

Re-integration Quality and Empowering Strategies

When you are excluded from the labour market for a longer time, for whatever reason, your chances of finding a job again are drastically reduced. Re-integration therefore is a chronically issue. How can we find a way out? The Equal project REQUEST looks for answers in which 'Empowerment' plays a central role.

Taking over control and giving control

When someone wants to return to, or re-integrate into the labour market, motivation and willingness to take active control are critical indicators for success. The extent, to which the returning individual is capable of taking this role, is a matter of empowerment.

In a previous project (VrijBaan) individual empowerment was the central theme. Empowerment, internal leadership or self-steering capacity provides confidence in someone's ability to achieve a certain goal. It is also the feeling that what you want to achieve, meets your own standards and values, the feeling that you determine your own goals, and make your own decisions. Through measurement of individual empowerment, the need for personal training can be assessed. Consequently on an individual level, a training programme is aimed at empowering participants to become more active and improve their capacity to find a sustainable a job 'of their own'.

However, also the environment plays an important, sometimes even crucial role. Services offered by job coaches, rehabilitation consultants or other professionals in this area, should support the individual empowerment of their clients. They should promote self-motivation, self-steering and support own initiative. An empowering environment reinforces internal leadership and gives control to the client. The REQUEST project seeks to create an empowering environment.

REQUEST: Empowering environment

The REQUEST project focuses on an empowerment stimulating or reinforcing environment. The aim is to develop approaching strategies, enabling clients to increase their capacity to handle their re-integrating process and to take their own responsibilities herein. The empowering environment is directly reflected in the quality of interaction between professional and client, as well as in the degree to which an organisation enables the professional to act in an empowering way.

In REQUEST the three main questions are:

- What do we mean, when talking about an 'empowering environment'?
- Which criteria should be met, and is it possible to objectively assess empowering quality?
- To which extent do organisations met the criteria for empowering quality?



Practice based project approach

The approach of the REQUEST project is based on daily practice in the re-integration chain. After a definition phase during which various instruments are developed, we want to create an empowering environment in four regional experiments. All key actors in the re-integration chain, such as CWI, UWV, rehabilitation institutes, schools, municipalities and some companies participate in these experiments. Via CWI (National Centres for Work and Income) a number of independent labour consultants are involved.

Each participating organisation denominates a so called 'empowerment messenger'. These messengers introduce empowerment and the empowering concept into their organisations and commence an awareness raising programme of information, presentation en explanation. Thereafter they organise a quick scan to assess the empowering quality of their organisations. The quick scan includes an enquiry within the organisations, a consensus meeting and the development of an improvement action plan.

Firstly we address the empowering competencies and skills of the professionals. Offering training and workshops, we want to enable them to enhance their empowering capacity. Secondly we want to increase the empowering quality of organisations themselves, i.e. procedures, management, policy and service providing processes. The central REQUEST team provides the required contents and facilities, such as promotion material, training and consultancy functions, and coaching.

For clients this practical approach will have a direct impact: support and room to take their own control in returning or re-integrating into the labour market. If necessary, or when clients indicate so, they can follow a VrijBaan Empowerment Training programme to acquire the proper competencies and skills.

Project partners

REQUEST is an initiative of REA College Nederland, the National centre of expertise and innovation where the four Dutch rehabilitation institutes have concentrated their expertise in re-integration and labour. The project leadership is carried by the Pluryn Werkenrode Group. In the four regions the UWV (executive authority for the social insurances) of Heerlen and Arnhem participate. Furthermore some big companies, such as Philips semiconductors, the 'Belastingdienst', and some municipalities take part in regional networks.

On a central level two interest groups are involved: the ANGO (general Dutch organisation for the disabled) and Programma VCP (Programme for the strengthening of client participation). The Institute for Rehabilitation issues (iRv) certifies the scientific support, and the national Centre for Work and Income (CWI) is an important partner in the disseminating process.

An a transnational scale we co-operate with the Finnish EQUAL project 'Job-coach' (Kiiipula Revalidation Centre, Kiiipula) and the Belgian EQUAL project 'Training Quality' (Job & co, Ghent).