

VITA



VITA Manual Chapter 3

How to Integrate

LEVEL5

in an Informal Learning Activity

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1. LEVEL5 as Holistic Informal Learning approach

The LEVEL5 system is more than a validation tool. It can be used as central instrument of an holistic competence based learning approach. Insofar it serves both as a planning tool for learning arrangements outside formal institutions (e.g. in mobility, volunteering, civic education but also in learning at the workplace, internships and practice phases in apprenticeships).

The learning is not based on a formal (standardised) learning objective including curriculum and instructional design models but on a simple circular process description (Plan – Do – Check (or Think-Act-Look), Fig. 3) known from all relevant management systems. So called Informal Learning Patterns support the learning providers who may rather act as counsellors or leaning companion than as teaching staff. This concept reflects the NEW WAY of learning which is essential to enable the learner to organise his/her learning in a self-sustainable way.



Fig. 1: Interlinking Informal Learning Design (Plan – Do – Check) with validation of personal and social competences with LEVEL5

The description of the procedure is subject of chapter 3 of this manual and includes an exemplary case from a mentoring project that could easily be transferred in all educational sectors. The informal learning patterns are organised in an inventory (open catalogue) representing different learning situations and arrangements that may support the acquisition of different social and personal competences and propose suitable assessment instruments.

2 How to integrate LEVEL5 in an Informal Learning Activity

2.1 Validating learning in informal and non-formal learning actions

Acquisition of personal, social and organisational competences often happens as an **informal** way of learning.

Therefore **formal** educational *planning* and *assessment* processes (like in school, university or formal vocational education) are neither practicable nor desirable here.

Exceptions are of course extra-curricular learning projects or work-placements.

Development of personal and social competences is merely a side-effect of taking action.

Hence informal learning actions are not primarily oriented towards the achievement of formal “*learning objectives*” but rather work along “*action related objectives*” (e.g. to support somebody).

Consequently the “LEVEL5-approach” is also based on an *action* related management approach.

2.2 Basic procedural steps

LEVEL5 is grounded on a cyclic procedure¹.

With this, the LEVEL5 methodology works along the basic principles of all modern management systems².

Figure 2 shows the (quality) management circle applied in formal education.

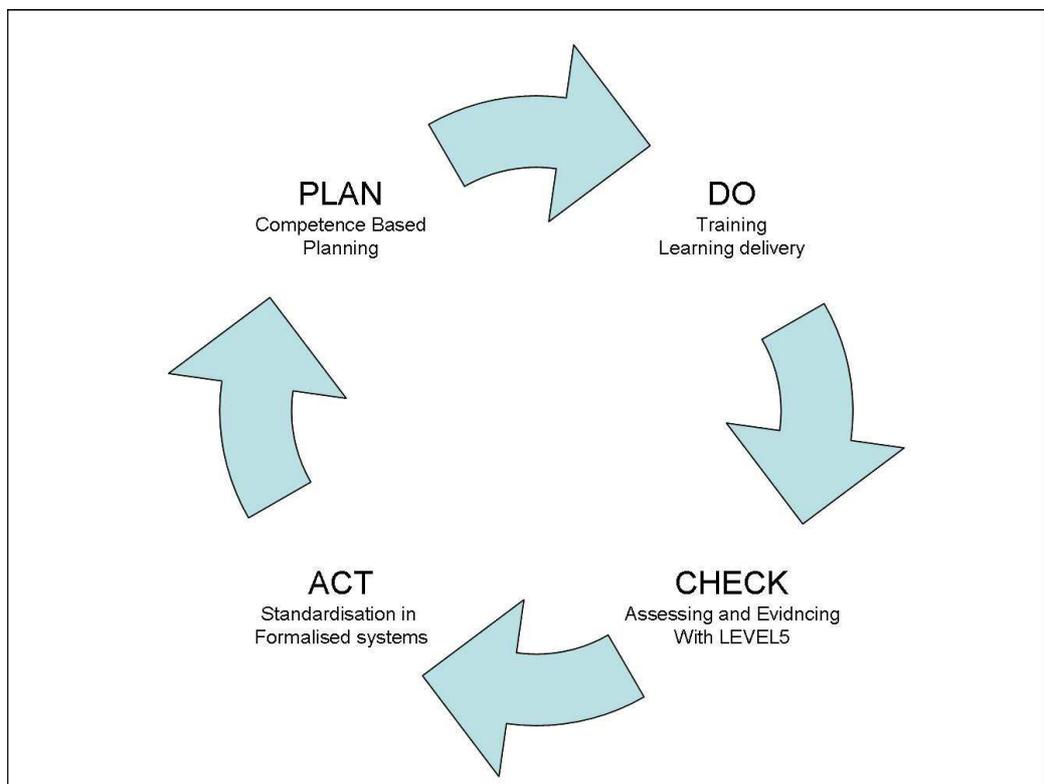


Fig. 2: PDCA management circle in formal education

¹ Well known for instance in all modern process, environmental and quality management approaches

