

Never work alone



WAS EVERYTHING BETTER BEFORE CORONA?

“Lockdown made us think about work processes”

E-learning

Will 2021 be the year of the breakthrough?

Labor market

The job market was hit hard

Providing leadership

“Keeping my team members engaged was not easy”

In this issue

03

Preface

On top of the classics such as “good health and the best of luck”, we would like to a little addition for you: lots of job satisfaction!

04

Working from home

“Successfully working from home requires a different mindset,” says business psychologist Bart Wille.

07

Providing leadership

Team leaders in the healthcare and retail sectors guide their workers through turbulent corona times.

10

Looking for solutions together

ACV employees guide you through the legal tangle.

12

E-learning

Will 2021 be the year of the breakthrough?

14

Labor market

The corona crisis has a significant impact on the labor market. The higher educated are likewise impacted.

Never work alone

General coordination

Sandra Vercammen
Sudermanstraat 5
2000 Antwerpen
tel 03 220 87 37

Project coordination

Lieveke Norga
Sudermanstraat 5
2000 Antwerpen
tel 03 220 87 92

Executive committee

Monique Vanwalleghem
Dirk De Cuyper
Jelle Vercoutere
Tom Bervoets

We welcome your questions and remarks:
kader@acv-csc.be



Colophon

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

Editing: Sandra Vercammen, Lieveke Norga and Jan Deceunynck

Design: www.x-oc.com

Press: Artoos Communication Group

RP: Sandra Vercammen, Sudermanstraat 5, 2000 Antwerp



Preface

Lots of job satisfaction!

The new year is an occasion to extend others your best wishes in everything. On top of the classics such as “good health and the best of luck”, I would like to add a little addition for you: I wish you lots of job satisfaction!

The past year has shown once more just how meaningful our jobs are in our lives. It hardly bears repeating just how much our job satisfaction was compromised. Covid-19 was a turning point in just about everything we took for granted. Nothing remained the same, including professionally. As so many of us started working from home, some of our colleagues could be contacted only via our screens. For coaches, keeping workers and teams connected was a tour de force. For workers, safeguarding the limits between work and private life was a challenge. The highly recommended telework did remove mobility-related stress for many employees, however.

Recently I heard a participant’s cry for help during a webinar about the new way of working: *“the employer who was always reluctant to allow teleworking now expects managerial staff to coach, guide and assess employees working from home. But all of this is new for those managers as well. They too are now suddenly forced into the new reality, without the knowledge and skills to deal with it.”* Providing supportive leadership is often not yet a baseline attitude. But the importance of it is even more acutely obvious due to the intensive telework.

By now, we have adapted to the sudden new situation. As a result, it sometimes seems as if we have already internalized the new realities. We

have undeniably taken steps. Yet you and I are still left with a lot of questions. How do I organize my telework? And what about my company car? What is the cost of telework and who pays for it? Do we still need strict work schedules? What meaning does an employer’s authority hold today? Am I still entitled to my own office space? What is the importance of ergonomics? As a manager, how do I ensure sound group dynamics? Where am I in the mobility shift?

We are at a crucial turning point. Whether it concerns mobility, new working methods, learning, supportive coaching ... We have gained momentum in all of these areas in recent months. Covid-19 brings challenges to the surface more than ever. ACV Kader wants to further guide this process of change based on the reality of knowledge workers, managers and executives. You once again gave us a strong mandate to do so during the last social elections. We are proud, glad, and grateful to have once again earned your trust, which is the most important thing to have.

Sandra Vercammen

Working from home

Jan Deceunynck

WORKING FROM HOME IS MAKING US RECONSIDER WORK PROCESSES

“Successful telework requires a different mindset”

A failed experiment. This is what business psychologist Bart Wille sees looking back on the large-scale telework during the corona crisis. An excessively high dose, uncontrolled circumstances and incorrect peripheral conditions meant that we all got the wrong idea of what working from home could and should be. Still, according to him there is a lot to learn from it...

As a business psychologist, Wille tries to bridge the gap between workers and employers in a scientific manner. “We have an objective look at people’s behavior in a professional context. And we share those findings in the same way with both employers and workers. Our starting point is simple: those who feel good about their jobs will perform better. We succeed only when we can increase well-being and productivity at the same time.”

