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Jobkanaal, a good job!

BELGIUM - Voka – Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Jobkanaal

1 Description

Jobkanaal is an initiative of Voka – Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, supported by the Flemish Government. Jobkanaal offers a free service to Flemish companies who intend to pay extra attention to certain target groups (foreign people, elderly people and persons with a disability) in their HR processes such as the recruitment of new employees.

Because of the high unemployment rate of Jobkanaal's target groups, Jobkanaal intends to improve their chances to find a job on the labour market.

The Pact of Vilvoorde includes a commitment between the social partners and the government concerning the policy of equal job opportunities for target groups.

The Lissabon Convention also mentions the commitment to reach an activity rate of 70%.

Therefore Jobkanaal is bridging the companies who are looking for qualified and motivated employees, and motivated people from the target groups looking for a job via the employment offices. Jobkanaal offers a free channel for publishing the vacancies of companies that support the Jobkanaal mission. Since March 2006, Unizo and Verso, two other employers' associations, have joined this project. This expansion of Jobkanaal is the result of the policy of the Flemish Minister for Work, Education and Training Vandenbroucke.

2 Sources of funding for the project

The Flemish Government is subsidising the project for forty full-time equivalents in the second project period (since march 2006). In the first period the government subsidized eleven full-time local responsables and one coordinator plus operational costs.

Voka supports Jobkanaal by offering knowledge concerning enterprises, information (databases, experiences, ...) and a network of existing contacts and partnerships. The Jobkanaal responsables can make use of this valuable information.

3 Aims and objectives of the project or measure

Jobkanaal wants to contribute to the achievement of equal job opportunities (for the above mentioned target groups).

For the first period (June 2003 – December 2005), it was the objective to collect 13.700 vacancies in order to reach a success rate of 40% for all target groups as a whole. The 40% success rate is defined as the global result without differentiation between the target groups.

From 2007, Voka, Unizo en Verso have made the commitment to annually fill 5000 jobs via Jobkanaal by candidates of the target groups. Therefore it is necessary to have a solid cooperation and agreement with the VDAB as the public - and most important - labour counselor. VDAB has agreed to find four competent candidates per vacancy, and also to inform Jobkanaal within seven days, whether there are competent candidates or not. This is one of the necessary conditions for Voka, Unizo en Verso to obtain the intended purpose. Other conditions are the introduction of the tax decrease for 50+ers, the expansion and remuneration of the Jobkanaal staff, the financial support of the actions part of the Employers' Platform for Diversity and the responsibility of the target groups themselves.

4 Activities

The core business of Jobkanaal is connecting companies and candidates from the target groups via labour counsellors in order to avoid mismatching at the labour market. Therefore the local Jobkanaal responsible keeps in touch with both companies and labour counsellors. In the different regions in Flanders, Jobkanaal has two or three responsables per region. They are actively prospecting companies, and keep in touch afterwards via personal visits. These personal visits are the key to sensitization and information concerning Management of Diversity and the collection of vacancies with perspectives for the target groups. From the start of the project in June 2003 till December 2005 more than 2500 enterprises were visited by eleven local Jobkanaal responsables. Since 2006 almost 10.000 enterprises were visited by twenty eight local Jobkanaal responsables (Voka, UNIZO & Verso).

During the visits several subjects are discussed, depending on the interest of the companies' HR manager or business manager. The focus is mainly on the free service 'Jobkanaal' and the theme 'diversity'. The local Jobkanaal responsible will also ask questions on how experienced the company is in managing diversity on the work floor and will give information concerning specific instruments and measures. The confidential relationship between Voka as employers' association and the enterprises permits an open debate about diversity. In consequence, Jobkanaal can provide the government with a better understanding of the needs and desires of companies. If there are actual vacancies, the local Jobkanaal responsible will gather all necessary information from the HR Manager or business manager in order to make a perfect job description.

