Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

BUSINESS PRACTICES IN THE SME

An authoritative weekly news magazine recently published the views of 12 eminent scientists and philosophers on the question of what we will have to strive for over the next fifty years.

The common denominator among these twelve opinions sounded like this: ‘Everyone realizes that our social model, which puts human dignity first and foremost and wishes to offer everyone equal opportunities for development, is being put under great pressure.’

Every scientist and philosopher pleads with us to support the preservation, strengthening and extension of our social model.’

The economic component of this social model we refer to as a social, ethical and ecologically corrected market economy. For a number of years a business concept has developed that corresponds to this social economic viewpoint. This business model is called ‘corporate social responsibility’. The fact that there is interest in corporate social responsibility is an indication of the important position the entrepreneur occupies in present-day society. This position has become all the more crucial as company stakeholders have become organized, have acquired a power of expression and have become recognized.

It is a characteristic of our society that both policy and the population assume that everyone, in their place and when carrying out their work, will behave as much as possible in a conscientious and responsible manner to achieve a sustainable qualitative society and world. Appreciation of values, morally responsible behaviour, dedication to decent human relationships and to a cleaner environment; these are the present-day interpretations of good citizenship.

This applies fully to businesses.

The entrepreneur is expected to behave responsibly, as are all other social groups and stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility is therefore not the systematic reminding of the 2 entrepreneur of his responsibilities. The concept of ‘corporate social responsibility’ offers the entrepreneur a framework for structuring and interpreting the responsibility that the business is adopting.

Naturally there have been repeated demands for a reliable test for corporate social responsibility. Entrepreneurs are partly judged on the extent to which they succeed in manifesting their responsible behaviour. How does the entrepreneur demonstrate this?

Naturally he shows this by the way he operates in his relationship with the various stakeholders. As the company grows, so too does the request for formalisation and certification. Managers of large companies who operate on an international scale lack the economies of scale of an SME, which often maintains personal relationships with its stakeholders. SMEs who explicitly adhere to their social responsibility will personally guarantee it.

Their efforts sometimes lack the objectivity of an audit certificate. SMEs do not always have the structure, nor the means and readiness to submit to expensive audit procedures.

Corporate social responsibility therefore may not be limited to expensive administrative procedures and purely formal processes. On the contrary, SMEs must be encouraged to make a special effort.

They have an economy of scale: the entrepreneur's personal responsibility and his formal responsibility as an entrepreneur coincide. In SME businesses, economic relationships are also human relationships. Corporate social responsibility can complement this effortlessly.

This manual stimulates the SME entrepreneur in his efforts to strengthen the social, economic and ecological components of his company maintaining a good relationship with all the stakeholders. The tone of this handbook comes from specific company operating practices, resulting from countless discussions carried out during the project that UNIZO-VORMING and Business & Society were able to set up with the support of the Flemish 3 Community's TRIVISI-campagne and the European Social Fund. This handbook reads like a manual. The reader can follow the example of fellow SME entrepreneurs and can find useful instructions in the many practical examples for creating concrete, systematic and profitable company practices following the principles of corporate social responsibility.

This is the best way of presenting the power of the SME company as a socially responsible business.

WHAT DOES CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MEAN FOR THE SME?

Corporate social responsibility is a hot item in the business world and undoubtedly one of THE challenges for the future. Yet for many SMEs it is still a relatively unknown subject. This manual can help you get started. Welcome to the world of corporate social responsibility…

Feedback sessions with business managers have taught us that people use different definitions to describe corporate social responsibility.

We have chosen the following from the multitude of definitions:

'Corporate social responsibility is the application of a strategy which systematically integrates the economic, environmental and social impact of a business into the management of that business.'

Communicating this strategy and reviewing it with all those interested parties in the company (shareholders, clients, suppliers, personnel, government) is an essential part of social responsibility. This input must of course be 'translated'.

For this reason there are a number of things we must know in advance:

• How does the SME take account of the employees, the clients, the suppliers and the neighbouring community in its daily business activities,...and how is this handled?

• How does the SME try to optimise its positive impact on society? What are the most important values here?

• How does the SME integrate care for people and the environment into its business activities?

The aim of this manual is to urge the user to set about becoming socially responsible in business, and determining priorities.

Corporate social responsibility also means: daring to question one's own activities and look at them from a different perspective. A company is only truly concerned with corporate social responsibility if it takes up its responsibilities in the three core areas – economy, society and environment – analyses the impact of its activities within the same core areas and begins a process of reflection. The 'how' is therefore important. How do you gear your company to the outside world? How do you integrate the economic, social and environmental aspects, so that you can grow further as a 'strong business'? This integration of economic, social and environmental goals can also mean that compromises must be made.

The examples in this manual show, however, that success in business and social responsibility not only go hand in hand but can be mutually supportive.

The examples of 'good practice' in this manual are a useful aid in convincing the SME of the extra value of corporate social responsibility. But this is not just for the SME. The manual is also intended for organisations to which SMEs turn for advice and support. They too are faced with the challenge of stimulating and supporting the SME in the process of corporate social responsibility by encouraging awareness and offering aid.

A manual for SMEs with up to 20 to 30 employees In these SMEs it is usually the business managers themselves who take these types of initiatives. The internal organisation is mostly informal. This requires suitable methodology. However, we wish above all to inspire and not to be pedantic. We advise using those proposals that best fit in with the SME's situation and can be integrated optimally. We have studied a number of themes in depth on the basis of a theoretical plan, supplemented with practical examples from at home and abroad. Each theme is concluded with a number of interesting links. Because of the continual discussion with and feedback from the SMEs, this manual is a good reflection of the real needs of the SME. The feedback sessions were organized regionally. The businesses that assisted in their capacity as examples of 'good practice' were invited to instigate discussions during these feedback sessions and to exchange experiences. Moreover, the SMEs are given the opportunity to register for an individual counselling path. In the manual you can read how 10 companies from different sectors, coached and counselled by the CommonSense consultants, discover, interpret and want to implement corporate social responsibility in their future development. Each one is a fascinating testimony that undoubtedly can be of use to you in determining and establishing your own viewpoint.

You can consult the manual in two ways. Either you follow the thematic arrangement that you will find in the table of contents, or you go straight to a description of a good practice. You will find the list of good practices in the annexes.

CSR MANUAL

A. MORE SATISFIED EMPLOYEES, BETTER BUSINESS RESULTS

How satisfied are your employees? It is very important to know that because content employees are:

- less often absent due to illness or for other reasons.
- better motivated and easier to enlist in new projects.
- more loyal, less quickly inclined to leave the company.
- indispensable during changing processes or in difficult periods.
- more productive
- conducive to a good working atmosphere.

Dissatisfied employees on the other hand:

- are less motivated.
- have a worse work performance.
- are quicker to call in ‘sick’.
- ruin the atmosphere.
- do not keep to agreements.
- weigh on the team spirit.
- do not communicate as they should.

In short, they have an adverse effect on the service provision and the course of business in the company. This dissatisfaction can have to do with a combination of factors.

A few examples of this are:

Dissatisfaction about the job and the possibilities of personal development:

- too much or too little variation in the work, or work that is too difficult.

• too low salary, too few fringe benefits and/or training opportunities.
• too many personal problems to be able to carry out the job properly.

Dissatisfaction with the relationships at work:
• difficulty in working together with one or more colleagues.
• increasing tension between natives and immigrants.
• difficult relationship with the boss.
• a missed promotion, too little recognition.
• need for evaluation.
• conflicts with clients.
Dissatisfaction with the working environment:
• too little insight into the company policy.
• difficult hourly timetables.7
• health problems, feeling of insecurity in the workplace.
• uncertainty about the future (e.g. approaching dismissals, reorganisation).
• problems with the style of leadership of the bosses, the company culture.

A.1 HOW DO YOU KNOW WHETHER YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE CONTENT?

1 Knowledge through measurement
In smaller businesses there is continuous contact between entrepreneur and employees.
Before long entrepreneurs are talking about a family feeling. But as in the best families people are sometimes unhappy. Holding a structured discussion with the employees to gauge their satisfaction is not therefore an unnecessary luxury. Not everything can be discussed on the work floor or during the lunch break. A frank discussion between the two of you will help you see what is really going on with the employees and how the working atmosphere is. ‘I know how content my employees are, because I talk to them daily about work and their private lives’.
Great, but….. do you really know whether your employees are content? Do you really take the time to find out? Are you not relying too much upon assumptions? Are you too easily distracted because of the pressures of work, incoming telephone calls, or a waiting client?

2 How do you deal with it?

There are different ways of determining your employees' satisfaction. Depending on the company culture, the structure, organisation, scale and/or atmosphere in the company, you can choose for a personal conversation, a group discussion or a questionnaire.

The HRM coach from UNIZO's networking service for growing SME's
(SME Contact –KMO Contact) can help you with this.

Ensure that all employees are informed of this initiative in advance, also those who work elsewhere. Urge the 'forerunners' in your company to stimulate others. And above all: let them see that you attach great importance to measuring employee satisfaction.

What is your company culture?

• Is there regular contact between management and employees? And is that through loose informal discussions or more structured meetings?
• Are there group discussions now and again on specific subjects or does this seldom happen?
• Is the contact open and honest?
• Are criticisms openly made?

How are you structured and organised?

• Has your company a flat structure or is there a team boss or a department head who forms the link between management and the employees?
• Is there someone responsible for personnel matters who is not part of the management team?
• Do the majority of the employees work in construction yards or in one place?

How large is your company?

• To what extent does the size of the company determine the relationship between management and the employees?
• Is there a direct relationship with the employees or does communication take place via middle management?

How would you describe the working atmosphere in your company?

• Does the working atmosphere in your company allow a job satisfaction assessment (or not)?
• Are there conflicts that could influence a job satisfaction assessment?

3 Choose the suitable method

The announcement of an employee satisfaction assessment creates expectations among your employees.

• Ensure that these expectations are realistic.
• Take account of realistic timing (when do you expect the first results?).

• Warn them that not everything can be achieved and that the proposals drawn up by a large group receive priority.

• Get involved when considering the results. A management that is amenable to feedback and prepared to steer the company based on these results will be able to achieve much more.

• Make it clear that you appreciate their cooperation.

• Let them know how it will be reported.

AN INDIVIDUAL DISCUSSION

The advantage of an individual discussion is that you can obtain a deeper insight. You get to know your employees better so that you can also learn to assess his or her behaviour more correctly.

Do not limit the discussion to a job appraisal. A good discussion is only possible if both parties take the time for it. Do not feel attacked too quickly, but ask questions to better understand what the other person means. Allow your employee to talk about himself. It should not turn into an hour of gossiping. And last but not least: summarize the discussion afterwards together to ensure that you have understood everything properly.

• Do you want to speak to your employee yourself?

Indicate then why you are doing this. Let them know in advance what you want to discuss. And, very importantly: do not allow this discussion to turn into a discussion on salaries, because then a person is less inclined to speak freely. Do not hold a discussion about employee satisfaction in a conflict situation.

You are and remain the entrepreneur after all. Choose an open discussion in an open atmosphere. Hold it preferably on ‘neutral ground’ and not in your office where the telephone is constantly ringing and employees are walking in and out…

• Do you want someone else to carry out the discussion?

You can appoint someone who works in your company and is trusted by everyone or refer to an external specialist, through a payroll administration company. Tell your employees why you have chosen to have this external confidential adviser. An ‘audit’ can create a lot of unrest. Let the designated person draw up a confidential report that sketches a general picture of employee satisfaction in your company and contains proposals for improvement. Personal matters do not belong in this report.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A group discussion offers the advantage of having your employees tackle a subject as a group and apply all their knowledge and experience of the company to arrive at certain findings and then formulate solutions. The disadvantage is that you do not know which direction such a discussion will take. Yet a good group discussion can only stimulate the team spirit. A piece of advice: choose an external location for your group discussion.

Your employees are having a day off and feel less inhibited.

That does not detract from the fact too that an informal discussion is best conducted in a formal way. Give everyone a questionnaire in advance or ask your employees to give a signed score to a number of high priority subjects or problems.

An atmosphere that is too informal stands in the way of a formal decision-making process. This is certainly true if the group discussion has to result in concrete solutions and agreements.

If you are not yet accustomed to conducting group discussions about employee satisfaction, draw up a clear outline beforehand of the object of the discussion and appoint, for example, a mentor to keep the discussion on track.

QUESTIONNAIRE

An advantage of a questionnaire is that you get a good picture of employee satisfaction. In this way you can immediately set priorities and work out actions where there is overall support.

Employees usually complete such a questionnaire very honestly, especially if anonymity is guaranteed and the answers are used in a secure way. This approach takes up more time, but for SMEs with more than 30 employees it is an interesting method.

Tell your employees in advance why you are choosing a questionnaire and what the purpose is. Provide them with a list with clearly formulated questions and appoint someone to look for and remove any possible obscurities. Or have the group go through and fill in the questions under supervision.

By setting open questions you receive open answers. These provide a lot of information but are more difficult to translate into general conclusions.

Closed questions, with a yes/no answer or with different possible answers, give an even better overview of matters that are important to the personnel. However, there is a disadvantage: there is little room for distinguishing answers. You can solve this by providing space beside the closed questions to give additional commentary or suggestions.

You can choose to put propositions to your employees for their views or put forward subjects that must be worked on. In any case, drawing up a good questionnaire is a craft. The following few points are important for this.

• Questions that are felt by the employees to be biased or questions for which the employees do not recognize the relevance arouse suspicion.

• Completing a questionnaire may take no longer than 15 minutes.

If possible do the test yourself beforehand.

• Guarantee anonymity and confidentiality.

• Inform your employees in good time and give then sufficient time to complete the list

• Guarantee total anonymity by delivering them in blank envelopes. Provide a box in which the forms can be deposited.

• Report the results.

• And … do not do it alone! Draw up the questionnaire in consultation with others.

4 What kind of things can you record in an employee satisfaction assessment?

You can choose for a thematic assessment, spread over several years, or for a periodical global assessment. The following is an overview of possible subjects and the components of these that may arise:

Job

The content of the job, the amount of work, work tempo, working hours, combining family with work, the physical load, degree of difficulty, availability of suitable materials, responsibilities, clarity in tasks to be performed, variation in type of tasks, contacts with clients, career opportunities, training, financial remuneration and fringe benefits.

Social relationships

This includes collaboration between colleagues and teams, supervision by the direct manager, contact with clients and suppliers, space for personal development, evaluation.

Working environment

Policy, culture, labour organisation, work consultation, safety and health at work, communication, mobility policy, image, the values aimed at by the company, the attention to environmental issues and social matters.

Specific initiatives and projects

Here you can evaluate any initiatives or changes that were made or carried out throughout the year.

Important! Do not limit yourself to asking questions, but urge your employees to express their own proposals for improvement.

This will help increase the support for them when they are introduced.

How do you arrive at conclusions and action proposals?

As a business manager, logically you have the inclination to pay more or less attention to certain topics in your policy management. When the results of the employee satisfaction assessment are processed, the blind spots can become visible.

Good advice: do not make an analysis on your own but together with someone who is familiar with personnel matters. Let him or her first view the results and draft a short report. Then form your own opinion. Naturally you deal very confidentially with criticism regarding one specific employee, e.g. suspicions of theft, bullying, intimidation, and fraud. Such problems require a personal approach. You could possibly contact your social administration or your prevention adviser to determine a suitable strategy.

Always make an anonymous report, without mentioning names. It is the results of the group that count. You can spot problems that arise from an individual discussion or a questionnaire, but emphasize mainly the problems that are of priority to the group.

You are better to deal with the other problems during job appraisals and assessment talks.

Important! Don’t ignore the problems even if you do not agree with a number of the remarks.

Adopting an open attitude against criticism is disarming in itself.

You do not have to change everything at once, but it is advisable to consider recommendations. Think for example of:

• The costs and benefits of the action for the company and for the employees.

• The risks the company runs if nothing is done.

• The urgency of certain problems (try here to deal with them quickly).

• The extent to which the present system must be improved (clearer information, more consistent compliance) or a new path must be considered.

• Who in your team can further plan and implement the proposals?

The next crucial step is to submit feedback to the employees.

They will obviously be curious as to the results and the eventual proposals for a solution coming from management. So prepare the feedback well. Call the employees together for this and make enough time available. In this way you will make them feel that they are important to the organisation.

Written feedback is also possible, but is more superficial and by doing this you are denying your employees the chance of expressing their opinion on the results and the proposals for improvement.

A pair of golden rules …. If you wish to present the results yourself, then take the time to consider the results, ask any possible additional questions to clarify certain remarks or problems and ensure that everyone understands what is being dealt with.

Then turn to look for solutions. If you can have your team thinking along with you, then you are already quite a way towards a solution. Try to think of a proposal for a solution yourself and then try it out on your employees. Above all, explain clearly why you are proposing a certain action or not. Remember that your solution does not automatically mean an answer to the question from your employees.

A tip: after the results have been announced, try to start up a working group to develop proposals. Close the meeting with a work plan so that it is clear who will do what and when. Define the responsibilities. Compliance with the proposals is very important. The opposite would not be plausible. It is better to introduce one proposal and realise it than make promises that come to nothing. If your team gets the impression that their opinion does not make any difference, they will rightly hold their tongue in future and reluctantly participate in any subsequent project. In this way you will evolve into a lamenting culture that will be more difficult to transform into a positive dynamic business culture.

Regularly inform your employees on how far you have advanced with the planned actions. Summarize them in a memo and announce how far you have progressed (still under preparation, settled). Distribute this document to the employees, discuss it at a staff meeting, hang it up or put in on the intranet. If you have set up a working group, have someone make a report and distribute this among the employees after approval.

COUNSELLING PATH

Best Practice (BP) PEETERS-VERVOORT
PEETERS-VERVOORT BVBA
NIJLENSESTEENWEG 262, 2270 HERENTHOUT.
ACTIVITIES: PLANT CENTRE ‘PLANTENLAND’, LANDSCAPE GARDENING AND LAYOUT, PAVING AND GARDEN MAINTENANCE

The business manager, Paul Peeters, is the head of the company.

His wife heads Plantenland, together with four employees. Twelve permanent employees work in Garden Maintenance IPVO) (six teams of two); these are supplemented by temporary workers and students during peak periods. Eight people work in landscape gardening and layout (two work in design, in preparing quotations and planning and coordination, with six carrying out the work – three teams of two).

Website: www.plantenland.be

Hey, I'm growing! A story of motivation and communication. Paul Peeters and his wife Maria Vervoort established Peeters- Vervoort in 1978.
Originally it was a tree nursery, but the business quickly grew successful because of the quality, expert approach. The nursery was sensitively expanded, the plant centre was built and the business also specialised in garden layout and maintenance. This year Peeters-Vervoort has developed into an impressive 'green business'. On the one hand there is the Plantenland with more than 25,000 m2 of greenery. On the other, there is the landscape gardening division, garden layout and maintenance (for public green areas, company and private gardens).
The business has grown incredibly fast in recent years. In addition, the work has become even more labour intensive, thus increasing the work pressure. This increased work pressure also has to do with looking after the environment. In garden maintenance harmful weed killers are being used less and less thereby increasing the number of annual maintenance overhauls.
In 2015 dangerous weed killers will be officially prohibited, which will increase the work volume even more.
The business manager observes that the team leaders as well as the employees are finding this high work pressure hard to take. That also has consequences for the turnover in staff. Paul Peeters points out the problem exactly: staff motivation and communication with the team leadership requires urgent improvement. Nonetheless employee involvement is high.
Recently, quite a lot of measures have been taken to that end: there have been regular job performance interviews, a monthly work consultation, a daily briefing, group activities and outings, a wide range of educational and training courses (including communications, and social skills), and the establishment of a communications working group. But the way in which these things develop can and should be better according to the business manager.
Anyway, high employee involvement should lead to a high level of satisfaction. Unfortunately this is not the case, in spite of the good collaboration between the employees themselves, the enthusiasm of the temporary workforce (who can later start as permanent staff in the integration company) and the successful diversity.
The business manager wants to communicate to his employees in every possible way that he appreciates their efforts and contribution, for example, by taking part himself in training sessions and seminars, among other things, via the Plato network of the Kempen Strategic Plan and by setting up an advisory group in which managerial colleagues can exchange experiences regarding management and motivating employees …
The plan: increase employee satisfaction through better communication …
Helping increase employee satisfaction is the central aim of the counselling process.

The question is: how do the employees feel about the entrepreneur’s offer; how do they experience their present work situation? Afterwards consideration can be given to the actions that should be undertaken in order to reach the objective.

They opted for a system of sounding out employee satisfaction. An employee from administration was appointed coordinator. She will help in setting up the questionnaire and collecting and processing the results.

The only way to know is to measure it.

The process manager begins by handing out examples and models of satisfaction questionnaires and tips for a satisfaction survey.

The business manager takes on the task of communicating with the managerial personnel in the company.

During subsequent sessions the satisfaction questionnaire is given more content and structure. Various topics are then chosen with regard to the job itself, organisation of work, collaboration among colleagues and the working atmosphere, management style, mutual trust and vision of the future. An implementation plan will also be set up with concrete agreements concerning interviewing methods, planning and timing, processing of the results and reporting.

The survey is carried out in groups, under the supervision of the coordinator. The coordinator takes care of the practical matters. She ensures that everything is clear and the employees can ask her questions.

The process counsellor also passes on tips for targeted communication. The business manager himself explains the objectives and intention of the survey. In this way he shows his active involvement and commitment. Clear and transparent communication will remove any mistrust among the employees. The survey is first presented to the managers and thereafter at the staff meeting. Everyone is informed as from the initial preparation. This stimulates involvement and is a ‘boost’ for credibility. The timing and agreements are clearly communicated: how and when will the questionnaires be processed? When will the results be announced? How will the reporting take place? Those involved are given a guarantee that they will be informed of the results as soon as the survey is processed and that no matter what, actions will also follow on from this.

The counsellor indicates that it is important to make clear to the people that these actions will require the commitment of all parties and good collaboration between all those involved.

To that end employees and managers will have to take the initiative and join forces, so that bad past practices such as passing on responsibilities disappears and that communication is improved. New faith in the future.

The result of the counselling course is twofold: a completed satisfaction questionnaire and an implementation plan. The next step is the processing and analysis of the results and the setting up of an action plan for the future.
As the discussions with the business manager advanced, the suspicion became stronger that the term ‘faith’ was a recurring issue throughout the problems; faith in management and trust in the economic situation and the future of the company. Fear and uncertainty for the future also diminish the employees’ capacity as a result of which the positive pressure to perform well can transform into a negative spiral. The relation between economic and social objectives also appears obvious from this. The results of the survey will have to reveal whether this suspicion is confirmed.

B. EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Employees who feel involved in their company …
• are stimulated to think creatively and take initiatives.
• are more quickly prepared to discuss mistakes openly and spontaneously.
• assist their colleagues in achieving company objectives.
• are more loyal employees.
• wish to grow and develop flexibly.
• radiate trust to clients, suppliers, etc.
• form a valuable sounding board for your policy.
You can involve your employees in different ways in your company policy. We will mention a few by way of example. Whether you can also implement them in your company depends upon the nature and the characteristics of the business (e.g. the number of employees). Not all examples are applicable to each SME. It is up to you to weigh it up and make the final choice.

B.1 HOW CAN YOU INVOLVE YOUR EMPLOYEES IN YOUR COMPANY POLICY?

1 Inform your employees about the fortunes of the company
• Call your employees together now and again to inform them about your objectives for the coming year or about the latest developments, e.g. during a New Year’s drink?
• Do your employees know which values you as an SME manager find important with regard to the functioning of your company? A few tips …
- Try to note for yourself the five most important values you stand for. Here are a few examples for inspiration: the quality of your product, team work, timely deliveries, friendly contact with

clients, consideration for the environment, employee participation, working towards results, good atmosphere on the work floor, a financially sound company, etc.
- Discuss this some time with your work crew.
- Check where any possible overlapping and/or differences are.
- Develop a set of values that everyone can sign up to. Define each value and furnish them with examples.
- Hang this ‘values charter’ in your reception area, or put it on your website.
- Try as business manager to set an example by observing these values, adjusting them if necessary and regularly emphasizing the meaning of them and raising them, also at interviews.
• Are new employees welcomed properly during their familiarization period?
- Appoint someone in your crew to take care of his or her reception and to organise a short tour on the first working day.
- A mentor can follow and guide the new employee for a certain time, answer questions or refer the new employee if necessary to the right person.
- The operation of your SME and the customs of the workplace (working hours, breaks, official days off, request for leave, etc.) can be explained in a welcome book.
- Appoint a confidential advisor to whom your employees can refer in case of bullying, discrimination, unwanted familiarity …
• Do your employees see the end result of their work?
Bring them face to face with the finalized projects on which they had been working.
- Make, for example, a workbook with photographic material of the completed building projects in which they were involved. Leave this for perusal in the reception area.
- Install a computer in the workshop on which the most recently finished projects are shown.
- Let your employees know how the client welcomes their work.
Certainly convey the compliments too. That motivates.
• Regularly bring out a short report of your decisions or meetings with the bosses/team managers etc.
2 Stimulate consultations in both directions
• As a business manager communicate as much as possible yourself with your personnel.
In this way you are lowering the threshold to your employees and inviting them to give their comments. If an employee comes to your office to discuss something with you, make sufficient time for this. If they do not come spontaneously to your office then take the first step and visit the warehouse, the production workshop or the building yards regularly.
• Widen the agenda of the work consultation.

Give your employees the chance to contribute the agenda points that they wish to discuss. Appoint someone who can pass on the agenda points (for example, the assisting partner) or place a file somewhere where they can be collected. Structure the agenda points and determine when which point is presented. If applicable, ask for more explanation in the preparation stage.
Inform everyone of the timing at the next work consultation.

• Ensure that new ideas and criticism get back to the person who can really do something with it.
Hang up a compliment/complaints box in your reception area and invite the parties with whom you work to use it: employees as well as clients, suppliers, etc. Get involved as management in order to react to each suggestion.

• Bad news reports and crisis management.
If you cannot consider certain proposals or promises inform your employees in a timely manner of this and explain the reason for this. In this way you prevent resentment and misunderstandings.

Deal discretely with impending restructuring or collective dismissal. Put forward a proposal for dialogue and consultation.

Ask a few employees who are well placed in the group to negotiate an acceptable proposal with you. Allow the group to possibly nominate another candidate.

Should misunderstanding grow and dialogue become very difficult, bring in a mediator, preferably someone who has an eye for both the company's and the employees' needs.

3 Pay attention to internal communication

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CREATES INVOLVED EMPLOYEES

Involve your employees in company policy by:

• Keeping them regularly informed.
• Ensuring that the message you wish to communicate is indeed understood.
• Communicating your message in a respectful way.

MAKE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION A FIXED AGENDA POINT AT YOUR MEETING WITH THE DIRECT EMPLOYEES

Make the employees with whom you work directly aware of the importance of internal communication and train them to convey messages to the work floor. Tell them which values you wish to see translated in the manner in which people communicate in the company. And don't forget that your behaviour is the norm!

MAKE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION A PRIORITY IF THERE ARE MAJOR CHANGES ON THE HORIZON

Ensure that your people always hear it first from you.

DIRECT YOUR COMMUNICATION AT THE TARGET GROUP YOU WISH TO REACH

Ensure that you reach everyone you wanted to reach. Use various means of communication to that end.

REMAIN OPEN FOR QUESTIONS AND CRITICISM

Tips for effective communication:

Ensure that the person responsible for internal communication can communicate directly with you. Chart the different target groups inside your business and gear your communication to them (if a worker for example has no email address, you ask him how you can reach him quickly, e.g. by going around the work floor, putting notes on the notice board, passing on information through employees,…).

Communicate, preferably orally, and support this with a written document.

Treat your employees as mature people and remain open for their questions, criticisms and/or remarks. Your department heads or team bosses play a crucial role in translating your messages to the employees. Guide them in this and ensure they have adequate training if necessary.

Have an operating procedure that makes these two-way communications possible.

Work proactively on communicating well with your employees, and in this way you will also create the necessary goodwill.

BP FAMILY RUN SME FROM THE KEMPEN

CONTACT PERSON: HR-REPRESENTATIVE

Step by step you will also make progress!

This company in the textile sector has been a well-known entity for generations in The Kempen. It has been operating for over eighty years now and many families have spent all their working lives there. Over the years long-lasting relationships have been built up with clients and suppliers. Purchase and sales has always been the principle activity. Production is centralised in the Far and Middle East. The company has created its own sewing workshop in Serbia.

The sector is evolving quickly. New materials were also introduced gradually.

At the moment the factory is being managed by the third generation. Our contact person is the wife of the business manager. She is responsible for personnel policy and also carries out public relations and administrative tasks.

Employee involvement as the basis for a new human resources strategy.

The business occupies a unique position in Europe. There is hardly any competition, so the business can utilize its strong points – such as flexibility and quality - optimally. The ‘problems’ are mainly to be found in the area of the human resources policy. Because of her experience as the person responsible for human resources in larger businesses, our contact person has developed an explicit perception of what is understood by a ‘good personnel policy’. The SME context calls nonetheless for a totally different human resources style. In the company she drew up an outline of the personnel policy step by step. She also filled the position of confidential advisor and contact point, and that is very much appreciated by the employees.

The involvement of the personnel has grown strongly in recent years. People make proposals and pose questions spontaneously regarding the state of affairs in the company. But the organisation of human resources could be better. There is still no structured work consultation with the office workers. The labourers are given a short briefing each morning and every now and again informal discussions are also carried out with them in order to obtain feedback. In short, they are in the transition phase of an unstructured or barely structured to a more professional, well structured personnel policy.

The person responsible for HR has already taken a number of initiatives to this end and has recently also started defining function descriptions. She is thinking of other steps, but for the time being she is missing the coherence and the overview to outline the steps further. An external HR consultant has been taken on for the implementation of concrete action, with the specific tasks of: sensitisation, communication and training.

Problems in the area of sustainable relationships with suppliers are examined on the side. The question is, under what sort of working conditions does the production in the factories in the Far and Middle East take place. We refer here to the criteria of the ‘International Labour Organisation’.

The aim of the counselling is to support the person responsible for HR in developing the personnel policy further and making it more professional, against the background of the economic developments in the sector. The main objective is the creation of a structured and realistic development path for future action regarding personnel policy. The underlying objective is still more employee involvement. Towards a structured HR approach.