² E.g. the so called PDCA circle

With the conversion into informal learning the fourth “ACT”-step becomes superfluous since a standardisation is in most cases neither useful nor meaningful.

In a planned informal/non-formal learning setting³, however, the first three steps remain essential which leads to a simplified circle (Figure 3):

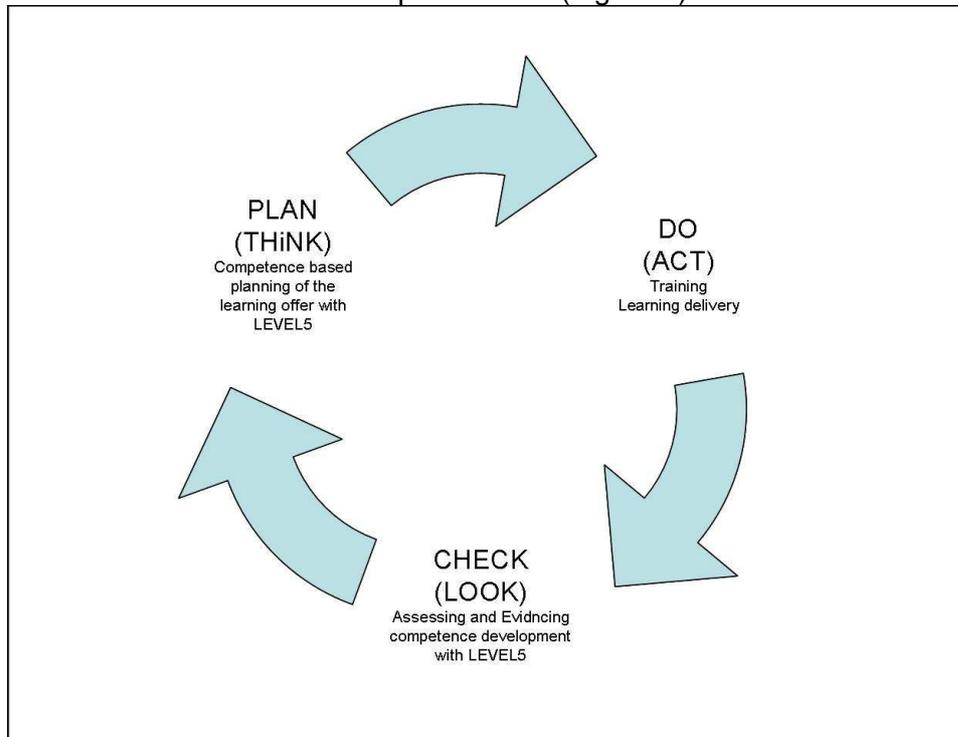


Fig. 3: Think-Act-Look management circle⁴ adapted to non-formalised learning

In both cases the LEVEL5 system plays a prominent role in the holistic learning system. The validation of competence developments is not only an ex-post assessment but it is the cornerstone of a holistic learning system for volunteering actions.

2.3 Transfer in an informal/non-formal learning project

Figure 4 shows how the 5-step procedure of LEVEL5 is implemented in the simplified Think-Act- Look- cycle.

LEVEL5 steps 1-2 (project description and topic creation (selection from the LEVEL5-inventory)) are representing the “Think” phase. Here we reflect about important project issues and think about which competence the learner might acquire. This topic will be substantiated and further developed to a description of a competence that may be acquired during the informal learning phase. This output of this step is a first reference system, e.g. on teamwork, autonomy, intercultural communication etc.⁵.

The “ACT” stage of the action circle consists on the one hand on the learning delivery.

This learning is as diverse as the different settings in volunteering – it cannot be standardised like in formal education.

However, it can be influenced, it can be modified, planned and improved by simple learning “patterns” that will be presented below.

