthammer, Mercuri, IFG Langues or StratX, specialize in intra-company missions, through a remarkable degree of integration of production (salaried trainers), and a high level of expertise in their area of specialty.

5. “E-trainers”, such as Crossknowledge, Auralog, Télélangue, iProgress, Smart Canal or Hyper Office, are e-learning training companies: their business model is different from that of traditional training organizations, notably by the importance of the initial investment and the logic of the economies of scale which governs them.

According to the editors of the 2017 study by the Fédération française de la formation professionnelle (which became Les Acteurs de la Compétence in 2019):

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5. Precepta Consult (2015). Les organismes de formation privés. Stratégies et mutations à l’horizon 2015, 2–4 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.centre-inffo.fr/uhfp/2014/IMG/pdf/9SAE01-2.pdf> [Accessed February 2018].

The division of training into modules, in other words, into homogeneous blocks of knowledge and skills, in which training organizations have been engaged for several years, partly explains why training is becoming shorter and shorter. On the other hand, interns are increasingly shifting towards service and personal development specialties, to the detriment of general disciplines, for which longer training is required. Nevertheless, the number of training hours varies significantly, depending on the audiences and the status of the training providers. In 2013, it amounted to 36 hours for employees, whereas it nearly tripled (109 hours) for job seekers and individuals<sup>6</sup>.

This reduction in internship training time corresponds to a modularization growing trend, breaking down training into small, increasingly targeted blocks of skills. This development is part of a loyalty strategy on the part of training organizations. An offers manager explains this strategy of breaking down knowledge into small modules, something which should make it possible to “enhance customer loyalty”:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Web project manager, for example, or E-commerce manager or Web marketing manager, these are the most comprehensive training courses, providing an overall image of a function, throughout a period of approximately 10 days. Between 8 and 10 days. And then, we have more specific internships, on “how to create a Facebook page”, for example (professional of course), or natural referencing, or advertising on social networks. This involves breaking down the missions of the communications manager and translating them into precise goals. This is what makes us see customers again. These function as incremental training programs, they are enriched. Customers come for priority training, and then they need additional training on a more specific point. For short training sessions, one has to define precise and reachable goals”.

The discourse of this offers manager, whose role is, among other things, to build “products” that best meet the demands of companies and to promote them, clearly shows that modularization is seen as strategic: following a division of skills logic – which deserves to be called into question – it must make it possible to retain “customers”. As we will see in the third chapter, this implies a certain conception of knowledge, considered as autonomous

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6. FFP, Fédération de la Formation Professionnelle (2017). Faire décoller l’investissement dans les compétences. Diagnostics et propositions, October, 32.

building blocks, and the sidelining of more complex and transversal bodies of knowledge, something which fails to fit into this logic of division into operational, tightly targeted goals.

The longest internships (over eight days on average) can be certifying (and in particular, internships which take the title of a profession such as “Communication Manager” or “Community Manager”), but the vast majority of internships offered for employees are brief, non-certifying internships (one to three days). There are two main types of internships, which correspond to two types of relationships between firms and training organizations: intra-company and inter-company internships. The director of a structure specializing in the training of managers and executives in communication (and former marketing director of a magazine publishing conglomerate), offers a rather interesting analogy with the press sector, to differentiate these two types of offers:

**INTERVIEW**.— “I always draw this analogy with the world of the press where I come from: it’s like subscriptions and single-issue sales. When you subscribe, it is much less profitable for a publisher, but you have foresight because of your subscribers: the readers are registered and then they have already paid in advance for X months and services. So, you give them a discount. But single issue sales, if you publish monthly, you don’t know how many copies you are going to sell each month [...]. In terms of cost per unit, intra-company is obviously less interesting, but in terms of volume, it is far more engaging. And then you establish a relationship. For intra-company training, the customer should be able to choose from sufficiently interesting themes, enticing the sufficient number of employees so that they can be grouped in a course, and this cannot be the case for all employee training needs”.

Even if the analogy made by this director is enlightening to ponder the difference between the intra- and inter-company strategies, the inter-company does not entirely fall under the “editorial model”, nor does the intra-company fall under the “club model”, as conceptualized by cultural industries theorists. For Møglin, the club model is based on “the principle of subscriber payment, in exchange for access to a fixed set of programs (unlike the flow model), but without, however, encouraging the appropriation of these programs individually (as in the editorial model)” (Møglin 2010). All things considered, even if intra-company offers greater foresight than inter-company, it does not necessarily amount to a subscription. Even if the implementation of intra-company training programs can enable training

organizations to forge closer links with the firms, the “customer” loyalty issue is transversal, regardless of the type of offer.

Following economies of scale logic, large structures deploy a wide range of inter-company internships, whereas the smaller structures often concentrate on intra-company training programs. According to an offers manager:

**INTERVIEW**.— “The inter-company is a difficult market because you need a base. The entry ticket is high even for the inter-company. You have to reach a lot of firms, you need a lot of space, and logistics behind it too. The offer must be in line with expectations, and this is not easy. This is the reason why there are not so many actors who propose inter-company training in France”.

According to the FFP<sup>7</sup>, 38% of the organizations adhering to the federation offer “Marketing and Communication” training offers, placed in the third position behind “Management” (57%) and “specific occupations” (53%), and ahead of human resources management (29%), IT (28%), finance and management (26%) and languages (25%). Note that it is difficult to know whether under the “Marketing and Communication” category, the FFP includes communication as a transversal skill (and in particular, public speaking offers). In my opinion, the “specific occupations” category (which comes in the second position), is actually a false category since it brings together extremely heterogeneous types of offers.

The educational structures that offer communication training are very different from one another and operate in a highly competitive market. Thus, visibility and credibility stakes are high, the goal being to establish their authority in the market. Research by Oger (2013) on discursive authority provides important heuristic support, because among other things, it makes it possible to differentiate authority from legitimacy (which is a more sociological concept, superbly developed by Bourdieu). Furthermore, it shows that authority does not reside outside of discourse, it is challenged within it. “Storage of force in signs”, “symbolic capital” made of “accumulated credit”, authority cannot exist without authorization: it is relational. For Monte and Oger, “authority should rather be considered as the claim to an increase in credibility, fueled by the social status of the speaker

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7. FFP (2014). Comprendre (enfin!) la formation professionnelle : un enjeu économique, social et sociétal. Report, October, 15.

and/or their institutional position, but which also includes a discursive dimension, as well as a contextual dimension, both closely intertwined” (Monte and Oger 2015, p. 6).

The analysis of authority as understood by Oger invites me to invest in the field of discourse analysis. For Foucault, “discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (Foucault 1971, p. 12). This is why “what we are concerned with here is not to neutralize discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to pierce through its density in order to reach what remains silently anterior to it, but on the contrary to maintain it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity” (Foucault 1969, p. 47).

Even if our aim is not to analyze all the forms of mediatization of professional training organizations, prospectuses seem to be a suitable support to analyze the discursive use of authority, as well as the editorialization and the valorization of offers:

Working on one’s authority is an investment adapted to such an enterprise, in the sense that authority designates both the concealment of power tools and the performance of such power. It is the promise of a capture without its implementation, a result announced without having to manifest an effort. Authority implies recognition, credit, and obedience to an entity recognized as legitimate. The notion of authority excludes the use of violence, constraint and even persuasion. However, despite the myth of natural authority, authority is neither a force nor an argument, but a construction (Marti 2015, p. 15).

Like Marti, my remarks will not focus on “the efficacy of this power”, but on the analysis of “the adoption of authoritative postures to legitimize and give credibility to a discourse and an existence in public life” (Marti 2015, p. 15).

The adoption of authoritative postures in professional communication training involves multiple strategies which correspond, in part, to the great diversity of structures offering this type of training. There are large generalist structures, associative networks, private structures specializing in communication, public *grandes écoles*, private schools, professional journals

which offer training in partnership with specialized structures and a plethora of independent trainers who have their own little structure.

I conducted an analysis of self-presentation discourses (Amossy 2010) in the 2018–2019 prospectuses of eight professional training structures (three multi-specialist, three specialist and two *grandes écoles*). This analysis was later updated by an exploration of the 2023–2024 prospectuses of these same organizations, in order to identify evolving elements.

I chose these organizations following several criteria:

- considering the actors who occupy the largest place in the professional training market and have an international presence (the multi-specialists);

- considering the main actors mentioned as specialists in communication training (not only in the interviews conducted, but also recommended by training brokers, or “rewarded” in rankings such as *Décideurs*<sup>8</sup>), (the specialists);

- considering two *grandes écoles* to determine whether university status had an impact on self-presentation discourses and the content of the training offers.

For this study, I did not include consulting firms which offer training services, because these – only a few in number in the field of communication – are mainly intra-company and are not listed in the prospectuses. Nor did I consider any universities (apart from the *grandes écoles*), because they still have a few short training offers and almost no communication internship offers. Finally, I did not choose any associative networks, because, in addition to the fact that they propose a limited number of offers, they are often integrated into the offers of other organizations by means of partnerships.

This distribution of the corpus of prospectuses makes it possible to distinguish three logics in the construction of authoritative discourses: the logic of training specialists, that of communication specialists and finally, the prestige logic of the *grandes écoles*. These logics are not exclusive and can be combined; they are a way of identifying the main argumentative

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8. The magazine *Les Décideurs* operates according to a survey conducted by managers, who rank training organizations by theme or occupation: <http://www.magazine-decideurs.com>.

strategies implemented with a view to establishing authority in the professional training market in communication.

The “multi–multi”<sup>9</sup> organization logic, as the Precepta firm describes it – training specialists who offer varied products – brings to the fore their position on the professional training market, the plethoric dimension of their offer, their “quality approach”, their expertise in educational engineering and in particular, the deployment of their digital offer. Let us take some examples from the prospectuses to illustrate these different lines of argument.

Activity figures are systematically presented in the first pages of the prospectuses of large training organizations. In a certain way, they constitute proof of the organization’s expertise in training, whether in terms of experience, territorial coverage, number of facilitators, number of trainees or scope of training areas.

In one of the first pages of its 2023 prospectus, entitled “Our key figures”, the multi–multi B organization presents the following information: over 50 years of experience, seven locations worldwide, 150,000 persons trained every year, 1,500 expert speakers.

It is interesting to note that it is the large organizations that most often resort to branding and come up with slogans. These slogans are in English for the largest structures with an international presence, and in French for the medium ones.

Multi–multi A	“ <i>Beyond knowledge</i> ”
Multi–multi B	“ <i>Learning is changing</i> ”
Multi–multi C	“ <i>The art of training</i> ”
Specialist A	“ <i>L’expert médias et communication</i> ”
Specialist B	“ <i>L’excellence à la française</i> ”

**Table 1.1.** Slogans from large training organizations

9. Centre Inffo (2015). Les organismes de formation privés. Stratégies et mutations à l’horizon 2015. Une étude de la collection PRECEPTA Consult [Online]. Available at: [www.centre-inffo.fr/](http://www.centre-inffo.fr/).

The multi–multi slogans focus on questions of learning. According to them, knowledge serves a higher purpose: their slogans, “beyond knowledge” and “learning is changing”, illustrate their claim to turn bodies of knowledge into tools at the service of professional success. Educational expertise is therefore at the heart of their claims. As for the slogans of specialists, these emphasize “excellence” and specific expertise in the field of media and communication.

