

# Winter school

## Report

08-03-2007

Jan de Koning  
[info@dekoningadvies.nl](mailto:info@dekoningadvies.nl)




---

### Winter school 2007 successful

The 75 winter school participants (31 January tot 2 February) had three enervating and inspiring days. The transnational winter school was about 'Empowerment and Empowering strategies in vocational rehabilitation and fulfilled the expectations to a high extend.

#### Diversity

The first day focused on how empowerment becomes manifest in individuals, organisations and in the society context. Using a variety of methods, i.e. plenary presentations, workshops and a 'stakeholder debate', empowerment emerged as a multidimensional concept which can be looked at from numerous perspectives.

#### Empowerment makes you happy

Eric Demandt, director of REA College Nederland, mentioned empowerment as a new challenge for professionals, organisations, and 'service providers' in the rehabilitation chain. He emphasised the added value of a new 'empowerment paradigm' which replaces the classical care system, where the care provider is responsible for the client, and support and coaching is restricted by bureaucratic rules and procedures. *'Everybody will be happier, when the service user takes over the control over his own future and destination'* Demandt argued and consequently he asked himself the question why we all do not implement a new 'empowering support structure' when there seems to be so many advantages. *'Fear for change and for loss of control'* obviously prevent professionals and service providers to transfer the control over the rehabilitation process to clients. On the other hand clients are uncertain and hesitate whether they can handle their responsibility to take over the lead in their lives. Enough tot do before we can make the cultural change towards an empowering strategy.

#### An empowerment avalanche

During the afternoon debate, it became clear that the various 'stakeholders' have quite different viewpoints with respect to the empowerment concept. Filip Standaert of the Belgian Job en Co showed himself a skilled moderator in this high speed debate, where various core issues on empowerment and empowering strategies came under review one after the other.

*Louis Vervloet* from ESF Belgium argued that empowerment should start from the basis; everybody has to work on himself, on his own power or strength. According to Vervloet empowerment does have its limitations: *'It is out of the question that there is a complete freedom of choice, since society, legislation,*

*and also personal capacities put their restrictions. To empower means to give responsibility and space for ones own choices with respect for individual autonomy. That does NOT necessarily mean that you can do whatever you like. Empowerment becomes evident in interaction with others and keeping into account the social, supporting or employment environment.'*

**Fini de Paauw**, president of the Dutch Society of the Disabled (ANGO), thought that everybody is talking quite a bit on empowerment, but when it comes to concrete actions, very little has been done yet. He proposed: *'Empowering competences should be developed during vocational training and higher education.'* Furthermore de Paauw argued that time has come to put stricter rules for the accessibility of social and public facilities to disabled persons.

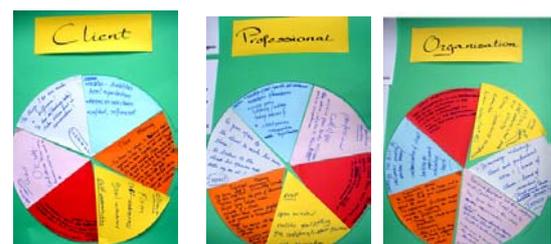
**Frans Nijhuis**, Professor at the Maastricht University, predicted an avalanche when the empowerment paradigm is becoming the common basis in the rehabilitation chain. In order to empower clients, also empowered professionals are required. These in turn need empowering organisations, institutes and companies, whereas these entities only can function within an empowering public framework. *'Expecting from clients to act autonomously, and to create their own future, includes a complete and radical cultural change, both for professionals and for organisations, service providers, companies and civil service. This avalanche might be a risky development.'*

**Sibo Van Veen**, is management consultant in the health care market. He shortly characterised Nijhuis' 'avalanche idea' as 'bullshit'. *'In the past we never had an empowerment avalanche, so why should we get one now?'* According to van Veen 'authority and power' are no longer the key elements of the empowerment paradigm. 'What organisations need is a new type of leadership, where empowerment is a 'state of mind', a mentality which is the locomotive power for quality and creative energy. Van Veen calls this the 'pneuma', or spirit that distinguishes the real innovative entrepreneur from others. Empowerment, on his reasoning, is an essential prerequisite for innovations, and entrepreneurship, and thus it becomes an economical necessity for modern organisations and companies.