Besides the personal visits, the local Jobkanaal responsables and the coordinators (one from Unizo, the other from Voka) for the Jobkanaal project organize network activities for enterprises and labour counsellors in order to stimulate cooperation. Jobkanaal organized - with or without the cooperation of the partners - 106 collective information sessions for companies. (Currently, 4 members of the Jobkanaal staff belong to one of the target groups: one person with a visual disability, two foreign persons and one elderly person.) Since the beginning of the project in June 2003 till December 2005, approximately 3000 candidates that are all part of one of the target groups have found a job with the help of both Jobkanaal and the network of labour counselors. Since the expansion in 2006 another 11.952 candidates that are all part of one of the target groups have found a job.

5 Difficulties encountered in implementation, scope for improvement

The local Jobkanaal responsables depend on the commitment of their local partners (all the organizations who are coaching and guiding target groups looking for a job) when they want to succeed. As Jobkanaal is a new player in the field of diversity, it is not always easy and it takes a lot of patience and energy to receive the respect and trust of the network partners (different organizations in Social Profit who also are supported by the government but who have a different mission compared to Voka). Because of its unique character, *Jobkanaal could be used as a model in other contexts where legal, political, social, economic and/or cultural conditions may be somewhat different.* An employers' association is very well placed to take such an initiative in cooperation with the labour counsellors in order to stimulate equal participation at the labour market.

6 What we learned: SWOT-analysis

6.1 Strengths

- Jobkanaal is operating from Voka – Flanders' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which has direct contact with the companies. The Jobkanaal responsables have access to valuable information (databases, experiences, contacts, ...).
- Jobkanaal includes all forces in one distinctive channel, the responsables are connected with, and caring for, both the companies and the network of labour counselors. As a network builder, Jobkanaal offers a distinctive overview of the players on the labour market and of the opportunities they offer.
- Jobkanaal is bridging candidates of the minorities, labour counselors helping these candidates, and companies intending to employ them. As a very result-focused channel for recruitment, Jobkanaal is intervening effectively on the labour market.

6.2 Weaknesses

- The economic situation and the heavy competition between the many candidates for vacant jobs. This is an extra impediment for candidates of the target groups in finding a job, and has an influence on the Jobkanaal results.
- Within the large network of public and private labour counselors, many different procedures are used. Although it is labour intensive, it is absolutely necessary to communicate about the procedures, and make them fit.
- Jobkanaal is a free extra channel for recruitment that could be used by companies to quickly find competent candidates of the minorities. But the large network of labour counselors often offer no or unmotivated candidates to employers. This undermines the sensitizing effect and damages the confidence of employers in Jobkanaal, and this often even strengthens the existing prejudices.
- Candidates don't always point out to be motivated to work. There often appear to be no candidates for very uncomplicated and low-skilled vacancies.

6.3 Opportunities

- It is important that Jobkanaal also uses its link with Voka in communicating about and sensitizing employers to diversity, in order to reach a wider range of companies, based on confidence.
- Jobkanaal is bridging unemployed people, labour counselors and companies by prospecting and sensitizing actively. It's important that this cooperation is working in two directions, and that it additionally can be used by both the counselors and the companies. If a company is looking for a truck driver, e.g., he can ask the Jobkanaal responsible to look after truck driver candidates. Or if a counselor has a truck driver candidate, he can ask the Jobkanaal responsible to look after a matching vacancy. This way, every Jobkanaal partner can be dedicated to his own job, supported by a fruitful cooperation with the other partners. 3. It is important to determine distinctly, and agree about the task and job of all different partners being active on diversity. Additionally, it is also very important to join forces in order to provoke effective and enduring employment, based on a respectful attitude.

6.4 Threats

- The existing prejudices concerning some target groups promote discrimination.
- We cannot control all the partners of the project, nor their contribution: the fact that they give too little feedback about how many candidates they present/introduce, will influence negatively the quality of the service Jobkanaal wants to offer to the companies.