What this requires, he summarizes in a simple ABC: autonomy, belongingness and competence. In the context of working from home, ‘autonomy’ means a certain freedom of choice about how workers want to organize their work. ‘Belongingness’ indicates that they want to stay connected. And ‘competence’ is the desire to be good at what they do. Feedback is a requirement for this.

It is clear that the corona-induced teleworking was not a perfect illustration of this. Hence the ‘failed experiment’. “The administered dosage was far too large,” explains Wille. “Due to the mandatory lockdown, things suddenly went from 0 to 100% for many employees. This does not work. You have to learn to work from home. This takes baby steps. There was also no time to discuss this telework. It all had to happen very quickly because of the mandatory lockdown. And on top of that, all lifelines for teleworkers were also shut off. Schools were closed, the children are suddenly around the house all the time, and grandparents were not allowed to help out.”

Not an ideal context to familiarize oneself with a new way of working. Lots of room for improvement. “Employers, workers, scientists, politicians,... will all have to think about how work from home can be embedded in our work organization,” explains Wille. One thing is crystal clear to him: “One size fits all won’t work. There is no system that works for everyone. The circumstances and needs are different for everyone.”

Hybrid form

Quite a few employers were obliged by the crisis to let their workers work from home. This blew the doors wide open. But not always wholeheartedly. “I am still often still startled at the mistrust and negative premises employers harbor against their

workers.” However, they do realize that working from home is here to stay. At the same time, the initial enthusiasm shared by many home workers is also somewhat nuanced. They are happy about saving on commuting time and with the improved interplay between work and family. However, at the same time they have become more aware of the added value of social contact and office work. “Sometimes you have to take something away to demonstrate its value,” Wille explains. According to him, the solution lies in hybrid work forms that combine the best of both worlds.

Because working from home offers considerable advantages for everyone involved. “In the past, all office work was organically intertwined. Working from home makes us reconsider our processes. Did it make sense to drive to work with the laptop every day to do things one could be doing just as well or even better at home? Is it not more efficient to sometimes isolate yourself so that you can continue working undisturbed? But at the same time there are things that work better when people meet in person. Digital meetings are not a full substitute for physical contact. This is something we learned by now as well,” Wille explains.

***“Keeping contact is important.
But it’s not the same as keeping
control.”***

Providing leadership

Leadership is also interpreted differently by working from home. “You are forced to let go of a bit of control. You still want and need to manage and know what your employees are doing, but you can no longer observe them. You can still try through tracking systems that measure how much time workers were active or how many keystrokes they logged on their keyboard. Or by having them indicate in an Excel sheet every evening what they did that day. But these things do not work. They are also very demotivating. It is better to focus leadership on output, to provide coaching on a project basis. Staying in touch enough to know what is going well and what is going wrong. What difficulties are encountered. How people are doing. Keeping in touch is therefore important. But that is not the same as scrutinizing.”



Working from home also requires a different mindset from team members. They have to learn to plan and estimate how they can best achieve results. The organization can also foster this by providing workers with new skills such as time management. “The resulting gain is tangible for both parties in the short term,” says Wille. “There is no harm in employees knowing that things are challenging for their managers as well. Working from home is a shared responsibility. If workers show that they can handle their responsibility through a proactive attitude, this gives their managers confidence.”

Working out routines

Guarding borders is also a shared responsibility. The temptation to do more work than in the office is real because of the absence of the commute that marks the start and end of the working day and because of the ever-present computer. “Workers

must learn to deal with this and set boundaries. Or work out routines. I myself reserve a time slot around noon to go out for a walk. I cannot be bothered to in the evening, because then it is dark and cold. A walk is much nicer around noon. Everyone will have to find similar routines for themselves that prevent them from working too long. As a manager you should of course pay attention to this, but it is not easy,” he says. “It is important to formulate mutual expectations.” In any case, he is not arguing for collective solutions such as shutting down the network outside office hours. “Because this in turn does not respect the work schedule of other workers who want to be active at that time. But I do indicate to my workers that I do not expect them to respond immediately to emails I send outside of regular working hours. The work schedules that work for me are not the norm.”

Coaching

Jan Deceunynck

CORONA IN THE HEALTHCARE AND RETAIL SECTOR

How to navigate your team through troubled waters?