Expertise in educational engineering and in the deployment of the digital offer is another type of recurring argument among large training organizations. I will return to the discourses which present the “digitalization” of training as an educational panacea later in the book. For example, the 2023 prospectus of the multi–multi B organization lists “the 8 reasons why we systematically integrate digital into our thinking”:

- “1/ To support the transformations of firms;
- 2/ To train more, at a lower cost;
- 3/ To make learning more effective;
- 4/ To improve user experience;
- 5/ To transcend the simple face-to-face internship;
- 6/ To promote Social Learning;
- 7/ To enrich the trainer’s posture;
- 8/ To improve employer brands.”

Further in the book, I will develop this question of the idealized and ideological representations of digital technology in training. For the moment, let us note that different challenges emerge: economic challenges relating to performance and the economies of scale (training more at lower cost), and above all, ideological issues which present digital technology as an educational panacea. *Strategies Formations*, which works in partnership with specialists, also speaks of “augmented face-to-face” to describe its “blended” offer. “To transcend”, “to improve”, “to enrich”... all of these terms clearly show to what extent these discourses participate in what Robert (2017) calls an “*impensé numérique*” (an “unimaginable digital”).

Finally, another way for large training organizations to build their authority is to make the collections of works they have produced visible. The

most representative example is the “*La boîte à outils de...*”, a collection published by Dunod. Most of the time, these works are given to trainees who follow the corresponding training, and are then presented as a “plus”, a “bonus” in the prospectus notices. For example, this is evidenced in the description sheet dedicated to “effective speaking” from the multi–multi A organization. Among the “pluses” listed, they indicate that the book *Les cinq clés de la prise de parole en public*, published by Dunod, will be offered to participants.

These publications enable these organizations to present themselves both as actors in the production of knowledge and as those who know how to respond to the social demand for “practical knowledge”. In the third chapter, I will examine the claims of these writings more closely, when I address the order of “scholarly” discourses in professional training.

The argumentative logic relating to specific expertise in communication is based on other arguments. Communication specialists insist on their “expertise” specific to the field. For example, the line of products of one of the specialists is called “The Communication Expert”. The introduction to the 2018 prospectus from *grande école* B concludes with these words: “(we) are therefore pleased to offer you an expanded range of increasingly expert training courses”. In the introduction to their 2018 prospectus, one of the specialists highlights their ranking in *Décideurs Magazine*:

Beautiful birthday gift for our 25th birthday: *Décideurs Magazine* has just put us back on top of the podium in the Communication category of its annual Guide to the Best Training Organizations in France, with the mention “Indispensable”.

Note that expertise can either apply to communication occupations, or to communication as a transversal skill.

A third discursive strategy, which we mainly identify among the *grandes écoles*, is to build their authority upon the institution’s prestige, which also enables them to propose longer and more expensive internships. The 2023 prospectus from *grande école* A devotes several pages to the institution’s presentation: “since its creation almost 150 years ago, (the institution) has continued to reinvent itself”. It is therefore necessary to reflect the institution’s prestige on its professional training offers, while showing that these tackle different challenges, as the director of professional training

stresses in his introduction: “our goal is to reconcile the institution’s intellectual innovation with the concrete needs of firms and public actors, and their perspectives for change”. This structure is also the only one which offers alumni dedicated to professional training: the Executive Community.

*Grande école* B, whose 2018 prospectus is much shorter, places less emphasis on the institution’s image, which is not presented in its prospectus. On the other hand, it uses authority quotes (Ducrot 1984), the only ones which anchor references within the framework of the human and social sciences. The prospectus is punctuated with quotes by Flaubert and Clémenceau, as well as Barthes and Eco. The quote that introduces the “Digital Communication” line of products: “The universe is a safe of which humanity seeks the combination” is drawn from *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes. The quote that introduces the “Innovative Communication” line of products: “A dream is a scripture, and many scriptures are nothing but dreams” comes from *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco. The link with university research is emphasized in the case of the two *grandes écoles*, as they can present their training as being at a higher level of analysis than the offer proposed by other organizations. For example, the introduction to one of the 2018 prospectuses states:

The digital is a global phenomenon that we approach in a panoramic way, through the prism of the social sciences. Our goal is not to provide preconceived solutions, but to help executives acquire the height and perspective that will allow them to (re)think their practices, their strategy, their environment to make the digital a lever for transformation.

Despite not being named as such, the industrial dimension is praised as an asset enriching the quality of offers proposed by large organizations, whereas on the contrary, it is criticized by others as being a sign of standardization of the offers, and therefore, unsuitable for executives and managers. This is also why those responsible for training at the *grandes écoles* believe that multi–multi structures are not direct competitors for them:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Because they do very industrial things/They are never pioneers, for me they are followers/We do not have the same audiences/We follow different processes. They are great industrial war machines of professional training, their entire economy is based on inter-company training”.

For her part, the manager of the “Corporate Communications” line of products from the multi–multi A organization explains that the *grandes écoles* are not direct competitors, because they target audiences who already have initial training in communication:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Compared to the *grandes écoles*, in the communication occupations, we are generalists, we are operational, we are not academics. I do not expect to compete with the *grandes écoles*. Some of my customers come from firms that have appointed them as Communications Manager or Head of Communications, but who have not studied communications and who need an overview of the tools. They did not receive that in their initial training. For those who have specialized training in the field, there is no need for them to come to me. We will see what an audit is, a communications plan, it is an overview of the tools”.

Even if the structures can be differentiated according to these three logs, they also operate following transversal logics: they emphasize the trust placed in them by their customers, the expertise of their facilitators, the capacity of the structure to offer “tailor-made” solutions, as well as training certification and evaluation.

For Oger (2013), authority is a relational concept, supported by an issue of trust: we delegate authority, we grant authority. Showcasing “trust” is a necessary part of prospectuses: organizations list the main firms they work for. In a certain way, these lists of corporate logos, often displaying messages such as “they confide in us”, allegedly guarantee that the statements are endorsed by the customers (the firms). Besides, the testimonies of trainees in the form of quotes are expected to reflect their satisfaction. The change in enunciation, shifting from the structure’s “we” to the trainee’s “I” stresses the fact that authority is not self-declared, but is conferred. We therefore come upon what Perelman calls “argumentation through fruits” (Tindale 2009).

The expertise of facilitators is also systematically emphasized in the training prospectuses. This is reflected by one of the specialists, who announces in its first pages: “Our facilitators and actors place their expertise and talent at the service of educational messages. With at least 10 years of professional experience and interpersonal skills validated by a 5-member jury, they benefit from permanent skills updating”. Finally, the promotion of a “tailor-made” offer is part of the servuction logic and is there to show the

capacity of the structure to be as close as possible to the needs of its customers.

Prospectus	Off-the-shelf	Architecture of existing contents	Personalization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content developed by experts</li> <li>• Inter-company training programs enabling attendants to leave their familiar surroundings and have exchanges with people from different professional backgrounds</li> <li>• Open-mindedness and sharing differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internships at your place (minimum 5 attendees)</li> <li>• The facilitator will adapt, react to any scenario proposed by your collaborators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content and educational modalities adapted to your goals and limitations</li> <li>• Educational proposals adapted to your habits and your training culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training programs that suit you</li> <li>• Internships enriched with examples and illustrations drawn from the challenges your organization faces and your day-to-day problems</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.1.** *Example of a tailor-made offer (inspired by the organization's prospectus)*

The discourse is often deeply engaged, and the argument focuses on the concept of personalized service. In this case, the term “tailor-made” encompasses both genuinely co-constructed offers and adaptations or customizations of standards (also presented in the aforementioned example as “the architecture of existing contents”). This recycling capacity is made possible thanks to the increasing modularity of “brick-based” training offers, thereby making room for multiple rearrangements.

Diploma courses and certified internships are especially showcased, even though they only represent a small part of the offers presented (between 2 and 9% of the communications offers analyzed). Finally – and this is a growing trend in the field of training – organizations are exposing the partnerships they have established. Actually, small structures are increasingly intervening on behalf of larger ones, or small- or medium-sized structures are proposing joint offers. The partnership is then presented as the implementation of complementarity, with each partner benefiting from increased credibility through the partnership.

Far from merely having the goal of complementing expertise, partnerships enable small- and medium-sized organizations to establish more diversified prospectuses of offers. An oligopoly-fringe model, the training market invites fringe actors to join forces in order to avoid disappearing

altogether. Among other things, partnerships serve to pool “customer portfolios”. This is what the former head of offers at the *grande école* B explains:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Our partner was really the closest competitor and when we met, we realized that we did not have the same customer portfolio at all. Even if it is true that we have a similar offer in terms of prices, conditions, values and themes, their proposal mainly appeals to communication agencies and freelancers, whereas we have more major accounts among our customers. We finally said to ourselves that by coming together, we should be able to strengthen our common visibility”.

For large organizations that mainly promote their partnerships with business schools, such partnerships aim to propose offers leading to diplomas and to highlight the links they could not offer on their own, between initial training and professional training. The introduction to the 2018 prospectus from multi–multi B insists on the partnership the organization has recently established with Brest Business School:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Our alliance with Weidong, as well as the arrival of the Brest Business School into the Group opened up a new path full of promise for international connections. This unique configuration proposes reboosted blended learning, educational approaches adapted to multispecialization, standardized and tailor-made certification programs, synergies between initial and ongoing training or even interactive and dynamic digital learning platforms”. At the end of this introduction, the president of Brest Business School stated: “The complementarity of our two structures creates value. BBS has mastery of certificate and diploma programs, as well as experience in marketing and distribution, not to mention expertise in digital tools”.

The case of an association between multi–multi C and a communications specialist is quite interesting to study, because it involves the optimization of the logics identified. As it is a large training structure and at the same time, has resorted to a branding logic and the association with specialists, it highlights their specific expertise in the field of communication. In its prospectus, we find all the forms of argumentation developed by large organizations (number of trainees, experts, training courses, distance training offers), arguments evoked by specialists in communication (“indispensable”), as well as cross-cutting

arguments relating to trust (“so loyal”) and certifications. The 2023 prospectus also presents “the 9 good reasons” to choose that organization:

- “the most comprehensive offer on the market” (specialist logic);
- “an orientation service that listens to you” (transversal logic, relating to trust);
- “professionals who facilitate learning, and not professional trainers” (specialist logic);
- “designers who are experts in content and pedagogy” (large organization logic);
- “an innovative pedagogy based on practice and the digitalization of the learning experience” (large organization logic);
- “a quality approach (98.2% customer satisfaction)” (large generalist logical);
- “a Corporate Social Responsibility approach” (argument which has not been identified as salient among other structures);
- “an active community” (transversal logic, proposing additional services apart from training such as blogs, breakfasts, forums, etc.);
- “our references” (transversal logic of trust)”.

Thus, organizational strategies (such as the establishment of partnerships, branding) coupled with discursive strategies all contribute to “the adoption of authoritative postures to legitimize and give credibility to a discourse and an existence” (Marti 2015, p. 15) in the highly fragmented and competitive market of professional training, because it is in the sense that “speakers are recognized as allegedly holding certain knowledge, a skill, a position, an experience, a know-how so that at first glance, their discourse can be qualified as authoritative, even if its authority is fragile and contested” (Monte and Oger 2015, p. 9).

## 1.2. Segmentation of communication fields

According to the 2017 study by *Acteurs de la Compétence* (FFP until 2019), training in service-oriented specialties is still the most followed, with 60% of interns and 58% of trainee hours<sup>10</sup>. These training courses cover the multivalent specialties of exchanges, management, communication, and sanitary and social specialties. Regarding access to training for “information and communication” professionals, according to a 2016 Céreq study, “information-communication” comes in the 3rd position, just behind “financial and insurance activities” and “public administration”, with a 52% access rate to training<sup>11</sup>.