³ Independent from the definition of informal or non-formal learning, excluding incidental learning, there are different learning environments, e.g. learning on the job, in mobility, in volunteering, in mentoring but also in any kind of not formalised courses that do not exclusively aim at the acquisition of job-related competences.

⁴ This circle is identical to the Look-Think-Act cycle developed by Kurt Lewin in the framework of Action Research

⁵ Please find pre-formatted reference systems in the annex.

In the “ACT”-stage, the “informal” learning experience therein takes place. Consequently also the assessment is situated in this phase.

The learning, the setting and the questions around the aspired competences determine the assessment “system”. For further reading we recommend the SEALLL project publication⁶ containing a repository and guidelines to self evaluation and assessment in LLL.

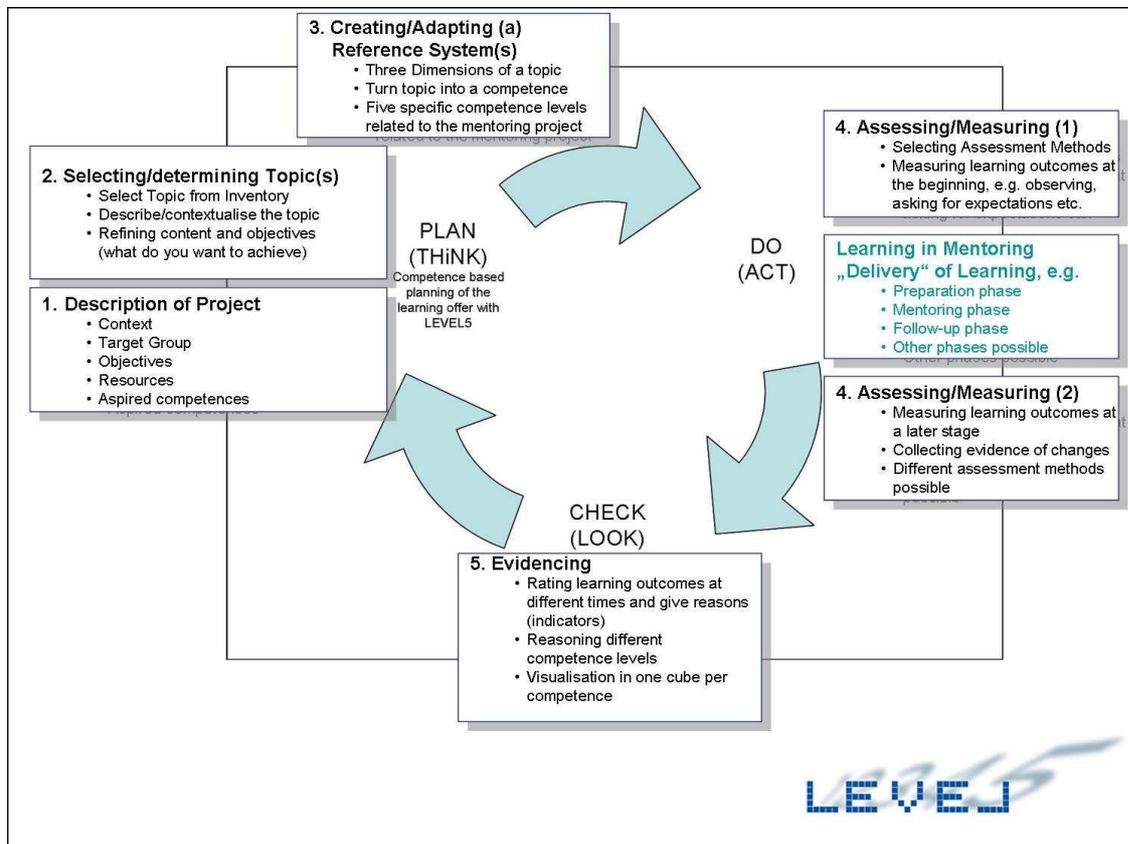


Fig. 4: LEVEL5 planning and validation steps integrated in the TAL circle

Partly overlapping with this “ACT” phase the evidencing, rating part follows in step “Look/Check”. Here the results will be visualised and shown.

2.4 Exemplary case from a mentoring project

Figure 5 shows the case of a senior volunteer who acts as a business angle (a mentor) in a project to support young entrepreneurs.

