

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES EMPLOYMENT: THE UEMPLOY PROJECT SOLUTIONS

PENTRU ȘANSE EGALE PE PIAȚA MUNCII: PROIECTUL UEMPLOY ȘI SOLUȚIILE SALE

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Abstract. *Many companies realize that inclusive employment is an effective strategy to meet their social responsibility but the majority of employers have no real experience of employing a disabled person. Proactive cooperation with employers is needed to counteract stereotypes and encourage them to understand skills and capacities of people with disabilities. For disabled the project will facilitate greater involvement in their organizations' strategic planning; improve independence, self-confidence, accountability, flexibility and sociability; improve employment inclusion and ensure full equality in employment practices; gain positive experiences from the process; receive better services from service providers*

Key words: equal opportunities, consultancy, employment, disability.

Rezumat *.Multe dintre companii își dau seama că egalitatea de șanse pe piața muncii este o strategie eficientă pentru a contribui la imaginea responsabilității sociale a firmei, dar majoritatea angajatorilor nu au nicio experiență reală de angajare a unei persoane cu dizabilități. Este nevoie de cooperare proactivă cu angajatorii pentru a contracara stereotipurile și a-i ajuta să înțeleagă capacitățile și abilitățile pe care le au persoanele cu dizabilități. În ceea ce privește persoanele cu dizabilități proiectul va încuraja o implicare mai semnificativă a acestora în administrarea strategică în cadrul organizațiilor din care aceștia fac parte; va promova creșterea independenței, încrederii în sine, a sentimentului de responsabilitate, a flexibilității și a sociabilității; va sprijini integrarea pe piața muncii a persoanelor cu dizabilități și va asigura egalitate deplină în practicile de angajare; va oferi experiențe pozitive pe durata derulării procesului; va contribui la îmbunătățirea serviciilor oferite de diverși furnizori.*

Cuvinte cheie: egalitatea de șanse , consultanță, piața muncii, dizabilitate.

INTRODUCTION

The current economic climate is an especially difficult time for employers as they are facing new and greater challenges. The need for innovation and alternatives has never been greater. One vast and largely untapped resource is citizens with disabilities (Bruce, 2009). Time after time, disabled workers have

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demonstrated that - with appropriate selection and support - they have the ability to display higher levels of productivity, commitment and adaptability in the open labour market (Council Directives).

For disabled persons the ability to find and retain work is fundamental to their development. Employment is more than simply being able to earn money for a task performed. It is seen as central to human identity and development and is an essential constituent of personal identity. Work is central to the dignity, self-confidence and social meaning of individuals. Work gives people a valued identity and a sense of sociological belonging (Colibaba et al., 2011).

Making the transition from dependence and institutionalization to independence and contributory citizenship has almost universally been viewed as participation of people with disabilities in the life of a society (Bruce, 2010). It was important, therefore that societies now increasingly understand the seriousness of the participation of people with disabilities in the life of a country. The “social model of disability” promotes the disabled person as a value added to the society and especially the community he/she belongs to.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The UEmploy project (510784-LLP-1-2010-1-RO-LEONARDO-LMP), supported by the Leonardo da Vinci program, is based on quantitative and qualitative research carried out within the project partnership. It is based on the identified significant implementation gaps for European companies around issues of Equal Opportunities (EO) and work rights for disabled people. The project brings together expertise of seven partner organizations from Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland and Ireland to develop, test and introduce a consultancy model to promote effective employment outcomes for European citizens with disabilities

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

UEmploy project addresses two long term target groups of an open and sustainable labour market: disabled people and employers.

The evidence from across the world is that people with disabilities usually have difficulties in finding suitable employment due to unsuccessful approaches to strategy, which in turn may be based on negative public perceptions of disability and over-medicalization in such service provision as exists.

As a result, their skills and abilities are often underestimated and they either can hardly find a job at all or are offered inappropriate job positions. This makes their eventual employment unstable. Services proposed by the project will help to improve this unfair situation.