The first step for the person responsible for HR is to write down the strategy she has in her head. What is her ultimate picture of the development path? What does she wish to achieve in the short and long term? Which steps must be taken in her opinion to this end?

The counsellor, together with the person responsible for personnel, draws up a logical cohesive HR strategy. That happens on the basis of the following structure:

• Why: Perception of HR and objectives in the short and medium terms (what does she wish to achieve by making HR more professional?)

• What: Definition of actual activities (introduction of new HR instruments and processes)

• How: Process elements for the execution of actions (Do the actions fit in with the company culture?)
How will the new instruments be introduced? Which role or roles does the person responsible for HR, the business manager, and the external HR consultant fulfil? How are planning and timing?
By asking critical questions the counsellor is fulfilling the function of a sounding board. In this way the person responsible for HR clarifies her vision, sorts out her thoughts and further refines her strategy. A new long-term element is also added to the original step-by-step plan: the evolution towards competency management for office workers and labourers. A phased approach is chosen which takes account of the business culture.
The vision of a development-oriented competency management is already firmly present in the company. People have the chance to gain new experiences, to learn other tasks and receive training.
There is no immediate search for ‘the right man/woman in the right place’, but consideration is given purely to staff development. First a person’s competencies are considered and his/her potential to develop skills. The question is: which job content best suits the prospects and interests of the employee.
That requires daily observation and adjustment. This is a task for the person responsible for human resources, with the support (read: possible input) of colleagues and suppliers. Because of the small-scale nature of the business, the daily contacts and the possibility of interim feedback, this is perfectly possible.
Before the final version of the human resources strategy is complete, the person responsible for human resources prefers to already take a step towards the implementation phase. Together with the counsellor she examines the job descriptions of the office workers and a description is made of the job skills. The counsellor also advises on further structuring and focuses attention on any missing or new elements. In this way a balance should be found between the ‘ideal’ job description and the daily reality in the company.
The HR person prepares a plan and timetable for the specific actions. First the job descriptions will be reworked and the others involved will be asked their opinion, including the staff.
In the short term the plan provides training for ‘carrying out job appraisals for the business manager’ and in starting up a work consultation. Since there is no company history in that area, a ‘step by step’ approach is sensibly chosen here with as the first ‘step’: informing the people about the new developments in the company.
Combine business economic objectives with the development of the HR policy.
The secondary theme – the evaluation of working conditions when looking for new suppliers – sadly enough does not appear attainable. It mostly concerns large companies who work with

sub-contractors. Posing critical questions is sensitive and only stirs up mistrust. Moreover, it is practically impossible to get through to the level of the sub-contractors. The business manager admits that the company has no impact here.

Changing little things ‘step by step’ appears then to be the best strategy. The long history and the business’ company culture do not tolerate sudden changes. The HR strategy, which the responsible personnel officer is now aiming at, is a long-term process, but does have a structured and phased approach and realistic actions.

The basis for and the vision of a development-oriented competency management will facilitate the implementation of other HR actions. The final objective is nevertheless to further increase employee involvement.

The planned HR strategy is not a project in itself, but must be integrated into the general strategy. It is intended in future to link the strategic company economic objectives with the HR development objectives.

For the person responsible for human resources, the value of this counselling is: the fact that they are compelled to adopt a more structured approach. The counselling was also an excellent sounding board for her. By brainstorming, exchanging thoughts and posing critical questions, she was able to structure her thoughts, determine priorities and finally switch to concrete actions.

CSR COUNSELLING PROJECT

BP LS TRANSLATIONS

LS TRANSLATIONS BVBA, HEISTRAAT 62, 9100 SINT-NIKLAAS.

OFFICE MANAGER: KRISTINA LIEBRECHTS.

LS Translations is a translation agency, specialised in translations from and to all European languages. LST works for companies, government and service organisations, private persons and associated translation agencies and also supplies interpreters. Kristina Liebrechts, as office manager, is responsible for contact with clients and business partners, and for the coordination and planning.

The translators/interpreters work on a freelance basis via the home working system and contract themselves out for a fixed-term period to LST. The working relationship is described as a
‘W.A.T.’: Working Apart Together.

Website: www.LStranslations.be

Do we adequately interpret the wishes of our clients?

In 1990 Luc Slosse began a one-man business, specialised in copywriting. Requests for translations gradually arose and LS Translations was born. Because of its fast growth the private limited company was split up into two companies in 1996: LS Translations (LST) and LS Communication (LSC). Kristina Liebrechts is the LST office manager. Luc Slosse, her husband and business manager, is the director of LSC. LSC is a full service communications agency, which specialises in the development and implementation of communication strategies. The agency is also active in media production and is officially licensed for this. In 2003 LSC obtained the Q*For certificate for training and advisory organisations.

LST is recognized by the Flemish Government as a training provider in the framework of the system of training vouchers.

Both companies maintain close contact and gear the organisational strategies to each other, among other things, during an annual planning weekend. Communication and translation jobs are generated from both sides. They therefore often work with the same clients or business partners.

In a joint ‘mission statement’ both companies declare that they strive for quality, open communication (to say what we do), respect deadlines (to do what we say), carry on doing what they are good at and remain ‘top of mind’ with the clients.

How do you keep your client satisfied?

LS Translations wants to supply quality superior translation work, carried out by professional translators.

They work according to the mother tongue translator/reviser system. The translations are checked thoroughly for precision, style, terminology, nuances, and if necessary, experts are called in.

From the description of their working methods with clients, it appears that the principles in the ‘mission statement’ have also been applied in practice. Business partners are considered by the company to be ‘structural clients’, organisations such as press agencies who deliver clients themselves, mainly companies and government authorities.

The strong points that LST has already applied, make the company a ‘best practice’ in the area of customer relations. Let’s enumerate:

• LST guarantees a consistent and tailor-made translation as specified by the client by applying quality procedures for terminology management (‘Trados’ software). LST has a Native+ label. They work with a glossary, in which the specific vocabulary and the specific jargon of each client are separately maintained.

• The office manager is the contact person and the fixed point of contact for the clients.

• The quality of the service provided is communicated to the clients, by way of logos of certification, among other things.

• The client’s precise expectations are explored beforehand and the agency then tries to satisfy these expectations to the maximum. An example: if there is a request for a language in which LST has not yet had any experience, they immediately explore how this request can be complied with if possible. In this way they also acquire expertise in new areas, e.g. with regard to Eastern European languages.

• An open communication policy is in operation vis-à-vis the clients with regard to price, delivery periods, etc. Requests are answered with a quotation within the shortest possible period.

• LST does what it promises. Deadlines are rigorously adhered to.

Clients demanding too much are urged to formulate more realistic expectations. This is also to avoid burdening the employees unnecessarily.

The reasons why clients choose LST, are, according to Kristina, the price/quality ratio and the quick delivery time. She is aware of the positive impact of the LST principles and practices, but is also vigilant for things she may not have considered.

Moreover, she expresses her concern in order to give the positive relationships with clients a more permanent and durable character.

She wants to work proactively in order to avoid losing relationships with certain clients, for example, if a trusted contact person has left the company. The counselling course focuses on the following question: How do we ensure that positive relationships with clients and business partners have a lasting and permanent character? That requires firstly strict compliance with the client relationships, but there is not yet any systematic structure available for that in the organisation.

Furthermore our aim is also to consider in which way those involved could be better informed about the company and possible new developments. Counselling in ‘systematic thinking’.

LST is looking for a system of tracking the frequency of client contacts and also wishes to introduce a procedure to evaluate customer satisfaction. Consistent interviewing by telephone or written (e-mail) questionnaire, when delivering a service or through periodic telephone contact is one of the possibilities.

Based on the results of the questionnaire further steps can then be taken to improve the service provision, resulting in lasting client relationships. The ‘good practices’ of other companies can be very educational. Therefore, it was opted to exchange experiences with another service company, the computer company

Alfa Solution (see further).

Alfa Solution has introduced an interesting client questionnaire methodology into its procedures for quality control and can in its turn draw inspiration from LST know-how in the area of mission definition and setting strategic objectives. This ‘mutual cooperation’ can have important additional value for both businesses. Before the project starts, the counsellor brings the businesses into contact with each other.

Kristina Liebrechts of LST and Luc Slosse of LSC exchange experiences with Danny Wullaert of Alfa Solution regarding problems of customer satisfaction. Even though both businesses are active in very different areas, they also share a number of concerns, e.g. in relation to the sensitisation of clients, how to deal with urgent requests, etc.…

Alfa Solution provides documents for perusal, which the company uses for the systematic surveying of customer satisfaction. This information is evaluated, together with the advice from CommonSense, regarding the setting up of client relationships.

In the meantime LST and LSC themselves have already undertaken a number of actions (in the framework of the Q*for label, a newsletter, business gifts, etc…).

The annual strategic planning weekend with LSC is the right moment for LST to put the new actions on paper and to make preparations. The process counsellor makes sure there is feedback in the last phase.

Durable relationships, effective relationships!

The action that LST wants to undertake, links up with what they are already doing at this time and further supplements this. It fits perfectly into the strategic vision and mission of the company, in which ‘top of mind’ is the main idea in relationships with clients.

Four times a year a ‘Flash’ will be sent together with an invoice or order form, with information which can be important for existing and new clients such as: news from the company, the publication of new dictionaries, etc. Additionally, twice a year an ‘LS info’ will be distributed to a selection of companies from the Trends top 30,000.

The objective of these actions is twofold: to attract new clients and to better inform existing clients, and to have a concrete and effective way of not loosing sight of the clients and further developing a lasting relationship.

A more large-scale project in the longer term is the further computerization of working processes, whereby each client, coordinator, translator and reviser involved, receives their own task and responsibility. This computerization offers a lot of advantages: a smoother workflow, shorter work paths, greater involvement of everyone, better work planning, time-saving for the translators and the revisers, more efficient coordination and, for the clients, better insight into the status of the assignments. Using the fast transparent communication lasting relationships can now be systematically worked on. But this operating procedure also offers an economic advantage. There is a great chance that LST can now acquire an important lead with regard to the other translation agencies.

C. A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORK PLACE

A safe and healthy work place is the basis for a good personnel policy. Deal actively with safety and health. Ensure that you know the risks of your company activity and have it totally under control. A passive stance can be negative, as much for your employees as for the company.
Which steps should you take to make a proper risk analysis?

C.1 PREPARE YOURSELF WELL

• Check whether there are codes or norms of good practice or good craftsmanship in your market segment that you can use as a guide.
• Set up a working group in which someone is always present who has a thorough knowledge of both the equipment and the work situation, and has experience with it.
• Ask for support from your internal or external safety advisor.

C.2 ANALYSE THE SAFETY OF YOUR SME

• Identify the dangers: set up a checklist to track down the risks. Line up the foremost points and ask yourself each time what the risks are.
This list is best set up by someone who is familiar with the equipment and the work situation.
Make a map of the buildings and the machinery and indicate who is situated where. Use this as a starting point.
• Analyse the possible consequences: tick off the points of attention on the checklist using the WHAT-IF method: brainstorm on possible situations or events and check what could happen if these really did arise. Define undesirable events and their possible consequences. Think of the possible impact on the safety and health of all involved, not only the employees, but also the neighbourhood and the environment.
• The risk level is determined by the chance that it happens and the damage that can arise from it. Don’t think only about the human damage, but also the possible environmental effects inside and outside the company.
• Check whether the existing security is sufficient or open for improvement.

C.3 SET UP AN ACTION PLAN

1. Look at suitable actions that guarantee optimal safety. Pay attention mainly to the risks that are most likely and can have a great impact. Take action to reduce risks, prevent damage or limit it.

A few examples of this are:

Avoid risk: which measures are necessary to rule out the dangers. E.g. Replacing machinery.

Prevent damage: e.g. install a fall barrier for workers who work at a great height.

Limit damage: e.g. draw up an emergency plan; provide first aid training for accidents.

Be alert for new risks when considering measures. Think for example of medical supervision in order to be able to monitor the health situation.

Involve your employees in the analysis of and the search for suitable solutions.

• What are the risks in the eyes of your employees?
• How do they judge these risks?
• How do they deal with them?
• Which approach are they proposing?

Use the following action card at the discussion:

RISK ANALYSIS

Dangers Risks Possible consequences

Existing security

Measures

Buildings and spaces

Daily production processes

Occasional processes

2. Communicate these actions and integrate them into your training sessions. Ensure that all those involved are updated on any changes!

3. Follow up your actions and evaluate them regularly. Analyse incidents and take immediate action if certain accidents or problems repeatedly arise.

(1) Convert this plan into an Excel file that you can regularly add to and rework.

(2) These are the normal production processes that occur daily and result in the final product.

(3) For example, temporary jobs limited in time and space, such as a move, rearrangement of the furniture, renewal of machinery, a specific project. (source: The risk analysis, www.meta.fgov.be)

CSR COUNSELLING PROJECT

BP PATERSPAND CONGRESS CENTRE
VZW HET PATERSPAND, CONGRESS CENTRE, PATERSSTRAAT 10, 2300 TURNHOUT
10 EMPLOYEES. BUSINESS MANAGERESS: SUZY MAES. WEBSITE: WWW.PATERSPAND.COM

“Monks can live without partners. But not the Paterspand” The Paterspand in Turnhout has been well known for years in the social and cultural circles of Turnhout and the surrounding area.
The congress centre unites the original architecture of a former Franciscan monastery with a daring, imposing, contemporary glass and steel structure.
In 1997 Suzy Maes started developing The Paterspand, in collaboration with a working partner.
Since then the VZW Het Paterspand has developed into a congress and meeting centre in its own right where enthusiastic employees battle for the impeccable organisation of seminars and congresses, fairs and product presentations, company events and private parties day in day out.
Besides these ‘business to business’ activities the Paterspand is also active in the ‘business to customer’ area, as the proprietor of the cafeteria in the De Warande Cultural Centre.
VKW Kempen is the owner and fellow occupant of the Paterspand building. The VKW’s payroll administration company and company physician service are also housed there.
With a central location, beautiful architecture, modern infrastructure, outstanding accommodation, satisfied clients … the future of the Paterspand seems assured. But business manageress Suzy Maes is looking ahead. Her vision contains a wider perspective. The objective is twofold:
To safeguard and increase the cost-effectiveness with a quality high-grade product and in addition, help realize the social objectives of the institutions with which the Paterspand has close contacts. The Paterspand holds all the strong points necessary to achieve these objectives, but there is a problem: the high running costs. The personnel costs and the high VAT rate are squeezing profitability and competition with institutions offering similar services – congress centres, hotels and catering companies - is real. The building of a second podium in De Warande and the possible lowering of VAT do create favourable prospects for growth, but the rooms in the building itself and the relationship with the institutions housed in the Paterspand, are still not used sufficiently.

There is a need for broader familiarity with the congress centre's assets. The unique location, the wireless internet, the central location in the Benelux, the client-oriented and quality service, to name but a few, should be known to a wider public.

We have to think and act across boundaries. Brand awareness must be increased. The Paterspand must become a concept in the mind of everyone who organises congresses, fairs, product presentations and parties … In short, there is a need for a phased strategic approach.

Towards a new future perspective

The development of a marketing plan is the first phase of the counselling path that is mapped out for the Paterspand. The starting point is the establishment of lasting client relationships through corporate social responsibility. This is an ambitious project. On the one hand there is the economic aspect: how do we make running operations more profitable? In actual fact: how can the capacity of the Paterspand be better used? On the other hand there is the social viewpoint: how do we set up relationships with the relevant partners, with respect for their vision and their values? In other words: the marketing plan has to fit into a wider social project.