Two sectors that have been blown completely off course in recent months are the healthcare and retail sectors. Due to the contamination risks and the large number of covid-19 patients, the healthcare sector transformed towards an unprecedented long-term crisis approach. In the retail sector - certainly in non-food - everything suddenly came to a standstill for a second time now. Kader magazine asked two managers from the relevant sectors who are also present in the workplace themselves, how they experienced this period of crisis.

Ann Snoeckx is store manager at the WE branch in Turnhout. With 38 years of seniority under her belt, she has seen it all. However, this double lockdown was a first for her as well. Gunther Groenen is responsible for the biotechnical department of the Hospital Network Antwerp (ZNA). During the crisis, his team had to ensure that all available medical equipment was brought to where it was most needed.

How did you experience the corona crisis?

Ann: Our stores were closed during the lockdowns. But that does not mean we had nothing to do. I have not had a single day off in the past period. We continue to take care of the shop windows and accommodate the transfers from our shops to the e-com department. Our stock is also used for shipping to digital customers. Furthermore, there are calls with management, there is the need to divide the available work between the team members and the organization of a multitude of training courses. The latter are on a voluntary basis and are not considered working time. However, there is a certain amount of pressure to follow them. That is not easy, certainly not for colleagues with young children.

Gunther: It was more hectic than usual. There was always a need to quickly address current developments. A department that was converted into a Covid department needed a change of equipment,



Ann Snoeckx

for which we then had to look at one of the other branches of the group, or had to rent or buy. The physical relocation of the equipment was not the most difficult part. A lot of time was spent making arrangements about what could be relocated or not from where. I did manage to find my groove in this hectic atmosphere. For years, I have been involved in (crisis) management as a volunteer for the Flemish Cross. I was also there in a leadership position during the 2011 Pukkelpop disaster. This was also a situation in which we had to pivot and improvise on the spot. And above all, stay calm. By the way, I received compliments from my team members for staying so calm and bringing a sense of calm to the team. That was nice to hear.

What were some of the difficult times for you during the crisis?

Ann: Keeping my team members engaged was not easy. You see less of them during periods of temporary unemployment. Some fell back to 7 hours a week. It is difficult in such a situation to keep an overview of what you already communicated to whom. Even when the shops were open, workers sometimes worked only few hours and were often still temporarily unemployed. It is more difficult to keep everyone involved under these circumstances. The workload was also greater at the same time. We had to do the same work with fewer people because we only managed half of the turnover. And during the second lockdown, fear for the future struck a number of colleagues. What will happen? Will the store even reopen? What if there are layoffs?

Gunther: For us, it was not always easy to know who was running the organization. We already had a complex structure with different branches and departments. But this was aggravated even



Gunther Groenen
© DANIËL RYS

further. Who is at the wheel? After the first crisis things remained busy for a while because all of the equipment had to be returned to its original location. And now everything has moved back again. Things did move more quickly the second time around. Many arrangements had already been made during the previous crisis.

Were there also things you happened to like about the crisis?

Ann: Not really. Except that I became a grandmother in September, in between the two lockdowns. But that is not what you meant, is it? (laughs)

Gunther: I was actually in my element. I drew a lot of energy from the hectic pace. And from the appreciation. There was also more cooperation between various departments, because we had a common goal, namely to tackle this virus.

What could have made your task easier?

Ann: Communication is difficult. I have no work computer and have to make do with my personal belongings. I am doing this interview on my smartphone. At the beginning of the call my battery was at 100%, it is now only at 70. It is difficult to work like this. At work I have a computer, but it does not have a sound card. So it is not useful for online meetings either.

Gunther: Smoother communication and flow of information. And quicker involvement. That could have prevented quite a bit of panic. But we have learned from it. During the second crisis, there was much more clarity about who was allowed to make what decisions. Better agreements have been made with the non-acute hospitals, we have a better overview of what is available in-house and the shortage during the second peak was mitigated by

purchasing extra equipment. On the other hand, almost all activities were halted during the first wave, while this time around attempts were made to maintain a number of activities. Which meant that we now faced new challenges.

How do you keep in touch with your colleagues?

Ann: Primarily via WhatsApp. In our staff group, I communicate who can work when. But we also use this group informally. We share jokes or fun messages to keep the mood buzzing. A lot also happens via email with my own superior.