Regarding employers, the project aims to provide a mechanism to guarantee effective selection processes so that to match the employer’s need with the skills or qualifications of an applicant with disabilities. The use of this mechanism paves the way for how companies are helped to become ready to hire and train disabled persons workforce for job specific positions – a specialized consultancy service for how to efficiently employ the disabled workforce.

The consultancy process provides a structured decision making/risk analysis procedure which offers solutions for people with disabilities and employers to choose the best working positions and job profiles for the appropriate type of disability.

UEmploy Consultancy Model (fig. 1)

The following actions are performed during the consultancy process:

Preparation for the audit and interviews:

The UEmploy consultant visits the company, meets key stakeholders of the selected work process, video records the selected work process and collects information about quality and safety issues and practices. After the analysis of the collected information the consultant prepares questions for interviews with line management. A competency checklist is also compiled in order to select critical competencies of the selected work process.

Interviews:

The consultant runs 5 interviews with line managers, the safety officer, the HR manager and the appointed GP of the company. Interviewed participants fill out a competency checklists and rank individual work process related competencies.

Field trip:

The consultant visits the workshop area with the safety officer, walks down the usual pathways workers use every day, checks dining rooms, toilets corridors, stairs and other facilities to find unsafe conditions and potential hazards people with disabilities may face when being employed in company locations.

Analyzing information:

Collected information is analysed in details with the following steps:

- Critical competencies of the selected work process are identified
- A decision making matrix is compiled to list critical competencies and match them with different categories of people with disabilities
- A risk analysis is made to minimize hazards and potential accidents when people with disability are employed
- A Potential Problem Analysis is compiled to work out preventive measures to avoid accidents and quality and other problems.
- Proper categories of people with disability are selected as the result of the analysis

Presentation of the report:

A slide presentation is designed for the line management to introduce the results of the audit.

