

Curriculum development in times of a pandemic

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Introduction

The European project **MELODY** is **developing a basic training curriculum on awareness and initial management of incidents with chemical, biological and radio-nuclear hazards** (Internal Security Fund Police, grant agreement 814803). The curriculum is designed for emergency service personnel all over Europe, from **dispatch officers over police, ambulance and fire & rescue personnel to general practitioners and staff working at hospital emergency rooms**.

Development and evaluation of the curriculum

The **developed** curriculum is based on the identified training needs of first responders in several European Member States. Gaps were identified in the existing CBRN training curricula and teaching materials were complemented to meet the identified needs. The **best suitable training material** was selected and modified, and a **training guideline** was developed covering the teaching methodology to build **theoretical knowledge, table top exercises and scenario discussions**. This resulted in a **draft curriculum consisting of seven modules**, including **training topics and learning outcomes** (see figure 1). In addition, an **e-learning** version of the first two modules was developed.



The MELODY project is currently in the process of **testing** the training materials on the target audience, followed by an **evaluation** of the curriculum, training materials and training guide. Various test events have been and will be setup in different European countries: Hungary, Finland, Belgium and The Netherlands. The training schedule of each of these test events is designed taken into account the availability of the training modules, training facilities and trainees. Test events include two full days of training and evaluation sessions are held in each national language. Figure 2 provides the evaluation strategy used in this project.