Gunther: I mainly keep in touch through Teams. More than before. During peak periods, we had a short meeting every day. This has slowed down a bit, but Teams is here to stay. We used to meet physically, always at one of the locations. But this was always a difficult trip for colleagues. Often it simply did not happen. It is now easier via Teams. I also try not to go overboard with communication. Because of excessive communication, my employees grew a bit weary of information during the crisis. As a result, they sometimes risked missing out on important information.

How do you view the future?

Ann: I am incredibly excited to see the shops open again. It can also be done safely, because we have put a lot of effort into safety for customers and staff. Disinfecting changing rooms, steaming clothes, continuously disinfecting cash registers, never allowing more than 35 people in the shop at the same time, ... But the future does seem a bit gloomy to me. I fear it will take some time. And this year's crisis has hit the numbers hard. The e-com department is doing well, but of course it does not make up for all loss of turnover. I am fearful of store closures and layoffs. We are lucky that we are not a listed company and that the owner of WE absolutely lives for the company.

Gunther: I hope that the crisis will lead to enhanced structure within the organization. The crisis has shown that such a need exists. And it would also be nice if a number of procedures could be relaxed. During the crisis, everything could and had to run very quickly and smoothly. Hopefully we can review a number of strict procedures and make decisions more autonomously.

Services

Jan Deceunynck



© DANIEL RYS



© DANIEL RYS

LEGAL ACV PROFESSIONALS GUIDE YOU THROUGH A LEGAL TANGLE

“Looking for solutions together”

Do you have a legal question about your job? You’ve come to the right place: ACV. Hendrik Blondeel and Ann Dili work at the legal department of ACV and know the ropes. “Listen and analyze,” this is the essence of their job according to Hendrik. “Because the question put to us is often a steppingstone to a more complex problem. It is then up to us to gauge what the author of the question really wants from us.” Ann adds: “Together with the member, we look for the best way to tackle the problem.”

What kinds of questions do people put to you?

Hendrik: They run the gamut. They are also increasingly complex. Wages, working hours, notice period, copyright, non-competition clause... Often a combination of a variety of issues. Then it is up to us to analyze what the underlying question actually is. And especially what exactly is expected of us. Some members primarily want our advice and then approach their employer themselves. Certainly workers who are confident like to tackle things personally on the basis of the legal information they receive from us.

Ann: But there are also members who want us to contact the employer. Sometimes even with very high expectations which we then have to tone down a little. Trying to “get back at” your employer because you are disgruntled about being laid off is not the best way to get things done. Then we try to look objectively at what is demonstrably incorrect and whether we can correct it. Initially in consultation with the employer. Sometimes we also go to court, but often what people want is not legally enforceable. A dismissal can feel very unjust, but still be legally sound.

Often the actual question also belies a multitude of secondary questions. Then you need someone knowledgeable on the matter who will show you the way out of the legal quagmire.

How do people react?

Ann: Then they are of course disappointed. Fortunately, these are exceptions. Most of our members are open to reason.

Hendrik: Over the years I have learned to be very open and honest. I try to avoid overly high expectations from the start.

Ann: If someone comes to us with an impossible question or expectation, I have already learned that it is best to say so immediately. That yields more satisfaction than if you try to take it on, but inevitably fail anyway. At that stage, failure is much more difficult to accept.

Hendrik: If we clearly explain from that start what is possible, people understand. The law is what it is. Sometimes there are imperfections, sometimes you cannot enforce what you would want to. And a disjointed employment relationship with a reluctant employer is also difficult to rectify legally.

Doctors sometimes complain about patients who consult ‘Doctor Google’. Are you sometimes confronted with members who scoured the internet?

Ann: Sometimes. We do notice that people often look for information themselves. On the internet, from friends, from the union. Sometimes they come to us for a ‘second opinion’ or they check our information with others afterwards. People shop around more than they used to.

Hendrik: But the solution is usually not so easy to find on the internet. Legislation and jurisdiction are highly complex! And often the actual question also belies a multitude of secondary questions. Then you need someone knowledgeable on the matter who will show you the way out of the legal quagmire.

Ann: I have also had members ask us to thoroughly comb through their final account settlement upon their dismissal because they believed something was off. But then we found that mistakes were also emerging in their favor. Good thing they did not immediately challenge them on a whim. Because then they would have risked even more.

You are of course usually contacted when things go wrong. How can people avoid getting to that point?

