

# Inclusion as organisational culture

## Dare t(d)o change for inclusion

The employment of persons with disabilities remains a major challenge in Flanders and by extension in Europe. The EU has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Its transposition into national frameworks is not so easy, especially the transposition of Article 27 on the right to work and employment.

To enable the right to work, it is not enough to bring people to the labour market but, above all, to bring the labour market to the people. Equal access to the labour market is essential for creating a society without exclusion.

Promoting inclusion (in Flanders) is an objective of many organisations, each with its own strength, based on the belief that investing in inclusion of people with disabilities can result in creating more employment, in more appropriate and decent work, thus increasing the inflow into the labour market and decreasing the number of people with disabilities leaving their job and the labour market.

For GTB to contribute to the realisation of this ambitious goal, we are committed to and involved in various projects that mutually reinforce and deepen each of the projects. This is more than necessary as research shows that the majority of employers think positively and are supportive about inclusion but need a push to take action. In this article, we want to highlight the projects that aim at providing action oriented support to employers and look at their coherence and interlinkages.

### 'Dare'



In 2010, we started DUOday in Flanders. It is an annual work experience day to sensitise the different levels of government and the employers to employ (more) people in vulnerable situations on the labour market because of their work-related limitations and/or due to health problems. We deliberately chose an action-based activity in line with motto 'Action speaks louder than words'. This action is also supported by the employers' federations and by partnerships of service providers. Today in Flanders, DUOday is one of the most successful actions

to sensitise employers and to build bridges between employers and service providers in order to give more vulnerable and disadvantaged persons opportunities on the labour market. Meanwhile, DUOday takes place in many countries within Europe.

We started this action because we noticed that there is a lot of lack of knowledge as well as many stereotypes and prejudices towards people with disabilities. What we wanted to do was not talk about but to get people to work together. This has also become DUOday's strength by connecting jobseekers, employers and service providers in an effective and low-barrier way and in getting them to work together. The focus is on 'CONNECTION'.

This action gives companies a better idea of the possibilities of potential future employees. They get to know the organisations that can offer support for their recruitment and get more familiar with potential candidates, thereby contributing to a more inclusive labour market.

The jobseekers get extra opportunities to get to know workplaces, gain more insight into job requirements and employer's expectations, thus giving them more opportunities to better plan their own career and to convince the employer of their skills and capacities.

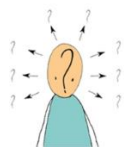
Service providers get a better view of their clients' skills, can figure out the suitability of a jobseeker for a specific job. They also get a better view of the labour market in their region and can create employment or internship opportunities for the future.

Governments at different levels, including at the local level, are sensitised to put employment policies for the vulnerable target groups (higher) on the policy agenda and to deploy appropriate support measures and/or resources.

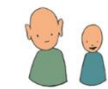
More info: [www.duoday.be](http://www.duoday.be) [info@duoday.be](mailto:info@duoday.be)

## 'T(D)o'

DUOday is a 'Job taster'. Companies that want to take it further and employ persons with disabilities experience the need for more intensive support. They want to do this but don't know how to go about it. They do not know the possibilities or do not have a good overview. Talentscope was developed starting from this need. GTB started working with it in Flanders in 2020. Talentscope is a service model in which the resources of various specialised organisations active in guiding vulnerable groups to and on the labour market take away the additional burden from employers and support them with their HR policy in relation to the employment of persons with disabilities.



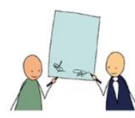
INFORMATION



DREAM DETECTION



CONSULTING PROCESS



MATCH REPORT



ACTION PLAN SPEC



IMPACT EVALUATION

Within a Talentoscope programme, we start with an interview ('in listening mode'), based on the Talentoscope questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 11 open-ended questions. The first five questions are about the organisation's organisational model and culture. With this, we want to gain more insight into what the organisation offers to its customers, what their sales market is, who their customers are, what their customers expect, what makes them unique... Once we have a good overview of this, we go deeper into the organisation's culture. What they consider important are the values of an organisation, how people treat each other within the company, how management treats people, in particular persons with disabilities ...

The next three questions are designed to explore how current trends and developments on the labour market might affect service delivery. What changes or developments in the sector affect the organisation? What do they need to keep up and what impact it will have if the organisation cannot evolve with it. The last three questions are about staffing levels (and staff profiles). How do they look like now and what is needed to meet future challenges.

Based on this conversation, an action plan is drawn up. If companies want to get started, an agreement is drawn up in which the actions are laid down. The employer gets one contact person who gathers a working team of experts around her/him to implement these actions.

Practice shows that these concrete actions help employers to make their recruitment and retention processes more inclusive. They give more thought to their employer branding, recruitment and selection (processes and criteria), onboarding, employee retention and reintegration, etc.

The integrated approach from a Flemish-wide partnership works. Investing in a partnership is an important challenge as 'together you can do more than alone'. The figures of the past 2 years can prove this. Because the start-up was simultaneous with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can only talk about a good restart from 2021. By the end of 2022, we conducted calls with employers in 336 companies to detect their needs and questions. Of these 336 interviews 'in listening mode', 226 (67%) companies launched an action plan. These action plans resulted in 116 employments, 115 coaching sessions in the context of job retention and reintegration, 313 workplace placements in the context of training and competence building, 60 mentoring sessions for internal company coaches ...

