

THE CLIENT AS LEAD ACTOR

The DP called [VrijBaan](#) used a literature search and field-testing to develop a diagnostic instrument that demonstrated that empowerment can be determined through six components: Competence; Self-determination; Impact i.e. the contribution made in the working environment; Significance i.e. the relevance of work activities to individuals and their own values; Group-orientation; Positive identity. Based on these components, empowerment could be assessed at an individual level and thus it was possible to design an individual (tailor-made) empowerment-training offer to compensate for any “empowerment - weaknesses” that were identified in relation to one or more of the components. This diagnostic instrument was tested in the Netherlands with a group of 400 people with disabilities.

The DP was very carefully constructed. It involved four of the five Reintegration Centres throughout the country which assist those “at the greatest distance from the labour market” and which are now using the outcomes of the project to redesign their training offers. In terms of validating its results, the DP was tied to a regional network of groups of people with disabilities and the National Disability Council, which is the advisory body to central government on disability issues, was a member of the DP, as was the Centre of Expertise on Disability, which is linked to the University of Maastricht. Given his involvement in the project, Eduard Schoevaars, the representative of the National Disability Council now believes that “The effects of non-discrimination legislation depend on the ability of individuals to exercise their rights. Thus, empowerment is not only indispensable for successful reintegration into employment but is also decisive in the full exercise of citizenship”.

The DP and its transnational partners produced tools that included:

- A publication explaining the six components that can be used to determine the degree of individual empowerment;
- The criteria for an empowering attitude for coaches;
- The criteria for empowering training modules;
- A booklet on empowerment for trainers or coaches;
- A training handbook;
- The diagnostic instrument that includes scientific references and standards.

The DP attracted a lot of interest amongst a range of key actors. The diagnostic instrument is now being used by a major pension fund in collaboration with the national body for social security. The pension fund caters for people who have worked in the health sector in the Netherlands and if some of these clients become unfit for work before they reach the normal retirement age of 65, the fund has to start to pay them a pension. This is a very costly obligation, but this pension fund believes that empowerment is a crucial factor in relation to a successful return to work. Thus, it will use the DP’s diagnostic instrument to measure the level of empowerment of such people and to see if it is possible to provide training that will ensure that they return to work. Another very interested party is a group of occupational health physicians that is attempting to discover if the level of empowerment is lower amongst people who are frequently absent from work. Also a second Round EQUAL project called REQUEST proved that it was possible to apply the tool to other disadvantaged target groups.

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