Ann: We are increasingly being asked for contract advice. This is always a good idea. Because the moment you sign, you are recording a number of things on which you cannot renege afterwards. So it cannot hurt to take a good look at it and to know what is in your contract. We are happy to take a look as well. We know what to look out for. You can always ask your employer for clarification before signing. Of course, not every provision in your contract is exactly how you prefer it. There is always some give and take. But it is always good to at least know what exactly is included and to what you and your employer are committing.

**Do you have a question as well?
Contact us at acv-kader@acv-csc.be.**

E-learning

Vic Van Kerrebroeck



FLEMISH GOVERNMENT IS FULLY COMMITTED TO E-LEARNING

Will 2021 be the year of the breakthrough?

Flemish Minister of Labor Hilde Crevits and the Flemish government seek to foster e-learning in 2021. They wish to encourage Flemish people in taking up more courses. A large-scale survey last summer showed that more than 8 in 10 of Flemish course providers have partly converted their offer to online learning because of corona. This was not without its niggles, and generated practical problems as well as legal obstacles. This is why Minister Crevits is currently developing an action plan. Whether this will sufficiently account for the scientific findings on e-learning remains to be seen. We have read more on this topic in 'A Skeptic's HR Dictionary' by Patrick Vermeren, which we discussed earlier in Kader Magazine.

2021 is set to become the year of the training course. Minister Crevits spoke of the start of the *'learning twenties'*. An action plan proposes an additional range of training courses as well as the use of new technologies and a screening of the own regulations. After all, until recently, Flemish training leave was only possible for classroom training. Starting this school year, it will also be applicable to digital courses. In addition, Syntra Flanders will set up a pilot project 'instructive e-learning network' to exchange knowledge and expertise on e-learning.

In *'A Skeptic's HR Dictionary'*, author Patrick Vermeren critically breaks down a variety of HR practices based on the most leading scientific theories and findings. He also devotes a chapter to e-learning. The corona crisis has forced this method of learning down a rapidly accelerated path these past months. Workers who previously received additional training in classrooms had to switch to studying behind their laptop for safety reasons. It seems very likely that this way of learning will continue to expand in the coming years. Through hybrid forms in combination with physical training moments, or otherwise.

Will this lead to better results, higher success rates, enhanced participation and increased efficiency? Will e-learning lead to lifelong learning gaining a real foothold? Possibly. But it is by no means an easy task.

Indeed, research shows that e-learning can only be successful under very specific conditions and for certain types of subjects. For example, e-learning works well for teaching facts and data and to e-learners with specific personality traits: meticulous, methodical, goal-oriented, and motivated. Unfortunately, the vast majority of potential e-learners does not meet those characteristics.

Research shows that as many as 95% of workers who start an e-course do not finish it.

Moreover, online training courses also lack elements that course participants can only experience in a real physical classroom environment: the teacher's passion, questions from the teacher to the group or individual participant, individualized feedback from the teacher to the course participant, etc.

A human is by definition a social being from an evolutionary point of view. This also has consequences for the way we learn - including in a professional context. As scientific research shows that people still learn best as part of a group. And that certainly applies to matters related to interpersonal *soft skills*. People mostly learn these from each other.

If the government and/or the social partners therefore want to focus more on e-learning for safety or efficiency reasons, they should not lose sight of a number of key considerations. For what themes is this feasible? To what audience possessing what basic skills do they want to appeal? Also, what substantiated methodologies can be used. For the time being, research, as mentioned above, shows that only a small proportion of predominantly highly educated and well-motivated workers have the drive to successfully complete an online training course.

The bottom line therefore seems to be: e-learning can sometimes be a step forward, especially in combination with physical group training. However, it is not a good idea to focus solely on e-learning. From a scientific point of view, it is not a good idea for all subjects and for all target audiences. No need, then, to write off traditional training courses in equally traditional classrooms. Not even in the so-called *'learning twenties'*.



THE JOB MARKET WAS HIT HARD

Safely navigating your career through the corona crisis is not something you do on your own

The corona crisis has a significant impact on the labor market. It does not impact all profiles to the same extent. However, groups that have felt invulnerable in the past are likewise affected. Among the higher educated, the impact is even greater than average. The hardest hit are academic bachelor's degrees.

For the first time in almost five years, job opportunities are looking worse than the year before. Positive growth has stopped. The number of vacancies is declining, particularly in the business and financial sectors, but also in social services.