Please note that it is difficult to appropriate and comment on the figures above, due to the fact that “communication” can be classified under very different lines of training products. Training in “communication occupations” coexists and sometimes even merges with offers in marketing, management or “digital transformation”. As for training in communication seen as a transversal skill (public speaking, “assertiveness”, written expression), this can either be included under the “communication” products, or the “personal development” or “professional efficacy” products. It is precisely these fluctuations, these porous boundaries between communication and other fields of professional training that I will study, based on my research analyzing offers within the prospectuses:

The productivity of a training organization lies in its ability to modify (management) the training activity in the direction of optimization and adaptation to the needs of potential customers (development). The profitability criteria are quite simple: to adjust training durations to goals, to increase the trainer/trainee ratio, but above all, to maintain the attractiveness of the training courses themselves and awaken customer interest (Santelmann 2004, p. 23).

It is precisely this question on the construction of the attractiveness of offers that I will explore through the analysis of prospectuses. From the outset, this shows that we are in a model of diversified production and a product lining policy, with options adapted to a finely segmented target

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10. FFP, Fédération de la Formation Professionnelle (2017). Faire décoller l’investissement dans les compétences. Diagnostics et propositions, October, 4.

11. Céreq (2016). Employer tax declaration, No. 2483.

(Fichez 1993, p. 111). Although this is a trend in professional training, it is considerably stronger in the context of communication occupations:

In parallel with this expansion of activity, the number of training courses linked to communication, in all its forms, has multiplied, thereby segmenting the field of communication into occupations (by their name). Even if they differ from institution to institution, these training courses reflect a professionalization dynamic of the information and communication sector, all sectors combined (Brulois et al. 2016, p. 5).

The scriptural economy of a training organization prospectus comes down to the notices listing:

The list implies discontinuities and non-continuities. It presupposes a certain material arrangement, a certain spatial layout; it can be read in different directions, laterally and vertically, from top to bottom as well as from left to right, or vice versa; it has a well-marked beginning and end, a limit, an edge, just like a piece of fabric. The most important thing is that it facilitates the organization of articles by their number, their initial or by categories. And these limits, both external and internal, make the categories more visible and at the same time more abstract (Goody 1977, p. 149).

I would add that this list organized into sections also gives the impression of a clear division between the fields, even though they are closely intertwined.

A prospectus cannot be read in extenso, it is consulted, and this consultation is done following the summary which formats the classifications within the list. This summary highlights the categorization and classification operations of training offers into products and sub-products. However, it seems relevant to take a closer look at these operations and examine the consistency criteria according to which the offers relating to communication are named and classified. To do this, I analyzed the 2017–2018 and 2023–2024 prospectuses from eight organizations, and I retained the products and sub-products relating to communication as a transversal skill and those offering training for communicators (by examining the “public” box in the prospectus). According to this analysis, the constructions of products and sub-products depend on the positions of organizations – for example, the *grande école* B

mainly develops training for communicators, whereas one of the specialists exclusively develops communication training for all executives. But it also reveals fairly mobile, even indistinct, boundaries between communication and marketing, and between communication and personal development (or “professional efficacy”).

Offers relating to communication occupations are often included under broader products such as “marketing and communication”, or “marketing and corporate communication”. Communication would then be a sub-product of this category, but in power relations, after all, it is marketing that takes the upper hand. As a matter of fact, the texts presenting the products mainly use terms associated with the practice of marketing.

The text from the 2023 prospectus by the multi–multi B organization which introduces the “Marketing-Corporate Communication” product clearly shows the influence of marketing on communication:

“At present, no purchasing decision is made without prior consultation of customer reviews, ratings and social recommendations which influence us more than branding itself. The rapid development of numerous social networks such as Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest and instant messaging services such as Snapchat or Whatsapp have transformed the brand-consumer relationship. Consumer actors have taken power! To regain trust, brands must be interesting rather than self-serving. From being transactional and one-off, marketing is becoming relational. The current trend is to invest less in traditional, product-focused advertising and more in customer-focused branded content. A brand is interesting because it brings expertise and knowledge to its customers. Not only is its content ludic and entertaining, but also useful and practical. So rethink your marketing strategy in 2018: no more distributing the same content along several supports and different media... Dare to develop your new, original and renewed content over time and thus become your own media!”

**Box 1.1. “Marketing – Corporate Communication”**  
(2023 multi–multi B organization prospectus)

Although it introduces the “Marketing – Corporate Communication” product, this text speaks of rethinking marketing, and not communication. Communication can appear as a marketing instrument, as a declension of the strategy (designed by marketing) into communication “tools”. Even when the “Communication” and “Marketing” products are distinct, shifts between these two professional fields are still quite frequent. For example, in 2018,

the “Communication” product from *grande école* A, included an offer entitled “Strategy brand and the customers: learning from luxury customers”, whereas it could have been proposed under the “Marketing” product. It is also interesting to point out that for another organization, the “Media and advertising” sub-product is found in the “Communication” line of products, instead of the “Marketing” one. Several 2023–2024 offers are also aimed indiscriminately at marketing professionals. In the “Communication” line of products of multi–multi organizations, this is evidenced by the following training programs: “Responsible marketing and communication”, “Evaluating the effectiveness of your marketing and communication actions” or “Evaluating marketing and communication actions: choosing and monitoring your performance indicators”.

The products entitled “Digital Transformation” or “Digital Marketing and Communication” are those for which the lack of differentiation (or rather, the relative placing of communication under the control of marketing) becomes the strongest. In concrete terms, the importance given to the digital in training offers in communication has significantly evolved. Throughout the period studied (2019–2024), this is evidenced by the inflation in the number of generic training courses (+ 14.5%) such as “Finding success in digital communication”, “Evaluating digital communication”, “Digital strategic communication and planning”, or the number of training offers relating to social networks (+ 17%), such as: “Optimizing the performance of social media strategies”, “Managing the e-reputation of a firm”, “Social networks: understanding and mastering Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Viadeo”. Finally, over the last two years – and we will return to this – training courses dedicated to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in communication have emerged. Take, for example, “Artificial Intelligence at the service of communication occupations”, “Producing content thanks to Artificial Intelligence tools”, “3 hours flat to raise awareness on Artificial Intelligence”. The text at the beginning of the presentation of the three hour flat offer is as follows:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its applications, such as conversational robots (ChatGPT), is a splendid source of innovation and creativity. This training will allow you to discover the principles of Artificial Intelligence and to implement use cases in your professional environment.

It is interesting to see that technology itself is perceived as a source of creativity. At the same time, this “creativity” is directly associated with the

promise of efficacy, as evidenced by one of the goals of the training offer “Artificial Intelligence at the service of communication occupations”: “to devise effective prompts to generate text and images”.

Thus, the growing importance of questions relating to the “digital” seems to have reinforced a form of primacy of marketing over communication. According to the product manager of the multi–multi A organization:

**INTERVIEW.**– “The digital has astoundingly addressed marketing themes. Then, this raises the question of the future of communication and of communication services in firms which are increasingly shaken up by the digital. And we can clearly see that the Web and social networks tend to reshuffle and redistribute the cards. This is not obvious. Distinctions are not so neat between customer relations, marketing and communication. In business services, it’s not that clear either. I think that now there is real porosity between these different services, plus the IT management. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to see organizations where marketing and IT management merge. There is a real change. So how do we continue to differentiate Corporate communication from the rest? What is it that remains specific to Communication, Customer Relations and Marketing? The boundaries are truly uncertain”.

In their study of the links between marketing and communication in the Information and Communication departments of the University Institutes of Technology (IUT), the two researchers in organizational communication, de La Broise and Morillon, highlight what they call their “dangerous liaisons”:

Search marketing, e-advertising, direct e-marketing, e-participation... Should we see in this lexicon a radical transformation of the communication function? Indeed, new professional figures incorporating English expressions (community manager, digital planner, social media expert) today carry the technological promises of digital communication. However, it is still difficult to discern among these emerging occupations their explicit connection to a particular function or to a homogeneous professional group (de La Broise and Morillon 2014, p. 166).

In organizations, the adjustment (or entanglement) of two related functions makes it difficult to discern between what

(both internally and externally) falls under the scope of communication or marketing, whether in firms or in public service organizations. While not unfounded, this confusion is undoubtedly explained by the expansion of management [...]. Few are the organizations or institutions which currently seem to resist managerial rationality (de La Broise and Morillon 2014, p. 176).

The question of the extension of “managerial rationality” will be key to the rest of the discussion, where I address the relationships between modelization, mastery and the quest for certainty, and describe the quantitative shift at work in the injunction to evaluate communication.

With communication being considered as a “transversal” skill, back in 2018, the offers were included under the “personal development” or “personal effectiveness” products. Between 2018 and 2023, new product categories appeared to bring these offers together. In particular, let us mention the “Professional efficacy” products, which replaced the “Personal efficacy” offer at two multi–multi organizations, and the “Human engineering and soft skills” offer, which appeared in the listings of *grande école A*.

Just like time or stress, communication has to be “managed”, or even “optimized”, to render any type of professional more effective in any type of situation. Later, I will show that neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is often used in public speaking training, and to a larger extent, we find numerous modelizations used in neuroscience. I will also address the question of professional efficacy being heavily imbued with behaviorist conceptions, which stem from certain social psychology trends reflecting instrumental conceptions of communication.

While during the first years at the information and communication university departments, training in journalism often involves the same initial training as communication (the “information and communication” degrees), the relationships between the “Journalism” and “Communication” products in professional training seem better demarcated than those between communication and the aforementioned areas. Although three of the organizations studied (one specialist and two *grandes écoles*) offer products relating to journalism, their offers contain almost no communication terms. Even if they contain the term “media”, media training offers are clearly identified under the “Oral communication” or “Professional efficacy”

products, because they are not aimed at journalists, but at those having to intervene in the media.

Finally, communication also has links with graphic design. In that sense, large organizations offer products relating to “Graphic Communication” which mainly include software training offers, such as desktop publishing (DTP). In global terms, all of the offers clearly show the extent to which communication is associated with the mastery of instruments (not only of software or “social networks”), but also management techniques (such as “design thinking” or “creative thinking”). For Grignon, who works on communication expertise within agencies:

Communication occupations continue to diversify and recompose themselves, in a context characterized by a spectacular technicization of activities. In the professional spheres of public relations, such as in those of marketing and advertising, expertise engages increasingly equipped practices, connected by heterogeneous devices. In particular, Internet tracking software (monitoring tools, analytics, maps, etc.) has gradually established itself as an essential aid for communicators. Although they generally seem to be perceived as simple measuring instruments, these media accompany the redefinition of professions and contribute to the progressive institutionalization of bodies of knowledge, reading skills and know-how (Grignon 2016, p. 24).

The *grande école* B, which targets communication professionals, segments its communication offers more finely. It proposes a segmentation comprising the “fundamentals”, intended for all communication professionals on communication challenges (“strategic communication”, “innovative communication”), as well as different activity sectors, such as the “Territorial Communication” product (in partnership with Cap’Com), a type of offer which is not sufficiently well represented among other organizations.

