

Taylor revisited: 'The right job for a man'

- participative work (re)design for special need groups -

Henny Mulders and Fred Zijlstra

Introduction

In all western economies social security is being transformed from a 'passive compensation oriented insurance system' to a system that activates people towards work participation. Organizations find themselves increasingly in the centre of this new social security system. 'All that are able to work, should work' is the new mantra. Organizations, however, are generally not prepared to employ people with special needs. There are two trends that prompt them to react and to anticipate, or rather: to be adaptive.

First, in the very next future (within 5 years) there will be a structural shortage of qualified personnel at the labor market, due to inevitable demographic developments. Organizations will have to develop new strategies to incorporate the growing labor market reserve that consists of job seekers who do not match the standard demands of regular jobs today, including people with special needs.

In addition, organizations will have to adapt their work processes to include ageing workers. The 'healthy worker' effect, which is the expression of a selection process that is currently experienced as 'natural' for workers in their fifties, will no longer be a valid option due to the changes in disability legislation, early retirement arrangements and pension schemes. Active participation of elderly workers, including those with chronic health problems, is inevitable to realize productivity and to guarantee our social security system in the future.

Both trends have in common that the usual solutions, dismissal of less productive workers and recruiting and selecting new personal that fits best the companies' existing job structure and work processes, will no longer be a viable strategy.

Conclusion: both trends confront organizations with new challenges to *change their work processes and job structures* to make optimal use of a *combination* of fully qualified workers *and* workers with restricted abilities. In order to successfully meet these challenges organizations will have to adapt to these new external and internal labor market conditions. What is needed is a *flexible and adaptive* division of tasks, and appropriate ways of coordination between workers with high and less capacities to ensure a maximum organizational result (in terms of output and quality of goods and services).

One possible adaptive organizational strategy could be coined as:

PARTICIPATIVE WORK REDESIGN

This strategy will be illustrated by an example of a systematic approach to incorporate young people with disabilities in regular working organizations.

Background

The Netherlands has a special disability arrangement for people with substantial functional limitations due to impairments acquired before the age of 18 years, the so called 'Wajong Act'. The impairments may be genetically determined or acquired by disease or accident. To qualify for this disability allowance, professional assessment by an insurance physician and a labor expert has to prove that the applicant is not able to perform *regular* jobs on the labor market due to his or her disabilities.

Being 'disabled' according to this disability law ('Wajong') in fact means that at the age of 18 years a person is not able to earn minimum wage by performing a regular job in a regular working organization (without any adaptation). Some of these youngsters are indeed completely unable to perform any work at all, because of their severe medical impairments (circa 25%), that cause them to be dependent on continuous care. Most of them (75%) though are perfectly able to perform some kind of productive activities, but not the complete set of tasks of which regular jobs consist, and not without proper guidance. Also many of them are –at this stage of their development- lacking the social skills that are so important to perform sufficiently as a worker, and to survive without additional support in today's working organizations.

Over the last few years the number of this group of young people that are according current legislation 'disabled' is increasing and without an adequate response of our society their numbers will further increase (constant high inflow, little outflow)

Growing number of young people on disability allowance (X 1000)						
	2002	2006	2007	2008	2010	2020
Inflow	7,0	13,6	15,3	16,1	16,2	16,2
Outflow	3,7	4,9	4,4	4,6	5,5	6,6
Total	131	156	167	178	200	295

The Dutch 'Wajong' arrangement is rather unique. In other European countries similar trends among young people can be observed, but they are not so obvious because elsewhere young people with functional limitations are 'hidden' in other social security, or welfare arrangements of a more general nature.

The existing 'Wajong' disability allowance is under reconstruction. From 2010 on there will be a new arrangement for young people with disabilities. Only youngster with very severe disabilities, who are completely unable to perform productive activities of any kind, will be granted a full disability allowance. All other young people with substantial disabilities are supposed to participate somehow in work or study. They are entitled to a wage supply or a study fee. They receive support in job seeking and job keeping (job coach); at the age of

27 a final assessment is performed to establish their degree of disability (loss of earning capacity with respect to minimum wage).