KULeuven university saw a decrease in the number of vacancies in the database it offers to its students. Employers are less keen to attend the annual job fairs - although the forced switch to an online approach will undoubtedly also play a role in this.

Perhaps you started your studies fully convinced that you would be selected for a position before you even graduate. Things are not quite turning out that way.

Flanders	October 2020	Annual difference
Inactive jobseekers	191.477	+4,1%
Highly educated	40.544	+7,3%
Graduate HBO5	2.925	+11,3%
Professional bachelor	18.157	+5,5%
Academic bachelor	3.383	+14,6%
Master	16.079	+7,1%

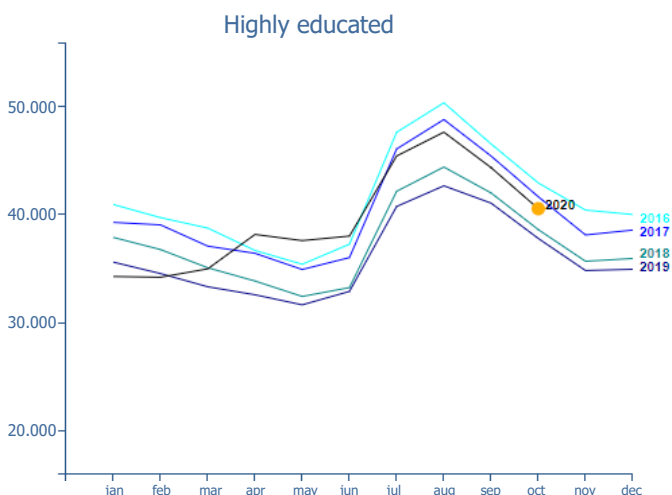
Source vdab: https://arvastat.vdab.be/arvastat_basisstatistieken_werkloosheid.html

Number of inactive jobseekers by level of education in October 2020

Precisely this year, the Flemish government decided to tighten the conditions for career coaching and significantly reduce the budget. The number of hours of coaching per worker is reduced. And above all: from now on you must be able to present 7 years of work experience in order to be eligible for coaching without having to bear the full cost yourself.

That is unfortunate. Certainly at a time when the facts show that finding a job that matches their profile is not an easy task at all for young people. Getting your career on the right track sometimes requires very deliberate redirection. Perhaps you started your studies fully convinced that you would be selected for a position before you even graduate. Things are not quite turning out that way. Or perhaps you made a hasty choice during that first application, possibly under pressure from your parents, loved one, partner or the drive to

To be clear: despite corona, the ACV Kader team will be present via webinars to get to know the school leavers and their concerns.



Source vdab: https://arvastat.vdab.be/arvastat_basisstatistieken_werkloosheid.html

Number of inactive highly educated jobseekers (graduate + bachelor master) compared to the past five years

stand on your own two feet? Sometimes that first job does not quite match the rosy picture painted at job fairs or employment interviews? Or is it just difficult to 'find your way' through a succession of application letters or within the organization where you are working?

WORKING ON JOB SATISFACTION

As a member you can therefore, even as a recent graduate, turn to the ACV to get on track for the career of your dreams. Your job satisfaction, this is what it's all about for us. Regardless of your right to career vouchers from the Flemish government, our Center for Career Development offers robust coaching in the shaky labor market. The career coaches developed a specific range to help young people who do not yet have 7 years of professional experience on their way. This range includes a mix of thinking exercises and assignments, but also individual coaching discussions that link the 'desire' to find the right job to tips and ways to get there.

What is the best way to go about your search? What can you change about your current job? How do you best handle that difficult conversation with your manager? What competencies do you still need that may lie just outside your comfort zone? In short, how can you evolve your career the way you want it to?

Curious about this opportunity to more closely align your career with the career of your dreams? Our coaches are happy to tell you more during an initial meeting. You will then receive online access to the thinking exercises and reflection assignments. You mutually agree on the three individual coaching moments. This can take place at the office or online, but also during a walk. The choice is yours.

This free offer only applies to ACV members. All information via www.loopbaanontwikkeling.be



Never work alone

Quarterly ACV-magazine
for professionals and managerial staff

Receive Kader digital

You prefer to receive this magazine by mail?
Send your e-mail address to
kader@acv-csc.be.