



## FILING CARD GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

European Network 'Career & AGE'

### Identification of the 'Practice'

TITLE of the good practice: "Work pays. Feedback and participation give strength."

Country/Region: Belgium/Flanders

Nature: Programme – Measure – Project – Other:

Period\*:

Budget\*:

In which language(s) available:

Final beneficiary:

Leading partner:

Contact details:

Website:

\*: If known/if available

### Description of the 'Good Practice'

What was the problem?:

The growth from a small group of volunteers to the large organisation we are today, affected the individual influence in creating the policies, procedures, directives and so on. As a result, employees feel less committed and less motivated. Moreover, disturbing working conditions remain unresolved. This project focused on the most common problems that could be identified: concretely, physical problems make the hard work (i.e. growing organic fruit and vegetables) too heavy for some of our older employees aged over 50 years. A survey indicated that the cause was found in decreasing physical strength and in personal physical impairments due to ageing.

What were the objective(s)?:

We aim to adapt the working conditions /context to the needs of each employee experiencing physical difficulties and this within the same division, within another division of our organisation or within another organisation. All the information and possible solutions have to be suggested by the employees themselves, so as to ensure that the adaptations are goal-oriented and broadly supported by the employees. All communication needs to be captured and processed by means of a standard form that can be used for a very diversified workforce. Diversity can be in terms of age, gender, education level, social background, cultural background, linguistic skills, disability, and so on.

What did you do?:

First we helped the employees of our 'social economy' company to express themselves clearly, taking into account that their social background and lack of sufficient linguistic skills to speak and understand the Dutch language, can lead to serious communication problems. In fact, a high-quality communication is required to create an improved working context based on the employees' reality of every working day. Consequently, we consulted those colleagues responsible for job rotation in our divisions to see if there was a possibility to rotate within the original division or to be relocated to another. If none of the previous options applied, the employee was helped to find another job elsewhere. All actions were steered and suggested by the employees themselves, rather than being imposed by superiors, in a tailor-made personal development plan

Was there a specific focus on gender, diversity:

Yes, we used the skills of a language-coach to assess our documents on their accessibility so as to ensure both that the information required is captured and can be understood by our non-native employees.

Also, specific questions were asked about gender (e.g. women are a minority) and culture (e.g. employees from different nationalities work together) because these specific points of view can have great impact on the sustainability of a proposed solution.

What did you achieve?:

Most importantly, we developed an instrument that can capture and process all necessary information concerning the individual working comfort and this from a very diverse workforce. Further, several individual rotations (between greenhouse activities and outdoor activities) were achieved, we relocated three employees to a different division (to relieve chronic lower back problems) and, finally, we implemented a general rotation system for the most physically demanding jobs for the entire division. Interestingly, it turned out that younger employees also benefit from this rotation system and we are convinced this also has a positive effect on the sustainable employability of the entire workforce in the long term.

What were changes or effects of the good practice?:

Apart from the obvious individual benefits, which are related to a clear decrease in the rate of absenteeism, we feel that an enforced trust of the employee in the employer will encourage future communications on how we can improve the working conditions/ working context for all. If a person can see that an individual contribution to a better company is actually implemented, the participation transcends the spoken word by the creation of real actions and this proves to be a catalyzing factor in the development of a policy which makes careers possible at any age.

What were the critical points to get the project running?

We actually needed to overcome the deeply rooted gap of trust between employers and employees, to make sure everyone was convinced this effort really focuses on a win-win situation, instead of trying to get rid of some 'too-old-to-be-useful' colleagues. Stories about older workers being shed are widespread in the news and the media and many companies actually adhere to a policy of dismissing older workers. In order to gain the necessary trust from the employees, actions speak louder than words.

Transferability:

Which part of your approach could be used in another context? If the goal really is a win-win situation for both employer and employee, by improving the working context and individual job comfort, the approach of focusing on a relationship of trust before communication could certainly be used in different human resources projects. Especially the tailored personal development plan can be used as the main formal communication interface between employer and employee as an addition to the official employment contract. The focus on supporting non- native speakers with a language coach can also be used in another context where high- quality communication is necessary.

Which conditions are needed to optimise the transferability of the project? A genuine intention of the employer to invest in the working context of the employees, guaranteed by clear commitment and open communication.

Link with the focus of the network (Tick more than one box if necessary):

SYSTEM level

ORGANISATIONAL level

INDIVIDUAL level

Life phase

Career phase

Generation

### **Other information**

Any other useful information on the Good Practice: