EQUAL

reQuest

Most wanted

Empowering Empowerment

Environment

Colophon

In this publication, the masculine form is used purely for the sake of readability.
(*he* or *his* instead of *he/she*, *his/hers*).

Introduction

This publication is an adaptation of the study conducted by the Knowledge Centre for Revalidation and Disability (iRv) in Hoensbroek[1] in the framework of the REQUEST project. The study focused on answering the following question: 'which elements determine the empowering qualities of an organisation and its professionals?' The aim was to create a scientific basis for developing a practical instrument '*to determine the extent to which an organisation acts in an empowering way towards people who have work-related problems.*'

Research consisted of a literature study and in-depth interviews with professional counsellors, job coaches and 'hands-on experts'. The information gathered from the literature study and interviews was analysed, categorised, and presented in two 'Delphi rounds' to experts at the institutions participating in the project. This led to consensus on a number of organisational preconditions, profess-sional activities and skills that are characteristic of an empowering attitude in clients/candidates involved in a particular process.

[1] B. van Lierop, D. Van der Pijl, K. Van Soest: iRv (06) 14-03/040275/52981/July

'As a leader...I have always endeavoured to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes, my own opinion will simply represent a consensus of what I heard in the discussion. I always remember the axiom: a leader...is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.'
(Nelson Mandela)

Underlying principle

People who want to (re)join the labour market must be motivated and prepared to actively take control of their situation. The extent to which a person is able to fulfil this control role depends on his level of empowerment. The same can be said of a person in a work situation who, for whatever reason, is about to switch to another workplace or job, either inside or outside their own organisation. The question is: *'Will you just let it happen or will you take the step yourself?'*, *'Will the decision be made for you or will you take the initiative?'*

'Empowered	→	greater autonomy	→	more own choices	→	higher success rate in change procedure

To understand 'Empowerment', we could start by defining the concept: 'What is it?' But we could also first describe 'What it does'. Empowerment helps people to effectively use their talents and capacities and to self-confidently interpret their own actions. Empowerment enhances people's performance, initiative and creativity, and enables them to assume responsibility. Empowerment, also called 'inner leadership', leads to effective relationships with people and motivates and creates space for creativity and renewal.

Empowering leads to greater autonomy and encourages you to make your own, independent choices. It increases your chance of successfully acquiring and preserving your place in society or on the labour market. Based on this hypothesis, the importance of establishing concise definitions of the concepts of 'empowerment' and 'empowering' become clear, and also how to give these concepts a concrete shape.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

The next question is to determine what the concept means for the practice of (re)integration in the work process and mobility circuits. How can this vague 'all-purpose concept' become operational and be used in practice? It was decided to make the concept operational in two successive projects.

In the first project, VrijBaan, the focus was on a person's individual empowerment. Research conducted within the project's framework showed that people are empowered when they feel they control their own destiny, when they feel confident in their capacity to achieve something, and when they feel that what they want to achieve really suits them, that they have chosen it themselves.

Empowerment is a dynamic process that changes over time, through personal development, (life) experience or training. People take a test to find out how empowered they think they are. Then, on an individual level or in a group, they follow specific training to further develop their 'inner leadership', which in turn allows them to assume greater responsibility and control over every aspect of their lives.

Strengthening empowerment

'The VrijBaan Empowerment Method' is a structured approach that *enables people to become more active* when looking for and holding on to a job.

By filling in the VrijBaan questionnaire, participants develop their *own* insights into the strong and weak points in their empowerment.

Together with the trainer, they then compile and implement a personal training programme. In this programme, participants acquire or strengthen the skills and attitudes they need to take control on their way to finding a job.

The REQUEST project's main focal point was the effect the environment has on a person's individual empowerment. 'Environment' is a broad concept, comprising an informal element, such as family, friends, educators and neighbours, and a formal element, such as social institutions, the health sector, educational institutions, businesses and organisations. In REQUEST, we limited ourselves to the environment involved in rehabilitation and mobility. This 'professional environment' comprises:

- 'Professionals engaged with rehabilitation or mobility candidates, such as (company) occupational health doctors, job consultants, employment experts, rehabilitation advisers, case managers, counsellors, or job coaches.

- The organisations to which these professionals belong: rehabilitation companies, educational institutions, local governments, implementation institutes for employee insurance, centres for Work and Income, and ultimately also companies in which the rehabilitation candidate hopes to find a job.

- The laws, regulations, and implementation procedures that comprise the social, organisational and legal frameworks within which rehabilitation or relocation procedures must take place.
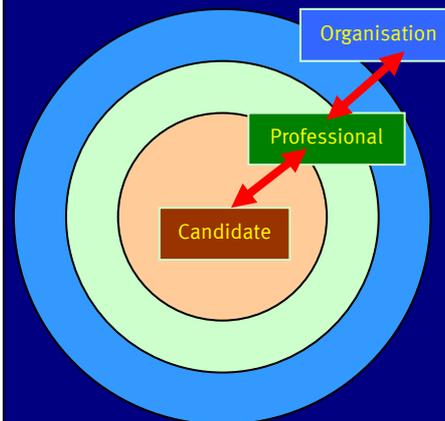
The empowering environment

'Are you a 'hopeless case', or is your problem receiving serious attention?'
'Do you trust that everything will turn out well, or is the procedure just making you more insecure?' Sometimes the environment has a decisive - positive or negative - effect on the success of the rehabilitation process or on the progress of the relocation.

REQUEST examined how the professional environment contributes positively to the stimulation and development of 'individual empowerment' in a client or candidate and how that environment minimises possible negative effects on empowerment.

Based on the hypothesis that empowerment of the individual is an important condition for successful and sustainable rehabilitation, we define the stimulation and supply of a positive contribution to empowerment as an 'empowering environment'.

The 'empowering environment' is specifically apparent in the attitude, treatment and personal approach to the client, candidate or client. So what does this mean in practice for services, coaching and support in integration and mobility?

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

What is the meaning of 'an empowering environment'?
Which preconditions/criteria apply to 'an empowering environment'?
How is it possible to determine the extent to which an organisation satisfies the criteria of 'an empowering environment'? *(Core questions in the REQUEST project)*

People with a work disability meet professionals from various organisations and institutions during their (re)integration process. The way they are treated by the trainers, coaches, counsellors or officials at those institutions effects their individual empowerment. In order to support clients in their individual empowerment, 'empowering behaviour' or an 'empowering approach' is necessary. A supportive professional must therefore have specific skills and competencies.

At the same time, it is important for the organisation to enable its professionals to act in a way that encourages empowerment. This is done by, for example, providing target-oriented training courses, by functioning in an empowering way, and by promoting, evaluating or rewarding empowering behaviour. In addition, empowering competencies and skills can also be cited as job requirements or selection criteria when employing professionals. The extent to which an organisation succeeds in integrating empowerment into its mission statement, philosophy and policy, and then realising an 'empowering approach' in business processes, services or production, depends on the 'empowering quality' of that organisation.

The extent to which concrete descriptions of the components of empowerment are apparent in what people do or say is a good frame of reference for daily practice. These descriptions can be used to create an image of an 'empowered candidate or client'. It is then possible to examine the relationship of the empowered candidate or client with the empowering skills of a professional and the empowering quality of an organisation.
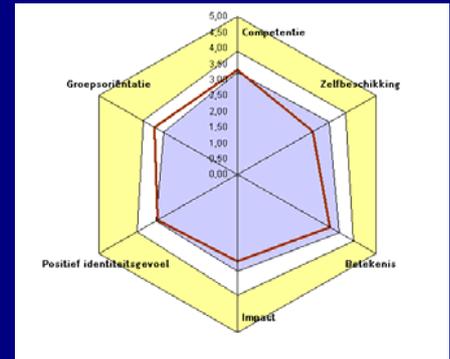
Six Components

Based on a literature study and a number of in-depth interviews with professional counsellors, job coaches and 'hands-on experts', as well as with people who successfully completed a (re)integration procedure, the following six components were defined:
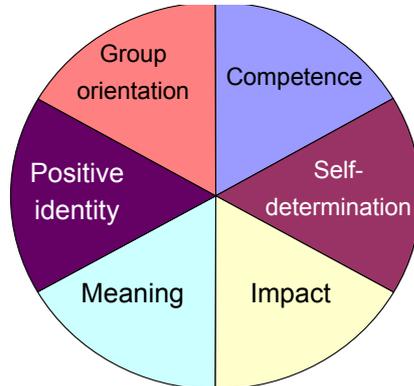
These six components are the main building blocks of empowerment. Every component is representative of a specific aspect. The extent to which a person has realised the components contributes to their individual 'empowerment profile'.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

The VrijBaan questionnaire is a self-reporting list that people with a (work) disability use to test their own level of empowerment. The test produces a "profile" that indicates the strong and weak components of a person's personal empowerment. It particularly focuses on the extent to which people are able to assume control during their reintegration process.

Competency

The *'Competency'* empowerment component means that you are confident and have the skills to successfully complete a particular task. People with a strongly developed sense of competency know what they can and cannot do, are confident in their own abilities, and are not afraid to express this.

Toine: *'I often thought: I'll never manage that, I'm just not able to do it, and who wants to employ a retrained old crock anyway? But yes, you've said A, so you have to dare to say B as well. The truck I drove meant the world to me. After the accident, I could only do administrative work. At first I didn't think much of it, but I gradually got to like the training course. With my years of practical experience I could easily get a job in a logistical company. And now everything is going great.'*

Self-determination

The *'Self-determination'* component means that you are able, and are not afraid, to make choices about your life. This gives you the feeling that you control your own destiny. Many candidates in a rehabilitation procedure are happy to leave everything to the recommendations of the 'experts' — after all, they know best. They say: *'I'll just wait and see what happens'* and *'Just tell me what to do',* and in that way make the professional responsible for the next step to be taken. A reaction of an over-helpful institution could be: *'Well, if you can't choose, I'll choose for you.'*

Impact

The *'Impact'* component gives you the feeling that your choices can actually influence the way your process is progressing. You feel you are influencing your own situation. People with a well-developed sense of impact realise that they control, manage and give shape to their own development through the choices they make. They are aware of the consequences of their choices and take them seriously.

