

Never work alone

Building social dialogue with and for executives

Union work

The team behind your representative

Remote coaching

How to supervise employees who work from home?

Future reorganisations

“Even if you see it coming, it is still a very emotional process”

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Colophon

ACV Kader is the network for professional and managerial staff within ACV. The framework has grown from the LBC-NVK, recently ACV Puls, but since 2018 also addresses managerial staff and knowledge workers who are affiliated at ACV BIE. This publication appears four times a year and is sent to all members.

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Preface

Your vote for more job satisfaction and job security

You achieve more with dialogue. In addition, you do not work on job satisfaction and job security on your own – not in a complex organisation, not in a company undergoing a complete reorganisation, not in a quickly changing working environment, not even in a company where it is nice to work. Dialogue about possible improvements is essential for creating an optimal working environment.

Over the past few months, constructive dialogue with a focus on specific results for executive staff has inspired hundreds of executives to present themselves as a candidate for this year's social elections, which have been postponed and will take place from 16 to 29 November. They want to represent their colleagues, and many of them deliberately want to do this by means of an AVC mandate. This is because ACV not only represents all employees, enabling the trade union to focus strongly on collaboration, but also plays the executive card. ACV explicitly supports collective trade union work on behalf of executives via 'ACV Kader'. This network provides executives with excellent support and an interactive range of services. We highlight this strong framework on page 8.

Our framework programme for the elections? You can read all about it on page 4. On the basis of our many contacts and conversations, we have developed an election programme we know our executives feel strongly about. What we offer is not a detailed reference work, as each company has its

proper context, but rather a bundle of recognisable concerns executives want to address, preferably in consultation with management.

Our programme centres around constructive, powerful social dialogue, which we promote strongly among executives and the management. The added value of dialogue resulting in a more transparent and fair remuneration package, a better work-life balance etc. should not be underestimated. Voting for an ACV Kader candidate is voting for recognition, dialogue and result. Organised consultation ensures a reliable partner for your employer and a credible mouthpiece for you and your colleagues.

Will you vote for an ACV candidate in exchange for 200% commitment?

[Sandra Vercammen](#)

Social elections

Sandra Vercammen



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Vote for social dialogue with and for executives

Postponed but not cancelled: the social elections have been deferred to the period from 16 to 29 November. As the date draws nearer, we would like to remind you of what the elections are all about: we want to work towards a positive, result-oriented dialogue between executives and the management. The impact of the coronavirus crisis on the position of executives has made this more imperative than ever.

In addition, we are committed to supporting our executive representatives even better so as to cater to your concerns as well as the concerns of other members even more effectively. This article explains how we will address topics such as a transparent and fair remuneration package, (un)limited flexibility and availability, career opportunities and workability in the long term, the role of executives and social dialogue in practice.

A transparent and fair remuneration package

Each employee wants to know what they will actually receive at the end of the month. Executives are also entitled to know this. We therefore keep on advocating transparency, objectivity and verifiability of the remuneration package. The reward for work performed is increasingly undermined by the highly variable nature of the (fixed) remuneration package, which is expected to further increase in the current context. Fringe benefits or copyright fees furthermore increase wage flexibility. The often arbitrarily defined group of executives has to be able to conclude wage agreements just like any other group of employees.

Our commitment

- Supplying tools to calculate the actual impact of policy proposals regarding the remuneration package (short and long-term income security) and informing employees on this topic. You need to see the whole picture in order to be able to make well-considered choices.
- Engaging our negotiators and remuneration experts to give advice on wage policy.
- Sharing inspiring examples of social dialogue about wage setting for executives.

Limits to flexibility and availability

Executives can claim compensation for overtime work. This sounds great, but the reality isn't as rosy. Online facilities and flexible working hours, possibly in combination with telework, often result in very long working days and sometimes require us to work during the weekend and in holiday periods as well. Unpredictability causes additional stress, and official disconnection times have not yet become customary. Under the motto "part of the job", employees take the performance of all sorts of peripheral activities for granted as a matter of course. In short, many men and women find it difficult to set limits and to combine their job and their private life.

