Co-funded by
the European Union

THE PERSONA SHADOW QUEST

INDIVIDUAL

VET design

1. AT A GLANCE

Activity title	*The Persona Shadow Quest*
Format	*Individual*
Duration	*90 min (Self-paced)*
Group size	*Self-paced*
Challenge	*Reaching Underrepresented Learners: Designing VET for migrants, NEETs, and other adult learners.*
Setting	*Personal workspace and local community/digital environment.*
Method / framework	*Reflective Storytelling / Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.*

WHAT YOU WILL HAVE AFTERWARDS

- A completed "Inclusion Diary" written from your learner persona's perspective
- At least 5 hidden barriers, sorted as psychological, geographic or linguistic
- One redesigned, Easy-to-Read version of a real VET recruitment material

DESIGN THINKING STAGE

Empathise | **Define** | Ideate | Prototype | Test

2. DESCRIPTION

This activity requires the VET professional to step out of their institutional role and "shadow" the life of a specific underrepresented learner. Instead of analyzing data from a distance, the educator selects a detailed "Learner Persona" (e.g., a refugee with high skills but no local certificate or a rural NEET with low digital literacy) and attempts to navigate the local landscape from their perspective. This involves physically or virtually visiting community centers, job portals, and library boards to see how VET opportunities are marketed. The educator documents the journey through a first-person "Inclusion Diary," identifying the specific psychological, geographic, and linguistic friction points that would discourage that learner from applying.

2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Identify and categorize at least 5 hidden structural and psychological barriers within current local VET outreach strategies.
- Analyse the "Andragogic Gaps" (e.g., lack of self-concept or orientation to learning) that prevent marginalized adults from engaging with formal education.
- Apply "Easy-to-Read" principles and typographic accessibility (e.g., Open Dyslexic) to redesign recruitment materials.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of personal biases in course design and propose inclusive alternatives.



- When redrafting materials, use simple sentences and avoid metaphors or confusing jargon.
- Remember that many underrepresented learners primarily access the internet via mobile phones with limited data; check if your "Shadow Quest" sites are mobile-responsive.

3. PREPARATION

Review the project's Needs Analysis to understand the specific profiles of migrants and NEETs in your region. Select or create one Learner Persona that represents a typical underrepresented group in your local context.

3.1 MATERIALS NEEDED

- ☐ Persona Brief
- ☐ Inclusion Diary Worksheet
- ☐ Sample of current VET marketing flyer
- ☐ Red and Green Markers
- ☐ Smartphone for digital shadowing

3.2 PLAN YOUR SHADOW QUEST

🗺️ BEFORE YOU GO

- Write your Persona Brief: age, background, language level, device and data
- List 3–4 places to visit – online and offline
- Pick one current VET flyer to test

👣 DURING THE QUEST

- Visit community centres, job portals and library boards as your persona
- Use only a smartphone with limited data
- Note every moment you feel lost, unwelcome or confused

✍️ AFTER THE QUEST

- Mark barriers in red and helpful moments in green on the flyer
- Rewrite it in Easy-to-Read language
- Bring your Inclusion Diary to the debrief

👀 Remember: you are not the expert today – you are the learner.

4. STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Step	Time	What the facilitator does
1	*10 mins.*	*Persona Immersion: Read the assigned learner profile and internalize their constraints (e.g., limited transport, no laptop).*
2	*20 mins.*	*Field Shadowing: Visit a local job center or browse a popular VET recruitment portal through the eyes of the persona.*
3	*15 mins.*	*Friction Logging: Use red markers to highlight every piece of jargon or complex instruction that would confuse a non-native speaker.*
4	*15 mins.*	*Andragogic Analysis: Identify which pillar is missing (e.g., does the ad spark "Motivation to Learn" or just list rules?).*
5	*20 mins.*	*Iterative Redesign: Rewrite one paragraph of the ad into "Easy-to-Read" format with pictograms.*
6	*10 mins.*	*Final Reflection: Compare the original material with the inclusive version and note the potential impact on enrollment.*

5. DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What was the most surprising barrier you encountered when you stopped looking as an "expert" and started looking as a "learner"?
- Which specific "Institutional Friction" point (jargon, location, digital requirement) felt the most exclusionary?
- How does the redesigned material better respect the "Self-concept" of a disadvantaged adult learner?



5.1 KOLB EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

Concrete experience	*Shadowing a marginalized learner's journey to find VET information.*
Reflective observation	*Writing the first-person narrative diary of the barriers faced.*
Abstract conceptualisation	*Mapping those barriers to specific andragogic principles like "Orientation to Learning.".*
Active experimentation	*Redrafting course flyers using inclusive typography and simplified language.*

6. WORKSHEET – INCLUSION DIARY

Name: ..... Region: ..... Date: .....

6.1 MY LEARNER PERSONA

Name & age: ..... Background: .....

Language level: ..... Device & data: ..... Biggest worry: .....

6.2 MY SHADOW QUEST LOG

Place I visited	What I saw and felt as my persona	Friction type (P/G/L/D)	🔴 or 🟢
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Friction type: P = psychological · G = geographic · L = linguistic · D = digital

6.3 MY EASY-TO-READ REWRITE

🔴 **BEFORE – one sentence from the flyer**

.....

.....

.....

🟢 **AFTER – my Easy-to-Read version**

.....

.....

.....

Easy-to-Read check: □ max. 15 words per sentence □ no jargon □ pictogram added □ readable on a phone

🔁 **Bring your Inclusion Diary to the debrief and share your most surprising barrier.**

Authors and main contributors:

Thomas Gkilias (MindmeUp), Konstantina Mataftsi (MindmeUp), Mohamed Sakr (Acceleras), Kristýna Strnadová (Know-House), Magdalena Hubená (Know-House), Marzena Beáta Oltean (VET Center Romania), Szabolcs Dolcsig (VET Center Romania), Thomas Blum (RegioVision GmbH Schwerin)

Parts of this document were drafted with AI. Reviewed and approved by the VETdesign consortium.

Copyright Notice:
© 2024–2026 [Design Thinking for Quality VET Education Matching Labour Market Needs – VETdesign Project]. This document is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike (CC BY-SA) license. You are free to copy, distribute, share, and adapt the material for any purpose, including commercial use, provided that appropriate credit is given to the original authors, a link to the license is included, and any modifications are indicated. If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same CC BY-SA license.

Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

For further information or permission please contact: info@vetdesign-erasmus.eu
Project no. 2024-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000253834
Co-Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them