Peter: *'If you let yourself get tied down by all kinds of rules and bureaucracy, it can take a long time for something to happen. You keep on waiting until something clicks somewhere, until somebody signs a paper or draws up a report. But then one day, I just had enough. I decided to take my chances and forget about working for a boss. And if they cut my disablement benefit, so be it. But a bank saw that my plan had potential and gave me a generous loan. That was the end of all that meddling and patronising behaviour and was I no longer dependent.'*

Meaning

The *'Meaning'* empowerment component means you feel and experience that your work is significant, meaningful and compatible with your values, opinions and behaviour. The choices that you make in your rehabilitation procedure, in your personal development or in your career are also meaningful. People attending a training programme or mandatory course they don't like will probably drop out before they finish it. Without significance, nothing is achieved or changed: in this respect, reactions such as *'What good will it do me, taking all that trouble to reintegrate, Why should I bother?'*, *'That's not for me'* are signals 'of significance'.

Sense of positive identity

A frequently underestimated component of empowerment is a *'Sense of positive identity'*. You feel positive about yourself. You accept yourself as you are and feel that your limitations or the boundaries of your possibilities do not dominate your life, but rather that there is space for other things.

José: *'I'm still the same person I always was. OK, my eyesight has got a lot worse, but what can I do? I can't just throw in the towel and feel sorry for myself. My life is definitely not over. I can still do a lot of things, I'm glad to say. I'm now busy learning braille and when I've mastered it I'll be able to use a computer. Then I'll hold training courses for people with a visual disability. Empowerment training courses, because I took those courses too. As a hands-on expert, I still have plenty to offer.*

Group orientation

The *'Group orientation'* component implies that you realise you are part of a community, that there is therefore always a certain element of dependence on others and that it is necessary to work together with others. A person with a strong sense of group orientation realises that he functions in a social context and that his behaviour contributes something and is of value to others. He can estimate the value of his own role in his environment and does not assume a-priori that the environment will always accommodate itself to his situation. He also realises that he can ask for help if necessary, without losing his independence.

Empowering

'How do you get a person, a candidate or a client to develop the six empowerment components?

An training course focuses on the six components in great detail. Course members become aware of their responsibility, their ability to make choices or the values and standards on which their behaviour is based. They practice skills that make them more aware of the impact their choices have and the effect of their actions on others and on their own situation.

However, if candidates come up against a wall of bureaucracy, patronising behaviour or a lack of understanding, there is a risk that their recently acquired skills will not have the optimal effect. This is why they need an environment that enables them to take control.

Besides training, therefore, 'empowering' must mainly take place in the day-to-day practice of coaching, guidance and counselling during rehabilitation programmes, career development or mobility processes in the relationship with and the interaction between professionals and clients or candidates.

'Empowering is about sharing power. It is embedded in the culture of the organisation. In an empowering organisation, leadership is not a static, hierarchical given, but rather a dynamic aspect of the organisation's business operations. Power in an empowering organisation means working together while making the best use of people's competencies, while aiming for optimal use of the skills and talents that are required for a particular task.' *(Ken Murell)*

Criteria for an empowering approach

The quality of a professional's approach to a candidate or client is reflected in the way the candidate is treated. In a rehabilitation or mobility process, the empowering approach depends on a number of conditions, criteria and basic principles. Some of these are very practical by nature; others are more on the level of relationships, personal convictions, professional skills and qualities.

Environment The professional environment is the basic condition for an empowering approach. This relates to practical issues, such as the place where the contact occurs, the way appointments are made and the quality of the manner in which the person is received. However, compiling dossiers, written communication, the supply of information and the professional's level of knowledge are also part of the professional environment.

Communication / skill The quality of the empowering approach is expressed in the verbal and non-verbal communication between the professional and the client. It is embedded in the types of questions asked by the professional, the way the professional communicates good or bad news, and how the client reacts to questions and to the information being supplied. Here, the professional's social and coaching skills are important. To what extent does the professional succeed in putting the candidate at ease? Can he dispel the client's anxiety, is he on the same wavelength as the client, how does he approach the interview, and how does he react to the other person's behaviour?

Clarifying expectations Approaching a person in an empowering way means empathising with that person's perception of his environment. The empowering professional makes a distinction between what he himself expects

from the procedure and what others expect from it. And while doing this, he is always aware of his own convictions, attitudes and prejudices.

Respecting the interests of others What is important for the professional and what is important for the client? If there are conflicting interests, it is important that both parties can preserve their identity, self-respect and self-confidence, but also that they respect these qualities in the other person. The task of the empowering professional is to safeguard and encourage this.

Motivating / inspiring In the relationship with the client, the professional's attitude toward his fellow man plays a role. Is he acting with compassion? Can he show that the candidate matters to him, that he is *really* interested in what the candidate wants or does? Does he know how to make a distinction between what he wants as a professional and what the other person is doing? Is he able to motivate and inspire the candidate?

In addition to relational aspects in the empowering approach, a number of other general aspects are also important — for example, the way the components are integrated, the level of cohesion in the organisation, and leadership.
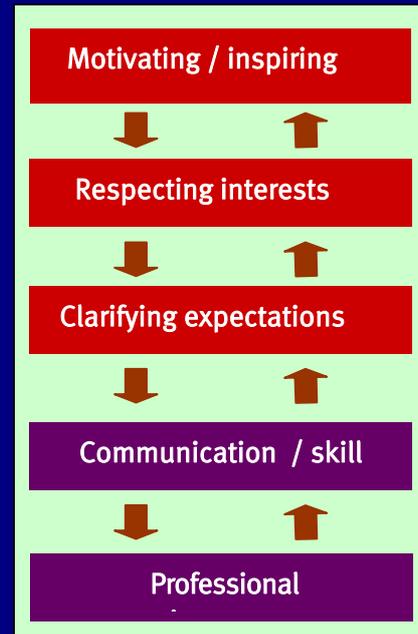
Integration

This theoretical basis is universally applicable and you may ask yourself: *'What is so empowering about it?'* What is a positive contribution to the degree of empowerment and what is a negative contribution that lacks motivation? To answer this, you could say that an *'empowering approach'* only exists if the treatment of the candidate includes integral attention for all the components: competency, self-determination, impact, significance, a positive sense of identity, and group orientation.