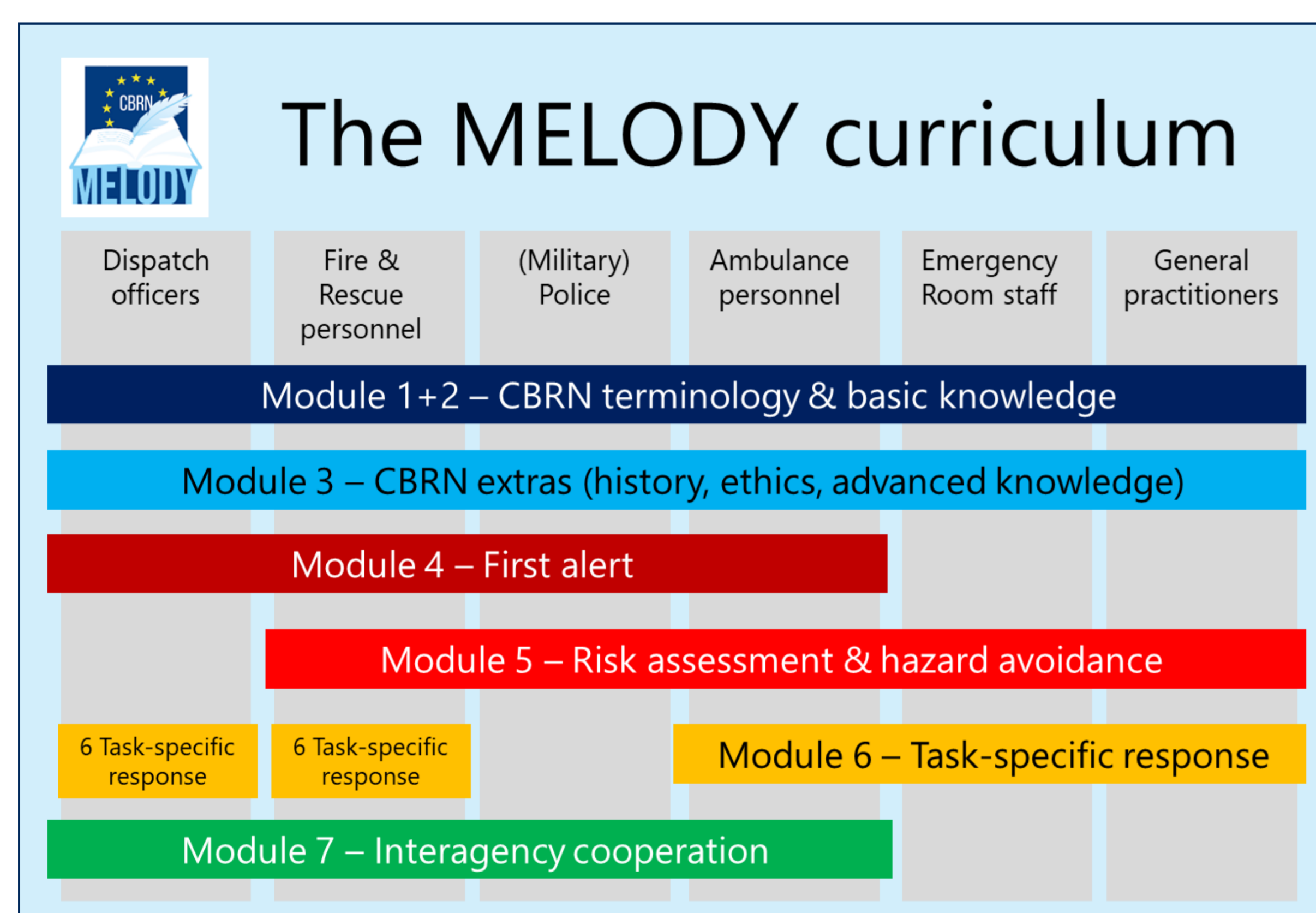


Figure 1: overview of the MELODY curriculum

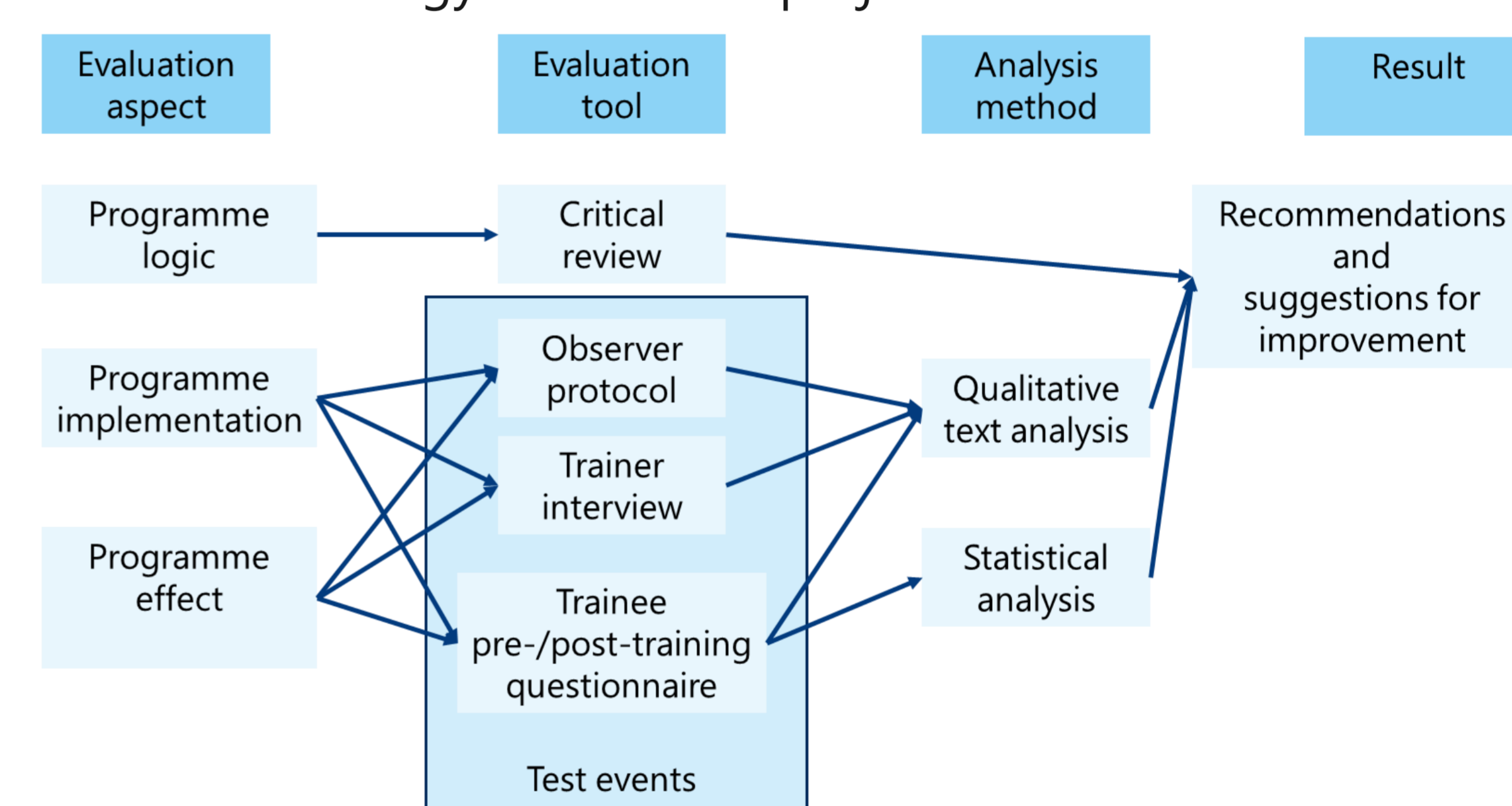


Figure 2: overview of the evaluation strategy

While the live test events of the classroom training, originally planned in four European countries for the period of April 2020 – October 2020, suffered from shifting restrictions due to the ongoing CoVID-19 pandemic, several test-events were shifted towards online solutions.

The **critical review**, summarizing the qualitative findings of the project team with respect to the alignment of the course material with the training topics and learning objectives, facilitated a constructive dialogue within the project to review the MELODY training course as a whole.

In addition to the critical review, input was provided for a thorough **review of the course material and programme setup** via the **observations, trainer interviews** and **feedback from the trainees** from the test sessions.

In the light of recent and ongoing CoVID-19 developments, the two face-to-face test events in The Netherlands and Belgium are now being transformed into one digital event that is scheduled for May and will jointly be held in Dutch for trainees from Belgium and The Netherlands.

First results

Two test events, one in Hungary, the other in Finland, could be performed face-to-face last year despite the pandemic.

A total of 105 volunteers from 11 countries have evaluated the e-learning format of modules 1 and 2.

Future outlook

Using the evaluation data from all test sessions, the **training curriculum, training guide and training course material will be further improved** as the next step in the project.

Thereafter, **the fully harmonized and improved CBRN first responders training curriculum** will be **validated** in a series of four pilot courses at four locations across Europe. The final results will be **disseminated and demonstrated during networking activities** with the relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

- A basic training curriculum on awareness and initial management of incidents with chemical, biological and radio-nuclear hazards is being developed.
- The pandemic situation made it complex to test the various training modules with first responders due difficulties with recruiting volunteers (other priorities), and due to pandemic restrictions (travel, social distancing, use of PPE).
- Thanks to information technology, the curriculum can still be evaluated and optimized via remote learning.