The impact evaluation conducted in February 2023 by an external research firm (IDEA-consult) confirms that the starting projects that position themselves at the cross-roads of the demand of the employers and the supply service represented by the providers is positively related to the realisation of concrete changes by employers after having done the counselling. These changes can be found in adjustments to

HR/staffing/recruitment policies to increase the intake and the retention of persons with disabilities as a broader vision of inclusive entrepreneurship.

From our experience, we can say that the actions help companies become more aware of their employee processes, and more creative with the opportunities available. From research, it appears that companies which were already more aware of inclusion took more and longer-lasting actions. However, the actions do not always guarantee more inclusiveness either. Certainly not for companies that only focus on HR processes and short-term interventions without a broader vision of an inclusive business/enterprise/organisation. In these companies, inclusive mindsets need to be worked on within the culture of the organisation. In a subsequent project 'Change4inclusion', here focused upon, we have explored this aspect in more detail.

More info: [www.talentscoop.be](http://www.talentscoop.be) [info@talentscoop.be](mailto:info@talentscoop.be)

## Change for Inclusion

The project idea for 'Change4Inclusion' came about during the implementation of the Talentscope project. Change4Inclusion is also an ESF-funded project. It is a project of GTB vzw in partnership with Sterpunt Inclusief Ondernemen vzw, GRIP vzw and Pulso Europe NV. The project focuses on developing inclusive policies at the workplace. Research by SERV (Sociaal Economische Raad Vlaanderen) shows that employees with a work-limiting disability are affected by a big gap with other employees regarding their employability. The Change4Inclusion project provides 3 of SERV's 6 recommendations namely: strengthen their career thinking, stimulate HR policies and share know-how around workability, with practical tools. The focus is on providing insight into how organisational context in all its aspects affects work ability, especially that of employees with disabilities, and how strengthening an inclusive organisation is a strategic added value.



Talentscope focuses on the technical side in this employer support. The HR processes in business operations are put at the centre of the scope. Within the Change4Inclusion project, we focus on the moral side of inclusive enterprise/organisation. To become a sustainable inclusive business/enterprise/organisation, it is important to have an inclusive mindset within the organisation's culture. To this end, we continue working on the Talentscope questionnaire around the theme of culture. We then consider what an employer understands by inclusion and what initiatives they take around this. It is important to clarify the difference between diversity and inclusion. For the inclusive culture check, the questions were based on six domains within organisations that play an important role in how inclusive an organisation is and feels to employees. These domains are leadership, communication, resources, risk awareness, management engagement, colleague engagement.

The outcome of this survey can result in the setting up in an 'inspiration session' with the employer on the inclusive corporate culture 'only', but also in a 1-year change process with an in-depth analysis and the setting up of an action plan per domain of action identified.

To bring about a change in the mindset of an employer around inclusive entrepreneurship, we also investigated within this project what the added value is of using experiential knowledge alongside professional and scientific knowledge. Research quickly showed that a lot exists on the use of knowledge by experience within individual coaching, but little or nothing can be found on the use of inclusive entrepreneurship. Following the thematic scope of the Change4Inclusion project, we developed a framework in which we want to be clear about the roles and competences we expect in order to attract the right people. In addition, we have developed a modular training offer specifically targeted to employers with support for intervention and coaching in the process of working towards an inclusive entrepreneurship.

Finally, within the project, we also explored how to make mentors on the workplaces more inclusive because we are convinced that the success of a sustainable inclusion is determined by the quality of workplace support which can be obtained by the persons with disabilities. Therefore, we want to fully support and deploy this key function of (peer) mentors in the workplace to strengthen a company in its growth into an inclusive enterprise.

In Flanders, there are recognised mentor training courses for which it is difficult to adapt their content. We are thus going to look at what we can offer within the mentor cafés that have been organised regularly since 2020 by some experienced job coaches. During a Mentor Café, a small group of workplace mentors (= 6 to 10 people) meet to exchange experiences and to learn from each other. Following the principles of experience-based learning, a very concrete situation is approached from different angles, discussed together and a concrete solution/approach is sought. During these intervention moments, the starting point is always the input by the participants. A Mentor

Café insofar is actually a short (2 to 3 hours), demand-oriented session as intervision between mentors led by a professional job coach on the basis of the discussion of certain cases or themes with numerous practical tips and tricks, which can immediately be taken back to and up at the workplace. These Mentor Cafés can take place both physically and online and can be organised in open or in-house sessions. While some Mentor Cafés deal with the general challenges of a mentor/mentee, others focus more on specific themes.

More info:

[www.epr.eu/project/change-for-inclusion/](http://www.epr.eu/project/change-for-inclusion/) [www.change4inclusion.be](http://www.change4inclusion.be)

### **'Next'**

It emerged from the meetings of this project that there is a gap between science and practice on inclusion, between experts, employers and academics alike. It also became clear that there is a need for better definition of the concept of 'inclusive business environment', more thorough validation, and evidence-based tools and interventions to achieve this. We have 'improvised' tools at our disposal, now we also want to use scientifically validated tools. Therefore, the partners decided to join forces and follow up on this challenge by applying for a PhD.

### **'Dare t(do)o change for inclusion'**

DUOday, Talentoscope and change4inclusion as different actions each have their specific goal in making companies more inclusive ... and there are still plenty of new challenges ahead.

Thanks to all project partners DUOday, Talentoscope and Change4Inclusion

Wannes Marivoet, GTB, 2023

Original article in English and Dutch

<https://www.epr.eu/inclusion-as-organisational-culture/>