Cohesion

An 'empowering approach' is cohesive almost by definition. In a strictly hierarchical organisation, it is difficult for a professional to behave in an empowering way. But even if there is only limited time available, or if the aim is to generate as much 'production' as possible (=get people to work straight away), the professional can still ask himself what the candidate is contributing, what the candidate is experiencing, or what the long-term results will be. If a candidate is expected to act autonomously, assume responsibility for his own actions and exercise control, this implies a radical shift for professionals, organisations, businesses and the government.

Leadership

An empowering approach requires a new type of leadership. Empowerment involves a certain mentality and acts as the driving force behind the creative distribution of power based on people's talents and individual capacities. Empowering organisations are more flexible and better able to innovate. They distinguish themselves from others by their more committed and motivated employees, and that in turn contributes to the quality of the end product.

The players in the empowering environment are the client or candidate, the professional, his supervisor and the organisational context. The empowerment components are the playing field.

	Client	Professional	Supervisor	Organisation
Competency	self-confidence	*generating and facilitating self-confidence*		
Self-determination	choices	*supporting choices and providing space*		
Impact	influence	*encouraging and allowing participation*		
Significance	making meaningful	*taking people seriously and protecting their interests*		
Pos. identity	self-respect	*treating people with respect, accepting them as they are*		
Group orientation	dependence	*identifying expectations and promoting teamwork*		

Empowerment, empowering environment

What significance do the conditions and criteria described above have for the empowering environment — that is, for the chain organisation-supervisor-professional? How do they ensure in practice that the client or candidate develops his individual empowerment? In the REQUEST project, the standpoints, activities, skills and policy required to do this are defined for each empowerment component. This is done from the perspective of the organisation/supervisor, the professional and the client.

Competency and the empowering environment

Organisation → professional Competency relates to people's confidence in their own skills. In order to do his work properly, a professional must be confident in his own skills. An empowering organisation attempts to create the conditions and work situations in which the professional has this confidence and in which he can continue to utilise and develop his own capacities as much and as efficiently as possible.

How? By satisfying his need to learn, develop and constantly improve himself. But also by realistically accepting, for example, that a professional has outgrown his job and needs new career opportunities and challenges. Confidence in his own skills also means that the professional receives feedback on his performance and that the organisation has quality standards in place for evaluating this performance. This implies that an empowering organisation uses empowering skills as a quality criterion.

Professional → client The professional is responsible for implementing the organisation's philosophy and mission in the domain of competency. He encourages the candidate to gain a good understanding of what his options, qualities and capacities are, but also of what his limitations are.

He knows the right instruments to use to achieve this and, where relevant, offers the necessary training to enable the candidate to discover his qualities. He also ensures that the client does not constantly feel he is overstepping his own boundaries and cannot meet the expectations of the professional or of others. The professional's expectations are secondary and may not put the candidate under any pressure.

'Often, 'empowering' is a question of *daring to do something.* Do you dare as a professional to inspire confidence in a client, do you dare to leave it up to him to do something, to assume responsibility. Or do you already know what you will say to him, for example, if he tells you he wants to become a magician?' *(Trainer)*

Self-determination and the empowering environment

Organisation → professional Self-determination is about making choices. A professional may expect his organisation to allow him to make his own choices within legal, organisational and procedural frameworks, and in this way exercise control over his own work situation. Within the organisation, therefore, he is given sufficient time and 'discretionary' space to feel responsible, and, as such, to be the 'owner of his work'.

In order to do this, the professional must be clear about what is expected of him, and about where his responsibilities and authorisation lie. But he may also expect the organisation to support and cooperate with (the development of) his empowering skills and his empowering behaviour. This means that there is clarity about procedures, about where the organisation wants to go, and about which options are available to the professional in the area of personal development, training and room to manoeuvre with clients.

One condition for realising self-determination is that the professional shares power. This means that he must have a say in formulating the organisation's aims, that autonomy and dependence are in balance, and that there is agreement with the organisation about mutual expectations and responsibilities.

Professional → client In the context of self-determination, taking an empowering approach means that the professional gives the client or candidate the opportunity to gain his own impression of the available options and to weigh the consequences of the various alternatives against each other. The professional supports this choice process by indicating the margins within which the client can make decisions, by discussing alternative choices, and by providing the client with accurate, relevant and comprehensive information. The main point is that the professional leaves the ultimate decision to the client.

The professional encourages the client to assume responsibility for his choices; this means the client is not told or ordered to do something. Sometimes those choices and decisions can clash with the professional's views. The professional has an empowering attitude if he accepts the choice in such situations and does not wonder whether the client will be able to carry it through. Only then is the professional capable of providing the client with all the necessary information, including information about rights and obligations and possible instruments and facilities.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

You would expect a professional to know all the ins and outs

'One condition for realising self-determination is that the client is provided with clear and reliable decision-making procedures. As a professional, you have to be aware of what is possible and what is impossible; you must have a thorough knowledge of the laws and regulations, of the labour market and of all kinds of procedures related to reintegration, both inside and outside your own organisation.'