Looking for interesting clients and partners.

The plan is simple. The Paterspand has to focus on the larger companies with more than 1,000 employees in the immediate region, but also outside it, in Flanders and the southern part of the Netherlands. At the same time the links must be tightened with complementary organisations and partners inside and outside the region. What can these partners mean for the Paterspand and what can the Paterspand mean for them?

The first step is to check the partners in and around the Paterspand with whom new relationships can be made and whether that relationship can be strengthened. An analysis of the up-todate client database is included in the marketing plan. This is an excellent basis for discussions with other new partners. VKW (the Association of Christian Employers and Business Executives) Kempen is a concrete example of this.

A discussion with them can lead to better collaboration, but also to the establishment of new networks with a social additional value that answers the economic objectives of both parties. They are keys to starting the dialogue, e.g. the joint organisation of congresses and seminars. During the course, the marketing plan will be adjusted with the help of the counsellor, among other things, in order to index and analyse the client database based on branch of industry, geographical and behavioural characteristics.

Time and resources are limited. Therefore a phased approach is chosen.

Phase 1 anticipates personal contact with large companies in the region. In this way the stakeholders from the immediate area can become involved. We are then talking about network forming at the level of the Paterspand. A win-win situation, because, as previously mentioned –

more clients for the Paterspand also means more potential clients for the payroll administration company and vice versa… The contact between the VKW and a Dutch employers' organisation in its turn offers interesting perspectives for the Paterspand. The business economic objective is one matter. A few bottlenecks have to be eliminated in order to achieve the marketing plan in practice. There is not sufficient manpower to directly acquire clients. There is a lack of know-how and the technical means to successfully carry out promotional activities and interest companies in the Paterspand. Suzy Maes therefore proposes recruiting a temporary worker and hiring in a communications agency. Additionally, other consultants can be called on by using advice vouchers. These are all proposals with quite some financial implications. However, the solution is quite obvious.

Try to enlarge resources by collaborating with partners who have the same vision of quality service provision.

And so we land in the second phase of the project: network development at a regional level.

The Warande Cultural Centre is an obvious close contact. Through the cultural centre, the Paterspand reaches the associations, the educational structure, etc…. and some social additional value can be created. Another potential partner is a catering company that shares the quality vision of the Paterspand and with whom there is already collaboration. In this way the marketing plan is part of a larger entity that creates real additional value for all those involved. The forces are combined.

A new subject, which came up in the course of the project, is the enlargement of support for the Paterspand within the hospitality sector. For Suzy Maes it is beyond doubt: corporate social responsibility means ensuring the operation of a labour intensive business by means of transparent bookkeeping, a comprehensive statute for personnel, etc. The hospitality businesses should join forces by exchanging know-how, knowledge and experience in the area of marketing, by making joint purchases, choosing the same software, having one reservations system, approaching personnel problems in the same way, and pursuing a standard quality norm…..

She proposes looking for partners who can exert influence on policy and represent the other entrepreneurs, such as: the hospitality federation with its specialised study centre, the economic department of the City, UNIZO, and others.

The proposal is included in the counselling plan under the title 'corporate social responsibility at the sectoral level'. This is also the last phase in the marketing plan: network forming at the sectoral level.

It was decided to address the partners in the region. Suzy Maes proposes concrete initiatives for this in the future.

A new step towards more social responsibility in the hospitality sector. The Paterspand marketing plan was finalised during the counselling plan.
The plan determines which markets the company wants to take advantage of and in which way potential clients can be enlisted.
This is an element of a much larger process in which alliances will be entered into with other potential partners. The objective of these alliances: the integration of economic and social objectives.
During the counselling path there was huge progress. A number of aspects of the original marketing strategy were critically questioned and adjusted and clear priorities were set. New insights came about through discussion and were integrated into a phased marketing plan. In short, the mere business economic objective was exceeded in this way. A basis was created to increase support, both regional and by sector. And above all… an opening was created to put social responsibility in the hospitality sector on to the agenda.

D. LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUSINESS PARTNERS

More and more SMEs work with clients and suppliers from many other parts of the world and are, in this way, also faced with an increasing focus on environmental and social aspects. NGO's and other interest groups observe the activities of companies even more intensively. Because of the extremely fast development of the information society, they are now able to immediately expose incidents or bad practices happening all over the world.
Pressured by this development, the larger companies also increasingly want to understand the full chain and by using purchasing procedures, they are influencing the internal environmental and social policy of their suppliers.
This is about having control and avoiding bad practices so that the reputation is not damaged.

D.1 OBTAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHAIN

Pause at your position in the chain. If you bring your own brand on to the market and have a grip on the whole process, you will obviously have more influence on the chain. If you are a retailer who mainly imports end products and sells them, then this is not the case. You can try to chart the most important environmental and social risks within the chain.
Indicate which factors you as a company can influence yourself.
Also take account of social focal points, typical of the sector in which you are active. Companies in the textile sector prefer to keep an eye on working conditions in the producing countries.

Subjects such as child labour are relevant here. Companies in the packaging industry or in the energy sector are expected to pay attention to environmental matters.

For some services and products it is not so easy to be familiar with or define the chains.

Yet it is useful to check which elements in the chain you are responsible for and what influence you can exert on the upstream or downstream chains. For companies with a long and complex chain, whether they are active at the beginning (e.g. chemistry), in the middle part (e.g. logistical activities) or at the end (sales of electronics, cars), it is important to have a view of its sustainability. The fact that more and more is outsourced and subcontracted, does not simplify this task at all! It is essential that product-specific as well as organisation-specific consequences are discussed.

The broadest definition of the chain contains all the activities from the extraction of the raw materials up to and including delivery to the client:

• Purchase (extraction of raw materials, half-finished products, end products, energy, …).
• Product development (inventing of concepts for new products).
• Production process.

Transport (raw materials, half-finished products, end products). Distribution and delivery to client.

In analysing the chain, the environmental, social and ethical matters are important. Here is a short summary.

Environmental

subjects

Social subjects Ethical subjects

The use of natural raw materials

Role of the business in the local community

Bad practices

Waste Direct and indirect Child labour employment in developing countries

Emissions Investment in education and training

Discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion

Global warming Salaries, working hours

Energy consumption Employees privacy

Loss of biodiversity Right to assemble…

Nuclear radiation Irresponsible marketing (e.g. directed at children)

Deforestation Supporting violent regimes

Honesty, trust, respect in business relations

Bribery and corruption

D.2 FORMULATE YOUR OWN VALUES AND MAKE THEM KNOWN

Before you state your objectives as an SME business manager in collaborating with your suppliers, you must first establish what you find important in that relationship.

Try to take your own contribution to the chain as the starting point and do this exercise together with some of your employees.

• For example, have each of your employees list the top five values that he/she personally finds important in the relationship with suppliers.

• Group them and try in this way to build up a set of values.

• Jointly discuss the way in which you as a business can translate these values into cooperation with your clients, suppliers and employees, both inside and outside the business.

• Check which adjustments are necessary to (better) meet these values.

As the business manager of a smaller enterprise it is not always possible for you to effectively influence your suppliers. What you can do is:

• Make it clear what values you support and communicate this clearly to your present and potential business partners in the chain. Add a letter or a brochure to the exchange of correspondence with your suppliers in which you inform them of this.

Or express your expectations and objectives in an ambition statement which can be included on your website or in your rules of procedure.

• Debate hazardous subjects with your suppliers before problems arise.

• Ensure that the people who have most frequent contact with the suppliers (buyers, representatives) properly understand what the values mean. Together with your people think about the possible dilemmas with which your buyers can be confronted. Start off in this way with concrete, identifiable, practical examples.

D.3 HOW IS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SUPPLIERS?

It is better to work well with a few suppliers than maintain superficial contact with many suppliers. Think mainly about “vital purchases” such as investment goods (equipment, machinery and computers) and the services of sub-contractors.

A tip: look at the suppliers with whom you are working and at how the mutual relationship can be influenced. The following questions can help you to obtain a clear view on this:

• Which supplier are you most dependent upon? And, vice versa, upon which supplier have you the most influence?

• To what extent do you change suppliers?

• Are there already suppliers who lay down conditions for you in the area of quality, environment, social behavioural codes? Or vice versa: do you already lay down such conditions for your suppliers?

• Which type of contract do you have with your suppliers? Do the deliveries take place on the basis of standard conditions? Or does the collaboration go further, with special conditions?

This list can form the basis for the selection and evaluation of your suppliers. The objective is twofold: purchase exclusively from reliable suppliers and bring about a dialogue between the supplier and your company.

D.4 WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY GOOD SUPPLIERS?

Define what your business expects from the ideal supplier. Begin with past situations that you would rather had seen different.

Look further than the price/quality story. Make a list of priorities of fundamental criteria for a good relationship structure with your supplier. Involve your employees in these talks too. They often have another view of matters because of their daily contact with the suppliers. Here already is something to inspire you:

• Price.

• Keeping up to date with the current market information (knowledge of new materials).

• Delivery period and terms.

• Specific characteristics of the products/services.

• Flexibility and feedback when dealing with remarks and complaints.

• The results of a sample delivery.

• Having a quality system.

• Having seals of approval.

• Working with qualified personnel (including numbers, turnover).

• References which point to experience.

• An open and honest attitude towards the environmental and social impact of products and services.

• Transparency in the chain.

• Own participation in social or ecological projects.

• Possibility of visiting potential supplier.

• After-sales repairs/service (if relevant),

Use these criteria to evaluate your existing suppliers and to pre-qualify new suppliers.

Try also to take account of the interests of your client. If your large clients find the environmental or social aspects of your product essential, influence over your suppliers becomes even more important. Check why certain companies choose your enterprise. Cash in on the efforts that you are making now already.

D.5 GET TO KNOW YOUR EXISTING SUPPLIERS BETTER

There are different possibilities. If it transpires that there is too little information on hand in order to evaluate your suppliers, you can then for example, invite them to an ‘Open Day for Suppliers’.
In this way you can get to know them in another more informal way and further explain your policy and your vision of future trends.
Exchange knowledge and experiences on the way in which you want to deal with the environment and social matters in your company.
Remain open for suggestions from suppliers and ask whether they want to inform you in time about innovations in that area.
Stimulate them also to question themselves. Put a number of interesting links on your website which can motivate your suppliers in their turn to influence the chain. Keep up a lively contact with suppliers abroad so that they will definitely want to meet you when they are in the country.
Carefully select your new suppliers.
Select your new suppliers through pre-qualification. Establish a trial period and after a number of deliveries, evaluate if and to what extent the supplier meets your expectations. Also ask for references to avoid wasting time and money and any misunderstandings. Buyers who know what type of collaboration the company is aiming for, will work more effectively in their search for suppliers.

D.6 ORGANISE FORMAL AND/OR INFORMAL PERIODIC CHECKS

Try also, in your day-to-day work, to keep to the values that you support. Check whether the agreements with suppliers have really been taken to heart.
As the agreements take on a more formal character you can also choose for more formal types of evaluation or control. As a company you can stimulate more sustainable practices. An example: Progast, a Slovak company, controls the chain via a system of bonuses for timely deliveries (suppliers) and payments (clients). Moreover they only accept suppliers with an ISO 9000 certificate to guarantee quality.

Another method is working with local intermediaries – even if indirectly – to obtain an insight into the observance of ethical principles in the third world.
If you wish to work more systematically, then you can for example give the vital suppliers a score of 1 to 3 on previously established criteria.
This annual assessment can form the basis for intensifying or weakening supplier relationships. Give your suppliers feedback regarding the assessment. That will motivate them to improve their services.
If you strongly suspect them of using bad practices, then you can find solace in having the supplier audited.
For this you can apply to a recognized audit office. Of course you can also choose to inform the recognized authorities of your worries. Give your buyers the task of explicitly emphasising the values your company stands for when they are visiting suppliers.

D.7 CONSTANTLY IMPROVE YOUR OWN PERFORMANCE

In a small business the functions of buyer, environmental and social expert are often merged into one or two people at most.
It can therefore be useful to call in the expertise of your suppliers when developing products or adjusting existing production methods.
Regularly question the method and criteria for selection and assessment of your suppliers. Involve the employees in the evaluation of the products or services supplied and the collaboration with the supplier(s). Is the selection process still effective? Do your criteria comply with the present trends and expectations of the client?
As environment and/or social criteria become more integrated into your company policy, you can also expect more from your business partners. Think, for example, of introducing a quality control system into your organisation. In strong growing businesses, in particular, this can be important with respect to the structure the business organisation is built on. Sometimes it is also a way of qualifying for new orders.

CSR COUNSELLING PATH

BP ALFA SOLUTION
ALFA SOLUTION NV, PROCESSIESTRAAT 2, 8790 WAREGEM.
CONTACT PERSON: DANNY WULLAERT
THE BUSINESS HAS 22 PERMANENT EMPLOYEES, FOUR INDEPENDENTS

WORKING AS SUB-CONTRACTORS, AND TWO BUSINESS MANAGERS (FATHER AND SON)
WEBSITE: HTTP://WWW.ALFASOLUTION.COM

Dealing with IT intelligently.

Alfa Solution is active in the purchase of IT hardware and provides a broad service package: advice with regard to business projects, technical services, PC assembly, installation of networks, development of web applications and support. Alfa Solution profiles itself as an information technology partner for businesses, SMEs and the self-employed and focuses mainly on the quality of service provision. Tailored and individual solutions for specific client needs are central. In 2000 the company attained the ISO 9001 certificate.

Since the 90’s Alfa Solution has had to contend with the economic consequences of the ICT crisis. The net profit margins are becoming smaller, badly limiting the financial room for extra service. The business manager defines corporate social responsibility as an honest and correct way of doing business in constant consultation with the ‘stakeholders’ (clients, suppliers, government and personnel). This CSR vision is the basic thread throughout his company policy. He supports the BCD (Belgian Computer Dealers association, agent and interlocutor of the sector for the government) and UNIZO. And it is a matter of honour for him to complain about fraudulent practices in the computer trade and to counter these with appropriate action.

Surviving the price war!

Initially the business strives for a lasting relationship with its clients. The professional services run according to clear-cut principles and practices: correct product analysis, the provision of the right information, transparency and open communication, selling the right products, no abuse of the client’s ignorance, keeping promises, only carrying out projects that can be handled… The company also proactively tackles complaints or problem situations. Along with the purchase or delivery of a service, the client receives a ‘computer manual’ with useful information about installation, guarantee, repairs, viruses, contacts, etc. The business manager is nevertheless of the opinion that the enterprise does not sufficiently communicate the vision behind the practices.

Another, much more important problem has to do with the situation in the ICT market itself. The price war being fought out between the big suppliers and distributors is having a negative effect on Alfa Solution. As an SME it is difficult to justify higher prices and to adopt a position yourself towards those distributors who apply a lower price, in particular the large chain stores (Aldi, Lidl, Carrefour,…)

A small SME can only justify the price difference by the quality of its service and its professionalism. The business manager wants to communicate this message to the stakeholders in a positive way, not only for his own business, but for all ICT
SMEs.