**Serge Huyghe**, managing director of the Flemish VKW, agreed with van Veen. Moreover he stated that the empowering approach should form an integral part of a company's Human Resource Management. Self management of employees is crucial for a company, and through empowerment productivity might well be increased. According to Huyghe 'it is not merely a matter of giving away control; it is more looking for new mutual targets and incentives. This position from employers' side raised the discussion concerning possible abuse of empowerment. One debater observed considerably that 'it is not acceptable to give a management consultant an assignment to empower the employees of an organisation, keeping in mind that they might easier find another job when they are fired.' Empowerment as essential element of an organisations' strategic policy, must never be used as an ad hoc management-'tool'. The crucial matter is how to translate such empowerment strategy to the tactic and operational levels.

### **From talking to acting**

During the afternoon workshops, participants developed their own personal plan for active improvement of their empowering quality. The assignment in the "Empowerment quotes" workshop was to establish priorities in statements concerning operational, tactical and strategic policies in their organisation as well as in the public context. In this 'quote workshop' the following three priorities were addressed:



- Empowerment and society: Empowerment should be formulated as a societal/public goal, and it should become a continuous item on the political agenda.
- Empowerment and organisation: all personal in an organisation should have an empowering attitude and share the organisations' viewpoint.
- Empowerment and professional: The starting point of view should be that people themselves are the only experts in their own situation. People are also capable of recognising their own skills and strengths, and they are able to decide whether or not they need support.



'What is empowerment, when life is a pie' was the promising title of a workshop aimed at the same goals, i.e. 'Describe the essential elements of empowerment on the level of a client, a professional and an organisation, considering the six components (competence, self-determination, impact, meaning, positive identity, and group orientation). The three 'pies' that came out of this workshop showed what empowering strategy is all about: trust, responsibility and respect for the individual.

In order to make the next concrete step into practice, all participants got the assignment to formulate during the winter school their personal action point, and to attach this on the bulletin board.

Some examples: 'I will introduce the issue on development of empowering competencies to my manager.' 'I will write an article on empowerment and publish it on our organisation's website.' and: 'I decided to take a course to become an empowerment trainer.'

### **Empowerment and organisation**

The second day was on empowerment, quality and organisation. Frank Visser, who is the project manager at Philips, introduced the Philips Employment Scheme, and explains how the empowerment concept becomes integrated in the organisation's HRM policy. Philips wants to deliver a substantial contribution to the promotion of labour-participation by vulnerable groups in the society. Their target groups are long term unemployed, Women returning to the labour market, ethnic minorities, physically disabled, and young school drop-outs. The participants in the Employment Scheme get a one year labour experience position on the basis of a minimum wage.

After an intensive vocational training, for some months they fulfil a function together with the Philips employee involved. Thereafter the Philips employee follows a personal training programme in order to qualify himself for a higher position. During that period, the participant in the Employment Scheme takes over the duties of the Philips employee. Without production loss for the company both persons can develop. At the end of the work experience year 70% of the participants find a job on own strength.

Visser appoints the empowering elements in this strategy: `the work rhythm and the work experience, the training in many cases leading to a start qualification, and an activated social network give to the participants in the Employment Scheme a new impetus to take initiative for further rehabilitation. Self-confidence and self-respect have strongly increased as well as the pleasure in working. The University of Tilburg evaluated the project and made recommendations on internal communication, management style and focussing on empowering strategies.

## Empowerment and quality

‘What do Michael Jackson, Mahatma Gandhi, Paolo Freire, Edward Deming and Martin Luther King have in common? The answer is *‘empowerment’*’. Guus van Beek, executive director of the EQRM (European Quality in Rehabilitation Mark) elucidated this statement with remarkable quotes of these celebrities. Each of them delivered in their own manner and from their own perspective a contribution or interpretation to the empowerment concept.