Impact and the empowering environment

Organisation → professional The 'impact' component relates to people having an influence on the environment and on their own process. This includes the feeling of being taken seriously.

The organisation allows the professional to exert influence on important outcomes in the organisation — among other things, by providing a work climate in which professionals communicate with each other and in which conflicting opinions are valued and new initiatives and ideas encouraged and appreciated.

By taking such concrete steps, an organisation with an empowering working style shows that it is listening to its professionals. Professionals can adopt a critical stance against what is happening without negative consequences. They can discuss their own working methods and that of others and also receive feedback in the form of adapted, improved or changed business processes.

By facilitating and valuing impact, the organisation shows that it takes the professional seriously and trusts his professionalism and creativity. By making an impact, the professional also feels he has added value for the organisation.

Professional → client Some simple operational issues positively contribute to the feeling of impact; they include jointly planning a date and time for a meeting, agreeing on the subject of the meeting, giving the client access to his dossier, sending a personal letter or providing information on how the case is progressing or on a relevant new development.

What is more important, however, is to take the client seriously in interviews and in the decisions taken in his case. The professional listens and shows that he understands and is doing his best to help the client. The opportunity to get a 'second opinion' or to have a say also creates a strong sense of impact. The principle *'never decide without involving the client'* stimulates and inspires the client to come up with his own solutions.

A third aspect of impact in which a professional plays an important empowering role is the effect/impact of the client's behaviour or decisions. An empowering professional informs the client about the effects and consequences of his actions and decisions concerning his environment, his own case and therefore also the options open to him. It is important that the client is aware of these consequences when making decisions and is also prepared to accept them.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

'As a client of the CWI, I want to be able to voice my own opinion, even if it is not what the adviser wants to hear. I want to be able to do that without the fear of sanctions, threats or unpleasant reactions.' *(CWI client)*

Meaning and the empowering environment

Organisation → professional Meaning relates to the meaningfulness of work and of the choices made in that context. It relates to whether the work is compatible with the individual's own standards and values.

For the professional, meaning implies that the advice he gives is compatible with his own values, views and behaviour. The organisation makes this possible by appreciating the professional's own views and by stimulating self-management and leadership in the professional.

It is also important for the organisation to be clear about its own standards and values, as expressed, for example, in its mission statement and philosophy. Ideally, these are consistent with the professional's standards and values, but in practice tension can exist here. In this context, it is the organisation's responsibility to continually try to put 'the right person in the right place'.

Professional → client The success of a process often depends on the motivation of the client or candidate. In order to motivate a person, the aim must be compatible with whatever is meaningful for that person.

To enable a client to experience and develop a sense of significance, the empowering professional allows him to tell his story, and encourages him to reflect on it. This is possible, for example, by reflecting the client's problems, questions and remarks back to him, by acting as a mirror and providing objective, honest feedback. The professional asks searching questions about values, standards and behaviour, and in this way helps the client give meaning to what he is doing.

The professional ensures that the client is faced with choices and decisions that are meaningful for him and he stimulates the client to act according to his own values as much as possible. The client may expect that professional provides him with information that he finds meaningful. He may also expect to be given enough time to acclimatise, to become accustomed to a new situation and to find out what is really important for him.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

'Pleasure in my work is an important condition for my empowering approach. It shows that my work means something to me. If you enjoy your work, it's logical that you also want to communicate that to your client. \you should encourage him to accept a job only if he enjoys doing it.' *(integration counsellor)*

Sense of positive identity and the empowering environment

Organisation → professional A sense of positive identity means that people accept themselves as they are and that no personal aspects dominate their lives.

It is important that the professional is aware of and accepts the possibilities and limitations of his job. He is aware that nobody is able to do everything, but he also knows that he can still make important contributions with his specific capacities.

Conditions for a positive sense of identity include a work climate and work in which professionals feel 'good', go to work with pleasure and are treated with respect. An organisation can achieve this, for example, by explicitly discussing a person's perception of work in performance interviews, by encouraging personal development, and by gearing a professional's tasks to his specific talents and capacities.

Professional → client It is important for the empowering professional to focus on the client's positive sense of identity. If, instead of trying to find new options, the client does not accept himself as he is and is in continual conflict with his limitations, he will be incapable of benefiting from influence, significance, cooperation and opportunities. In such a situation, it is no use '*helping a person to get a job'.* It is better to first give the client time, space and the instruments he needs to positively develop his sense of identity.

A limitation however cannot be an excuse for certain undesirable behaviour. It is the professional's task to recognise such behaviour and to draw the client's attention to it — for example, by providing feedback and by examining, together with the client, the impact his behaviour has on others. Providing feedback in an empowering way means: *'at no cost to a person's self-respect'.*

'As an organisation, you must ensure that your advisers can deal with extremely demotivated clients External pressure and coercion, such as benefit cuts, are usually not the way to really motivate clients.

You have to keep investing, to keep looking for what is behind that demotivation. Because most clients know much more and can do much more than you think. But sometimes they are being held back by fear, and at other times by a lack of understanding.

