

## Empowering Persons with a Disability

Empowering Persons with a Disability is considered as an important and decisive factor for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disability.<sup>1</sup> Empowerment can be described as: *'being able to make choices and give direction to your life'*. It determines and influences the result and the success of Social Inclusion. Those who strive for social Inclusion must be motivated to actively contribute to the inclusion process. The extent to which someone is able to shape this process has to do with empowerment. The question is: 'Do you let it happen or do you take the steps yourself?' or 'Will decisions be made about you or do you take the initiative yourself?'

Empowerment contributes to someone using his/her talents and capacities effectively and self-consciously giving substance to his/her own actions.<sup>2</sup> In this way, empowerment promotes performance, initiative and taking responsibility and self-direction. Empowerment, also referred to as 'inner leadership', leads to effective relationships with people, motivates and creates space for creativity and innovation. Empowering leads to greater autonomy of individuals and to making your own, independent and conscious choices. This results in an increase in the chance of success in acquiring and maintaining a place in society. Based on this hypothesis, it is important to look for clear and concrete definition of the concept of 'empowerment' and 'empowering' and how to operationalise them in concrete behavioural indicators.

Empowerment is a dynamic process and can change over time. Empowerment can change through personal development, (life) experience or training. Through a systematic assessment, self-evaluation questionnaire of systematic observation by a third party, you can estimate into what extent a person is empowered. This person can then work on an individual level or in a group to further develop his 'inner leadership' with targeted training and thereby becomes more active in taking responsibility and directing in any aspect of his/her life. Research (Nijhuis & van Lierop 2004) shows that the concept of empowerment is composed by six categories: These six categories can be considered as the most important building blocks of the empowerment concept. Each category is representative of a specific aspect of empowerment

The six categories of the empowerment concept are:

- 1. Competence:** The category 'Competence' means that the person has confidence in his/her own abilities to successfully complete a certain task. A person with a highly developed competence knows what he/she can and cannot do, has confidence in his/her own abilities and knows how to indicate when he/she need support.
- 2. Self-determination:** The category 'Self-determination' means that a person can and dares to make choices about his/her own life. A person has the feeling that he/she have control over his/her own situation. Often, persons with a disability often like to let their choice be determined by advice from 'experts', who after all know best what is good for them.
- 3. Impact:** The category 'Impact' gives a person the feeling that his/her choices actually influence the course of his/her (personal) development process. The person feels that he/she has influence over his/her own situation. A person with a well-developed sense of impact realizes that with his/her choices he/she controls, directs and shapes his/her own development. He/she knows the consequences of his/her choices and takes him-/herself seriously.
- 4. Meaning:** The category 'Meaning' means that a person feels and experience that his/her personal development and the choices he/she make in it have meaning, that they are meaningful and are in line with personal values, views and behaviour. Someone who is forced to do something or has to accept something that he/she doesn't like, probably drops out prematurely. Compulsion is a pronounced extrinsic motivational factor.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nation Inclusion Strategy: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities OHCHR (2006)

<sup>2</sup> Vrijbaan Empowering Method 2011.

5. **Positive identity:** The category 'Positive identity' means that the person has a positive attitude towards him-/herself. The situation he/she is in does not play a dominant role in how he/she view him-/herself. The person accepts him-/herself as he/she is and feel that he/she can handle life from his/her positive identity.
6. **Group orientation:** The category 'Group orientation' implies the realization that you are part of a community, that therefore there is always some dependence on others and that cooperation with others is necessary. Someone with a strong group orientation realizes that he functions in a social context and that his behaviour contributes and is of value to others. On the one hand, he values his own role in his environment and does not assume in advance that the environment will fully adapt to his situation.

### The empowering environment

Sometimes the environment has a decisive influence, positive or negative, on the success of the process of inclusions which should lead to participation in society. In the REQUEST project<sup>3</sup> it is investigated how the professional environment can contribute to the stimulation and development of 'individual empowerment' of an individual with a disability and how that environment can minimize negative influences on empowerment.

Based on the hypothesis that empowerment of the individual is an important condition for successful and sustainable participation in society, we define stimulating and making a positive contribution to this process as an 'empowering environment'. The 'empowering environment' becomes visible in attitude, treatment, behaviour and personal approach of those who interact with an individual with a disability.

In the project SE(E)U we will include the empowering environment by answering the question: What does this mean for the practice of sport instructors in their work of supporting an individual with a disability in their personal development process?

In Table 1 the operational definition of empowerment that is used in this project is presented. Some behaviour indicators have been formulated. The table stems from the operationalisation of the empowerment concept.

	Categories	Behavioural Indicators are:
1	Competence	Having confidence in own skills; Achieving objectives; Trusting in own abilities; Solving problems.
2	Self-determination	Having a clear opinion; Expressing disagreement; Expressing preferences; Controlling own situation; Making decisions;
3	Impact	Having capacity to change; Controlling own situations; Taking initiatives; Being proud.
4	Meaning	Motivating yourself; Being driven to perform; Being driven to improve; Carrying out tasks.
5	Positive identity	Accepting personal characteristics; Asking for support; Accepting own disability;
6	Group orientation	Acting as a member of a group; Reacting openly to others; Asking for support from others.

<sup>3</sup> Van Lierop, B.G.A. e.o, iRv, Kenniscentrum voor Revalidatie en Handicap (2007)