The listing testifies to this role of writing which “exteriorizes, crystallizes and accentuates the discontinuity, by conferring a spatial and visual dimension which allows it to be subjected to possible rearrangements” (Goody 1977, p. 186). The construction of lines of products into lists appears both as a differentiating trait (“public expression” in one of the structures, “managerial communication” in another, “territorial communication” in yet

another), and as a homogenization of classifications, something which deserves to be called into question, due to the notoriously porous boundaries between marketing and communication, or between communication and personal development.

Organizations also differ, quite relatively, on the basis of the length and prices of the training offered. Even if we can observe some remarkable differences, there is also a sort of standardization of prices, but especially of training temporalities. As we will see in the chapter devoted to temporality, training organizations that used to propose longer offers tend to reduce the duration of their training and align themselves with the shorter temporalities of larger organizations.

The indexing of the training offers (488 in 2019, 519 in 2023) proposed by the eight selected training organizations enables us to see both homogenization and differentiation elements.

Regarding the differentiation elements, we observe – and this corroborates the analysis of the institutional rhetoric – that large organizations offer more “mixed” (“blended”) training programs, and 100% remote learning. Two of the multi–multi organizations studied differ on this point. Since 2020 (the year corresponding to the lockdown), multi–multi B has been offering two options for all its internships: one in person, the other as a “virtual class”, carried out in a synchronous time (the same duration as the in-person training courses) and different from e-learning modules, which represented 14 out of 96 training offers, in 2023. In fact, e-learning modules are largely carried out on our own, asynchronously with one or more video conferences with a trainer (alone for the “coaching” modality, or in small groups). Also note that even if organization B proposes all of its communication offers both in person and in a virtual classroom, this does not mean that all the internships actually take place in a virtual classroom. For this, it is necessary to grant a minimum number of students enrolled for a session (the threshold generally being eight interns). In 2023, the multi–multi A organization proposed 87 training offers in communication occupations and in communication as a transversal skill. Out of these 87 offers, only eight were 100% remote. On the other hand, 72% of the proposals indicated that they offered “remote activities” in addition to the in-person internship. As we will see later, these “remote activities” are sometimes reduced to the (optional) consultation of online teaching aids before the internship. Synchronous training (in person or in a virtual classroom) therefore remains the main modality – this being notably significant in training offers

in communication as a transversal skill (where the interpersonal dimension is particularly emphasized).

Differentiation also takes place in relation to the economy of variety. Specialists B and C, who present themselves as experts in communication occupations, are fully part of a great diversification of offers (respectively 60 and 88 training offers in communication occupations). As for the prices, even if we can notice that the offers from *grandes écoles* and specialized structures for communication training are more expensive than those from other organizations, a communication training program costs a median price of 1,483 euros, and a training program for communication occupations 1,812 euros. It is also interesting to point out that while the organization Precepta classifies universities and *grandes écoles* under the “certifiers” category, the analysis of their communication offers actually reveals that they do not offer more certifications than other organizations. Even if in their institutional rhetoric organizations emphasize their capacity to certify training, certification remains truly marginal in the offers studied.

Whether it is considered as a transversal skill for everyone or as an area of expertise for communicators, communication is listed under different product titles, and most importantly, maintains close or even ambivalent relationships with several other training areas. This makes it possible to begin to bring out the instrumental conception of communication that structures professional training (whether to sell oral or written communication “techniques”, or to promise mastery of communication tools at the service of a marketing strategy). The analysis of the titles of the training courses will allow me to delve deeper into this question and unveil the close links which are established between the instrumental conception of communication and the efficacy imperative.

### **1.3. Mediation and the performative ideal: the promises of guaranteed learning**

How does a transitive conception of mediation join an ideal of learning performativity? After examining how this conception of mediation is deployed in professional training, I will analyze what I call a “mediagenic” conception of mediation.

In this book, mediation will be understood in the sense proposed by Jeanneret, as a “productive and creative activity which intervenes in the

course of communication, by bringing in a new dimension” (Jeanneret 2014, p. 13). The concept of mediation is so important in Jeanneret’s reflection on triviality because it is mediations that produce the social circulation of objects and their transformation at the whim of practices. In a broader sense, for the author, this way of understanding mediation involves a certain way of apprehending culture. This posture is properly summed up in the introductory remark to *Penser la trivialité*:

Everything is transformed, nothing is transmitted from one man to another, from one group to another, without being elaborated, without metamorphosing and without generating something new. If we take stock of this phenomenon, we are led to adopt a certain view of culture and to have certain requirements for its analysis (Jeanneret 2008, p. 13).

So, under what conditions can this type of analysis be deployed?

Davallon explains how the analysis of mediations enables us to grasp the complexity of communication phenomena:

The first finding is that the notion of mediation appears every time there is a need to describe an action involving the transformation of a situation or communicational device, rather than a simple interaction between already constituted elements, and even less, a circulation of an element from one pole to another. I will argue that there is recourse to mediation when there is a defect or inadequacy in the usual conceptions of communication: communication as a transfer of information and communication as an interaction between two social subjects. With this recourse, the action’s origin shifts from the sender actant or interactants to a third party: there is communication through the operation of a third party. The essential question therefore points to the nature of this third party (Davallon 2004, p. 51).

Thinking about mediation means taking into account the fact that communication processes are not linear but discontinuous. These discontinuities are not considered as simple accidents along the way; taking them into account enables the shift from a recurrence-inventorying posture to a dynamic understanding transformations.

This book will specifically focus on knowledge mediation. Hence, the adoption of this conception of mediation invites us to think about what we mean by “bodies of knowledge”. As I pointed out in the introduction, bodies of knowledge will not be considered as fixed categories or as contents which could be decontextualized from the communication situations to which they are applied in this book. According to Maury and Kovacs, coordinators of an issue on the anthropology of bodies of knowledge in Information and Communication Sciences for the journal *Études de communication*:

Far from being a process of contents reproduction, propagation or transmission, the sharing of values and knowledge implies a transformation, a reconfiguration of meanings, diverse and multiple appropriations. Because it is the man, the group, the culture which are at the heart of this process. One of the challenges of Information and Communication Sciences (ICS) is the characterization of the forms of knowledge that emerge and are activated, in human interaction, social practice, the use of techniques and intellectual artifacts (Maury and Kovacs 2014, p. 15).

Based on the book by the Norwegian anthropologist Barth (1969), they insist on the fact that this approach implies not categorizing bodies of knowledge a priori, but understanding them as a relationship modality rather than an inventory modality, and considering the place of the researcher in the observation of knowledge mediation forms (which brings us back to the question of reflexivity).

This joins the perspective, developed by Jacob, in History. In his introduction to *Lieux de savoirs* (Volume 1), he defines bodies of knowledge as “the objects and results of pragmatics which validate and instrumentalize them, disseminate and transmit them” (Jacob 2007, p. 13). In an interview with Müller for the journal *Genèses*, he explains the posture that has governed this vast multi-volume transversal project<sup>12</sup>, articulating theoretical perspectives and empirical studies in diverse spaces and temporalities so as to grasp the modalities according to which knowledge constitutes “bodies”

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12. After *Lieux de savoir. Espaces et communautés*, published in 2007, Jacob directed Volume 2, *Mains de l'intellect*, in 2011, and a third volume should be published in the future.

and a “place” is shared in collectives and circulates across territories. For the historian, bodies of knowledge are defined by their pragmatics:

For a group set in space and time, these are statements, concepts, ways of doing things that have a particular efficacy and authority, thereby giving meaning to the visible or the invisible world, organizing the perception of time and space, acting on the living or the inert (Müller 2009, p. 118).

For Jacob, what turns these statements into bodies of knowledge is not a particular intrinsic characteristic:

[...] it is a consensus on their efficacy and their authority within a more or less extensive group of actors, from the specialized community to an entire society. This consensus is a cultural variable, which can be based on regimes of truth with a more localized or universal scope. The text *Lieux de savoir* is characterized by an approach which can generally be described as “constructivist”, since bodies of knowledge are envisioned as the object and the result of operations, processes and negotiations (Jacob in Müller (2009, p. 118)).

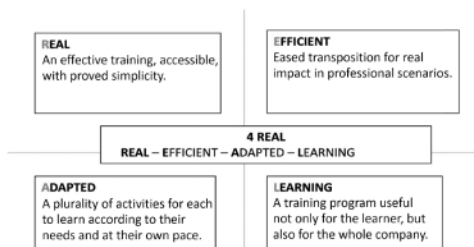
Apprehending mediation as an operator of transformations also leads to understanding bodies of knowledge in a certain way, not as a fixed standard but involving a plurality of statutes, of preparation and circulation modalities.

But this mode of understanding mediation is not the only one. Mediation is a “nomadic” concept (Darbellay 2012) which takes on different meanings and involves different challenges, depending on disciplines and research postures. It is, for example, used in theology to convey that the believer can only communicate with God through intermediaries (priests, angels, prophets, etc.). *Mediare* means being in the middle. Mediation has also been theorized by the sociologists of innovation. Calan and Latour (Latour 1990) primarily consider it as a chain or network of action logics: the chain produces tradition and the network, innovation. In educational sciences, many researchers set the reflection on mediation within the framework of “the Winnicottian hypothesis of transitional space. The activity implemented by an educator, the time and space dedicated to making contact, to the relationship” (Audebrand and Matuszak 2008). Depending on the theoretical framework, emphasis is placed on the actors of mediation, semiotic forms, spatio-temporal landmarks, etc. But another difference is structuring and

concerns the intention behind the use of the concept of mediation: to understand phenomena or to evaluate the “effects” of mediation, so as to better frame them.

This distinction between mediation as a concept and mediation as a category for evaluating the efficacy of systems is not only at work in research on education and training, but as Le Marec shows, is also significant in research on cultural institutions. It seems to be a structuring factor when we are working on knowledge mediation. In his article, Le Marec (2006, pp. 9–18) explains that studies on popularization and media functioning are crossed by two antagonistic communication models: the former from the perspective of improving practices, and the latter, preconizing the critical analysis of practices to understand the complexity of social phenomena. This optimization perspective often encompasses an instrumental and linear conception of communication.

“Learn, Apply, Perform” is a slogan promoted by the multi–multi A organization, and clearly embodies a transitive conception of mediation and an underlying performativity ideal. The promise of efficacy through training is made possible by the adoption of a certain conception of mediation, here presented as a guarantor of learning success. The three stages (learn, apply, perform) are deployed in a *continuum*, making it possible to transform the knowledge provided during training into operators of professional efficacy. On a similar note, in the CSP prospectus, we can read the following statement: “Given the fact that success cannot be improvised, our methods are systematic”; the guarantee of success is therefore correlated with the method’s mechanics. In its prospectus, this company presents its training engineering method under the label “4 REAL”.



**Figure 1.2.** “4 REAL” training engineering method (figure inspired by the prospectus of the multi–multi A organization) For a color version of this figure, see [www.iste.co.uk/seurrat/mediation.zip](http://www.iste.co.uk/seurrat/mediation.zip)

The terms used for describing this method, which is a trademark registered by this organization, perfectly illustrate the transitive conception of mediation associated with a performative ideal, with a view to guaranteeing the success of training. “*Real*” is part of the promise to adjust training to public expectations, “*Efficient*” crystallizes the idea of the transfer which enables performance, “*Adapted*” emphasizes personalization, while “*Learning*” highlights the spread of mediation “effects” throughout the whole firm. The figures there are presented as proof of the method’s validity. Now, as we will see in Chapter 5, the evaluation of formative “effects” is precisely a point which poses particular difficulty, as there is a shift from the evaluation of “results” to the evaluation of satisfaction. In order to make training attractive, educational mediation is presented recurrently under the “pluses” or “pedagogy” sections of the 488 training prospectuses studied as “active”, “participative”, “interactive”. Furthermore, training is often referred to as “action-training”. Incorporating the term “action” seems to convey the idea of “classic” training as something more passive, action being the best way to attain the expected results.

