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the ideal i-SME

Step by step guide
for enterprise owners

20 tips

to help you become an ideal inclusive small and medium sized enterprise, empowered by quotes, insights and findings from other business owners.

1. Vision

Making inclusion visible

2. Recruitment

You make your choice

3. Onboarding

The start of your new employee

4. Long term

Ensuring that everybody can function optimally



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Organizations

INTAMT

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DISWORKS

Country

Germany

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Portugal

Austria

Finland

Spain

Lithuania

The Netherlands



An ideal enterprise is **inclusive.**

How to be an ideal inclusive small and medium sized enterprise: an enterprise that is open and ready to recruit and employ people with a disability? This collection proposes some answers on the profile of an inclusive organisation.

What's an inclusive SME?

An inclusive workplace is one where all people, with all kinds of differences and disabilities feel welcome and valued for their contributions. It's a place where people with disabilities — both visible and invisible disabilities — have the same opportunities for development as their co-workers. And it's a place where people feel safe disclosing their disabilities that aren't visible.

Why your enterprise should be inclusive

- An SME that is open and ready for employment of persons with a disability has a strong emphatic vision. This will be reflected in the culture of your company, as well as your employees.
- Due to smart management, it will be easier to close gaps in your workforce. By optimizing teams in a creative way you can even boost results to higher levels.
- EU governments work on rules and regulations to compel enterprises to employ people with a disability in their workforces. Taking some simple steps now will prepare your enterprise for the future and get you a headstart in your markets.
- 'Inclusion' is something that should be evident, not only because of well-being but also economic opportunities.

VISION





tip 1

Include inclusion

in your vision and your strategy



We have included the following in our general vision:
We embrace employees with all kinds of disabilities, they can feel safe to disclose their disability since we value them for their contribution, and we provide them with the same opportunities as all workers in our company."

Feel free to change it into your own wording: what matters is that all aspects are included in your vision declaration. Next, translate it into your working strategy and into your daily practice. Make it visible! Let's see how.

recruitment





Recruitment starts with translating your need for personnel into a vacancy text. Then, you disseminate this vacancy and wait for the applications. Now the selection process starts and once that is done, you start inviting the ones you selected. The interviews with the selected candidates take place and then you make your choice.



The vacancy **text**

In an ideal i-SME, there is specific attention for the vacancy text: on the content and on the text itself.

Some simple tips make it easy to ensure possible candidates with a disability feel confident to apply: **be specific, clear and open** and, if possible, make use of special vocational service providers.



tip 2

Take a thorough look at the vacancy text. **Only include what is really necessary.**

“In former days, we would ask for a driver’s license if traveling is needed in the job. Now, we realize that travelling can also be done by public transport or any other means. And this is why we **now mention that you need to be able to travel.**”

“If special skills are needed, we formerly asked for a diploma that shows you have a proof of ‘having these skills’. **Nowadays, we ask for the special skills.** Because you might have learned them in your former work, or anywhere else.”

“Formerly we wrote ‘you need to be enthusiastic and dynamic’. We liked the words and wanted all candidates to be this, although it wasn’t really clear why we wanted this for the job. As if somebody quiet and secure wasn’t able to carry out the work in the most effective way. We learned to delete those words and **only go for the essence!**”



Check the text on all words, whether they are clear and can be interpreted in only one way

"Before, we used 'you need to be multi-deployable'. It was difficult for interested candidates to interpret what we meant by that. **Now we make it clear** where the candidate will be deployed, that can be two places, then we define two places."



Stimulate people with a disability that match the criteria to apply

"We know we are allowed to openly stimulate candidates with a disability to apply. Since they form a minority in our company, it is generally allowed to mention it, to **eliminate the inequalities between people** without disabilities who work and people with disabilities who work."

"We indicate in our vacancy text that 'we invite everyone who meets the minimum job requirements and has a disability for an initial interview'. That is **positive discrimination** and it gives them an advantage."

An ideal i-SME uses the 'usual' **dissemination channels**, like special sites on the internet, or in newspapers or branch-related magazines. Above that, the i-SME contacts special vocational service providers, since they guide people with disabilities to work, and because of their intensive guidance, they have a clear view of the possibilities of their candidates.