He was recently approached by the Consumer Association's 'Test-Ankoop' (purchase test), who want to better protect the consumer by dealing directly with the market. Test-Aankoop (TA) is proposing to the dealers that they sign a charter and general sales terms. The charter draws up the rights and duties of the buyer and the seller and provides a conciliation procedure. Test-Aankoop also proposes a price reduction of at least 5% for clients who are members of TA. The business manager is well aware of his rights and obligations as the seller, but finds (too) little reference in the TA file to the qualitative aspects of the service provision. He finds the TA certificate too limited as a quality label and the link to client discount is not the essence of the business. In spite of repeated emails and letters requesting more information and a call for a positive dialogue, he has still not received an answer from TA.

The price of quality…

A secondary objective of the counselling is the clear description of one's own vision or mission and the communication of it to the clients. It is intended to add the text to the existing information booklet.

The principal objective of the counselling exceeds the level of ones own business. The question is how Alfa Solution and other SME computer companies can take up a position and maintain it vis-à-vis the large distributors by means of the 'recognition of quality services'?

The counselling is therefore mainly aimed at enlarging the support of the individual enterprise, by having talks with those stakeholders who can enforce these matters.

With respect to Test-Aankoop, the risks of having a (too) restricted view of quality, and the way in which the TA criteria can be broadened to include full recognition, will be examined.

The BCD is already looking for possibilities of introducing a seal of approval. It is possible that this could also be taken over by TA. Towards a 'quality label'.

As far as the secondary objective is concerned, the company is looking for inspiration through benchmarking with LS translations and LS communication (see SME counselling path LS Translations).

Both companies have a well-defined vision/mission and communicate this to their clients via their website. For their part, LST can profit from Danny Wullaert's know-how in the area of client questionnaires and in building lasting client relationships. This is a 'cross-fertilisation' that can be advantageous to both parties.

In a first meeting Kristina Liebrechts from LST and Luc Slosse from LSC exchanged experiences with Danny Wullaert of Alfa Solution concerning customer satisfaction. They established that they share a number of concerns with regard to making the clients more receptive, dealing with urgent questions, etc. Alfa Solution in turn learns a lot about the way in which LST and LSC work in shaping their operation and how they translate this into strategic and operational objectives.

To achieve the main objective, a number of meetings are organised during the counselling path with BCD, UNIZO and Test-Aankoop. Danny Wullaert organises a first discussion with BCD and UNIZO in order to determine a common strategy and draw up a number of core criteria. In this meeting viewpoints and objections are formulated concerning the way in which Test-Aankoop approaches businesses and the consumer. It was found that TA principally uses pricing criteria in consumer information and pays (too) little attention to the quality of the products and services.

The main objective is clear: to reach consensus with TA as regards the most important purchasing criteria.

A second objective concerns the communication methodology. How should TA communicate this information to the consumer and make him/her receptive to the 'quality' aspect? And still… How do we develop a two-way communication with the entrepreneurs?

Another, more general objective is to draw up a charter that goes further than TA's proposal. UNIZO's study service will evaluate the present charter and sales conditions (which at this moment in time are not defined by sector). A first proposal concerns the composition of a Disputes Committee in which BCD is also represented.

Another concern that the business manager wants to put to TA is: what should a self-employed entrepreneur do to 'do the right thing' and yet be able to survive? To what extent is the client ready to pay 'a little' more for quality? The 5% price reduction that TA wants to offer its members, is also a subject for discussion but not the essence of the discussion. For those involved, this is difficult to accept. It is preferable to make agreements allowing individual distributors to decide themselves.

In the last session Test-Aankoop is also invited to examine which way they can be involved in the recognition and support of a similar label.

Result: a mission and a charter.

As far as the secondary objective is concerned, Alfa Solution is taking LST and LSC's mission statement as an example. Steps are being taken to elaborate it further, in close consultation with the employees.

As far as the principle objective is concerned, the initial impetus has been given to widen the support of the company. Test-Aankoop, UNIZO, BCD, Alfa Solution and Common Sense together wish to reach concrete agreements with regard to client communication and the charter for computer dealers. This is an interesting challenge, also for UNIZO. It is an experiment that can be extended in a later stadium to other sectors.

CSR COUNSELLING PATH

BP WINSON WATCH
WINSON WATCH BVBA, GROTE MARKT 15, 3500 HASSELT.
CONTACT PERSON: VÉRONIQUE VANDENBROECK
WINSON WATCH HAS FIVE FULL-TIME MEMBERS OF STAFF: ONE ACCOUNTANT AND FOUR SALESPEOPLE.
THREE SALESPEOPLE WORK IN TIME DESIGN (TWO FULL-TIME AND ONE PART-TIME).

High time for a new personnel policy!

In 1976 the Vandenbroeck couple opened a jewellery business in the Twee Torenwijk in Hasselt, quickly followed by the opening of a new business in Maastrichterstraat. After the purchase of new premises, they moved to the Grote Markt in Hasselt: the present 'Winson Watch'. The range mainly includes gold jewellery and timepieces from well-known brands. Their daughter Véronique Vandenbroeck works together with her brother in her parents' business. Recently a new shop was opened in the Demerstraat, with lightly less exclusive brands and younger looking collections: 'Time Design'. Véronique looks after sales in Time Design. Her brother manages the administrative tasks from the shop on the Grote Markt. Both parents are also still active in the business.

How do you reduce personnel turnover?

The production rotation and the pressure from suppliers have increased greatly over recent years. The goods have to be taken away in full packages and the suppliers are proving to be more and more selective in their choice of partner. Practices such as 'mystery shopping' are not shunned.

This changing strategy of the suppliers also has a direct influence on the product presentation and sales. Because of the higher quality demands the pressure on the employees is increasing hand over fist. The business manager attaches great importance to the quality of the work and therefore demands the maximum commitment from her employees. As far as the personnel is concerned, Winson Watch is in a transitional period. After the retirement of one employee, two other saleswomen left. New people were also recruited for Time Design. The recruiting took place through an employment agency. The candidates were selected with the prospect of a permanent contract. The personnel turnover remains high, even though the business manager tries as much as possible to concede to the personal wishes and expectations of her staff, for example, by organising training sessions.

If in spite of this people still leave that happens because, as they say themselves, they cannot take the pressure. The business manager has difficulty in exactly estimating the needs of her staff and their perception of the work pressure.

She wonders whether her employees really know what she expects of them.

Create involvement!

The objective is clear: raise employee involvement by better dialogue and better communication. The concrete action which then must be taken and in which we actively support the business manager, is the organising of performance appraisal discussions to measure employee satisfaction. How do they see their job and how can Véronique respond to their needs and interests? The business manager agrees therefore to call upon the employment agency.

In the first session the counselling objective is defined and a step-by-step plan is determined which will look as follows:

• The process counsellor works out a document to interview the personnel regarding their list of tasks and prepares the performance appraisal discussions with the business manager.

• The business manager will look after the communication and present the questionnaire to the staff:

What does their list of tasks look like and in which areas do their interests lie?

• The business manager makes concrete agreements with the employment agency.

• The answers to the questionnaire are processed and on that basis, the performance appraisal discussions will be prepared by the business manager, in consultation with the employment agency.

Unfortunately the counselling path could not run completely to plan, because the workforce had been entirely renewed during the summer period. It was therefore far too early for performance appraisal discussions. However, a job description was set up by the business manager for new recruitment, in consultation with the employment agency. She admits that it is not so easy to find the right people. Most of the time young people are the quickest to leave.

Continuity assured!

Even though the time is not right to effectively go ahead with performance appraisal discussions, the course has made one thing clear: the importance of dialogue with the employees. The principles of the dialogue can also be applied perfectly when recruiting and during the introduction and the probationary period of new employees.

The business manager already anticipates the possibility of carrying out a separate performance appraisal discussion with each new member of staff after a number of weeks. She will therefore use the documents that are passed on by the counsellor.

In addition it was agreed that telephone contact would be maintained regarding developments in recruitment.

In this way possibilities are also being created for the new employees to express their concerns. If they feel better understood from the beginning, they will also feel better in their job in the long term, deliver better quality work and also be less quickly inclined to give up their job.

E. BUILDING UP LASTING CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

E.1 EVERYTHING BEGINS WITH A GOOD WELCOME

In every marketing book it states that the first fifteen seconds of contact determine the further outcome. In other words: the client's welcome is an essential part of running a business.

A few tips:

• ensure that there is always someone available to receive clients, if necessary, using a system of rotation.

• Teach your employees what client communication is (conversation techniques).

• Ensure that you have an answering machine. Alleviate the waiting time with suitable music. And remember: clients who have to wait too long and/or are continually put through, finally hang up.

• Deal with your emails quickly. When possible let people know in advance when they can expect an answer.

• Make your reception area welcoming; ensure there is background music; offer something to drink and provide some information material, for example, a summary of your activities report.

How client-oriented are you in your work?

Often there is not enough time to reflect on important matters in client policy. How client-oriented is your company? The following questions can assist you in your research:

How well do you know your clients?

• Now and again do you sound out the needs and expectations of your clients?

• How frequently are you in contact with your clients?

• Do you systematically measure your clients' satisfaction?

• Is your client file divided into segments, with specific requirements?

• Do you know why your clients come back?

• Do you know why clients quit? Do you know which internal factors influence the satisfaction of your clients?
• Do you know which five elements of your service your largest clients find important?
• Do you know which factors can influence the clients' results the most?
To what extent do you observe agreements with your clients?
• Do you make clear agreements with your clients?
• Are you well enough organised to observe these agreements?
• Do you have emergency scenarios in case things go wrong?
• Do you dare to give a guarantee to a client regarding a mutual agreement?
How are you organised to learn from your experiences and to improve your performance?
• Do you adjust your operating procedures according to your experiences?
• Do you stimulate your staff to improve themselves further?
• Do you review your own operating procedures now and again?
Get to know your clients better.
What do your clients think of your organisation? Ask the client himself. There are various methods of identifying the needs and expectations of your clients:
• Organise a telephonic questionnaire with a number of clients.
• Send an evaluation form systematically with each delivery.
• Have your representatives regularly measure client satisfaction.
• Give clients the possibility of formulating their reactions via your website.
Try to get a picture of the different aspects of your SME operations:
• General matters, such as: accessibility, communication, flexibility, values, and readiness.
(Are you open to and sensitive for questions? Do you react quickly to questions from clients?)
• Products and services (quality, value, reliability, innovation, delivery, environmental aspects).
• The opinion of the client on the way in which you as an SME deal with social and environmental aspects in your company.
• Sales and after-sales service (employee competence and behaviour, advice, technical information, client information, answer times, dealing with complaints).
• Client loyalty (reasons whether or not to buy again, readiness to buy other products, readiness to recommend the organisation to others).
Finally a few more questions that you can take up in your daily contacts with present clients.
• How did you come to know our company?
• Why do you trust our company with this order? (experience or references, price, location, completion deadlines, quality of the bid).
• Did you have specific demands or expectations before this order was carried out?

If so, were these demands or expectations answered? If not, whynot?

• What have you especially valued in our services?

• What has been a less positive experience for you in our services?

• Have you suggestions for improving our service?

A golden rule: always inform your clients about the steps you are taking to improve your services.

Honesty lasts longest.

Explain to potential clients how precisely the collaboration works so that they know which steps to take. Spend sufficient time on your working methods. Remember that your working methods are not always known or obvious. Specify a contact person whom the client can call on with any questions and/or explanations; someone who knows the files and can set to work with them. Draw up a list that you can use as support at new talks. Ensure that you can see precisely what the client requires, even if he himself comes with a clear request. Ask extra questions and use your knowledge and experience to support the client's assumptions and expectations if need be. Ensure that your information is complete and correct. Are the prices inclusive or exclusive of VAT? And until when are these prices valid? Ensure that before they order, new clients know how the invoiced price is made up.

For example: if a fee is charged for the quotation which will be deducted when the order is made, has the client been informed of this beforehand.

Inform him also of the usual procedure when payment is late.

Respect your client's privacy.

Ensure that client information is safe and locked away and is not lying around in your office. If certain services are delayed, then immediately bring those involved up to date.

Try to do what you have promised. Also the way in which you deal with complaints will strongly influence the picture that the client has of you. Clients appreciate it if they can discuss a problem and find a solution together. Referring a problem elsewhere or covering it up damages trust and is all too often a reason not to come back.

Your clients must know to whom they can go with complaints.

Arrange a clear time for your client to receive feedback on a problem. Take the time to analyse each complaint carefully, so that you learn from it and matters can be improved upon. Or, as they say in quality thinking: each complaint is a gift. If you are in danger of losing an important client, invite him or her out to discuss the collaboration. Let your client make the evaluation, in the positive and the negative sense. Even if the client has already decided to stop, try to find out the reason.

Try to turn any problems with clients around in the positive sense. If the client, for example, systematically pays (too) late, you can offer him a discount for paying on time. This extra discount you then deduct in the next invoice.
Make your clients become more receptive.
You can stimulate your clients to be socially responsible consumers. Give them tips about the socially responsible use of your product by the consumer or add informative links to your website.
You can also inform your clients about the way in which you as a business wish to be socially responsible. Many initiatives can be perfectly translated for households. Consider the discouragement of using plastic bags as packaging material, the ingredients in your foodstuffs, the use of closed chest freezers and energysaving lamps and so on. Social arguments are also relevant, such as communicating with the neighbourhood, the labour organisation in dialogue with employees, etc….
Use your own communication means to spread the message. Let your clients know why another client has chosen you. Tell them what your strong points are. The Almasy website is a beautiful example. You learn more about the working of the Oxfam world shops, and who place orders with the company. First ask permission from your clients before you mention them in brochures or on your website.
Motivate you clients too by telling them why you are changing over to other suppliers, when in your opinion they live up better to your social expectations.

CSR COUNSELLING PATH

BP ZAP INTERNATIONAL
ZAP INTERNATIONAL BVBA, IMPORT AND EXPORT OF PLANTS
(HOUSEHOLD PLANTS, TERRACE AND BALCONY PLANTS, ORNAMENTAL PLANT CULTURE, …).
KONING ALBERTLAAN 163, 9080 LOCHRISTI.
CONTACT PERSON: KAAT BAERTSOEN.

ZAP is headed by Kaat Baertsoen and her husband and has seven employees (one buyer/salesperson, one buyer/bookkeeping assistant, one bookkeeper, three full-time workshop/maintenance staff, one half-time maintenance staff member).
ZAP creates a productive base for interested suppliers and employees.

ZAP International was set up in 1995 by Kaat Baertsoen and her husband in the centre of the village of Zaffelare. Three years later the business moved its activities to the horticultural district of Lochristi.

From the beginning the United Kingdom has been the most important sales market for ZAP International with 80% of customers. The clients are mainly in the ‘landscaping business’ (planting for businesses, airports, hotel lobby’s, office buildings, large events,… including maintenance), a specialized market. The rest of the clients are Belgian wholesalers who supply flowers and garden centres. They originally worked with suppliers (nurseries) in Belgium and the Netherlands. Because of the growing request for decorative plants and terrace plants, they also now import from southern Europe.

The business manager knows precisely what her company’s strong points are. The first important asset is the company’s storage possibility. The company permanently keeps up its own stock to be able to fill any request at a moment’s notice. The clients are willing to pay a surcharge for quality plants that require less maintenance and for quick service and ZAP’s professional advice. Transport is arranged by a firm that specialises in transportation to the UK, and is rationalised as much as possible to keep costs down.