The implementation of the rhetoric of the guaranteed efficacy of knowledge mediation in training seems to be linked to a certain conception of mediation which I describe as “mediagenic”. I borrow the notion of mediageny from Marion, not as a descriptive category of media phenomena, but as a way that could be described as mediological, of thinking about the perfect adequacy between a promise, its implications and its realization:

Mediageny is [...] the evaluation of an “amplitude”: the reaction manifesting the more or less successful fusion of a narrative with its mediatization, and this in the context – itself also interactive – of the expectation horizons of a given kind. Thus, evaluating the mediageny of a story means attempting to observe and grasp the dynamics of interfertilization (Marion 1997, p. 83).

In this notion of mediageny, there seems to be an underlying conception of the efficacy of media devices which assumes that some (media) forms are more appropriate than others to deploy certain narratives. In another article, Marion (2003) takes the example of the controversy described as especially mediagenic in the written press and which would find a place for “mediagenic redeployment” on the Internet. In my view, this

notion of mediageny is interesting not for evaluating the extent of success, but for qualifying a mediological conception of mediation which suggests that such and such form of mediation is especially conducive to guaranteeing operativeness.

In the first part of *Penser la trivialité*, Jeanneret proposes to examine three particularly telling conceptions of the circulation of ideas: their propagation and links with Tarde's social philosophy; their transmission, the guiding principle of Debray's mediological enterprise; and their reproduction, anchored in a semiotics pegged with linguistics. Jeanneret explains that the question of transmission is key to Debray's approach, because he sees it as a specifically important place for the deployment of power. For Debray, the question of the means and techniques is central in understanding transmission phenomena. Unlike the elementary philosophy of Tarde, which neglects forms and envisages a propagation of disembodied ideas, the mediological approach places the *medium* at the heart of its concerns. Jeanneret differentiates mediology as a theory from the series of mediographies exposed in the *Cahiers de médiologie*: "for me there is a mediology, which is a philosophy of the forms of transmission, and a mediography, which is an editorial enterprise bringing together a number of concrete analyses relating to different objects which can structure this transmission" (Jeanneret 2008, p. 37). Even if he insists on the importance of taking into account concrete forms of communication – an importance that the mediological project has particularly emphasized – Jeanneret shows that the conception of transmission expressed by this theory nonetheless raises numerous questions. For the author, what matters most is the elasticity of the notion of transmission itself. As such, the history of the term "transmission" is closely linked to the engineering of technical devices.

This primacy of the technical dimension explains the fact that men have often used the metaphor of the vector to think about communication: this can be summarized by the "telegraph model".

The bias towards a radically materialist point of view on culture results in an effort to deliberately reduce the world of speculation to that of operational devices. [...] In mediology we observe a constant shift from the formulation of messages to the transmission of objects, then from the transmission of objects to the transport of people: in short, from "mass media" to "means of communication" (Jeanneret 2008, p. 39).

I thus propose a shift from mediageny as a category for analyzing phenomena to mediageny as a mode of qualifying the mediological conceptions of mediation. It is then appropriate to further examine which forms of mediation in professional training crystallize these transitive and performative conceptions of knowledge mediation. In other words, how are these promises actualized through the implications of communication?

For Jeanneret,

the promise and the implication respond to one another. The promise comes down to making a definition of the act of communication and its aim public; the implication creates an object-discourse device which embodies such a claim and most importantly, summons the subjects of communication in a posture, a situation, a context of expression (Jeanneret 2014, p. 66).

The mediagenic conception advances whenever the implication of communication guarantees the success of the promise. In this context, training engineering is presented as the keystone of guaranteed success.

In the field of training, Fichez considers that articulating the question of mediation with that of industrialization makes it possible to understand “the way in which educational situations are affected by industrial trends” (Fichez 1998, p. 192). This, of course, raises the question of the use of tools and media in training, and to a larger extent, the place of training engineering in training structures. On this point, configurations are particularly varied. We can distinguish three types of relationships between industrialization and mediation in training organizations: educational engineering supported by the structures; educational engineering co-constructed between the structure and the facilitators; and finally, educational engineering, which could be described as artisanal and left to the responsibility of the facilitator.

On the basis of what they call “facilitation guides”, large organizations, as well as some of the specialists, produce the “educational procedures” which prescribe the contents and mediation methods that facilitators will then have to follow. The production of these “facilitation guides” is structured around certain conceptions of mediation. An offers manager explains that their company owns its educational contents and that producing the “procedures”

using common methods helps to promote a “quality process”. According to them:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Above all, it is a quality process that sets us apart from many competitors. It is a quality assurance for customers, for whom our firm constitutes a reference. They undoubtedly know that if they send a trainee at two different periods, the contents delivered will be identical, and there will be an identical quality level. We have very high quality standards, something which keeps customers coming back”.

This question of “quality” is particularly interesting to explore in order to understand the complex links between industrialization and mediation. Indeed, for the organizations that rationalize training development processes the most, this contributes to making products comparable following the same quality standard. This evidences the link between standardization and industrialization, where the organization of production aims to limit the differences between the standard and the different products as much as possible. However, it is not possible to compare this with the production of standardized and homogeneous products typical of the Taylorist model (Mœglin 1998, pp. 8–9). As I have been able to observe, large training structures are based on an economy of variety (Coriat and Weinstein 1995). The idea is to reconcile the compliance project with a “quality” standard and product variety. Hence, this involves thinking of recurring forms of mediation disconnected from specific training contents. A training manager of facilitators in a multi–multi structure explains their goals:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Training other facilitators is crucial because we have an increasing number of external customers. Different facilitators have to share the same practices so that the customer can identify that it is a specific form of training (Name of the structure), with the quality that accompanies it”.

For each training program, a “facilitation guide” is developed and presented by the manager as a minutely detailed scenario, timed with all the educational tools, theory, examples, cases, exercises, etc. The trainer is expected to follow this framework to “facilitate” the training. Even if this strongly frames the trainer’s practice, they do not necessarily become an automaton. As a trainer from one of the specialized structures points out:

**INTERVIEW.**– “The training is extremely well structured in advance by the educational procedure. You will do this exercise, go through this step, debrief at this time, etc. Afterwards, it is up to the trainer to own the discussions surrounding the exercise. Although there is a discourse, a framework, everyone makes it their own. And then, as we are all human beings, everyone deviates from it more or less in their own way”.

The design of the facilitation guides is strongly oriented by the goal of “seducing” the training audience: this involves varying the teaching methods as much as possible, punctuating the training times in order to elicit and maintain the interest of the trained audiences. This illustrates the link with the question of anticipating public expectations at work in effective rhetoric. For example, one of the multi–multi A organizations has formalized the start-up stage of training, considered a key stage, which they call “taking off”. For a training manager of facilitators:

**INTERVIEW.**– “The take-off is based on the principle that the first minute must involve learning. When we finish the presentation round, it is over. We start action straight away, with an exercise. And at the same time, the exercise’s pedagogy includes the goal of trainees getting to know themselves, understanding their training objectives, etc. We can no longer afford to go around the table with the collection of expectations. Our training courses are becoming increasingly shorter and our customer wants learning to take place from the beginning. [...] Our time to train is therefore shorter and shorter, we must be more and more effective. In the evaluations, we no longer want to read verbatim statements such as “we spent the whole morning introducing ourselves”, no more of that! We need very precise, highly structured educational goals. So, we created the take-off, and the same happens during the closing session, that is our way of saying goodbye”.

In this quote, the link between the forms of mediation rationalization, the shortening of training times and the imperative for educational efficacy is really striking. On another note, for training structures which do not offer pre-constructed training frameworks, this contributes to offering more “low-end” training. For example, for the former head of short training programs at the *grande école* B, multi–multi organizations are not their direct competitors:

**INTERVIEW.**– “Since they propose very industrial things, things end up being pretty much like a communications pie. To begin with, they are

never pioneers or supporters of research, to me they are followers [...]. I know that they propose inter-company communication, but we are not aiming for the same targets”.

This position is consistent with the criticisms formulated against the industrialization of training analyzed in the book *Industrialiser la formation, anthologie commentée*. The chapter on the time of criticism<sup>13</sup> (Mœglin 2016) highlights the fact that quite quickly, industrialist thinking in education will come up against its detractors. But these critiques are far from homogeneous and also fit into quite different ideologies. Two extracts (Innis, Piveteau) are analyzed therein. The chapter illuminates major types of critics: the traditionalists and the revolutionaries. The commentary on the text by Innis (Tremblay and Paquelin 2016) – Canadian economist and historian from the beginning of the 20th century and pioneer in the development of communication studies – clearly highlights the different arguments his criticism is based upon: the mechanization and standardization of educational practices and contents would result in a race to the bottom in favor of commercial logics. For its part, the commentary on the text by Piveteau (Mœglin and Petit 2016) explains how this author adapted Innis’ criticisms to the French context. As the authors of the anthology point out, its criticism, based on an ideal of democratization of knowledge, is nonetheless based on a certain amalgamation between organizational industrialization and the industrialization of learning. That chapter clearly shows that, even if these critical discourses must be contextualized, the values and forms of argumentation engaged are still at work in contemporary discourses.

In no way is the industrialization of mediation self-evident, as reflected by the plurality of methods of educational engineering. For example, the managers from *grande école* A stress the fact that there is no “rule”, that training courses can be developed by the facilitators themselves (who share their opinion on the framework), or co-constructed with the intervenors. As I pointed out earlier, since it is often customary to invite both a facilitator and “experts” to the offers from *grande école* A, the product managers are responsible for ensuring consistency and the articulation of the different intervenors’ discourses. *Grande école* A is thus situated between the fairly industrial mediation model by large structures and the more artisanal model, whereas *grande école* B is not engaged in the construction of training

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13. Chapter whose extracts are commented on by Gaëtan Tremblay, Didier Paquelin, Pierre Mœglin and Laurent Petit.

procedures for inter-company internships. It is different, however, for “tailor-made” offers, for which the structure responds to calls for tender and co-produces educational content and methods with the facilitators to address an order.

This shows that the industrialization of mediation has a variable geometry, depending on the structures and the types of offers (inter- or intra-company). Another aspect for thinking about the relationships between industrialization and mediation concerns the use of tools and media in professional training. Fichez (2000) draws a distinction between the notion of industrialization “in” training (namely the use of tools borrowed from the communication industries for educational purposes) and the industrialization “of” training, which encompasses a more radical transformation process in the way training operates. In this context, the use of digital technologies crystallizes questions about the industrialization *in* and *of* training, letting us see how a conception of media as an instrument for optimizing mediation is at work.

#### **1.4. Instrumented mediation: the digital seen as an educational panacea**

In the discourse on professional training, the “digital” is presented as a means which holds, in itself, the power to amplify the scope of mediation, personalize it, produce motivation and guarantee performative efficacy. The “digital” is presented as the optimal “instrument” for achieving promises, and the most effective “means” for multiplying formative “effects”.