Sometimes they have a long medical history, an unbearable home situation, or have held a number of unsuccessful jobs. So every *'suit yourself'* or *'tell me what to do'* has its own story.' *(supervisor reintegration company)*

Group orientation and the empowering environment

Organisation → professional Group orientation embraces the themes of mutual dependence and cooperation. In a creative and innovative organisation, cooperation between professionals is a precondition for that organisation's success. The cooperation is all the more effective when each person in the group contributes his own ideas, skills and expertise, and when these are accepted and valued by the group.

An empowering organisation constantly focuses on mutual dependence. The organisation makes its professionals aware of the added value of cooperation and promotes cooperative, harmonious and helpful behaviour. This requires a leadership style that unites people, open communication in two directions, and support for working in teams. The development of team structures is stimulated by means of supervision, peer supervision and possibilities for the team members to exchange roles, delegate tasks to each other or complement each other in service-providing processes.

Cooperation requires the following from the professional: loyalty, openness in group processes and an honest balance between the collective interests of the team and his own interests.

Professional → Client When providing support and guidance during processes, group orientation often involves 'asking for help[1]', 'giving help' and 'accepting help'. An empowering professional gives the client the feeling that he is not alone and that he does not have to do everything himself. The client does not have to feel dependent or feel he is the plaything of bureaucracy or of regulations. The professional encourages and helps the client to identify, develop and communicate with his network, as well as advising the client to keep in contact with that network. In addition, the professional ensures that the relevant information is also available from others.

It is important for the client to learn to accept that others are willing, sometimes even obliged, to put their qualities and knowledge at his disposal. This allows the client to make unconditional use of it.

A completely dependent structure however can be counterproductive, unrealistic and unnecessarily burdensome. In such a situation, an empowering professional draws the client's attention to the positive or negative effects of this behaviour and helps the client look for alternatives.

[1] For 'help' read: support, assistance, contribution, participation, etc.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

'If you were all alone in the universe with no one to talk to, no one with whom to share the beauty of the stars, to laugh with, to touch, what would be your purpose in life? It is other life, it is love, which gives your life meaning. This is harmony. We must discover the joy of each other, the joy of challenge, the joy of growth.' *(Mitsugi Saotome)*

Constant change

Change is a constant factor in modern organisations. Owing to rapid, often unpredictable, social, economic and technological developments, organisations that want to excel, innovate and provide quality must continuously adapt to the market.

Given the truism of 'change as a constant factor', organisations that want to achieve the best quality end product must now focus on the flexible deployment of people and resources, and strengthen and utilise individual capacities. This is why organisations increasingly urge their personnel to plot their own course and assume responsibility. As a result, flatter organisational structures, self-managing teams and 'the learning organisation' are now familiar concepts.

These organisations are however also faced with dilemmas. Managers wonder how far they can let go; professionals strive for autonomy, but also often need a supervisor to tell them how to do things. How do you keep everything manageable? Who is in control? How do you ensure that people really do assume responsibility?

Empowerment is a way of getting an organisation to excel in change. Empowerment links the organisation's mission statement and philosophy to the behaviour and skills of its supervisors and professionals, as well as to their approach to customers, candidates or clients. This gives rise to a chain that flexibly anticipates the changing environment on all levels, without causing the organisation to lose its cohesion and structure. Here, the *integration* of the six empowerment components plays a crucial role in the behaviour and skills of managers and professionals, and in the preconditions that organisations set in order to create an empowering environment.

Empowering behaviour and skills

An organisation in itself is not empowering. But it can create a number of conditions to stimulate empowerment. It is the supervisors, managers and professionals of an organisation who design and implement the empowering approach. Supervisors practice it in their leadership style with their employees, the professionals. Professionals in turn practice it when coaching, guiding or advising the clients and candidates who are using their services.

The elements that determine the empowering quality of the behaviour of managers and supervisors towards professionals are essentially no different to the quality elements of the behaviour of professionals to clients. The REQUEST study of criteria for an empowering approach identified 16 properties for empowering behaviour and 14 empowering skills[2].

The following overview refers to the 'professional/supervisor' and 'the other person' as the parties directly involved in the interactive process.

[2] Some empowering skills are the same as counselling skills. Here, only the specific *empowering* skills are referred to.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

Empowering leadership

- Commitment to empowerment
- Excellent communication culture
- Creative distribution of power
- Space for talent and capacity
- Reduced resistance
- Mutual influence
- Clarity about expectations

Empowering behavioural aspects

1. *The professional/supervisor provides feedback or coaching regarding the competencies required to make realistic choices.*
   He encourages the other person to trust his decision-making skills and make his own decisions. He helps the other person overcome his fear of failure, accept that things can go wrong, and deal with setbacks.

2. *The professional/supervisor provides feedback or coaching regarding the other person's use of his skills /capacities for his process or his work.*
   The support is mainly intended to ensure that the other person has a realistic idea of his capacities, of what he can and cannot do — for example, by using assessment instruments.

3. *The professional/supervisor gives the other person the confidence and the space he needs to make his own choices, even if they conflict with the professional's/ supervisor's views.*
   He gives the other person the confidence to undertake something or take the initiative, and encourages him to make his own choices.

4. *The professional/supervisor provides feedback or coaching regarding the responsibilities of the other person.*
   He makes it clear that the other person and nobody else is responsible for what he does in the framework of his case or his work.

5. *The professional/supervisor enables the other person to make his own choices within the confines of what he is able to do (in compliance with prevailing laws and regulations and within their own organisation).*
   He gives the other person the opportunity to make his own decisions and also enables him to make choices within the confines of what is possible in the organisation and what is acceptable for the professional in terms of his own standards. He does this even if he thinks that the other person cannot deal with that process of choice.