ZAP International also stands out because of its high tech approach. The company has developed a software package that centralises ‘supply and demand’. Up to 40% of orders are obtained online. The clients who order online receive discount.

Suppliers too can present their range for a small fee through the internet. Because of the simplified administration there is now more time to deal with specific client requests. The company also scores rather well on the ecological level. Three years ago the firm received the MPS label (the international certification organisation for horticulture) for the use of pesticides and energy. ZAP International can itself boast an A classification. To obtain this certification the administration in the business was powerfully streamlined. All purchase invoices are kept.

The suppliers who want to cooperate with MPS, are screened by an independent agency. Finally a lot of hard work is being done to make the growers and clients aware that they should only collaborate with MPS classified suppliers.

There has also been great progress in the area of recycling and sorting of waste material in recent years.

The company does not see itself evolving into new markets in the future, but extending the client base (possibly in new member states) within the same market. Towards more lasting contact with suppliers.

ZAP International is on the right path, but there are still a few important challenges. In the ecological area the company scores reasonably well, as previously mentioned. Now it is also important to make the suppliers aware of the MPS classification.

Another problem, of an economic nature, is the tendency for concentration in the client market.

A number of large businesses have taken over middle-sized businesses so that there are now only very large and relatively small businesses active in the sector. ZAP International is dependent upon a number of large players. It is true that a contract with a market leader ensures a strong position, but also contains the risk of a great economic loss if the client cancels.

In contract negotiations an exchange rate risk must be included in the calculations because everything is settled in British pounds.

Another tricky point is the shift in contacts. By the nature of the activities (import and export) and the evolution towards a demand-oriented market the future of the business so to speak, is controlled by the clients.

Clients and suppliers form one line in the chain. ZAP International is in a somewhat difficult position in between. Because of the movement towards concentration and the increasing professionalism the number of direct telephone contacts with clients has decreased sharply. The market leaders work with external buyers who receive commission on the number of orders made. Because of this the price of the plants becomes a more important criterion than quality and service. ZAP tries to take care of this by pointing out to management its specific strong points and additional value. From supplier to business partner and from employee to colleague.

ZAP International wants to build up a lasting relationship with its business partners. That requires a systematic evaluation of the suppliers. In the area of environmental matters the MPS label is already a good control instrument (although not yet all suppliers are aware of its additional value).

But there are still other elements that play a role in the relationship with the suppliers. The first priority is to make the suppliers aware of the advantage of entering their range of products in the online databank. They still see it as having too little benefit and they still experience it as being too much of an obligation. Another priority is the collaboration with suppliers who respect the delivery periods and terms. The business manager is considering the registration of late deliveries and incorrect invoices, retention of credit notes, and checklists. ZAP still does not use any systematic procedure for registering late deliveries or incorrect invoicing or for taking action.

It happens now informally and in an ad hoc manner. The business manager often takes the initiative herself to call the supplier.

This brings us straight on to the social objective of the counselling: employee involvement.

The business manager is happy with the way in which the work is carried out, but she still expects in some cases a bit more initiative and a sense of responsibility. Employees who feel involved in company policy are stimulated into being creative, seeking solutions and taking action. The business manager wants to allow the staff more participation and is open for ideas and suggestions, but the structure for that is lacking.

Communication between business managers and staff is too much of an ad hoc occurrence. Sometimes essential information is lost.

They want to begin with a structured form of employee participation via a work consultation or group meeting on well defined subjects which will benefit business earnings.

Achieve objectives through consultation.

The business manager is convinced that corporate social responsibility must be supported by the whole enterprise, as much by the ‘external’ stakeholders (clients and suppliers) as by its own staff. The objective of the counselling is set on the point of intersection of these relationships. The main aim of the counselling is to set up a more structured form of employee participation, and to increase the employee involvement in company policy. The first topic is the creation of lasting relationships with the business partners. Together with the employees working methods must be found to make suppliers more aware and to evaluate them. In the long run, they want to change over to a formalised system that involves the employees in quality control and in evaluating the suppliers. Thereafter consultation periods can be planned around other topics, which are introduced by both business managers and employees. The objective in the longer term is to secure the work consultation as an integral part of the work organisation, in a more efficient and structured work organisation, where everyone takes on their responsibility and where there is fast communication between employees and business managers.

In the first phase the objectives, content and approach of the work consultation are discussed with the two business managers. The subjects which will be discussed are then determined: work content, working methods, work situation, mutual collaboration and the organisation in general. The first meeting deals with a concrete topic that fits in with the objective of the ‘corporate social responsibility’ counselling course: the screening of suppliers.

The business managers draw up their objectives and ideas in the invitation for the first consultation. The approach to the first consultation is discussed together with the process counsellor.

In a simulation document the process is described step by step, with guidelines to ensure smooth progress, as much before (frequency, invitation, agenda composition, structure, …), during (chairing meetings, process monitoring, reporting, way of communicating, timing, delegating of responsibilities…) as after the consultation (report, follow-up on agreements, evaluation).

Employees are also sounded out for points they would like to see put on the agenda. Someone from the secretariat is appointed as coordinator. She is close to the staff, knows what is happening on the work floor and can stimulate employees to introduce certain concerns onto the consultative agenda. She is THE obvious person to collect the agenda points and monitor the consultative process. The process counsellor prepares the consultation with the coordinator: how do we tackle it and what is our role. The process counsellor is present at the first consultation to inform the employees about the importance of the work consultation in the course of corporate social responsibility, and to bring up background knowledge and practical examples.

After the consultation the business managers evaluate with the counsellor how things went and suggestions are proposed for further adjustments.

The first step is taken to a broad consensus.

In every respect the work consultation has started smoothly! All employees have received an invitation with the objective and the agenda points and with the request to add any other possible points to it. Everyone was present at the work consultation.

The business manager introduced it and explained the objectives and expectations. Everything took place in an amiable atmosphere with coffee and snacks. The coordinator took notes spontaneously, but this can be regulated in the future by taking turns. The atmosphere during the consultation was fine. Everyone could freely express his or her opinion. All the employees could bring forward their point(s) and that often lead to surprising conclusions. The original objective – to focus on the screening of suppliers – was quickly abandoned. As the meeting progressed, more and more concerns and more topics were raised.

Not each point was examined in depth, but it was decided how it would be tackled: through talks at the following consultation or in a smaller working group. During the discussions the business managers clearly indicated why certain matters could not just be changed immediately, for example, because of the economic situation (falling prices in the plant market). Employees also got the chance to explain, using concrete practical experiences, why they apply certain working methods. The employees found that over recent years a lot had changed in the positive sense and they did not hesitate to compliment the directors for this.

Collective problems were assessed in a spirit of solidarity: ‘We are all in the same boat’... Employees were urged to think of solutions themselves, and a number of them even expressed the desire to brainstorm further on the subject of the suppliers in a smaller working group. If this consultation did not lead directly to a solution, a little bit of ‘homework’ was issued. In this way people were stimulated to take the initiative themselves.

And in this case that worked rather well. No timetable was provided for in the agenda and often the discussion developed in a quite unstructured way (jumping from one thing to another). The first consultation lasted three full hours. This was too long for some people, certainly if they were not directly involved in the discussion. At such a time one could ask; could we not deal with this better in a smaller working group? In the meantime we can learn from this that it is necessary to have someone to lead the discussion, for example, the coordinator. Now it was mainly the business manager who called for everyone not to talk over each other, but to speak one by one…

No concrete date was agreed upon for the following consultation, but they would try to provide time for this every month. Everyone will once again be invited via the coordinator for the next consultation. It was also agreed to place the agenda on the notice board, with the possibility of having further additions.

At the end of the consultation agreements were made concerning planning and a follow-up on certain actions relating to the screening of suppliers, including the assignment of tasks and responsibilities.

Long live mutual cooperation!

Generally we can state that it is a process that still has to grow. By making step-by-step adjustments, it must be possible for the meeting to run gradually smoother and to be more structured. The main thing is that a learning process has been initiated and the opportunity has been created in which collaboration can take place in a constructive way. The work consultation offers the possibility of discussing matters that one does not normally have time for and giving information and feedback on the working methods. The employees as well as the business managers displayed a greater involvement through their definite intention to improve working processes on the basis of good agreements and good mutual collaboration. In this way organisation and social objectives can be smoothly interwoven.

F. BUILD UP A BALANCED RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

SMEs who are locally embedded, influence their environment in different ways. They are a potential employer for the region and make their own contribution to the community.

As a company you are also confronted with the strong points and problems of this community.

The way in which you integrate your business activities into your neighbourhood, will to a large extent, determine the picture your neighbours have of you.

A balanced relationship between the enterprise and the neighbourhood is best for everyone. In this way you will enjoy their complete trust when you want to further extend your business activities. The local residents know, after all, that you will involve them in matters if that is really important or necessary. Your company has a face.

The local residents are aware of the importance of your business based on clear and honest information. They know where they can go with their questions. Gossip is examined immediately. If necessary, there is a consultation. Compromises are made, to which both the neighbourhood and your company are committed. If you show that you are prepared to take account of the neighbourhood complaints, you will notice that the residents will lodge far fewer objections to any request for an environmental permit.

Do you pay the neighbourhood enough attention at the moment? If you answer no to three of the five following questions, this is already a signal for you to immediately get to work on the neighbourhood.

- Do you now and then inform the neighbourhood about your activities, investments, or plans?
- Is there a neighbourhood contact person?
- Do you know what the neighbourhood thinks or expects from your company?
- Do you sometimes receive complaints from residents?
- Have you already collaborated with organisations in your neighbourhood?

F.1 WHO ARE THE PLAYERS?

Your company can be influenced by a lot of players. Here is an overview:

YOUR SME

District committees

Neighbourhood councils

Employees who live locally

Other companies in the neighbourhood

Experiences from the past

Federations

Community development

Schools

Political factions

District, Council, Province, Region,... NGOs

The picture that the neighbourhood has of your business, is
shaped by a combination of factors:

• The embedding of your company (in residential areas, business
zones...).
• Nuisance whether or not originating from your business.
• Nuisance whether or not originating from other businesses.
• Profile of the residents (their worries, concerns).
• The dynamics and cohesion of the neighbourhood.
• Organisations active in the neighbourhood (community work, school, political factions….).
• Typical neighbourhood problems (lack of playground space for children, parking problems, road safety).
• Past incidents.

F.2 HOW DOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD VIEW YOUR BUSINESS?

If you start a dialogue with the neighbourhood you will quickly know what the expectations and needs are. Even if you cannot answer certain questions or worries, it is important that you know what is happening in your neighbourhood. A problematic relationship with an associate business (e.g. worries after a fire) can easily ‘blow over’ to your enterprise. A neighbourhood problem (for example, high unemployment) can create implicit expectations. As a business you can also support proposals from local residents to neighbourhood organisations or the council.
1. Does the neighbourhood experience any type of nuisance?
If so, what sort of nuisance? This is an overview of the subjects that could be important for local residents:
Type of nuisance
Where, when, who
Action proposal Who can help solve it?
For example: For example
For example For example
Odours Street, district
Insulation of certain machines
Business involved
Noise Time period
Recommendation of a delivery route for trucks
Government department involved
Parking problems
Duration of nuisance

Give feedback on what has happened with a complaint
Residents involved
Health problems
Road safety
Incident (e.g. fire)
Too little information
Restructuring and dismissals
Expansion
Which company
Organize a company visit
District organisation involved
Do you also have insight into the biggest problems or needs in the neighbourhood?
Typical neighbourhood problems and needs

• Deprivation of the neighbourhood (businesses and residents moving away).
• Badly maintained streets, squares.
• Inadequate functioning of public services.
• Too few services for families (childcare, community work, medical services).
• Too little space for sport and recreation, playgrounds.
• Bad access by public transport.
• Bad housing.
• Social problems, vandalism.
• Few avenues for retraining available.

2. Use the existing sources

If you are locally active, you will probably come into contact yourself in your daily work with local residents and organisations. They are a possible part of your customer pool or they regularly visit you.

Take time to have a chat and to check on what is happening in the neighbourhood AND with regard to your business. Employees who live locally, can also make an important contribution here.

Call them together and ask them about the concerns in the neighbourhood.

If you have the impression that there are certain rumours about your business going around, immediately go and talk to the people or organisations involved.

Become integrated into a community network. You can, for example, become a member of the neighbourhood organisations that have regular contact with the residents.

Via these networks you can then systematically get started. Ask whether you can come along once to explain the operations of your business at one of the meetings. Try then to make the subjects in the above table points for discussion. Take the first step yourself towards the neighbourhood.

INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Go and talk to the local residents. Randomly ring the doorbells of about 10 residents. Introduce yourself and arrange an appointment for an open discussion. If possible have neighbours you have befriended take part in the discussion too.

Local residents appreciate it enormously if you consult them yourself.

COMPREHENSIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

If you have planned changes that could greatly impact the neighbourhood, choose a systematic approach and do not avoid the problems. That works to the contrary. A systematic approach offers the advantage that you can obtain interesting alternative proposals that you had not yet thought of yourself.

Additionally, you are increasing your support because the neighbourhood feels involved in the changes. A written questionnaire is a possibility.

Collaborating with neighbourhood councils and district committees is certainly recommended. They enjoy the trust of the neighbourhood and residents are then more quickly inclined to cooperate. Most of these organisations also have an address list.

They can possibly organise your mailing and processing with you.

Ensure in each case that you ask clear questions, and that the residents can ask for more information by phone. Invite the residents to a neighbourhood meeting where the results will be discussed. And above all: ensure there is the necessary feedback. Residents cooperate in order to influence decisions.

They are mainly interested in the results. Indulge them where that is possible.

3 Minimise the neighbourhood impact of your business activity where possible. Try to find a solution for problems that were spotted. If it concerns odour or noise nuisance it can be interesting to:

• Screen new investments beforehand to check for such type of nuisance.
• Speed up new investments.
• Provide insulation, if necessary for certain machines.
• Adjust the work rosters to combine the noise nuisance of certain machines in the daytime and assign overtime for less noisy work.

• Carry out additional measurements to know the problem fully.

If there is a lack of information, it can be useful to:

• Keep the neighbourhood up to date with any developments in the measurements taken.
• Organise an information meeting annually.
• Write an article regularly for the neighbourhood newspaper, paper issued at the fair, …
• Organise a company visit.
• Make a brief and comprehensible environmental report for the neighbourhood.

In order to be able to quickly intervene in the case of any problems, a well-working complaints system is THE solution.

If the neighbourhood notices that the complaints are taken seriously and that the business is looking for a solution, trust will grow. Ensure there is:

• A contact number where people can call with questions, remarks, suggestions and complaints.
• Fast detection of the problem (quickly establish the damage or the problem).
• A good internal follow-up of the complaint.
• A grant where there is real damage.
• Recognition of the problem.

In order to let them know that you are taking the complaint seriously, it is important to report regularly on the state of affairs. Residents show understanding if they feel that something is happening and if the company itself is taking a step towards them. Try to come to a solution that both you and the residents are happy with. Try to keep an eye on the total context of the problem. Maybe there are a number of factors that magnify the problem for the resident, such as the inconvenience of other businesses, a difficult personal situation, etc. Switch over to action. Try to limit the inconvenience structurally. A few examples of this are: insulate where possible, replace filters on time, organise your transport to reduce traffic noise…

4. Cooperate to deal with cross-boundary subjects. If the neighbourhood has a problem or a question that goes beyond your business activity, consult the others involved, such as fellow businessmen and the local council. Problems such as road safety, high local unemployment, noise nuisance due to the combination of various business activities, an approaching restructuring of the business of the largest clients in the region…

By considering these problems together, proposals are quickly made and you can usually achieve more.