First of all, let us emphasize that it is the term “digital” and not the term “*numérique*” that is used in professional training discourses:

The French language stands out as being, it seems, the only one to use the Latin root *numerus* (“number”), whereas other languages, even Latin (Spanish, Italian or Portuguese), use, like German, English, Dutch and most European languages, another Latin root, *digitus* (“finger” – it is with the fingers that we count numbers) (Moatti 2012, p. 134).

Originally, the adjective *numérique* is drawn from the technical vocabulary. It designates a mode of automated signal processing. For the researcher, to use the term “*numérique*” as a noun is an abuse of language:

*Le numérique* in its noun form, almost personified, invades everything. The concept is so invasive that it leads us to forget what it relates to (photographic image, musical recording, information processing, etc.): everything converges in *le numérique* (digital technology). The adjective *numérique* abolishes the noun it is supposed to qualify: a shortcut symbol of a hurried world which forgets the noun form, even represses it, to more quickly designate the digital fact (*le fait du numérique*), regardless of the medium (Moatti 2012, p. 135).

Thus, “the portmanteau term *numérique* ends up being used *ad nauseam* to convey the immaterial, to the detriment of the immense underlying material and software base” (Moatti 2012, p. 136). Without going into detail about the controversies over the use of these terms, I will say, based on the reflections of Robert, that “the digital” and its variations such as “digitalization” further reinforce the naturalization phenomena pointed out by Moatti. By highlighting the idea of use in the term *le doigt* (“the finger”), the “digital” makes us forget about the material dimension of digital media, which contributes to establishing “*l’impensé numérique*” (the “unimaginable digital”) (Robert 2014).

There are many advocates of the “digitalization” of training, and in this sector we find a certain number of consulting/supporting offers for the “digitalization” of training organizations. What motivates this type of structure is not only to offer consulting services to the training organization, but also to bring together the actors of training, and establish expertise in the field. The *Acteurs de la Compétence* (FFP until 2019) are also highly involved in this subject. They set up a project as part of the *Programme d’investissements d’avenir* (PIA), entitled “*La formation digitale au service de l’employabilité et de la compétitivité*”. This project, with a budget of 2.55 million euros and deployed since January 2018, aims to “support the digitalization of companies in the sector in order to measure the digital maturity of training companies and to offer support in the transformation of their practices<sup>14</sup>”.

All these actors insist on the fact that “digitalization” does not imply the end of face-to-face practices, but rather an enhancement of face-to-face/digital complementarity. According to the *Acteurs de la Compétence* (FFP until 2019):

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14. See: <https://lesacteursdelacompetence.fr/>.

The market is actually moving towards a complementary integration of digital solutions, also offered by new entrants in the sector, with the educational expertise from professional training actors. Training thus becomes “multi-modal” and is based on “blended learning”, which combines face-to-face and the digital. This makes it possible to adapt the training courses to each profile, their expectations, needs and constraints. The offer of blended learning tailor-made devices is a key to developing effective training<sup>15</sup>.

The quote above clearly crystallizes the ideal of educational efficacy supported by the growing use of digital devices in professional training. Although blended learning is presented as a mixture, almost as a “perfect method”, the modalities of such a mixture do not seem to be self-evident. Hoping to distance themselves from this fashionable term, some researchers prefer to use the term “hybrid”, “because it refers to the creation of a new entity whose major characteristics are the presence-distance articulation and the integration of technologies to support the teaching-learning process” (Charlier et al. 2006, p. 482). In this clever cocktail, which is supposed to guarantee the success of blended learning or “hybrid training”, the challenge is to show the complementarity between the “assets” of face-to-face and remote training.

In blended learning, digital technologies (*technologies numériques*) are presented more as additive technologies than as substitutive technologies. Nevertheless, this articulation is not the only trend in professional training witnessing more and more actors specializing in “100% digital” training and landing on the professional training market, such as Google, who have not historically been active in the training sector. Grignon (2016, pp. 123–139) examines the way in which Google frames the ordinary practices of communication professionals. Through the sociosemiotic study of the “Academies” which accompany some of its software (Analytics, AdWords, YouTube, etc.), the author shows how the firm cultivates its control over the knowledge, skills and values which circulate in highly varying socio-organizational contexts and contribute to the progressive reconfiguration of the expert/lay landscape in the world of communication. The example of the Google Academy discussed by Grignon clearly shows

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15. See: <https://lesacteursdelacompetence.fr/>.

the way in which technologization and industrialization are accompanied by ideologization processes.

This question of ideologization is also explored by Bullich (2018) in his article on “the platformization of training”, where he analyzes “the economy of promises” (July 2015) of online training platforms – mainly Massive Open Online Courses, MOOCs – such as Skillshare, Udemy and Open Classrooms. For the researcher, the main promises of these platforms are customization and personalization, empowerment and inclusion in a community. As I pointed out earlier, the training organizations studied for this research project offer more “mixed” training than completely remote asynchronous training, such as the platforms studied by Bullich. In this way, they attempt to show the interest in the connection between activities carried out in groups (mainly in person but in the case of multi–multi B also in a “virtual class”) and online activities, performed individually in an asynchronous manner. This enables them to continue to legitimize their historical activity, in this case training internships, by showing how their “effects” are “amplified” through supplementary digital devices. Despite these differences, we find important links between the economy of promises analyzed by Bullich in these platforms and the promotion discourses of the offers listed in the prospectuses of five out of the eight organizations studied. If this statement is valid for only five out of the eight organizations studied, it is because the deployment of “mixed” offers requires significant investment that the smaller structures studied cannot currently make. Despite this, during my interviews with the director and the educational director of one of the specialized structures, both stressed the fact that they want to develop this type of offer, and in 2018, they launched an initiative (*Convention industrielle de formation par la recherche, CIFRE*) with a doctoral student who has worked on this subject. On the other hand, the low use of online training modules can also be presented as a choice. For those responsible for the “Communication” product of the Executive Education department in *grande école A*:

**INTERVIEW.**– “We are thinking about developing a bit of remote work, but we will continue to work mainly in person. Students who choose training at *grande école A* still have this expectation. There is mutual enrichment and the network, as well as the ability to meet directly and exchange ideas with our experts”.

This interview was conducted back in 2019. Since then, in 2021, *grande école* A has set up an offer promoting “interactive conferences” followed by “workshops”, but its training offers are still mainly face-to-face internships.

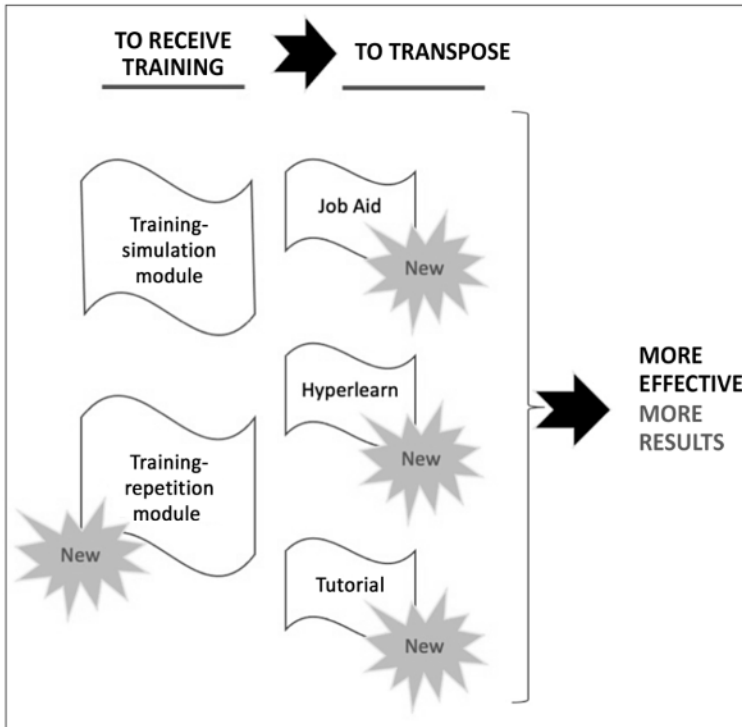
On the other hand, the five training structures which offer complete remote learning or “mixed” training offers develop a whole rhetoric praising the interests of this type of system:

Undoubtedly, the promise that is most often evoked by these platforms is that of personalization. This is aimed at both students and facilitators. First of all, this promise comes in the form of a use that is publicized as immediate, continuous, ubiquitous and at will. “Learners” are thus summoned to work on the platforms considered and to exploit the learning possibilities of “ATAWAD” methods (“Any Time, Any Where, Any Device”) (Bullich 2018, p. 18).

The personalization they promise is also accompanied by an abundant offer: the prospectuses are regularly supplemented to ensure that there are enough products to suit to everyone’s aspirations. We find this same rhetoric in the prospectuses of large training organizations.

As previously mentioned, the multi–multi B structure is the one that develops this type of offer the most. It even has a product called “NExT”. In the prospectus, such offers are presented as a real blended experience or 100% digital, with personalized coaching throughout the whole course. Thanks to the flexibility of these courses, NExT is the right answer to help optimize training management and improve learning efficacy. Personalization is therefore presented as a guarantee of success. The ubiquitous dimension is also particularly highlighted: the online and offline modes are adapted to smartphones and tablets, have a ludic character, with short sequences accessible anytime and anywhere. Learning and training become a pleasurable experience thanks to Pocket Impulse’s gamification and mnemonic activities. The flexibility promised by such devices allegedly promotes learner motivation, motivation being necessary for empowerment, understood as “increasing-capacitation”, that is, a “rise in each person’s capacity to act” (Bullich 2018, p. 21). For the multi–multi B organization, its offer “encourages stronger engagement on the part of learners and constitutes the ideal educational complement to strengthen the performance of multimodal systems”.

The platforms analyzed by Bullich exclusively offer online training, whereas the training organizations that I studied insist on the complementarity of the “assets” of each modality (so as not to disqualify their historical activity as providers of face-to-face training). Digital offers are therefore presented as “augmented face-to-face”, supposedly “optimizing face-to-face time”. In its prospectus, the multi–multi A organization explains that “digital classrooms favor greater efficacy, thanks to the alternation of teaching methods”. They argue that the “digital” enables us to “work on virtual situations and to transpose learning with complete peace of mind: before, during and after training”. In its 2023 prospectus, the multi–multi B organization presented a diagram which clearly embodied the transitive ideal of “transposition” crystallized around the use of digital technologies in training.



**Figure 1.3.** *Transposition diagram (figure inspired by the prospectus from the multi–multi B organization). For a color version of this figure, see [www.iste.co.uk/seurat/mediation.zip](http://www.iste.co.uk/seurat/mediation.zip)*

Thanks to the example above, we can see to what extent technologization reinforces ideologization around the efficacy imperative. First of all, this is visually embodied by means of a three-phase structure (training, transposition, results) connected by directional arrows, in a linear and almost mechanical conception of mediation. The repetition of gestures and the simulation permitted by digital devices is supposed to enable, de facto, the “transposition” of acquired knowledge into the professional world and its use at the service of efficacy and performance.

It is interesting to note that what organizations call “blended learning” designates extremely different practices. When we look at the training prospectuses of the five largest organizations, 56% of the training offers were labeled as “blended” (or with the mention “+ remote activities”) in 2019, and 71% in 2023. Sometimes, the “blended” modality is reduced to making online documentation accessible for download before the internship, or a video extolling the merits of the training that will follow. Without minimizing the influence of these media transformations in the field of professional training, I would say that this mediological conception over determines the role of the technical device in knowledge mediation:

The terms “extend”, “reinforce” or “multiply”, to describe the contribution of mediatization to mediation, are misleading if they give credence to the idea of a simple amplification of the second by the first. Mediatization is not the transposition of mediation. Their respective ways of processing knowledge, of constructing bodies of knowledge, of addressing the learner differ completely (Mœglin 2005, p. 78).