Our commitment

- Organising legal training on working time legislation and providing information and tools. This will enable us to raise awareness among executives: the legal working time limits also entitle you to claim compensation for overtime.
- Promoting consultation on disconnection, in particular in case of telework, now that this form of work has been rapidly introduced, often without any appropriate agreements.
- Distributing inspiring arrangements, for example with regard to limits to availability, room for recovery, disconnection and customised flexibility.
- Promoting 'customisation as a solution', or helping spread the idea of a human resources policy that starts from how people want to work.



Social dialogue for executives

Executives want to participate in decision-making. This is the signal we have been given on the shop floor over the past four years, and this is also the result of the research efforts by HIVA - Research Institute for Work and Society and VUB. We see executives engaging in constructive dialogue with the management to find solutions for issues that really matter: a fair remuneration package, work recognition, long-term workability, etc. High-quality dialogue with significant direct involvement of each group of employees is the best recipe for high employee satisfaction. Respect for each group's unique character is essential in this respect. In addition, an integrated HR approach is indispensable for a strong result.

Our commitment:

- Elaborating a dialogue concept and supporting social dialogue on the shop floor in line with the needs of executives.
- Spreading inspiring examples of companies where collective agreements have been negotiated for executives.
- Organising communication and social dialogue training and supporting executive representatives in linking their mandate in the works council and the committee for prevention with the group of executives.
- Engaging our specialists and field experts to provide negotiation training so as to enable executives to address their concerns and deliver specific sustainable results.

High-quality work and the executive's role

Executives are under considerable strain. They are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, so to speak. The workability of executives often suffers from internal competition and a lack of close collaboration. Dismissal procedures for executives are less transparent or have not been negotiated, and a poor or more distant relationship with their own executives can have a detrimental impact on their performance. This in turn affects their leadership quality. An executive who is accessible, helps find solutions, dares to make decisions, motivates people, engages in fast, open and honest communication during physical conversations, inspires autonomy and confidence, etc. helps create workable work. But an executive who abuses information and trust and shows signs of being a control freak or a workaholic can cause a lot of damage. Executives and their communication style play a decisive role in reorganisations as well.

Our commitment

- Investing in a vision of sustainable and humane leadership.
- Making companies and organisations aware of the importance of executives and leadership for high-quality work and integrating this importance into a human resources policy.
- Offering executives an exchange platform as well as training and coaching opportunities with input and support from external experts.





The above is only a selection of topics that really matter to executives. We commit to supporting the elected executive representatives in their role and assignment in the coming four years. Within this scope, we rely on the expertise of our organisation and the input of our members.

Career opportunities and long-term workability

You want to maintain a healthy work-life balance, in all stages of your career. A lot of employees want to work less hours or stabilise their job at a later age. The lack of a career policy is a pressing problem in this context. The reactions of our members show that it is crucially important to cater to the individual situation – working less hours, stabilising their job or changing jobs. The cliché of an over-fifty employee with a burnout is absolutely inconsistent with reality, but at the same time we have noticed that people are worried about the pace. How long can you keep up with the high-speed train? The wage policy factor once again plays a certain role in this context. Executives sometimes refrain from making a career move because of wage policy incoherencies. Employees simply earn disproportionately less in certain positions. In addition, employees may opt for less wage in certain situations so as to facilitate other career possibilities. We should dare break taboos in this context.

Our commitment

- Deploying training experts to shape a structural, proactive career policy and a training policy with as many career options as possible.
- Sharing good practices and experiences with regard to the executive's important role in opening career opportunities, including in the case of reorganisations.



Union work

Lieveke Norga



The team behind your representative

Rest assured: the person representing you in the social dialogue with the employer for the next four years is well supported by ACV. Our representatives can rely on a team of experts and coaches who are happy to advise and assist them together with the trade union secretary. Who are these experts? Let's listen to some of their stories.