If relationships are tense, ensure that there is balanced representation of residents, interest groups and businesses to ensure the discussion is conducted in a constructive way. Agree at the beginning of the meeting as to who will chair the meeting.

Firstly give everyone the leeway to air his views and only then look for solutions. Involve local government representatives on time so that they can pull their weight.
Think about your local sponsorship. Does it contribute to the development of the neighbourhood? Are there perhaps alternatives that can strengthen the area so that you as a business can also reap the benefits? Are you, for example, familiar with the ethical savings accounts and the ethical investment funds?

F.3 TAKE A STEP FURTHER: BECOME A PARTNER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The local embedding of the SME offers a lot of strong points for partnerships. Go looking for possible win-win situations for your business and the neighbourhood in which you work. First research which bottlenecks you experience yourself in the neighbourhood and whether you can cooperate towards a solution. Work out what contribution you should be able to supply to the development of the neighbourhood:

• Do you have space available that could be interesting for the neighbourhood?
A few examples are: space for sport, parking, playground, training and/or meetings for neighbourhood associations and/or non-profit organisations.

• Do you wish to support certain organisations or actions to develop the neighbourhood?
A few examples are: support for social projects which your employees bring up, offer employees the possibility of applying their abilities for a local socio-economic project, address the council together with the district committee to deal with road safety in your neighbourhood.

• Can you call upon the local labour market?
Can you recruit in the neighbourhood and in this way avoid unfilled vacancies? Can you call upon employment and training initiatives for the unemployed? Can you reserve space in local crèches for employees' children or enrol them for playground camp during vacation periods?

• Try to set up cooperative projects in which the different parties can commit themselves.

F.4 TELL THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WHAT YOU ARE DOING

It is good to look out for your neighbourhood but if the neighbourhood does not know or realize that, it will be impossible for you to build up trust. Therefore highlight the action you are taking on that subject. Tell the neighbourhood who you are. There are many ways to do this. Try to find a way which best fits in with your way of working. SMEs who have a lot of contact with the neighbourhood can for example, hang out little messages à la “Did you know that…”.

Use whatever means of communication you have, for example, little texts on weighing scales or on sales receipts, e-mails, little messages on your website,… If it concerns a wider initiative, then send a short press statement to the regional radio or TV company.
SMEs that do not have regular contact with their neighbourhood, are better to make use of the neighbourhood network, local organisations, regional press and the local government to spread their message. Invite the residents to visit the company once in a while or have an open business day and use the opportunity to introduce yourself fully.

CSR COUNSELLING PATH

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The secret of good customer care: good staff care Cleaningboy consists of three entities:
• Cleaningboy, a cleaning company specialised in cleaning private homes, companies, fairs and events, immoservice and hygiene service with as secondary activities, window-washing, cleaning advice, car-cleaning, tidying up new estates and renovations, arquet renewal, etc. …Cleaningboy has 35 employees.
• Cleaningboy Home Service is specialised in cleaning work for private homes, specifically in the area of the household service vouchers (interior cleaning, windows, ironing service). The company has 40 employees, fulltime and part-time.
• Cleaningboy cleaning shop in Kortrijk is specialised in the sale of cleaning products and in giving cleaning advice.
Cleaningboy was set up in 1993 by Hans Dejonckheere as a cleaning company, specialised in tidying up after fairs and exhibitions.
Gradually the activities were further expanded to businesses and private homes. The business is mainly active regionally, especially in the province of West Flanders, but nationally it also has a name in the clearing up after events.
For the cleaning activities in the private area, the daughter company Cleaningboy Home Service was set up in 2004, which operates according to the principles of the service voucher. This split was necessary because employment with private persons came under another trade association and it also had a different wage structure. Cleaning in private homes also requires a very

different approach than cleaning in businesses or office buildings. Finally Cleaningboy opened a shop in Kortrijk where people could go for cleaning products and cleaning advice.

Cleaningboy has always focused on growth and employment, environmental care and quality care systems. This is expressed in the various acknowledgements that the business receives. The quality barometer in Kortrijk Xpo rewarded the business many times with a certificate for quality service. They are the only cleaning company in the province of West Flanders to have received an official quality label. CLB received a certificate for their participation in the Quadrant counselling path on the setting up of an integrated care system. The business recently submitted a file to obtain a BeSaCc safety certificate.

In May 2004 CLB received its first environmental certificate from the environmental charter of GOM West Flanders. CLB does not only make use of environmentally friendly maintenance products.

The yards are cleaned with rainwater that is supplied in containers by the company itself. The washing powder in the CLB washing machines is automatically measured. And through a more efficient work plan relocations too are limited to the bare minimum. The company is also paying special attention to maintaining the customer and client relationships. On the one hand there is the quality service and almost daily personal contact, and on the other, the continuous concern to offer the client real additional value by integrating new developments in the cleaning world into the range and by actively taking account of remarks, questions and suggestions from clients.

There is a counselling path at the moment in collaboration with VIZO for better understanding of the clients and a checklist is being developed for client research. Testimonials from clients of Cleaningboy Home Service are placed on the website.

In the framework of the VIZO counselling path, the CLB, after an internal SWOT analysis, has also carried out a competitive examination. Based on this a number of objectives have been drawn up for the future.

The business also uses an efficient system of evaluation for suppliers. They only work with suppliers who offer environment friendly products. This evaluation is integrated into the quality care system. The employees are also involved as much as possible in the business. A lot of care is devoted to the welcome and training, and the people have a say in the organisation through group meetings, emails, daily contact and continual motivation. ‘Cleaningboy is fun’ is an expression that perfectly characterises the business culture.

Work is already being done in the ‘Investors in People’ system using Quadrant. A future objective is the development of a diversity plan, with attention to the employment of the less well educated and the older employees. The possibility of starting up an integration company in the framework of the household service voucher is still being examined.

Various initiatives are being taken on by the business in the area of corporate social responsibility. With regard to the integration of economic, social and environmental objectives, CLB may call itself a model business without any doubt. As already cited, the management of the business takes good account of the individual character of clients, suppliers, competitors and employees. The business has chosen to enforce complete transparency. Information from clients, employees and suppliers is immediately available via the website and via the internet, and a quarterly newsletter is sent by post.

The business manager is convinced that high-quality management of businesses, looked at from the philosophy of social responsibility, must be a daily point of attention and the subject of continual improvement.

Labels and certificates are not goals in themselves, but rather a 'reward' for the results the company achieves in relation to the various stakeholders. There is no use in striving for a label when the systems are not integrated into daily practice. Now that the infrastructure, the administrations, the products and the environmental care systems are nearly finalized, the business manager also wants, to elaborate and structure a better working policy for the staff. In the framework of quality care, environmental charter, safety certificate, Quadrant, etc. various instruments and procedures were worked out and put down on paper, including measures relating to staff care. At this moment everything is still too spread out and not geared enough to each other.

The structure and the coherence are missing.

The business manager wants to develop a sort of 'script' for staff care that can later form the basis for obtaining an ISO certification. But the starting point is and remains the final development of a staff care system, so that the people, motivated and satisfied, will continue working for CLB. Well-trained, motivated and contented staff after all, are crucial for the high quality of service of the business. The evaluation system for suppliers too is still open to improvement, especially when seeking out new suppliers. Likewise this should also be addressed. Investing in the future by 'Investing in People'.

The principle objective of the counselling is the development of an orderly and usable script in the framework of staff care. This script must be a reflection of everything the staff is doing already and at the same time a supplement for what is still missing. In this way action can be carried out within a cohesive framework. Cleaningboy is already taking a lot of HRM initiates. There are already finalized documents relating to business vision and business culture 'Cleaningboy is fun'), selection, job description, welcome (welcome file), job appraisal and assessment talks.

The business already has some experience through Quadrant. One can therefore start off using the principles of the ‘Investors in People’- method. The business manager wants to finalize everything in June 2005. It is the task of the process counsellor to hand him a structure and to support him in the development of the personnel care scenario. The business manager starts by collecting documents and information regarding personnel policy via other care systems, the ‘Investors in People’ method, welcome procedures, training, applications and the UNIZO HRM coach. The process counsellor draws up the first proposal for the ‘script’ and together with the business manager, lines up the most important elements.

It is important to ensure cohesion with other care systems. The counsellor will mainly concentrate on this item. The handbooks for IKZ (quality), IVZ (safety) and IMZ (environment) have been finalized, contain written procedures, and are mutually integrated. Each document is situated in one easily found location on the computer network. The abovementioned care systems already contain various elements of the personnel care system.

The business manager utilizes the Investors in People model as a start for the IPZ structure. Part of the IKZ script can be transferred one on one to the IPZ. It contains elements that are important for selection, welcome, evaluation, communication and involvement. There is a section on training of new employees (welcome) and permanent education in the IVZ. And the IMZ contains a section on ‘open communication’. The involvement of the employees in the environment policy is thereby one of the points of attention.

In a lot of instruments and documents a piece of essential information is still missing regarding work methodology and responsibilities at the various organisational levels. The procedures must be further supplemented in this sense. A general conclusion that applies for the entire personnel care system is the necessity for a ‘frame’. A support which is derived from a vision and from objectives in which HRM is seen as a collection of processes which connect the strategic objectives and personal skills development of the employees. It is important that the strategic objectives are operational and can be translated into resources and responsibilities. In different documents skills are formulated that are important for a Cleaningboy employee, mostly in the form of a list. What we are still missing is coherence and clarity, and clearly written behavioural indicators for the competencies.

Extending competency management as the ‘backbone’ for the further development of the personnel can be an action point for the future. This also recurs in the ‘Investors in People’ methodology.

The possible additional value for Cleaningboy IPZ can be tested on the basis of the additional information on Investors in People.

Organisations that structurally and continually pay attention to a development-oriented personnel policy can structure their HR practices with the help of Investors in People in an ‘improvement cycle’.

The four basic principles of “commitment, planning, action and evaluation” form a basic thread through the organisation and always return in the same order. IIP extends the modality for the structuring of a strategic HR policy. The added value is in the arrangement and completion of this policy and in the development of more cohesion. IIP supports businesses that wish to translate their strategy and objectives onto the work floor.

The four basic principles require a systematic definition and an effective realisation of the goals, means and responsibilities.

It is not about doing more or other things but about doing things well and where necessary, rearranging or supplementing existing processes. IIP is enhancing the effectiveness of HRM. It links the objectives of the organisation with the ambitions and possibilities (read: competencies) of the people who work there and also pays attention to appreciation. The objective is: to invest in learning and development in a permanent and systematic manner and from a strategic perspective. In this sense IIP can strengthen the development capabilities and competency management of organisations.

Typical for IIP is the involvement of the employees in the HR project. Bottlenecks can be charted using the perception of the employees. Objectives can then be linked to these in terms of competency development. In order to obtain an IIP label, one must be able to show afterwards that the bottlenecks were removed and that the employee in question has achieved the required competency level. In this way the effects of the training and development policy become visible.

Effective competency management also offers the possibility of successfully fulfilling the principles of IIP. The backbone is formed by carefully defined competency profiles, which are subsequently translated into indicators of concretely perceptible behaviour.

By confronting the perception of the employee and the manager with each other they can look together at how competency development can be stimulated and evaluated in order to achieve the desired level. Employees must nevertheless not only be ‘directed’ by a manager, but are also responsible for their own development process. The business manager indicates that in this area there is still a need for a suitable set of instruments. Towards a dynamic care system.

Starting off with the theoretical principles, and after a profound discussion with the business manger, we can decide that the ‘Investors in People’ method can provide a valuable contribution to the structuring of the IPZ at Cleaningboy. The resources for integrating CSR into personnel care can now be incorporated into a structure. Based on the IIP structure and the feedback from the process counsellor, the business manager can now further work on and refine his HRM structure. He will convert the different sub-aspects into objectives, actions, responsibilities, processes, procedures and documents. Where necessary, reference will be made to one of the other care systems. In this way he arrives at an integrated IKZ, IVZ, IMZ and IPZ system and the different dimensions of social responsibility can be explicitly integrated. As part of IPZ the business manager is contemplating the following concrete steps:

1. Communication with management and staff,
2. Refinement of the training plan,
3. Extension of competency management (incl. selection criteria).

The diversity plan too will be introduced into the personnel care system. If required external advice can be called upon for certain actions.

G. CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

G.1 CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL SUBJECTS

Do you have a specific environmental question? Run through UNIZO's environmental question and answer list (www.unizo.be).

You will find an answer there to questions such as "How much Recupel-recycling contribution for which appliance?" "Is soil decontamination synonymous with digging and removing soil?" and "Can I just burn my leftover wood?" Consult also the (free) electronic SME environmental newspaper of ARGUS in collaboration with UNIZO, which informs you about the environment, mobility, environmental planning and energy (www.argusmilieu.be). By doing so, you will get closer to the environmental subjects.

1 Environmental policy as part of the daily policy

An organisation where environmental care is part of the policy, can deal with its environmental problems more systematically.

• Let the environment be one of the deciding criteria when buying or investing.
• Put the relevant environmental subjects on the agenda of regular meetings.
• Try also during internal training and in consultations to draw attention to good environmental practices.
• Aim to give a more formal character to the policy by setting up a company public environmental policy declaration. Take the time at informal meetings to convince new employees, local residents, (licensing) authorities or suppliers of your good intentions.
• Take a good look at the organigram of your organisation: who takes on the environmental tasks or who is eligible for this?

2 Knowing your way through the environmental legislation

A specific expertise is required in order to adhere to environmental legislation.

- The legislation concerning environmental permits is incorporated in VLAREM; check whether the nature of your activities requires an environmental permit and check whether the permit you have is still valid. You will find a simple checklist on www.argusmilieu.be/NEO/InfoBrochures/VLAREM/vlarem.htm. Besides VLAREM, there are also VLAREA (waste matter), VLAREBO (soil), and the Interregional Packaging Decree (packaging). You can familiarize yourself with the legislation by using an intelligible environmental checklist, developed by the POM Antwerp and available at www.pomantwerpen.be.
- There are many environmental regulations. So make your own environmental calendar as a reminder for the follow-up of periodically recurring tasks in relation to environmental administration (www.milieukalender.com).
- Connect to networks that inform you about the latest developments concerning environmental legislation.
- You can also contact an environmental consultant to bring you into line with your legal obligations.

G.2 KNOWLEDGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

Try to obtain a complete picture of the activities, services or products that can influence the environment, in the positive as well as the negative sense. Where in the production line are the main emissions into the air, water and soil? Do I have these emissions under control? Are there environmental risks linked to storage or internal transport? Are there measuring programmes on hand with which I can use to check whether I am emitting within the permitted boundaries?

1. Best available techniques

How do I know whether I am applying a sound environmental technology and then not at too high a price?

The Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO) has in the past carried out studies of “best available techniques”. The results of these so-called “BBT studies” are usually collected in well-organized manuals. You can consult these via www.vito.be.

The Brussels Institute for Environmental Management (BIM) has drafted manuals for specific industrial sectors such as bodywork, garages and maintenance of parks and public gardens.