As a result, young people with restricted abilities are more than ever dependent on suitable job opportunities in regular organizations.

This focus on participation is in line with recent changes in all other social insurance arrangements in the Netherlands: 'work first'. Every young person with functional limitations has to participate in some kind of regular work and try to earn (partially) his own income, to become as independent a citizen as possible. Organizations of employers and labor unions do support this strategy. This is more and more becoming an item on the agenda of collective agreements. Still, at the company level, a lot has to be done to implement this strategy.

Who are these young people with special needs?

25% of these youngsters are severely (mentally) handicapped and are in need of continuous care (mostly institutional). The other 75% are capable to perform some kind of work activities. Their medical conditions are depicted below.

Diagnoses (inflow 'Wajong' 2008):	
Neurological disorders	5%
Developmental disorders:	56%
	- 35% mental retardation
	- 5% ADHD
	- 10% Autistic spectrum disorders
Psychological disorders:	30%
Physical disorders:	9%

	100%

NB. *co-morbidity and multiple (social) problems*

Most of them have learning difficulties and have attended special schools. They seem to profit from 'learning by doing'; to develop their abilities they are dependent on learning on the job. 90% of them do not have physical problems, but have difficulties in cognitive, emotional and social behavior. However: they are capable of performing *elementary tasks*, given the *proper conditions*.

Elementary tasks can be grouped to an elementary job, conditions involve organizational changes:

- with respect to the youngster(s): coaching, supervision, assistance
- with respect to co-workers: the elementary job(s) must be integrated in the organization: the elementary tasks must be fine tuned to co-workers tasks and co-workers have to accept the peculiarities of these youngsters and must be willing and able to deal with them.

Nowadays 26% of these youngsters are already working, 15% of them in sheltered workplaces, and only 11% in regular work organizations, most of the time in assistant jobs. Keeping a regular job seems to be very difficult: 50% lose their jobs within 6 months. Most organizations seem to be not (yet) capable to integrate these young people in a productive and sustainable way. Without additional changes in the organization they do not simply 'fit in'.

Participative work redesign

As existing jobs and existing working conditions obviously prevent people with special needs from participating, new approaches are necessary. One way to innovate work organizations to create sustainable jobs for special need groups, we believe, is participative work redesign. This is a stepwise interactive approach to **enable** organizations to employ non standard workers, as outlined below.

Step 1: initial commitment of top management and workers' representatives to integrate colleagues with special needs at the work place;

Step1: hierarchical integral analysis of work processes to identify elementary tasks by researchers (long list);

Step2: top management's approval to start further exploration, specification of organizational parts (target departments) and additional conditions or restrictions;

Step 3: redesign of work in focus group of workers, line management and researchers: validation of elementary tasks and generating suggestions for reallocation of task within the department to create elementary job(s) in interdependence with existing jobs: elementary tasks for each department (short list);

Step 4: selecting candidates by matching their elementary skills with elementary tasks (short lists);

Step 5: clustering elementary tasks to elementary jobs suitable to individual candidates;

Step 7: introducing the candidates in their working environment, managing mutual expectations, initial training and support by an external job coach, preferably (or followed) by a co-worker (mentor) or line manager;

Step 8: regular feedback by coach and line manager and (if necessary) rearrangement of tasks until steady state is attained or conclusion is reached: mismatch, new candidate.

Step 9: evaluation by management and staff to specify conditions to continue the project

Conclusion

Hire and fire is no longer the ultimate organizational response to future mismatches between task demands and (potential) workers abilities. Flexible job structures and work processes to ensure optimal cooperation of skilled and less skilled worker, of workers with and without functional limitations, are needed to realize an inclusive Organization.

Organizations will have to play a crucial role in the new social security legislation that is aiming to increase participation.

1. integration of the potential (elementary) contributions of people with special needs to the organizations' goals poses new demands to the organization as a whole : it stresses the adaptive capacity of the entire organization
2. sustainable integration of people with special needs not only demands restructuring of tasks to create elementary jobs, but also organizational development to create an inclusive social environment: a balanced mix of talents.