Contact special vocational service providers

"We work together with this service provider; they have job coaches and candidates and **they support us in making the match** between what we need and the candidates. It saves us a lot of time; they are really partners for us."

"The service provider's support has been fundamental, being always available within a phone call's reach, **establishing a relationship** of great trust and honesty. They reassure us that we will not be left 'hanging' if something goes wrong."

In an ideal i-SME, the selection of the applicants combines job requirements, and with the skills and competencies of the applicants. The i-SME excludes all other factors, like the names of the applicants or when they mention they have a disability. How can you make sure you are selecting the best matching candidates?



tip 6

Make a list of requirements, based on the vacancy and rank your candidates based on this

“We introduced working with tables with a list of requirements, to make use of the objective information mentioned in the application letters of the candidates. It really took some time getting used to **working in this objective way**. The tendency to immediately put letters of candidates mentioning a disability aside, ran deep. Now, I am happy that we are doing this in our company and I am pleasantly surprised by the choices of candidates we have made.”

An ideal i-SME ensures to include sentences in the invitation about accessibility and specific needs in order to invite all applicants to open up about specific requirements for the interview.

Ask in the invitation whether there are specific requirements needed.



tip 7

“We always include the following sentence in our invitations: Do you need any specific requirements concerning the time and place of the interview, or **is there anything we need to think of** when arranging the interview? Candidates really appreciate this; young parents appreciate it, as well as the few candidates with a disability we have.”

“We once invited a person in a wheelchair for an interview on the second floor and we had no elevator. We felt really embarrassed, and decided such a mistake was once and never again. And that’s how it is now, we know what to think of **when inviting someone with a disability**.”



All those involved in the recruitment process of an i-SME are trained in 'how to interview somebody who has a physical, intellectual, sensory or psycho-social disability'. In this training, they become aware that 90% of the interview is the same with all candidates, only 10% needs specific attention.

Offer those involved in the recruitment process a half day training in 'disability awareness'



"We learned to communicate in a clear way. We **skip metaphors, make short sentences, we avoid jargon and difficult words**. It was difficult in the beginning, now we feel much more comfortable ourselves."

"We know all our candidates want to make a good impression. We once had a candidate that did not look at us, which feels strange. We now know **he was very interested in the job**, although he appeared not to be."

"We give all our candidates time to answer, although this sometimes takes more time than we are used to. Again, it doesn't say anything about the intellectual capacities of the candidate, **that's what we have learned.**"

"We always organize a tour through our company, that gives candidates **a good view on the work** and the context of the work."

Ask the candidate what is needed to perform the work



"We know most adjustments have to do with hours and time of working, and being **respected by colleagues.**"

"In our case the necessary adaptations, such as the presence of a colleague to face the employee's insecurity, arranging the transport to the workplace, or the timely reinforcement of the employee necessary for a predictable increase in the work volume, **have been taken care of from the beginning.**"

onboarding



Onboarding means the period before the start of the new employee and the first period at work. The first step, before the start, is to check the company's accessibility. The second step is to discuss with the new employee what information will be given to colleagues, what support is needed from them, and if applicable, what supervision or external support is needed.



Third, there are subsidies and other facilitative incentives when hiring someone with a disability that might apply, and are worth to be checked. Finally, in the first period of work, an i-SME ensures the new employee is introduced to the colleagues, and supported in getting to know the job.



tip 10

Before the **start**

An ideal i-SME has done a check on its accessibility once they became inclusive, though when a new employee starts, there is always a check once again whether all accessibility issues are still taken care of.

An inclusive SME always carries out an extra check, and offers the new employee with a disability a tour in the company, to find out any other aspects that could welcome a change.

Check your accessibility in general

“We have checked our building. We imagined someone who was deaf, someone who was blind and someone in a wheelchair. We found out we needed **support from experts** to look for all accessibility aspects. They checked once more. That really helped us. In the end, only some small adjustments were needed.”

“The job coach advised us to look at ‘how to get in and around the building’ and also to look at ‘how to get out of the building when there is an emergency’. We never thought of that part, now we have included ‘**how to get out**’ in our accessibility plan.”

“We made adjustments inside the building. For the outside it was more complicated, we only had stairs. Then we were advised to ask for **a subsidy to adjust the outside**, now that is arranged too.”



tip 11

Take a tour through the company to find out specific accessibility aspects

“We hired an administrator who was wheelchair-bound. On her tour through the building, it turned out she couldn’t open the glass swing doors, they were just too heavy. We readjusted all doors. Not only she, but **also all our other employees were happy** that we ‘finally got rid of those heavy doors’.”

“The new employee with a visual impairment asked us whether our company newsletter and all our **company instructions were also available in a digital way**. We arranged it, now we offer it to all our employees.”



In an ideal i-SME, the supervisor and the new employee discuss the integration process together. This is something very individual and depends on how the disability impacts the person's functioning in the workplace – the information you disclose with the rest of the staff should always be agreed upon with the employee with a disability.

tip 12

Discuss together with the new employee about how to inform colleagues

“We know our workers are open to their new colleague. Still, they need to know what is expected of them and what kind of support is needed. We also support the new employee with how to be open where needed. We learned a lot from the job coaches; they are trained in providing everyone involved with **simple and functional information**, always only related to the job.”

The arrival of the new employee with a disability will not lead to a reduced production, a reduced customer satisfaction or a higher workload for colleagues. If doubts or fears arise on this issue, assure your team that in an inclusive SME value creation is the central topic.

tip 13

Explain the role of the new employee in relation to workload distribution

“The new colleague takes away some of the work our mechanics are happy to hand over to somebody else, now they can **focus on their core tasks**, which they like and it is also good for us as a company.”

The ideal i-SME actively looks for all kinds of subsidies and other facilitative incentives. It takes some investment of time to find out 'how it works', but it's a worthwhile investment. There is always something of which the SME can benefit that positively influences their decision process of hiring.



tip 14

Spend time finding out about subsidies and other facilitative incentives

"In the beginning, we thought we had to pay for the loss of production ourselves. Then we found out, we could receive subsidies for this. We also learned about receiving support of a job coach. It all **made it much easier to hire our employees with a disability.**"

"We receive a 50% compensation for the loss of productivity, which does not only reflect the employee's functional performance, but also **the adaptation effort conducted by the company**, in terms of needs for supervision, for example."



tip 15

Create mentorship for the onboarding process

All new employees need support and guidance; this is the reason for the onboarding process in the company: preparing all workers on welcoming all new employees, with and without a disability. In an ideal i-SME, there are always colleagues open to support and guide new employees in this onboarding process. In an inclusive team, colleagues help each other to get acquainted to work processes and common procedures; described and undescribed.

"Our chef baker has the seniority to guide the new employees. He knows exactly what needs to be done, he knows the traps in the beginning, and is able to **explain all the tasks in a very clear way.** He also has the patience to support this new colleague to become a really good assistant baker!"

"Every employee with us has to be trained, that's nothing new for our people. We always look at who is new and who then takes on the supervision. The arrival of **this new employee is no different from others.** It is always tailor-made and there has to be a click or it will not work."

"We made **a short film of our company** and the work that needs to be done. This was really helpful for all new employees, also for those who had difficulties reading. "

For the new employee with a disability, the level of needed support diminishes over time. The duties are known, the work environment and the colleagues are becoming more and more familiar, as well as the tasks and procedures of the company. The guidance that is still needed after this onboarding period is usually limited to a few minutes per day or per week.



An ideal i-SME knows there will always be some form of guidance needed and arranges this by appointing one person within the company as being 'the contact point' for the employee with a disability, who the employee can always fall back on. Most often, this will be the supervisor.

tip 16

Appoint one person to be **'the contact person'**

"I start and end the day with a **short conversation of five minutes** with this employee. I find that it's enough to take the pressure off the day and catch things at the end."

"I talk to her for an hour a week about how the work is going and what she encounters. With other employees it takes me ten minutes at most. I have incorporated that coaching time into my targets and **I still come out positive.**"

the long term:





the ideal i-SME

In an ideal i-SME the supervisor ensures that the new employee with a disability can function optimally in the workplace. The supervisor of the i-SME does this by being clear about the range of tasks, and not adding tasks or increasing tasks without discussing this with the new employee. The i-SME supervisor also motivates and stimulates the new employee while carrying out the work.



tip 17

As supervisor, be clear about tasks and stick to agreements

"I saw her carry out the work, she was fast and I wanted to reward her by giving her more work. She felt proud and took the extra work and then, after two days, she completely dropped out. I had to learn about her limits, **as with any new employee**. I will now stick to what we agreed upon, and stimulate her, that is best for all of us."

"We sometimes forget that our employee has some limitations - **difficulties have always been overcome with ease**. Supervision is essential, mainly to give simple, clear and short instructions, accompanying him in his daily work routine, reassuring him in his tasks through clear instructions."

The i-SME supervisor regularly discusses expectations, wishes for growth and development opportunities with the employee. The i-SME supervisor knows what steps are possible and which ones are not: the very small and less obvious steps and the bigger, more obvious steps. Every step is a step forward.

Include career thinking



tip 18

"He is very strong in details, **I saw possibilities to create a new specialist function in my company**, to find out how to optimize our working lines and I offered him the possibility to follow an education in this. He took this opportunity with both hands."

"In the beginning she worked on the production line. She is very accurate and we offered her the possibility to check the products on the line. She was nervous about this career step and it took some time for her to get used to it. She overcame her nervousness and we are **very happy with her accuracy in this new role**."

In an ideal i-SME all employees, staff and supervisors are open for colleagues who might need some extra support, might have some habits that differ from the general ones or might have some adjustments that are needed to carry out the work in an optimal way.

This same i-SME looks for new employees with a disability meeting the skills needed for the job. And, even more important, the i-SME looks for employees with a disability that are motivated to work there, that are open to learn and follow the cultural norms and mores of the company. When recruiting and hiring employees with a disability, the matching and, more importantly, this motivation needs to be clearly present from the beginning. The i-SME makes this clear at the start, to all involved in the recruitment and hiring process.

Be open about the importance of **motivation and willingness to learn**



tip 19

"In fact, it only requires, as already indicated, **understanding and flexibility** of our side and a clear motivation and a positive attitude from the applicant with a disability."

"During the first year, our disabled employee learned and developed ways to overcome his limitations, adapting his interaction with the work tasks and gaining skills. The only necessary adaptation was to give him time to learn the craft in his own way, and from the moment he achieved that goal, he has been perfecting his skills to mastery. Our relationship reflects a bond we try to establish with all our workers: of **mutual help, collaboration, and familiarity, but also of demand, professionalism, and quality.**"

And then, last but not least, it always takes 'two to tango'. There is a role for those who guide applicants with a disability and for the applicants with a disability. They have to take the requirements seriously, to prevent disappointments on both sides.

The i-SME makes this clear from the beginning, in their advertisement and in their contacts with vocational service providers for people with disabilities.



tip 20

Ensure your **requirements are taken seriously**

"We need workers that match. In the beginning, we often had to disappoint candidates, because of their mismatch with what was needed in the job and our company. It took some time for the vocational service provider to understand the seriousness of our requirements, now we **cooperate in a satisfying way.**"



One more thing...

When searching for answers about what makes the SME and ideal i-SME, there is always this first question, which has to do with the 'whom' and the 'what'.

We know, based on our meetings with owners and staff of SMEs, and based on research, that without the people in a company being open to recruit and hire a person with a disability, nothing happens.

Though, at the same time, we know, based on the latest insights of behavioural change, working in daily practice with tools and tips that support you in recruiting and employing persons with a disability can directly change the behaviour of owners and staff of SMEs: they become more open, just by using the tools and following the tips.

With this knowledge, we know while advising SMEs how to be the ideal i-SME, we have to focus on both the persons as well as the tips and the tools. This is what we have done. If you want to be the ideal i-SME, use this practical information about what to do when, in recruiting and employing persons with a disability.

Then again, there is this question that employers successfully employing persons with a disability ask us: why do you emphasize on the disability? This person is working in our company and is perfectly able to do the work! We indeed match the work and the person, though still: don't we all have something that demands a tailor-made treatment?

And, we agree with these employers, they are right; everybody has a unique way to handle things, even you! Still, to take away some of the myths around employees with a disability, we went to all phases in work and formulated tips as support. After having scrolled through this brochure, you make your own decision!



Inclusion simply makes great enterprises



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