⁶ http://www.sealll.eu/docs/manual/Sealll01_UK_web.pdf

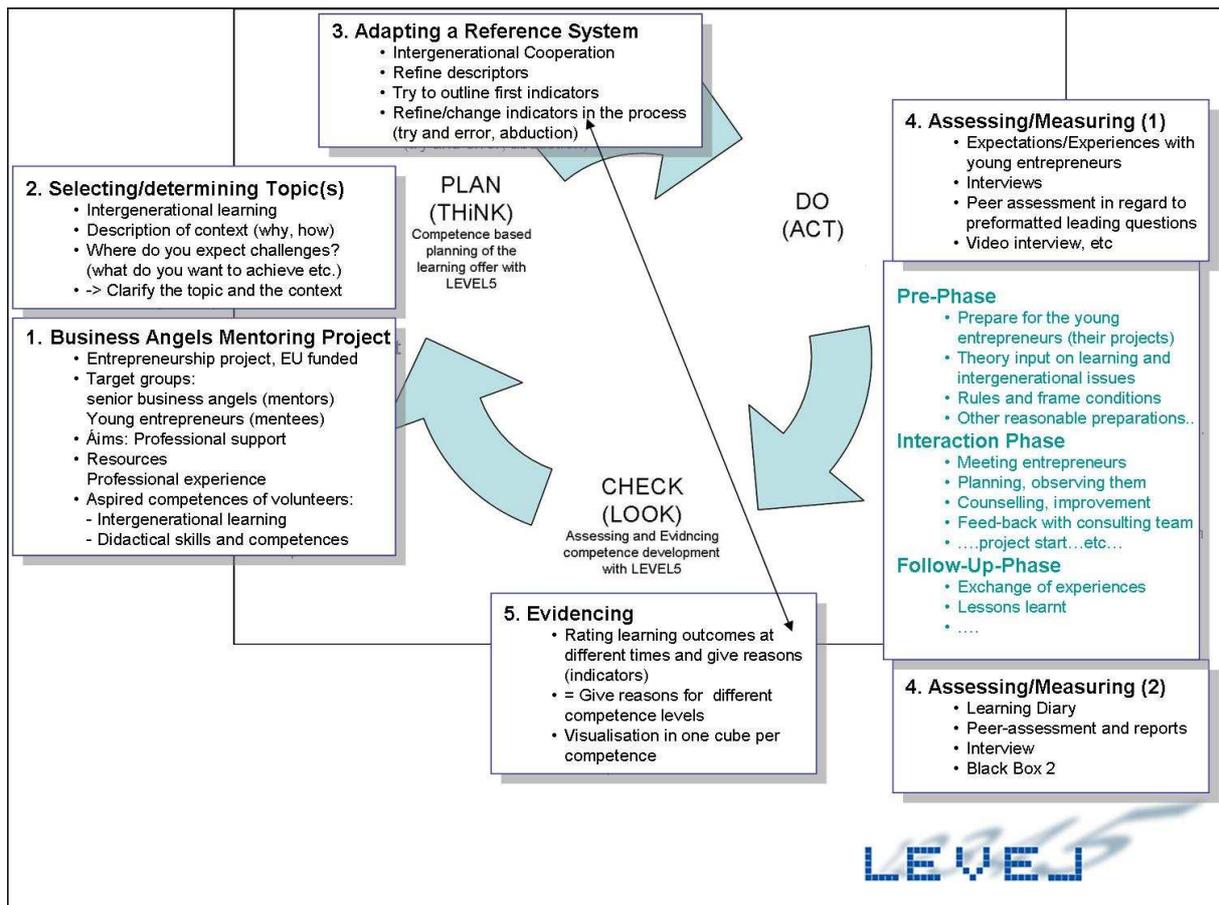


Fig. 5: Example of a holistic volunteering learning action (business angle case)

Rudolf Adler is a former expert from the middle management of a bank. He participated as a Business Angel, as one of 4 consultants in a mentoring project to support young entrepreneurs over a period of 1 year.

In this year he regularly met with “his” entrepreneur Peter Lustig, who wanted to develop his own business with an IT based cartoon production and advised him how to prepare the development and the launch of his venture.

The mentoring project was organised by the network “Volare 2020”, responsible person was Farah Peters.

Farah used the LEVEL5 competence oriented learning approach which was optimised by her mentoring project for her specific learning contexts – here the working (counselling) situation of her mentor (Rudolf) who ought to support his mentee (Peter).