6. *The professional/supervisor supports the other person when making choices in his process or his work.*
   He gives the other person the opportunity to discover what he wants. He gives the other person sufficient information for making decisions and ensures that he obtains enough information about the possibilities, opportunities and risks.

7. *The professional/ supervisor is aware of the boundaries within which choices are made.*
   He informs the other person about his rights and obligations, communicates with him so that he is aware of the impact of his choices, and gives him the opportunity to make his own decisions and manage his own affairs within the given margins.

8. *The professional/ supervisor clearly explains the effect of behaviour on others.*
   He ensures that the other person is aware of the fact that his behaviour can have a negative or positive effect on others, and he gives him the opportunity to experience this. He encourages the other person to be aware of the consequences of his actions.

9. *The professional/ supervisor takes the other person seriously.*
   He is open to what the other person says, he listens and shows that he understands the other person and takes the other person's limitations seriously. Furthermore, he is in regular contact with the other person and shows that he is doing his best for the other person. He shows, by his concrete actions, that he is aware of and respects the wishes of the other person.

10. *The professional/ supervisor shows that the other person matters to him.*
    He does not send any impersonal and/or standard letters, but rather shows the other person that he is there for him in particular. He gives the other person the opportunity to express constructive criticism and safeguards the privacy of the other person.

11. *The professional/ supervisor does not make decisions about the other person without the involvement of the other person.*
    He involves the other person when making appointments and gives the other person the chance to express his opinion if he does not agree with a particular decision.

12. *The professional/ supervisor empathises with the values and standards of the other person.*
    He does this, for example, by encouraging the other person to act according to his principles and by helping him to discover his own values and standards. He particularly encourages choices and decisions that are meaningful to the other person — for example, in relation to the process or the working environment.

13. *The professional/ supervisor gives the other person the opportunity to test information / activities against his own values and standards.*
He helps the other person to reflect on his behaviour. Within the confines of what is possible, he gives the other person the opportunity to become accustomed to situations that are completely new and unknown to him, and does not provide more information and guidance than the other person says he can 'digest'.

14. *The professional/ supervisor takes the values and standards of the other person into account.*
He does not ask the other person to take part in processes/activities that he knows are not compatible with the other person's values and standards. He makes it clear that he is well-informed about the other person's 'case' and tries as much as possible to be in agreement with the other person in terms of the targets that should be achieved.

15. *The professional/ supervisor supports the other person in realistically accepting limitations, boundaries and possibilities and impossibilities.*
If necessary, he creates the opportunity for the other person to accept the limitations and explains the significance of the limitation for the action to be taken.

16. *The professional/ supervisor stimulates the other person to work together with others.*
He makes clear to the other person that he does not have to do everything by himself. In doing this, he explains the importance of staying in communication with all the relevant people involved. He makes it clear that if there are any problems, the other person can always turn to him, and also to others, for support.

Empowering skills

PROVIDING FEEDBACK	The professional/supervisor provides feedback in compliance with the rules.
	The professional/supervisor provides feedback in his organisation on the extent to which employees/clients are being treated in an empowering way.
RECEIVING FEEDBACK	The professional/supervisor receives and accepts feedback from the other person on his empowering behaviour, and, if necessary, adjusts his empowering style based on that feedback.
ASKING QUESTIONS	The professional/supervisor asks the right questions, appreciates the other person's frame of reference and asks pertinent questions based on the six empowerment components.
ARTICULATION	The professional/supervisor validates the standards and values of the other person. He also articulates and describes his own empowering behaviour to the other person.
ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY	The professional/supervisor assumes (or delegates) responsibility for his own actions, and allows the other person to work independently.

TAKING SPACE	The professional/supervisor can do his work with a good balance of autonomy and dependence. He is aware of the room for manoeuvre he has within the confines of the organisation and makes use of this.
GIVING SPACE	The professional/supervisor creates space for the other person to test a proposed decision or recommendation against his own standards and values.
FAMILIARITY WITH THE FRAMEWORKS	The professional/supervisor knows how much time, space and resources are required to act in an empowering way. He is aware of the room for manoeuvre available in the organisation with respect to time, space and resources, and he is able to gear supply and demand to each other.
INDICATINGTHE FRAMEWORKS	The professional/supervisor makes clear to the organisation what is required (time, space and/or resources) to act in an empowering way.
SELF-KNOWLEDGE	The professional/supervisor is aware of the strong and weak points in his empowering attitude toward the other person.
WORKING TOGETHER	The professional/supervisor delegates tasks to others and works together with colleagues and organisations.

The empowering organisation:

1. Possesses the instruments to determine the quality of the empowering behaviour of its professionals.

2. Has a clear structure in which everybody's tasks, responsibilities and authorisations are clear (or are clearly described).

3. Has a communication structure in which all lines of communication relevant for professionals have been defined and protocolled.

4. Has incorporated the empowering approach into its philosophy and mission.

5. Has a clear and reliable decision-making procedure regarding clients (underpinned by everybody in the same way and with the same result).

6. Has space in its decision-making procedures to enable professionals to co-decide on matters that have a direct or indirect impact on they way they act.