2. Involve your employees

How do you best deal with the introduction of an environmental policy? Undoubtedly your employees have an eye for this. Ask two to five employees who are interested in the environment to form an ecoteam, made up of people who are employed in the production and administrative fields.

• Together with this group, select three environmental subjects and priorities to work on.
• Stimulate notification of leaks (taps, draughts, heating).
• Provide information on the basic regulations concerning sorting and waste costs.

CSR COUNSELLING PATH

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As a building company you first have to build up trust.

The Deketelaere & Partners Totaalinrichting building company is specialised in overall projects for interior design (alterations, renovations and structural work, interior furnishings, furniture, bathroom fittings, kitchens, heating, lighting, electricity, domotics, camera surveillance). The company has seven employees. Elektrobedrijf Hydropress supplies and installs pumping facilities. There are three members of staff.

Deketelaere Partners Totaalinrichting bvba was set up in 1993 by Patrick Deketelaere and Wim de Paepe. The business specialises in the total renovation and furnishing of buildings and offices. The clientele is comprised of mainly hotels and owners of the ‘better’ home, but the government is also a client. The business has its own design and coordination office that follows up each project from A to Z. Originally Patrick Deketelaere ran an electrical business. Since this did not yield anticipated returns, he expanded into building activities and took on a second partner. In 2000 the business went through a crisis after an incident with a client, leaving the firm as good as worthless.

The second partner withdrew and four staff members also left. The business manager decided to build up the business step by step.

The enterprise is now split up into two legal entities: a construction business (Deketelaere Partners Totaalinterieur) and an electrical business (Hydropress). Accounting is done separately and the personnel manager follows the logics of the different industrial sectors.

Corporate social responsibility, is also … communicating sensibly.

In Patrick Deketelaere’s story all the aspects of CSR are presented and the positive impact of corporate social responsibility clearly comes to the fore:

• Care for the environment: the business follows all the requirements of the environmental legislation. The business manager informs his employees and involves them in the action planning.

• Waste reduction: the business uses a well-developed waste sorting system. Reusable material is recuperated as much as possible. The recuperation of wood also has a social objective: free charity to underprivileged families. The disposal of very environment-unfriendly material is recharged in the sales price, so that the client too feels responsible.

• Staff involvement: The business manager works directly with his closest employees and maintains short lines of communication. He informs his employees in detail about the state of affairs and invites them to make proposals. This participation is very informal. The versatility of the personnel is a big asset and a continual source of new challenges.

• Staff diversity: They recruit young men from underprivileged backgrounds and ensure suitable work based on possibilities and capacities. As an example: designing furniture was added to the activities after it appeared that one of the employees had this ability.

• Lasting relationships with suppliers: The business works with a number of regular suppliers (including joint ventures and a regular distributor of seats with a brand name, domotics systems, etc…). The selection is strict. Quality and durability of materials and services are the criteria.

• Lasting relationships with clients: the business works for a number of regular clients. They continually provide new orders.

The business manager provides transparent files and correct, detailed information. All agreements are put on paper.

• Balanced relationships with the neighbourhood: The business is housed in a residential area. The work place and the furniture workshop were housed elsewhere in order not to create a noise problem and have a negative impact on the neighbourhood.

• The quality of the services provided has brought the business various provincial quality labels (for central heating/sanitary fittings and for decoration).

• Safety: The business deals with this in a proactive way and consistently makes risk analyses. Over the last five years there have been no work-related accidents.

The business manager emphasises that this has its price. He is more expensive than the competition. Therefore he focuses mainly on businesses and the more wealthy individuals. Because of the rise in prices in the housing market the orders are dropping. In addition, the firm had to deal with a number of bad payers thereby running up huge legal costs for this. In short, the business needs a few big, healthy projects to be able to continue on successfully in its activities.

Patrick Deketelaere is a committed entrepreneur and is actively involved via all sorts of federations and organisations in the development of his sector (the VEI, UNIZO, BEC, federation of electricians LVMEB, …). But he finds that he is not putting across the strong points of his own business enough in the areas of quality and social responsibility. The provincial labels are issued for a period of only one year. If these lapse then he can no longer use these as assets for his clients. Based on the initiatives that he is now already taking, it appears that he is eligible for 'best practice' in the area of corporate social responsibility. All the more reason to focus on good communications.

Tell the clients honestly what they are facing.

The main objective of the counselling is the development of lasting relationships with clients through an effective communication strategy.

Not only external communication is important here. Advantage can also be taken proactively of possible complaints and problem situations by concretely and correctly informing the clients about quality, price and service. If the client knows what he can expect, there is no cause for misunderstandings.

The counselling process is in keeping with the way of working in the organisation and begins with the provision of a number of documents for inspiration. By also using the information that goes with the labels, this can form the basis for good communications with clients. The business manager also asks his fellow employee for ideas and gives him the responsibility for the concrete implementation of the project.

During the course the objective of the counselling becomes further refined. They decide to develop a 'booklet' or 'handbook' with clear information on what the business client can expect regarding quality and service, guarantee, etc. This client handbook will also contain information on the quality labels that the company holds and what they really mean. Also the address file will be further improved and finalized. The open day during the previous 'Day of Technology' was a big success.

Many visitors wanted to be kept updated on the activities of the company.

Trust booklet.

During the final phase of the course the basis is laid for an information booklet. The clients will learn in detail what they can expect from the business and possible complaints are proactively dealt with.

The information booklet will strengthen trust and encourage the durability of relationships in the long term. The handbook will be sent to existing as well as potential clients via a renewed address file.

The business sees this as a first step to a more elaborated communications strategy that they want to use to communicate with other interested parties on good business practices. Possible points to brainstorm are the organisation of more ‘open days’ and the presentation of the business at SME parties that are organized by UNIZO’s networking service for growing SME’s (SME Contact-KMO Contact). The business manager will call in external specialist help for this, for example, by using high school students doing internships.
Finally we are happy to note that the ‘good practice’ of another company (Alfa Solution), has also been an inspiration here.

H. ENERGY EFFICIENT WORK

H.1 THINK ABOUT YOUR ENERGY USE

Many SMEs have no clear view of the distribution of energy to machinery, heating, periods and so on. However, systematically mapping your energy use offers a lot of advantages. It is really advantageous if you can intervene specifically in the area of energy consumption and thereby also reduce your energy bill. A meter card is a handy help in controlling your usage. You can closely follow the development of your own energy use.

H.2 SET UP A METER CARD

Put the meter card near the counters and note the metered amount(s) once a week, on the same day and preferably at the same time. In this way you can easily compare weekly usage. In the long term you can also compare monthly and annual usage. You can then aim for your own average.

Energy (type of) Use per month Costs per month

Electricity (Kwh)

Gas m3/m

Water m3

Heating oil/coal l/kg

Other (steam)

There can always be differences because of:

• The purchase of new electrical appliances.
• Abnormal weather conditions (in winter you normally use more than in summer).
• Season-related production.

H.3 HOW DO YOU CORRECTLY FILL IN THE METER CARD?

If your kWh meter only has one counter, the normal tariff applies. Then only use the column 'daily usage'. If you have a kWh meter with two counters, then the dual hourly tariff applies.
Enter the correct numbers in the collect column: daily usage and night usage.
You only have to fill in the numbers before the comma (or before the red square box).
Clients with electrical storage heating usually have two meters.
A separate counter measures the nightly use of the storage heating. This usage is calculated against the nightly tariff. Enter these meter readings in the appropriate columns.
This type of meter is available through www.interelectra.be.

H.4 CRITICALLY ANALYSE YOUR USAGE

Unfortunately enough there are few reference figures where SMEs can compare their usage.
Take inspiration then from sector-allocated initiatives. You can consult activities on the website www.milieuwinst.be which have been set up in your sector to reduce usage. By comparing the figures you are taking better account of the following elements:

- The number of people working in your SME and possible radical changes in manpower.
- The real usage time.
- The settlement of your personal usage within the business usage.

H.5 TAKE INITIATIVES

1 Lighting

- Look at the use of lamps which are continually lit. Are these really energy saving?
- User energy-saving lamps where possible.
- Replace lamps by lamps with a lower wattage if possible.
- Put timers on your lighting and movement sensors.
- Evaluate the efficiency of the overall lighting and possibly replace it with task-specific lamps on the desk itself.
- Also analyse the outside lighting.

2 Improve the insulation of your building

- Install insulation material.
- Ensure it is double-glazed.
- Is there machinery which you could better switch off during breaks or work consultations?

3 Heating

- Do you heat with gas or electricity? Is there a possibility of switching over to gas?
- How is usage during the weekend?
- Who can adjust the heating? Are there arrangements for this?
- Are your spaces well insulated? How much daylight do you get in the different seasons?
- Do you have open or closed deepfreeze chests?
- How efficient is your air conditioning?

4 Water

- Do you already use rainwater?
- What sort of flushing system is there in the toilet? You can also have a small usage button installed.

5 Transportation

- How does the dispatching work in your business? Are loads combined to a maximum before they leave?
- Which fuel do your company vans use? Will you buy new vans with LPG or switch existing vans to LPG? Van-pooling could be an efficient solution.

I. MINIMISE WASTE

In the preparation of the MAMBO model (less waste, more business profits) it appears that the real cost of waste for businesses can amount to 12% of the total production costs.
This means a big chunk out of the budget, but also: the possibility of saving and managing in a (more) environmentally friendly way.

I.1 WHICH WASTE STREAMS EXIST IN YOUR BUSINESS?

Raw materials and additives wasted amounts on average to 60% of the total waste cost of a business.
It is also an account where most savings can be made. Make up an outline of the use of raw and/or additive materials in your production process.
You can use the waste cards for this on www.milieuwinst.be and
www.milieuwinst.nl.
A number of questions which are important for a production environment are:

- How much wasted raw material have you noticed in your production process?
- Do you reuse remnants of raw, additive or waste materials?

• Would someone be pleased to receive the remnants you can no longer use?

Here are a number of questions that are important in the handling of your administration:

• Have you switched over to recycled paper yet?
• Are there agreements concerning the use of scrap paper?
• Do you use reusable ink cartridges for the printers?
• Have you discovered the “double-sided printing” option yet?
• Which cleaning products do you use? Are they bio-degradable?

Set up a waste materials register where each month you can note the nature, amount and processing method of each piece of waste material released; the waste material register is obligatory and forms the basis for the annual OVAM waste material report.

What are the materials and where are they released, how and by whom are they internally collected and by which (recognised) collection agent are they collected?

• Set up an internal recycling system.
• Try to collect waste separately (such as metal, paper, glass, paint).
• Put paper bins in the offices.

I.2 WASTE PREVENTION

Preventing waste is more environmentally friendly than later processing waste which has already been produced. Less waste also means reduced costs for the processing and collection, less loss of raw materials, a nicer working environment and a better company image. Classic instruments in the area of waste prevention are:

• Presti, the prevention-stimulating subsidy programmes.
• MAMBO, the software package that calculates your true waste costs (see above).
• STIP, the Support point and Information centre for Prevention of Waste.
• Environmental Benefit, a site that has sector-specific prevention measures and lots of business examples.
• Factor 10, the Flemish information point for ecodesign.

These instruments are not limited to a source-oriented approach.

They are also looking at the emission effects in water, air and soil.

I.3 RATHER PREVENT WASTE THAN PAY FOR IT

Waste costs mean an important chunk of the (environmental) budget of the SME. What do you think of when you hear “waste costs” of your business? Do you think of the invoices from collecting agencies and processors who empty your waste containers at regular times? Do you think of the rental price of those containers or the profits from the sale of certain waste materials to third parties? If you only consider the “waste costs”, you should realise that this is just the top of the waste cost mountain (barely 15%!).

Waste costs also include, along with the invoiced costs:

- The loss of raw materials that together with the waste disappear in the container.
- The costs, linked to the wear and tear on machines that during a part of the production time only produce unusable material.
- The personnel costs for cleaning up and transporting the waste to storage places.
- The part of the overheads that is devoted to waste production.

If you really want to reduce waste costs, then you must know where the waste is released and how you can prevent this. With the MAMBO package of OVAM you can make a reliable simulation of the real waste costs.

I.4 DO THE MAMBO

MAMBO (Less Waste, More Business Profits) is a user-friendly calculating model that calculates the real cost of waste on the basis of data your business has at its disposal. The waste costs are divided into: raw materials and additive losses, loss of additional value and the costs of collection and processing of waste (the invoiced costs).

The results will convince you of the necessity of examining how you can limit your waste production. You are saving a lot on your production costs after all!

MAMBO can also help you to take decisions. You cannot only calculate the waste costs before prevention but also calculate to what extent the waste cost can drop after your investment in prevention. This data forms the basis of a cost-benefit analysis that helps you to take the right investment decision. By using the MAMBO prevention module you can compare the results before and after prevention with the investment costs, so that the time needed for the return on your investment can be calculated quite precisely.

UNIZO is the executive organisation for the self-employed and SME’s in Flanders and Brussels. More than 80,000 members are active in the trade, distribution, industry, and service sector or in the liberal professions. UNIZO represents both SME entrepreneurs and one-man businesses.

UNIZO has three core tasks: to provide information and advice, to unite entrepreneurs and to champion their interests. With an extended network all over Flanders, UNIZO can take care of each question, each signal from an employer and translate it into representation of interests, information, advice, training and collaboration. Everywhere the needs of the self-employed entrepreneurs are at stake, UNIZO is there at the European, federal and regional levels, as well as in the city councils.

The organisation has UNIZO managers locally in most municipalities and cities amounting in total to 4,000 entrepreneur-managers who are all promoting the interests of the employer. UNIZO represents 84 associated professional sectoral organisations, has an extensive service for growing SMEs (SME Contact-KMO Contact) and an international service for export businesses, UNIZO INTERNATIONAL. The service is provided principally in the 23 UNIZO secretariats. People can go there for all questions concerning entrepreneurs.

There is usually a specific service available for starters (UNIZO Starter's service), for the social statute (SVMB), for the supplementary insurance for pensions (OVMB), an environmental service (VESME), and one for personnel administration (SOFIM/ADMB). Business & Society Belgium is a network of and a source of inspiration for businesses and business associations who wish to integrate Corporate Social Responsibility into their policy and activities.

Business & Society Belgium wants to stimulate and support this integrating and transforming process: Business & Society Belgium brings business leaders and managers together who in their field each do their best to put Corporate Social Responsibility into practice.

Activities Business & Society Belgium offers its members access to the 'best practices' of other businesses. In connection with this we encourage new cooperative links and concrete partnerships. Business & Society Belgium supplies you with high quality information on the newest developments in the theoretical and practical field, on all related initiatives both at home and abroad and brings you into contact with expert members who can offer you a tailored solution. The network itself regularly organises meetings and working groups in which specific subjects are studied in depth. Business & Society Belgium wishes to give its members a public voice, to defend their social needs and advance their dialogue with the NGOs and all other actors in society. Business & Society Belgium chooses to take a proactive approach: by taking initiatives themselves, by entering into partnerships both at home and abroad, by developing building blocks themselves that speed up a lasting change.

The European level of Business & Society Belgium is a member of CSR Europe, a European network that groups more than 60 businesses and 19 partners. CSR Europe plays a central role in promoting and implementing Corporate Social Responsibility in Europe.

The organisation is the driving force behind the European Business Campaign, an initiative arising from an appeal from the European Union during the summit in Lisbon in 2000 to advance the social commitment of business leaders.