Sebastiaan
(Training department employee)

Focus on the person behind the employee

“I provide training to representatives. These trainings always give me a big boost, in particular in situations where we help a representative address a specific issue that has bothered them for quite a while. We share tips and experiences as a group and discover new possibilities. To me, these trainings are a success if the participants have learned all kinds of new things and implement these lessons on the shop floor with a great deal of enthusiasm.” Over the past few months, we have had to adapt quickly to the exceptional circumstances so as to continue to provide training to and exchange ideas with our representatives without physical contact.”

“It always strikes me how much knowledge and experience we have in-house. The representatives learn a lot from each other and share their practical experiences. They gain insight into the rights of employees but also into their own possibilities to perform their trade union duties well. They find out how to get the most out of negotiations with their employer and how they can involve colleagues in this process.”

“I hope that employers will pay more attention to the person behind the employee in the future. When employers address the media, they usually talk about higher profit margins, competitive positions and flexibility tailored to their needs. Fortunately, the reality is more nuanced: plenty of employers recognise the importance of motivated and healthy employees. It is unacceptable that more than half of all people in Flanders do not have a workable job and that an increasing number of employees suffer from stress and burnout. This is where trade union work demonstrates its value: we can unite employees and stand up together for a pleasant and safe job that can easily be combined with family life and leisure activities.”

“We want employees to unite and stand up together for a pleasant and safe job that can easily be combined with family life and leisure activities.”

©Daniel Bys



Bram
(legal expert at the Research department)

Importance of a long-term vision

“These are interesting times for a trade union. People are sufficiently aware of the major transitions, such as digitisation and the shift towards a sustainable economy. But the practical implementation still requires some efforts. It is part of a trade union’s responsibilities to develop a long-term vision in this regard. Everyone is encouraged to act especially in the short term, and it is a challenge to reflect about how we can break the deadlock.”

The practical implementation of the shift towards a sustainable economy still requires some efforts.

“During trainings, I introduce representatives to the technical elements of a case. I point out that the legal aspect is only one element and that other factors also play a part in determining a possible global approach. I have a lot of autonomy and the possibility to set priorities within a framework. That is very important to me. I make suggestions for new collective labour agreements still to be negotiated and I point out gaps in the legal framework. At the same time, I offer valuable direct information to committed people. This information ranges from detailed notes to texts for a much wider audience. I really like this variety.”



Sandra
(ACV Kader officer)

Delivering customised services at all times

“I’m responsible for ACV Kader, the network that brings together employee representatives and experts. We support the executive representatives and experience on a daily basis the relevance of bringing colleagues from various sectors together to address specific topics such as working hours, disconnection from work and participation on the shop floor. It is fascinating to put all this information at the disposal of executives who contribute to the social dialogue in their company. I get a lot of satisfaction from our efforts to provide customised services and from seeing the results.”

Transparent arrangements and serene dialogue help balance the individual employee’s role and the employer’s responsibility.

“Lifelong learning and personal development should be our number one priority as AI, digitisation and globalisation present us with significant challenges. Transparent arrangements and serene dialogue help balance the individual employee’s role and the employer’s responsibility.”



Jan
(communication advisor)

Focus on job quality

“Expectations change, the context is evolving. Sometimes very quickly, like during the coronavirus crisis. It is really fascinating to contribute to innovation within ACV. There will always be a need for trade unions, but I gladly help us let go of all stereotypes and clichés.”

“I gladly help us let go of all stereotypes and clichés.”

“The Communication department develops numerous tools for our representatives. These tools make it easier for them to find the right information or make correct calculations in an efficient manner and to approach colleagues and interact with them. We have devoted particular attention to this interaction over the past few months, as the number of people who telework has soared and the distance between co-workers has inevitably increased as a result. However, we also like letting them have their say in our communications, so I often listen to the stories from the shop floor. This way, I try to map out the needs, so that ACV can give the right message.”

“We have been working on quality of work for a long time, and I think this topic is only gaining in importance. A lot of people have questions. How do you achieve a healthy work-life balance? How do you hang on to your job if the pace keeps on increasing? How do you maintain a good balance when working from home? The answers to these questions are to be found in the context of the different companies. Our future representatives should spend a lot of attention to these issues as far as I’m concerned!”