THINK!

Before the project Farah and her team mates sat together and discussed the project and used the LEVEL5 project description grids to develop a sound and understandable mentoring project description (the Business Angels Mentoring Project”),

Having done that they decided that the most important competences that the mentors could develop are: “Intergenerational cooperation”, “Communication” and “Teamwork”.

For the three competences the preformatted LEVEL5 reference systems were taken and intensively discussed. As Farah and her team are newcomers they asked for guidance from the RIVER team and discussed some open questions online with the Greek REVEAL-team members.

Farah’s team thought it would be a good idea to develop 3 project phases and deliver theoretical input and an initial assessment in the pre-phase, organised as 3 day kick-off seminar and to have 2-monthly feed-back rounds with the mentors. The whole project should end with an evaluation meeting.

The most difficult part for them was the planning of the assessment since they didn't have much experience here.

Based on the reference systems they knew quite well what to assess. In case of Rudolf Adler they agreed (of course together with Rudolf) that they would go for "Intergenerational Cooperation".

The most difficult thing about assessing is to asking the right questions. For this purpose they took the reference system and related the volunteering situation to the cognitive, active and affective level descriptions and derived basic questions from them.

They sat together and discussed for quite a time what they wanted to know about the volunteers knowledge, actions and attitudes regarding intergenerational collaboration and wrote everything down in their "mentoring plan". Based on that they not only developed the assessment method but also the knowledge input and the planned actions in the volunteering project.

ACT!

And this is how they integrated the assessment in their mentoring project (ACT):

Preliminary to the project they distributed a questionnaire asking about the experiences interests, and the likes and dislikes of the volunteers.

They also used a very simple video technique while interviewing the mentor.

A camera was positioned in a room and the mentors were asked about their the expectations, their plans, their hopes and their insecurities before they met the young entrepreneurs.

Following the recommendations of the REVEAL-experts they carefully developed the interview questions in order to get a rather clear idea about the initial rating of the knowledge, skills and attitude scales.

Farah's team asked the same questions again at the end of the mentoring phase. By this she got an automatic "documentation" of the developments of the mentors.

They also used other methods, for instance interviews during the feed-back rounds but also a self-assessment methods (the 4 volunteers built assessment tandems) and had their web-volunteering diaries in which they noted their experiences and of course observations from the Volare-team members who accompanied the mentors.

How about the learning input?

Farah's team delivered the pre-phase and gave some **theory** input regarding:

- intergenerational learning
- competence development and the idea of LEVEL5
- assessment
- coaching techniques
- new media

As self-learning resources they provided a number of content related literature.

Besides the feed-back rounds they offered a virtual help-desk at given times twice a week.

As far as the learning **actions** are concerned Farah made use of the informal learning patterns offered on the REVEAL website. She *coached* her mentors, developed together with all of them (*teamwork*) a common *workplan*.

LOOK! (and SHOW!)

At the end of the young entrepreneurs (mentees) had to present their projects together with the mentors. The mentors were asked to compile a final report based on their diaries, dealing not only with the results of the entrepreneurs' activities but also on their personal learning experiences.

This auto-assessment was discussed together with the tandem partner in the whole group and blended with the observation of Farah's team.

On top of that the final interview was taken on tape and published in the mentoring project's and on the REVEAL website on a voluntary basis.

On the basis of this blended assessment the ratings and the reasons (=indicators) were discussed between Farah, her team members and the volunteers and the certificates were prepared first in the LEVEL5 offline forms and copied in the LEVEL5 software. Farah issued the certificates for her volunteers at the end of the final meeting.

3 Impact

From the extensive use of LEVEL5 it has become apparent that a multitude of benefits can be gained from this process. It is not merely a documentation exercise but rather a dual process that benefits both the learner (on mobility) and the learning provider(s) (in this case trainers, instructors, counsellors, NGO etc.).

- Firstly, the learners' skill and competency levels can be accurately defined and measured before and after a learning experience. The impact of the learning becomes clearly evident through the evaluation of specific parameters which enable the individual's progress to be charted and monitored, thus enabling the learner to recognise the learning outcomes at a cognitive, active and affective level.
- Secondly, the educational and mobility staff members can monitor the effectiveness of the learning activity through highlighting specific areas for development or improvement and thus maximising the impact of their work.