



How can you improve your return to employment?
What is your own input in this process? And how can
you increase your input?

In returning to work usually *the professional* plays the major role, whereas the returning person in fact should have this. In the VrijBaan project we developed instruments to enable people to take over the control of their own re-integration, i.e. to improve their empowerment.

VrijBaan Empowerment Method

The VrijBaan Empowerment Method is a new 'empowering approach'. Through measurement of individual empowerment, the need for personality training is assessed. Consequently, on an individual level, a special training programme is composed aiming at empowering participants to become more active and improve their self steering capacity in finding a sustaining a job 'of their own'.

VrijBaan Questionnaire

The VrijBaan Empowerment Questionnaire is a tool to assess someone's individual empowerment profile. Through this questionnaire clients discover their own way of looking at strong and weak empowerment components. The VrijBaan tool measures to which extent a work-disabled individual is capable of taking their own direction in life and in rehabilitation or return to labour.

Content

The questionnaire includes 60 statements which in one way or another deal with one or more components of empowerment. It gives a self assessment, which is a kind of mirror, showing to which extent a person finds his or her self capable in decision making during the re-integrating process. This self-image may be the first step to give the re-integration a new impetus or direction, at least an *own* direction.

Target group

The VrijBaan questionnaire in the first place is meant for people with limited labour capacities or disabled people during their return to the labour market.

Empowerment

Empowerment, internal leadership or self-steering capacity provides confidence in your ability to achieve a certain goal. It is a dynamic personal feature and may vary during the time.

In the empowerment model of VrijBaan six essential components are distinguished. These are:

- Competence; i.e. trust in someone's own abilities (also called: self-efficacy)
- Self determination, i.e. the ability of making one's own choices
- Meaning, i.e. experiencing the meaning in one's labour activities, matching with own values
- Impact, i.e. the feeling that someone's decisions have an impact on or affect someone's life
- Identity, i.e. a positive attitude towards the self, coping with disability and giving space to other life elements
- Group orientation, i.e. realizing that one is part of a group and society, and that there is mutual dependency as well as a need for support.



Added value

By doing the VrijBaan test you take warning from a group of over 400 former labour disabled who presently have a job and, moreover, feel themselves secure to find another job if necessary and to keep their position on the labour market.

Through the VrijBaan Empowerment Questionnaire reflection commences on your own empowerment. The test may give answers to questions such as: 'To which extent am I capable of directing my own re-integrating process?' and 'Which elements of my personal functioning should I (further) develop in order to find a better job, easier, or faster?'

Referring to the mirror, held by the outcomes of the VrijBaan Questionnaire, together with your trainer or coach you choose to reinforce certain empowerment components in a purposive personality training programme.

Experiences

The questionnaire is experimentally tested both on a national and an international level. Individual empowerment profiles were determined from over 800 individuals having a moderate to large distance to the labour market, i.e. labour disabled or long term unemployed people. Over 300 people were involved in experimental studies where both the questionnaire and the personal empowerment training were applied. The responses of clients indicate that they feel safer and better equipped to take the direction in their own re-integrating process.

On National and European level our empowerment approach is recognised as 'best practice'. At the European EQUAL-conference 'Free movement of good ideas' the VrijBaan project was presented in the workshop "Making work, a real option for all". The European Committee organised this conference in order to promote promising project results to the European policy makers.

Empowerment Training

Based on the empowerment profile, resulting from the questionnaire, a person can more effectively work on empowerment strengthening. In order to achieve this, VrijBaan collected some 180 dedicated exercises and training modules. Each module addresses one or more specific empowerment components.

An empowerment reinforcing training programme takes between 6 to 20 days (30 – 50 hrs) spread over several weeks or months. The trainee develops the necessary self-esteem, personal skills, and attitudes, to take control over the trajectory, back, to work.

In order to compose a person-oriented training programme, specific training expertise and competencies are required. A professional trainer or coach takes into account the learning demands, and the physical and cognitive possibilities of the trainee. Also the selected training subjects and modules should form a logical coherence and variety. Moreover the approach of the trainer and the interaction with the trainees is crucial.

Empowering competencies

A realistic self-image of capacities and competencies is necessary to apply an empowering approach. The VrijBaan 'Reader for trainers' describes quality criteria for communicative and didactic skills. These should contribute to reinforcement of the empowerment components of the trainees in a positive way.

REA College Nederland offers special courses for professional trainers, who plan to implement the VrijBaan Empowerment Method into their practice, and who want to become experiences in the 'empowering approach'.

The VrijBaan **Empowering competencies** are:

- **General:** The trainer is aware of his functioning as a model.
- **Competencies:** The trainer acts progress-oriented, i.e. focused on personal growth of the trainee.
- **Self determination:** The trainer stimulates the trainee to make own and independent choices.
- **Impact:** The trainer promotes awareness and insight in impact and consequences of choices.
- **Meaning:** The trainer matches the training programme and the trainees' learning objectives.
- **Positive identity:** The trainer takes into account the process of mourning and acceptance of the disability.
- **Group orientation:** The trainer integrates coping with the group and commitment towards society in the development process and stimulates applying this in daily life.