Fatiha
(organiser)

Being close to the representatives

“I support our representatives by adopting an accessible approach and being close to them. Sometimes it suffices to exchange ideas about a specific situation, and sometimes more intense guidance is required. In the latter case, I help them develop a plan and a strategy step by step. That is also what I really like about my job. I come into contact with a lot of different people in different situations. And I can look at the specific context and assist them with my experience.”

“Insights from colleagues in the field represent a very valuable addition to the structures that are set up by senior management..”

“If I could choose a topic that should receive additional attention during the social consultations in the next four years, I’d go for work organisation and the importance of input from people in the field. Insights from colleagues in the field represent a very valuable addition to the structures that are set up by senior management. The social dialogue is an excellent platform in that regard.”

Remote coaching

Jan Deceunynck



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“Stay in touch as much as possible”

Companies have switched to telework en masse over the past few months. According to the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), barely 11% of employees teleworked one day a week prior to the coronavirus crisis. The SERV does not yet have any figures for the current year, but reports in the media suggest that, in some sectors, up to 75% of employees worked from home at the height of the health crisis. And telework became a lot more intensive, as people worked from home more than just one day a week.

The exact extent of the increase will become clear once the situation has stabilised. But there has no doubt been a significant and permanent increase in the use of telework. This situation presents team coaches with a new challenge: how to coach a team without or with hardly any physical contact?

Jeroen Lebotte has built up quite some experience in remote coaching over the years. At Telenet, he leads a team of about 30 internal and external employees responsible for the installation and maintenance of approximately fifty large and small data centres in Belgium and Luxembourg. They also carry out work on fibre-optic networks for major customers. “I have been remote coaching for a long time,” he explains, “but this extent is also new to me. I used to see my co-workers on a weekly basis, now once a month at the most. Coaching has become an even greater challenge as a result.”



Informal contact

What is the main difference with an office-based team?

Lebotte: The coffee breaks or informal contacts which inform you about how your team is doing, what their concerns are, what is going well and what is not. Face-to-face contact is always the strongest form of interaction. Prior to covid-19, I used to experience this when making phone calls in my car on the way home. These informal phone calls with my colleagues often revealed issues that would have remained undetected if there had only been formal consultations. Unfortunately, I no longer commute by car. Of course, I can still phone my colleagues, but the calls during the ride home were the conclusion of my working day.

What have you learnt from the coronavirus crisis?

Lebotte: I have learnt to take into account the circumstances in which people work. I do not have children myself and I like starting the day early, so a meeting at 8 a.m. is fine for me. However, as this usually is peak hour for my co-workers, it is better to leave them alone and move that meeting to 9 a.m.

What do you think the future holds for telework?

Lebotte: I suppose the current extent of telework will be reduced a bit. On the other hand, the office concept is 100 years old, so an update is really in order. Offices remain useful for creative work, as a

place where people can come together to look for innovative solutions or brainstorm. I am convinced that office work will become more high-quality, while everyday tasks will be performed from home. I am pleased that major companies such as Telenet set the example in this respect.

Trust

How do you keep a check on your team members and their performances?

Lebotte: I don't really like the word 'check'. It all revolves around trust. If someone is systematically cutting corners, it will always come out in the end. But what matters to me is output. If you coach and motivate your team members adequately, they will not just achieve their objectives but go the extra mile as well. So checking the number of hours worked really is a thing of the past, as far as I'm concerned. Telework requires more from employees, so it is fair to allow some flexibility in exchange. Over the past few months, the required output has been delivered, even at times when things were very busy due to covid-19.

Do you have any other tips for colleagues who now have to provide remote coaching?

Lebotte: Stay in touch as much as possible! Organise short meetings or even coffee calls more often to maintain contact. Otherwise, the baggage of frustration will only grow. It is better to address this baggage right away than allow frustrations to accumulate. Digital meetings can sometimes feel a bit strange, but the more frequently you hold them, the more successful they are. It sharpens your senses, which is not a luxury since the visual aspect is mostly lost. Even if you use a camera during meetings, you miss a lot of visual information. Also allow for breaks in between meetings. Digital meetings are more intense, so ten minutes between two meetings enables you to have a coffee or stretch your legs, like you used to do when walking from one meeting to the next.