**Mahatma Gandhi’s** *‘Be the change that you want to see in the world’* implies that the internal leadership, i.e. empowerment, only can commence with a fundamental individual change!

**Paolo Freire**, *‘The trust of the people in their leaders reflects the confidence of the leaders in their people’*, indicates that a process of change only is possible on the basis of mutual trust, respect and acknowledgement of each others autonomy.

**Michael Jackson** sings: *‘Start with the man in the mirror,’* and: *‘Take a look at yourself, and make that change.’* The ability to and the necessity of self reflection, i.e. looking at the reality of yourself, are fundamental matters and conditional for the empowering process.

**Martin Luther King**, advocate of the emancipation of the black minority in the US during the sixties, was aware of the impact component and the power of the group. He knew to mobilize this power, with his *‘I have a dream!’*

**Edward Deming**, the management guru of the quality circles, build the bridge from empowerment to quality: *‘First do what you have to do, then do your best.’* All elements in the quality process -planning, action, evaluation/self-reflection and change –, and empowerment have common values.



Van Beek investigated to which extent empowering elements are accounted for in existing quality systems, presently used by service providing organisations in vocational rehabilitation. He concluded that systems, such as Borea quality mark, the ISO-system and EFQM do not contain explicit quality criteria for realisation of empowerment in clients. Other systems (MQS, EUSE, E-QUASS, CARF, CKKR and EQRM<sup>1</sup>) include some criteria for promoting and reinforcing individual empowerment. These

are on client participation, involvement in decision making and feed back. However Van Beek directly added some question marks concerning the practical application of these quality criteria: *‘A gap exists between words and facts, between paper and practice, and between the ‘WHAT’ and the ‘HOW’.* Reason enough to give empowerment a stronger profile within the existing quality systems as a fundamental principle’, Van Beek said.

## Focus on empowering quality

Following on the overview of quality systems and the role empowerment playing in these, Van Beek presented in a dedicated workshop the instrument that has been developed within the REQUEST-project. This instrument is an inquiry, aiming to assess the empowering quality of an organisation and a professional working therein. Based on the answers to 78 statements, an ‘empowering profiles’ are

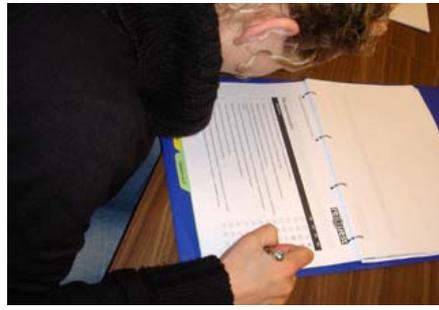
<sup>1</sup> MQS: Minimal Quality Standards, Vlaams Fonds voor Sociale Integratie van Personen met een Handicap  
EUSE: Quality Standards of the European Union of Supported Employment 2005  
E-QUASS: European Quality Assurance for Social Services 2007  
CARF: Standards for Employment Services 2003  
CKKR: Cliënten Keurmerk Reïntegratie  
EQRM: European Quality in Rehabilitation Mark 2003

composed of the organisation and the professional employees functioning in it. The statements concern the six components of empowerment (competence, self-determination, impact, meaning, positive identity, and group orientation), and how these are realised in the service providing process. The instrument evaluates your contact with a client and how your organisation enables you to behave as an empowering professional. Some examples of statements of the instrument are:

- 'I offer clients space to determine the steps in the rehabilitation process him/-herself
- 'My organisation offers me the opportunity to gain skills in supporting clients, to make autonomic decisions'
- 'My organisation evaluates frequently the way I support clients to make their own decisions'
- 'The performance review system of my organisation includes criteria for empowering competencies of employees.'
- 'I always check whether the client has understand what has been agreed'
- 'I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses in counselling clients'

### REQUEST Method

The instrument will become part of the REQUEST-method to develop the empowering quality of an organisation and its professionals. The



method includes six phases or steps, i.e. 1) Identification of the scope (part of the organisation, where the method will be applied), 2) Identification of individual perspectives (how do individuals experience the empowering quality?), 3) Analysis of individual data, 4) A consensus meeting leading to the organisations empowering profile, 5) individual empowering profiles, and 6) Determining a plan of (improvement) action.