My aim is not to deal with the full extent of the problems relating to the development, mobilization and promotion of digital devices in professional training, whose variety and plurality are faithfully represented in the publications of the journal *Distance et médiations des savoirs* (DMS). My purpose is to explore how the emphasis of training organizations in blended learning is part of a mediagenic conception of mediation, where digital technology is considered as an instrument for optimizing training “effects”. The growing use of online modules is leading to an increasingly strong modularization of “brick” content. This modularization, which has made segmented training times shrink (like the “3 hours flat” and “speed learning” offered by large organizations), is also leading to an increasingly robust

division of fields of knowledge and, as I will see later, to a primacy of schematic knowledge more suited to mediation in short temporalities.

Mœglin analyzes this shift from the service logic to the “self-service” logic. According to him, this actually leads to a shift in the center of gravity of the educational process:

[...] this substitutes the priority traditionally given to the development of educational contents and methods with a completely different priority. And what is this priority? To facilitate the access for “users” (according to the appellation in vogue) to sets of educational resources simply made available to them. And this, at the cost of modularizing resources, their disposition and combination in educational environments where users are invited to pick up what sparks their interest, according to a unique and personalized training path (Mœglin 1998, p. 107).

For the researcher, this position leads to a reversal, to a form of “unaccountability upstream in favor of downstream, making the pupil or student assume responsibility for the success (or failure) of a system where the learner is the main (if not sole) actor, in the name of official guidelines “placing the learner at the center of training” (Mœglin 1998, p. 108).

To be able to distance ourselves from the “economy of promises” underlying the discourses promoting digital training offers, we must take a closer look at such devices in order to see how these pretensions are embodied in communication engagements. I will not conduct this analysis here, as training for communicators (and even more, public speaking training) is still poorly invested in by digital devices. Why? As I will show in the section devoted to “paradigm shifts”, this could be due to the fact that training in communication (as a transversal skill and as an occupation) is imbued with an interpersonal conception of communication; organizations seem to consider that communication training is less suitable for “digitalization” than other areas of training, such as accounting or executive secretariat. A product manager interviewed in 2018 expressed the following: “We had an e-learning training program in oral communication and it did not reach such a large audience, except for a few trainees who were unable to attend. In oral communication, they tend to seek face-to-face communication”.

Observation of the training prospectuses shows three salient points regarding the relationship between educational offers in communication and digital devices: the specialized training organizations and the two *grandes écoles* studied do not currently offer remote training modules (even if one of their projects is to develop supplementary online modules). Since 2020, large organizations have offered some “100% remote” communication training programs, but most of all, offers presented as “blended”. Remote training offers offered by large organizations only correspond to 1/8th offers. They further reinforce the logic of content fragmentation and the reduction of training length. The two emblematic remote products from our two multi–multi organizations are respectively entitled “Speed learning 3 hours” and “3 hours flat”. These offers often relate to the instrumental mastery of such and such digital medium and in particular socio-digital networks, as evidenced by the titles of these offers: “3 hours flat to promote your image remotely”/“3 hours to develop your visibility on LinkedIn”/ “Social networks: understanding and mastering Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn”/“Corporate social network: the keys to successful deployment”/ “3 hours to decode nonverbal communication”/“3 hours to manage your emails efficiently”/“Turn your emails into an asset”.

It is interesting to note that this “dematerialization” of media, according to the term used by the actors to describe these digital documents, is not unanimous among facilitators. Actually, some facilitators think that interns – who for the most part do not print digital documentation and consult it shortly before training – will use it much less, unless it is distributed and used during training. This is why two facilitators brought printed documents during two of the training programs attended, one of them emphasizing that some of the documents were *spare*, and the other, that the material had been printed at the instructor’s expense.

The fact that training in communication strategies and public speaking does not involve a remote learning modality does not necessarily mean that a reflection on the tools and media of professional communication training and their links with an instrumented design mediation is not relevant. As Mœglin (2005, p. 86) does when he refers to the stick used by Socrates in his demonstration of the Meno to analyze its usability, it is appropriate to pay attention to the plurality of tools and media which simultaneously configure the forms of mediation and contribute to the construction of mediation conceptions.

In public speaking training, a certain technical device seems essential: the camera. Even if some facilitators use PowerPoint and others do not, or some distribute documentation and others very little, all of them use the camera as a mode of deciphering and “revealing” the functioning of the public speaking. For the educational director of one of the specialized communication structures:

**INTERVIEW.**– “There is a very important element in this know-how, in this transfer of know-how, which is the camera [...]. The video-recording will allow us to ensure that we are as objective as possible. Because if there is no video-recording, there will only remain my memory, which is infinitely subjective [...]. The video-recording cannot simply be blamed for being biased or a lie. If something is recorded, this means it has been produced. We don’t know where it came from and I don’t want to get into the origins of why, but just concentrate on the effects. The interest of the video-recording, is that it also makes it possible to slow time down, which is a problematic factor in communication”.

This statement is marked by an immanentist conception of meaning, a conception based on the idea of the transparency of semiotic phenomena: images speak for themselves, their discourse being univocal and universal. Watching a video-recording is supposed to produce a revelation or at least “trigger” the encouragement of the communication practices of interns to evolve in the right direction. As the speaker becomes its own audience, they must understand the “effects” of discourse so as to better control them. Most of the time, the intern will end the program with a stock of videos on a USB stick. Video-recording is at the core of public speaking training, which devotes a great deal of time to viewing and commenting on recordings of oral performances (which means that each oral performance is “watched” twice: once live and once recorded).

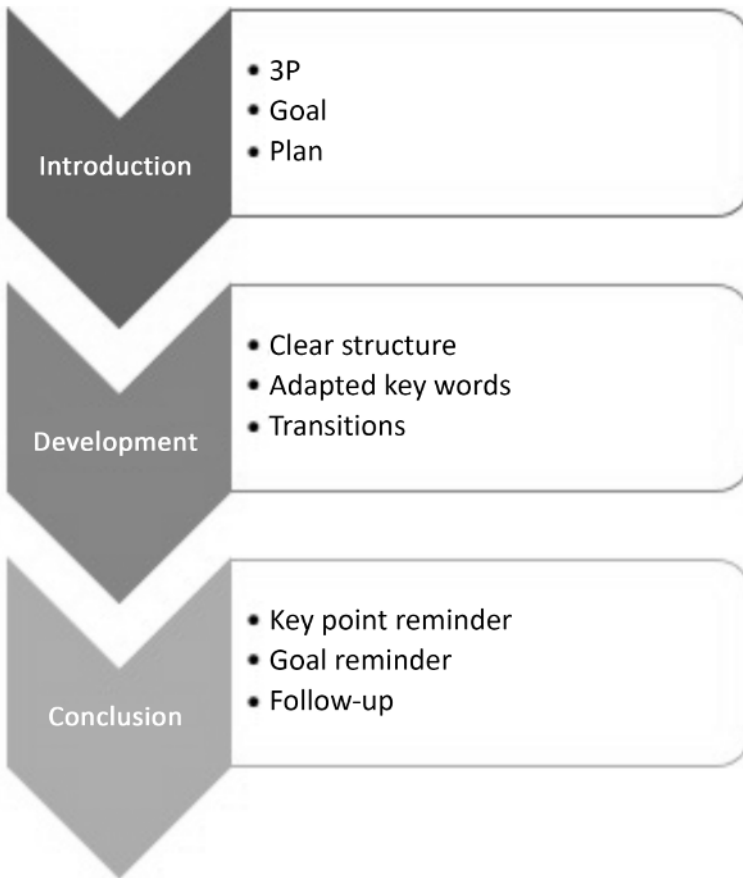
In the public speaking training followed in one of the multi–multi organizations – a training module which, as I have pointed out, is the most expensive of the public speaking training programs offered by the structure – the individual meetings between interns and the team of facilitators are there to optimize the time spent with each person commenting on their own video, without interns spending too long reviewing each other’s performances. This is similar to “media coaching” methods, as analyzed, for example, by Le Bouëdec in her current thesis. She proceeds with an organizational analysis of media training and media coaching. Based on three years’ experience as part of *CIFRE* in a communications consulting

agency which specializes in media speaking, she analyzes “the bond that unites a communications agency with its customer organizations in the search for ‘effective’ communication” (Le Bouëdec 2016, p. 27).

The search for “educational efficacy” at the service of “professional efficacy” governs knowledge mediation choices. In this view, other small tools, which may seem trivial, are also interesting to show the way in which they present themselves as instruments for optimizing public speaking, or the activity of communication professionals: post-its and index cards. These small tools play a prominent role in training programs, as they constitute a “set which is both heterogeneous and interdependent of other devices which happen to be available in a given context and generally guide social activity” (Jeanneret 2014, p. 13).

As I have pointed out, few printed materials are distributed during the training observed, but one type of format is still the favorite: the index card. This, as I have already emphasized when I analyzed training prospectuses, is a “unit of information”, “a summary of information” (Gardey 2008, p. 162). As I have seen in my previous works on training kits (Seurat 2010; Marti and Seurat 2018), the index card invites conciseness and content hierarchization. Furthermore, Gardey emphasizes that the index cards published by organizations are “most often preformatted documents which lead to the restriction and standardization of the information provided at each stage of a procedure” (Gardey 2008, p. 162). The index cards distributed in training programs in communication planning materialize the idea of planning and the importance of carefully following the procedure’s steps.

In public speaking training, the index card used is the Bristol type, which the speaker must use to best prepare for an oral performance. Handed out blank, it is then associated with oral writing instructions. It is presented as the essential tool to best control the course of our discourse. It embodies the concept of a simple and impactful discourse. The facilitator announces the activity that will be carried out with this “Bristol smart card”: “we are going to work with Bristol index cards. On each index card, you will write an idea in one sentence and no more, and at the bottom, what supports your idea, a number, for example”.



**Figure 1.4.** “Bristol smart card” (inspired by a training teaching aids from the multi–multi A organization). For a color version of this figure, see [www.iste.co.uk/seurrat/mediation.zip](http://www.iste.co.uk/seurrat/mediation.zip)

Index cards are tools for prefiguring discourse, and also tools for prefiguring the speaker’s postures. For example, a facilitator advises us to draw a “smiley” at the top right of each card, so as to never forget to smile. As an intellectual mnemonic technology, and an operator of action, the index card must enable us to control our statements and actions so as to bring them into line with the expectations projected by the audiences.

In public speaking training, post-it notes are often used by interns to formulate their evaluations of the oral performances of other group

members. Due to its very short format, the post-it encourages the intern-observer to formulate the evaluation in a few words. In one of the organizations, a post-it writing grid is also provided to participants: for each oral performance, interns are invited to write the first name of the person who has just spoken on a post-it, draw a heart next to what they preferred in the performance and an arrow pointing upwards to denote what can still be improved. It is interesting to note that, in this perspective for assessing interns, the co-learner is not asked to write a “minus” sign (which would denote a lack), but an arrow, representing the possible margin for progress. Each intern then leaves with a collection that can be consulted again at will. In Chapter 5, I will show how, through hermeneutic marking, the framing of communication assessment (of oral communication services and the communication “actions” of professionals) standardizes the apprehension modalities of communication.