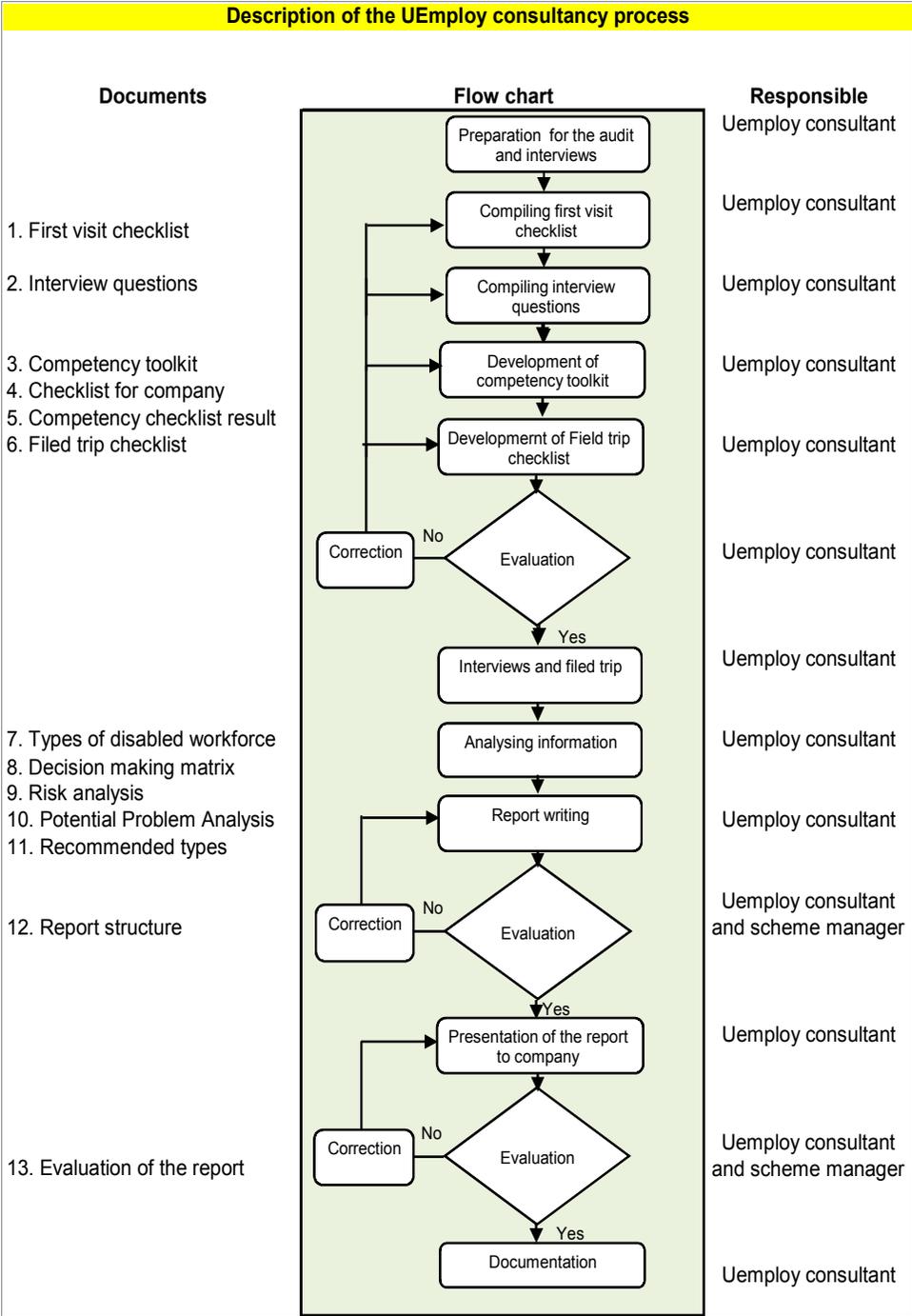


Fig. 1 - UEmploy Consultancy Model

Report writing

A report is written to the MD and other stakeholders of the company. The report contains proper types of people with disability who can be employed in different steps of the selected work process with minimized risks. The report lists recommendations to be implemented to make the location safer and more appropriate for people with disability.

Evaluation

The company has an opportunity to provide feedback of the consultancy process and the final written report.

Ensuring the quality of the UEmploy consultancy services

Quality is ensured by a Quality Management System which is controlled by Scheme Managers in each partner country who received Scheme Managers training.

Scheme Managers are responsible for the performance of the auditors. They evaluate auditor's activities step by step.

The audited company provides an evaluation of the consultancy process which will improve and enhance the future development of the consultancy process.

The consultancy process has potential benefits to employers. Employers have the opportunity to:

- Employ people with disabilities with minimized risks
- Enhance Corporate Social Responsibility
- Manage and retain a more diverse workforce
- Manage change within the organisation
- Manage effectively an aging workforce
- Promote inclusion and equality
- Meet national quota systems- for particular countries i.e. Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary

CONCLUSIONS

UEmploy project promotes equal opportunities for disabled work inclusion without impacting quality or profitability.

The model we propose is supporting both the supply and demand sides of the issue around equality of opportunity and labour market employability for disabled citizens. Our comprehensive approach is focused on considering and targeting not only the supply (talent, abilities, skills) side (disabled people) but also the demand side(employers). From this perspectives, inclusive employment means:

- reconciliation of the different perspectives and interests of employers and employees

- finding a variety of job opportunities for people with disabilities focusing on abilities and capacities rather than on the disabilities and difficulties
- matching individual skills and preferences to job requirements
- consultancy services for employers and practical guidance on improving the working environment

European Union strategy stresses the need for approaches that focus on the removal of barriers, which prevent people with disabilities from achieving full citizenship. European employment strategy for those with disabilities is strongly focused on rights, equality of opportunity, social partnership and anti-discrimination legislation. The foundation of this is the *Directive for Equal Treatment in Employment (2000/78/EC)* adopted in November 2000.

Inclusion of disabled workers/citizens will never happen effectively calling for equal rights and adopting laws to promote and protect them; we need to open our minds to new paradigms and methods. It is time to now move on from the discrimination approach (segregation, medical and charity model of disabled people) to a modern vision of society construction that goes beyond inclusion - to solutions of open access and sustainable growth for all.

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