7. Has a clear and transparent system for assessing its professionals.

8. Has a structure/culture in which the active contribution of professionals is encouraged and rewarded.

9. Has an accessible system for the storage and management of client dossiers.

10. Has a structure/culture in which professionals are encouraged to assume responsibility for their own actions.

11. Creates a working environment in which professionals feel good about their work.

12. Creates a working environment in which professionals are treated with respect.

13. Creates an internal consultation structure in which professionals can consult with each other and work together on a client's case.

14. Retrains professionals so that they can act in an empowering way in the best way possible.

15. Provides professionals with professional instruments to guide and support the client.

16. Creates sufficient time, space and resources for professionals to guide and support the client in an empowering way.

17. Draws up an individually tailored range of duties for each professional.

18. Encourages professionals to do work that does not conflict with their own standards and values.

19. Provides professionals with information about the possibilities and opportunities offered by other organisations in the field of client development.

20. Encourages professionals to allow the client to influence his own rehabilitation or mobility process as much as possible.

21. Gives professionals the space to make decisions on client cases within the confines of the laws, regulations and procedural margins of the organisation.

22. Ensures that there is adequate (empowering) support of professionals by colleagues and supervisors.

23. Enables clients to use instruments to gain a more accurate impression of their possibilities, capacities and skills.

24. Provides clients with instruments, such as schooling, training and guidance, to help with their development in a way that is expected to be successful.

25. Gives clients space to make decisions about their own process, within the confines of the laws, regulations and procedural margins of the organisation.

Creating an empowering environment

REQUEST focuses on creating an empowering environment. This concerns the professional environment, consisting of professionals such as rehabilitation advisers, mobility intermediaries, career coaches, counsellors, advisers or trainers, and the companies or institutions in which they work. With its dedication to empowering clients, those clients will be much more and better capable of assuming responsibility for their own development and their chance of success will increase. To what extent does an organisation succeed in creating such an empowering environment? A number of instruments have been developed in the REQUEST project that can be useful to this end.

Quick Scan The 'REQUEST Quick Scan' provides professionals and organisations with feedback on the extent to which they have realised an empowering environment. It is a diagnostic instrument, a questionnaire, consisting of 78 propositions. The outcome is seen as a performance indicator of 'empowering quality'. Based on the outcomes, the Quick Scan awards 'development points', aimed at strengthening or improving 'empowering quality'.

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008
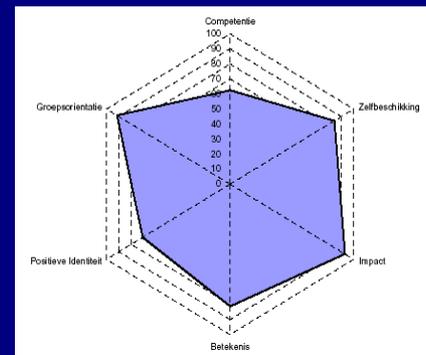
an organisation. The profile is created in six steps:
- Determine the relevant organisational unit
- Have a representative group of employees fill in the questionnaire
- Split the data into individual profiles and organisational data
- Perform a statistical analysis of the organisational data
- Hold a consensus meeting leading to the organisation's empowering profile
- Make recommendations for profile improvement

Personal 'empowering profile' In addition to an empowering profile for the organisation, the Quick Scan also produces personal profiles for professionals. These illustrate their empowering quality. The profile also specifies points that need to be developed and suggestions for working in an empowering way.

Development modules In response to the results of the REQUEST Quick Scan and the recommendations based on those results, an organisation can decide to strengthen or improve its empowering quality. This can be done in various ways — for example, by reorganising its business processes, by protocolling particular process components, or by training people. In the REQUEST project, a number of development modules were developed for use as part of an improvement programme. The modules are classified according to four themes:
- Empowering behaviour
- Empowering mission and philosophy
- Empowerment and HRM
- Empowering business strategies

In each module, the theme has been worked out on three levels. The initial introduction to each theme relates to knowledge and relevant environmental factors. Empowering behavioural aspects and skills for professionals, supervisors and the organisation are then discussed. Lastly, empowering behaviour is examined in detail on the level of personal mission, conviction and/or empowering leadership. The modules use a number of different techniques, such as theoretical presentations, consultation interviews, guidance/coaching of group or individual exercises, and peer supervision.

REQUEST project partners

■ Hoensbroeck Centre for Employment Perspective, Hoensbroek

■ Pluryn Werkenrode Groep Arbeid, Groesbeek

■ Heliomare, Wijk aan Zee

■ Bartiméus, Ermelo

■ Municipality of Beverwijk

■ Municipality of Heemskerk

■ UWV Arnhem

■ UWV Heerlen

■ Philips

■ Tax Administration Heerlen

■ CWI in cooperation with Independent job consultants

■ ANGO (Dutch Association for the Disabled)

■ VCP (programme to strengthen the position of clients)

■ Vilans (formerly iRv)

■ Stichting Leerplanontwikkeling (Foundation for Learning Plan Development), Enschede

International partners of the team (and equipment)

■ Kiipula Revalidation Centre, Kiipula, Finland ('Job-coach')

■ Job and co, Gent, Belgium ('Training Quality' project)

Empowerment and the empowering environment / 2008

More information

Project coordination REQUEST
REA College Nederland
Mw. T. Zaeyen
Winthontlaan 200
3526 KV Utrecht
T. 030 7508860
E. info@reacollegenederland.nl

WWW. REQUEST VRIJBAAN.NL