Whether digital or not, professional training tools and media are the operators of action which “instrumentalize” training and are supposed to amplify its scope. In this, they participate in a mediagenic conception of mediation which presents them as optimization instruments. These concepts expressed by the training organizations seem to echo the formulation of interns’ expectations.

### **1.5. The explicit request for communication “tools” and “techniques”**

In short nondegree professional training programs – even if most of the time those who pay are not those who attend the training – the logic of servuction is at work. This requires the offer to adapt to expectations. The formulation of promises is an obligatory and recurring part of training programs, which presents itself as a response to a request. In that sense, the promise always comes second, after the enunciation of expectations. Here, I follow Jeanneret in his characterization of promise *stricto sensu*, as the “explicit expression of a proposition on communication and what it can bring to audiences” (Jeanneret 2014, p. 14).

The profiles of those trained in “communication occupations” and, even more so, those trained in communication in general are extremely heterogeneous. In the three public speaking training courses observed, the interns’ occupations were quite different: customer relations manager, salesperson, network development manager, management controller, distribution manager, developer, salesperson, laboratory manager, marketing

manager, director of an accommodation institution for dependent elderly people (EHPAD), general director of services, financial director, head of internal audit mission, etc. Note, however, that almost all of the interns were executives. The higher the hierarchical level, the more opportunities to speak in public, but above all, the higher the expectation to persuade our audience. The companies represented are also quite diverse, despite there being an over-representation of large companies: BMW, Total, Disney, Alcatel, EDF, Danone, Sanofi, etc. The professional profiles of those trained in strategic communication and planning are logically narrower in terms of “communication functions”, but we note a fairly large heterogeneity of functions and hierarchical statuses: communications manager, communications assistant, director communications manager, head of corporate social responsibility (CSR), director of Africa communications, product manager, advertising space purchasing manager, HR communications manager, public relations manager, marketing and communications manager. As their title clearly shows, certain functions are at the crossroads of marketing and communication. Large companies are also the most represented: Total, Orange, Citroën, Siemens, Areva, etc.

On the other hand, there are significant differences in the professional experience of trainees, which ranges from one or two years, to over 20 years. This heterogeneity of profiles is common in intra-company training, and is presented by facilitators not as a difficulty for establishing common frameworks, but rather as an asset for training:

**OBSERVATION**.– “Some of you have initial training in communication, others do not, some already have extensive professional experience, others are at the beginning of their career. You are a heterogeneous audience, this is normal in training and this is what makes it so rich”.

A significant proportion of interns are undergoing “professional reconversion”, with a past in occupations relating to management assistance, marketing, commerce or journalism. This is also a point often stressed by the product managers from multi–multi organizations: their audiences need “to grasp the basics”, because many of them do not have initial training in communication.

Finally, being a participant in these training courses myself, my status as a teacher–researcher and the projection this role elicited deserves to be further explained. My status as a communications researcher has led many trainees and certain facilitators themselves, to see me as an “expert”. Despite

not being stabilized and changing depending on the contexts between researcher and expert, the distinction seems important to me, as we are discussing training practices. For Delmas:

The expert can be characterized as a specialist capable of providing a wealth of knowledge, constituted by such person, but often developed by others. It responds to a request [...]. The researcher, on the other hand, defines its activity on the basis of a knowledge production project, whose practical impact is not the main concern (Delmas 2011, p. 11).

To this, I may object and say that researchers do not think on their own, but develop bodies of knowledge “in the company” of others who have preceded them, or with whom collaboration takes place. Research can also be applied to social demands (notably within the framework of funded programs), and the relationship with the “practical impact” varies depending on the disciplines and research positions. Still, should we not ponder the distinction between the researcher and the expert? I do not think so, but I believe that everyone must think about this boundary in their practice, but also in their research ethics.

Being assigned this “expert” label produced a certain discomfort in me during group work, because group members could expect me to have “the solution” to the case studies, while certain facilitators could ask me to confirm their statements, especially when they referred to “theory”. It is precisely this relationship to certainty – which I will call into question in the third chapter of this book – that seems to be one of the frameworks of the debate between the expert and the research postures in the human and social sciences.

I would like to implement a comprehensive reading of the expectations of trainees in the professional training programs followed. It is neither an evaluative nor a justifying reading, but a reading “which refers to the meaning given to it by the actor in a given situation, that is to the ‘good reasons’ they have for acting in that way and not otherwise” (Berthelot 2001, p. 242). Formulating trainee expectations at the beginning of the course is a mandatory activity in all the sessions observed. It clearly demonstrates the supply–demand logic, even if the interns have not necessarily chosen the training themselves and are not the ones paying for it. The formulation of expectations as soon as the training begins has, as a corollary, the assessment

statement at the end of training and the evaluation questionnaire, which mainly concerns the adequacy between the expectations and the completion of the training program.

Out of the 38 occurrences of explicit formulation of intern expectations at the start of training (an intern can formulate several expectations) jotted down during my observations, 19 mention a need for “tools” or “techniques”, that is, over half of them. Furthermore, the need for tools is almost systematically associated with the occurrence of efficacy, performance or improvement (15/19):

**OBSERVATION.**– “I need tools to improve my performance”. “I need tools to be able to transmit information more effectively”. “I would like to master short sentences in order to have a more impactful discourse”. “I wish to obtain the keys to success”. “I need to acquire communication techniques to know how to communicate effectively with a nonspecialist audience”. “I need to go through the whole range of communication tools to be more effective in my practice”. “I want to strengthen my methodology to be more effective in my duties”. “I am looking for keys to better know how to build a communications plan”.

The relationship between means and ends which is at the heart of the question of efficacy is also explicitly exposed in certain formulations of expectations: “I need to acquire tools to go faster”/“I need to become more efficient with the same budget”.

It is also necessary to differentiate certain expectations specific to public speaking training, and media training expectations raised by programs in strategic communication and planning. The question of self-confidence is a fairly present expectation in the context of public speaking training and media training (8/22):

**OBSERVATION.**– “I hate speaking in public, I would like to be more comfortable”. “I would like to become more comfortable, to be more concise”. “I desire to know how to manage my stress better when I speak in public”. “I have already made several appearances in the media. I would like to know how to get to the point, gain self-confidence and know how to avoid any tricky questions”.

These remarks are consistent with the fact that these training programs are either classified under the “Communication” products, or under the

“Personal Development” and “Personal Efficacy” products. On the other hand, we will see that the use of the notion of “personal efficacy” in certain works in psychology is quite instrumental and strongly associated with the question of self-confidence.

Another expectation often expressed (7/22) regarding public speaking training concerns the ability to persuade:

**OBSERVATION.**— “I need to elicit adhesion”. “I need to become more impactful”. “What I expect from this training program is to give me the basis to better convince in meetings”.

This expectation joins the performative ideal which can already be detected in ancient rhetoric, the idea that mastery of language can make it possible to anticipate and control the reception of our audience. As for training programs in strategic communication and planning, they raise expectations relating to the strengthening of the intern’s legitimacy in relation to peers, as well as and above all, the hierarchy.

**OBSERVATION.**— “I would like to be able to have my communication plan validated by my superiors”. “I need to know how to convince my superiors of the strategic importance of communication”. “I hope I can gain credibility with my superiors”.

This quest for legitimacy is partly explained by the fact that these are training programs oriented to occupations, and that they mainly address the “communication function”. Further, drawing on the work of researchers from the *RESIPROC* network, I will show that the communication function struggles to move away from an instrumental vision.

Finally, among the professionals undergoing reorientation, it is the question of “methodology” that stands out the most:

**OBSERVATION.**— “I am shifting from marketing to communication, and I want to strengthen my communication methods and tools”. “I have a background in accounting. I want to learn to prioritize by having a tighter grip on methodologies”. “As I do not have a background in communication, I have methodological gaps”. “I have been parachuted into communications and I am waiting to obtain methodology to gain rigor and credibility”.

Later, I will show that the definition of what a “method” is raises questions in the context of professional training and in relation to what we can understand by “methodology” in the human and social sciences. For the moment, let me stress that “methods” in training are mainly procedures and lists of mnemonic tasks, which perhaps serve less to apprehend the complexity of situations – to gain understanding – than to claim mastery over the course of things to act upon. It is nonetheless necessary to note two expectations formulated as part of the training program in strategic communication and planning of *grande école* A, and which relate more to distancing than to the mastery of tools or procedures:

**OBSERVATION**.- “I would like to have a more global vision of the communications function”. “I chose this training to gain height”. “I would like to have more effective communication and a more structured discourse to be more credible in my occupation”.

Thus, communication, presented as a transversal skill, is believed to foster “professional efficacy” in all occupations. The mastery of “communication techniques” becomes a factor to gain in professional efficacy. Communication, seen as a set of skills linked to occupations, becomes the very object of the quest for efficacy. Communication is then either an efficacy factor – a means for achieving it – or an object that must be shaped in view of the efficacy imperative.

The promise of efficacy is highly present in institutional rhetoric, especially among large training organizations. Let us take, for example, the introduction to the 2018 prospectus of one of the multi–multi organizations, signed by its president. It opens like this: “Our mission is to make every moment an opportunity to learn; a rich and stimulating experience with a single goal: efficacy”. It ends with: “Inventing solutions that combine innovation, agility and efficacy: that’s also what it means, bringing you ‘Much more than knowledge’, a formula which refers to the slogan ‘Beyond knowledge’. Knowledge is therefore at the service of a value: efficacy”.

The formulation of training promises by facilitators always follows the statement of trainees’ expectations. It is important to emphasize that this formulation only occurs at a second moment, because the statement of the promises is directly presented as an adequate response to expectations. The facilitators also rely a lot on the formulation of expectations, even if this means directly using certain expressions from the trainees to demonstrate that the training will respond to them:

**OBSERVATION.**—“You are waiting a lot for methodology, which is very good, because that is precisely what we are going to work on during these two days”. “During this training program, you will acquire methodologies and learn how to position yourselves”. “In addition to the methodology, we will exchange best practices and we will see how we justify the role of communicators at a time when budgets are being cut”. “How do you design a communication strategy with high added value? How do you optimize the implementation of communication, learn how to evaluate it and integrate the digital? This is precisely what we will see during this internship”. “At the end of the internship, you will be secure”.

Facilitators nonetheless insist on the limits of the training program and above all on the fact that its success depends on the involvement of trainees and their ability to use the learning acquired during training in their professional life. In this, efficacy as a promise is differentiated from performance.

**OBSERVATION.**—“It’s not about performing miracles, it’s about giving you a larger perspective and efficacy in your speaking addresses. You should emerge from this training program with greater flexibility, gaining perspective and efficacy”. “There is no magic wand. The success of the training program depends on your involvement”.

The promise of increased efficacy seems particularly linked to the use of adequate means in relation to the temporal constraints of the action:

**OBSERVATION.**—“We are going to see a whole series of tools and method stages to design better communication plans. So far, you may have done it intuitively, now you will do it in a stronger, more convincing manner and you will gain efficacy. It will take a little longer upstream, but it will save you time afterwards”.

The modalities for referring to efficacy are therefore expressed differently: instead an imperative, it becomes a quest to which promises are made. But it seems to me that the quest and the promise contribute to the naturalization of this imperative as self-evident. It appears that the variation of discourse acts relating to efficacy particularly resonates with instrumental conceptions of communication. Seen as a series of (writing or oratory) techniques, or as a series of tools (mainly from management sciences), communication becomes the preferred territory for deploying performative efficacy.