Reorganisation

Jan Deceunynck



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ACV FEARS WAVE OF REORGANISATIONS

“Even if you see it coming, it is still a very emotional process”

Covid-19 is not just a health crisis, but also makes economic victims. The first bankruptcies have already appeared, but there is reason to fear that more company closures and reorganisations will follow. Kader asked three trade-union secretaries with ample experience in this regard for their opinion.

“You can usually see it coming,” says ACV-Puls secretary Robert Veekman. “Fixed-term contracts are not extended, revenues are in decline,” he explains. ACVBIE secretary Peter Goris is also familiar with the signals: “increasing unemployment among blue-collar workers, changes in management, layoffs of executives, poor economic and financial results, objectives not being achieved ...” But even if you see it coming, it is still a very emotional process. “These are human dramas you can do little about,” says Peggy Schuermans from ACV Puls.

Once a reorganisation has been announced, it is time for the trade unions to take action. Robert: “The first thing I do is properly inform the trade-union members about the procedure, but also about the emotional aspect. I warn them that it is the beginning of a tough period with ups and downs. Everyone will be affected sooner or later.” A lot depends on the relevant experience of the trade-union representatives, according to Peggy. “Since a reorganisation takes place once a year at Signify, the trade-union members are well aware of what it means. However, I remember a



Robert Veekman



Peggy Schuermans



Peter Goris

reorganisation at Pentair, a very quiet company with good social consultations, where it was like a bolt from the blue. That was very difficult.”

Coaching

In principle, the actual negotiations are conducted by the representatives. “They take care of the negotiations and we provide back-up support,” Robert explains, “but these roles may change somewhat if the representatives are inexperienced. Then I act as representative from time to time,” Peter adds. “A secretary’s task primarily consists of ensuring that the legal procedures and sectorial or collective labour agreements are complied with. It is therefore important to know the company. This is one of the reasons why we at ACVBIE advocate replacing the secretaries as little as possible and allowing them to develop expertise in a particular sector or at particular companies.” Consultation between the trade-union delegations is important too. “Sometimes we first need to come to an agreement, but in the end we all work towards a common goal,” Peggy says.

This common goal is of course the best possible arrangement for those affected. “Our primary objective is to save as many jobs as possible,” Peggy explains. “And come up with a social plan that offers acceptable prospects for those who are laid off. This is more than just money: outplacement and training are also important tools to help people on their way.” Peter stresses that it is not just about those who leave the company: “Those who stay behind and suddenly miss their colleagues also need to be supported and possibly be included in the social plan.”

Budget

“The employer is often willing to reach a compromise. But on the other hand, reorganisations

involve a lot of money. And in case of international groups, there is often a fixed budget which the local management cannot change,” Peggy says. There are many kinds of employers. “In a recent reorganisation at a plastics company located in Germany, the managing director made every possible effort to minimise the number of lay-offs,” Peter explains. “But at a construction firm that recently laid off a few white-collar workers to present even higher profit figures to the Besix group, the employer wrote ‘does not meet the criteria’ on the dismissal form of one of our members, who had never got any comments in his 30 years of service. These things really make your blood boil and remind you why trade unions are so important!”

Even though reorganisations are never pleasant, those affected can be grateful sometimes. “I remember Crown Cork, my first real closure case. I did not feel good about the social plan we concluded then, but unfortunately it was the best we could do. Yet when we proposed it to the employees, we were applauded. The plan was better than they could have hoped. We really had made a difference as a trade union.”

In time of reorganisations, trade-union membership makes no difference. And that bothers the secretaries a bit. “Some people think they can act as a freeloader,” Peter says. “They believe they can take advantage of those who pay membership fees. But at some point, there will not be enough paying members. And then the freeloading will be over.” However, there are differences in the services provided. “Members can at all times have a calculation made of what a plan means to them personally. Especially in case of a bankruptcy, ACV membership pays off.” She believes a good social plan is the best promotion for trade unions. “Then people will more easily consider becoming a member!”

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