### Double Bagger

Sometimes controversial, sometimes inspiring, and always full of humour and relativising, was Paul Meert, presenting his lecture: *'Do's and Don'ts in empowerment'*. 'Once I enjoy my pension, this summer when I am on vacation, within a couple of years when I'll be the managing director, ... then I will do this, I'll do that, and I want so...!' According to Paul we live most of our time in the future or in the past, whereas we only can act in the **NOW**, in this very moment. We don't like changes, although we love variation. So who don't we mention it like that? Variation. Meert catches his audience in a web full of speedy reasoning, amusing stories and short exercises, denouncing old unconscious patterns and habits.



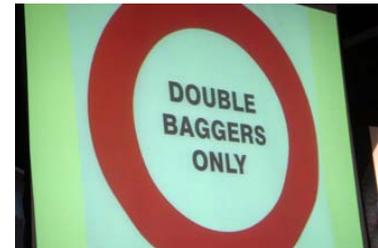
*'Only clap your hands when I have said 'three'; I even said no 'three' and yet you clap!'*

'Imaging an American supermarket; there is a function called 'Bagger'. This is the man or woman who puts your purchases in the shopping bag. Well, there are two kinds of 'baggers': one is the 'Single Bagger' who uses only one bag, throwing beer cans, bottles and Dutch cheese directly on the tomatoes, grapes or other vulnerable stuff, while thinking: 'What a shit job this is, and what shall I do tonight to forget this lousy

manager of mine.’ Chips are crushed between potatoes and without looking; the client gets the bag in their hands without any comment.

The ‘Double Bagger’ on the other hand, uses two bags; one is for the soft vegetables and fruits, and the other for less vulnerable goods. He is concerned with his work, makes a little chat with the client and shows interest in the client’s well-being. Upon his ‘Everything according to your wishes?’, he gets information about what was good and what wasn’t. He promises to solve problems or to transfer complaints to the manager. The ‘Double Bagger’ stands positive towards his work and himself; he is more client oriented, happier, and at the same time contributing some additional quality of ‘his supermarket’.

The behaviour of the ‘Double Bagger’ underlines the power of empowerment: ‘Present in the moment, proud on competences, do what you have to do, add an extra personal element, positive behaviour, and affective attention’. Everybody turns out to be a ‘Double Bagger’, or at least wants to be one. ‘An empowering organisation is innovative, offers quality, and only employs ‘Double Baggers’. And there’s no reason, not to start as a ‘Double Bagger’ right now!’ Meert thinks.



### Empowering professionals

The third day was about competencies involved in individual empowerment and in empowering skills, i.e. the requested skills and competencies to realise someone else’s empowerment. In the morning session Tom Hermant, expert trainer at Amelior training company, gave a lecture on competence management. The presentation by Mari Hyyppä, teacher at Lahti University, concerned the competence development in the curriculum of the faculty of social and healthcare. Together they moderated an exciting workshop in which the participants saw themselves confronted with their own (lack of) knowledge, skills and competencies involved in realising the six components of empowerment.

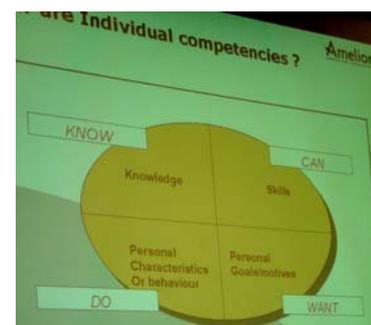
Implementing competencies in organisations becomes increasingly important. Looking at the dynamic environment in which organisations have to operate, competencies are even more inevitable. Technologic, economic and social changes require strategic adaptation in order to maintain competitiveness and to achieve optimal business processes. Also individual employees are changing; they are more empowered, work in self steering teams, and are accounted for the quality of their achievements.

### Competence as success factor

‘Competence management is the best way to realise the mission of human resource management: finding the right, motivated and qualified employees, matching the needs of the organisation,’ Hermant teaches. There are various definitions and models for competence management. However there is one, relatively simple model, that is discriminative, unambiguous, complete and acceptable. In this model individual competency is defined as:

*“Visible and measurable behaviour that distinguishes the successful/effective employee from the less successful/effective, given that both have the necessary knowledge and skills.”*

This definition distinguishes between *knowing* (knowledge), *ability* (skills) and *acting or doing* (behaviour or competence). Much less visible and in practice not impressionable, and nevertheless with a huge impact, is the *wanting* (personal goals, values and motives).



## Coherence of competence levels

To get to work with competencies, one should realise that there are three matching ‘levels’ that matter. At strategic level it concerns the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviour to realise the strategy of the organisation. The tactic level includes the company’s procedures in which the knowledge, skills and competencies are described, and followed by individual job descriptions. And finally there is the operational level, where the knowledge, skills and competencies are determined which are required to execute a job.

## Competence domains

Mari Hyyppä, expands Hermant’s model. She distinguished four domains of behavioural competencies:

- The productive competence: this is the instrumental, practical work using various tools and methods
- The scientific / synthesis oriented competence: this is investigating behaviour, based on critical analysis and problem solving abilities
- The creative / expressive competence: this is inspiring, empowering behaviour base don empathic and expressive capacity, for instance in music, drama, art and media
- The communication competence: the abilities of unbiased listening, verbal expression, and constructive conversation.

At Lahti University this competence approach is integrated in the vocational training for job-coach. Empowering competence has a dominant position in the mission statement of the social pedagogic approach. The acting by the job coach is aimed at the well-being of the client and on taking own responsibility. The coach stimulates the client to address their own capacities and own strength; the coaching therefore should be especially aimed at the development of behaviour –competencies- that match to empowered client.

## Empowering competences

During the workshop that followed, six groups start to elaborate the ‘empowering competencies’. Formulating the underlying questions over and over again turns to be essential in order not to revert to vague and woolly statements and discussions. *“Which knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies belong to empowerment component: self-determination?”* or *“which knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies are required to realise empowerment component: positive identity?”*

First the participants examined their own empowerment perception. During the second part they could apply this knowledge to their functioning as a professional. Therefore the key questions had to be reformulated: *‘which knowledge and skills are needed for a professional, and how do you have to behave in order to realise the component ‘impact’ at a client?’* *“Which knowledge, skills and competencies are required to enable a client to develop their positive identity?”*

Lively discussions, creative solutions, examples and counter-examples led to a matrix in which professional knowledge, skills and competencies became clear in relation to the various empowerment components. While doing this exercise the participants got the feeling that the development of their empowering competencies received a new and strong impetus. As one of them sighed: “Gosh, already time? How time flies, when you are entirely in NOW!”

Component	Knowledge	Skills	Behaviour
Competence	Self-knowledge specialised	Self-reflection	Takes initiatives Open minded
SELF-DETERMINATION	KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR LIMITS (SELF-POSITION)	Self-knowledge	Speaks his mind
IMPACT	GOAL/MISSION OF THE ONE	Communication skills	TAKES INITIATIVES Speaks openly in meetings
MEANING	CLEAR VALUES STANDARDS	Appreciate own SITUATION	ADAPTES COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
JOB IDENTITY	SELF-KNOWLEDGE	Put things in PERSPECTIVE	OPEN TO FEEDBACK
GROUP ORIENTATION	Group process Sense of collegiality	Communication skills	USE RESPECTFUL language; no cross talk eye contact
	TECHNIQUES TOOLS	PROFESSIONAL USE	UNBIASED NON-JUDGEMENTAL LET GO