

## Exploration of some of the 7 concepts identified as constituting a “circular” HRM

### Business Case: VO Event (Belgium)

VO Event is an event agency based in Brussels. A first team is in charge of event communication (B2B or B2C) which consists of the organisation of conventions, conferences, team buildings, corporate parties, etc. A second team offers "incentives" consisting of trips, sporting challenges, team buildings off the beaten tracks, etc. A third team specializes in organising events for European institutions such as congresses, conventions, activations... VO Event employs about 30 employees with different profiles.

Interview: Alexandre Velleuer, Managing Director

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### Context:

VO Event began its ecological transition several years ago and, according to its current leader, with a view that was probably a little too radical at first. "Sustainable development and circularity are values that have always spoken to us," says Alexandre Velleuer. The mistake we made was to tell ourselves that we should either go for it completely or not at all. We then realized that we had to move with it gradually and rather focus on what could have a real impact, with the aim of proposing events that were more in line with our values. Events are by definition ephemeral and often relatively polluting, especially in the management of fixtures and dismantling. » In 2019, the agency took a step forward with the creation of a toolkit – called "Circular Event Toolkit" – to create a virtuous circle of circular economy reflexes among all stakeholders of the event organisation business. Developed in open innovation, in collaboration with the agency *Sense*, specialized in sustainability, and Emmanuel Mossay, expert in circular economy, this toolkit will be shared with the actors of the industry, with a view to serving the ecosystem. "Our challenge is to dare to shake up habits," he says. "The solutions proposed by the toolkit are, for the most part, not so complex; however, they call into question the ways in which agencies, suppliers and customers have been doing business for years." The toolkit has been developed in several stages: a 4-month audit of past events, an analysis around 8 topics (furniture, decoration, food, place, waste and consumables management, signage, give away and goodies, mobility), a test, sharing and application phase, notably through a LAB with a few suppliers. **We therefore found it interesting to see to what extent this**

reflection around circularity in business also extended in the management of the agency's human resources.

### Concept 1

**The design of « work practices » and « work spaces » , emphasising maximum positive impact on a worker during his/her employed experience in the company and beyond**

When VO Event began offering services that took into account these dimensions of sustainable development and of circular economy, reactions emerged from within the company reflecting a need for consistency between what the agency offered its customers and the ways of operating in the company. "For three years, we worked on this consistency. For example, we have obtained an eco-dynamic business label. We adapted our car fleet to make it more environmentally friendly. Work has been carried out on the wage grid to make it more balanced, which is always a challenge in an SME. Particular attention has been paid to employees' happiness, with a number of actions and an index to measure how people feel within the company and identify avenues for improvement. This search for coherence has not only focused on the environmental aspect, but also on the social level, collective dynamics and a form of corporate responsibility to grow employees."

### Concept 2

**Process of understanding and responding to the needs of workers to optimise redeployment within the same company**

The economic reality of the event industry means that VO Event cannot afford to recruit people with long experience. "The average age is 33-34, with some forty-year-olds and three fifty-year-olds. In an SME, career development is possible – the most senior ones have evolved in their positions and have taken on responsibilities within the organisation, with management roles or changing positions – but the opportunities are obviously much more limited than in a large group. Nevertheless, there are cross-cutting developments, as was the direction of the colleague who was the driving force behind the development of the 'Circular Event Toolkit'. He has extensive expertise in all matters of sustainability and has developed a specific expertise in circularity. On this basis, new services are offered to our clients in a consulting process to accompany them in their transition to more sustainable events. This person has officially become our reference in sustainability and circularity."

### Concept 3

**Supporting the reintegration of a worker so he/she, following a period of leave (short/long term) can continue to be employed in his/her original function or in a new role within the same company**

"The event industry is among the most stressful one. The pressure is enormous on the profession as such. We have taken initiatives on working hours, but the schedules remain specific, with evening events and project management that involves more work as we approach the date of the event. Training was carried out with the management to detect and avoid deviant practices that could lead, involuntarily at times, to burn-out situations. We have had some successful reintegration experiences of colleagues who have experienced burn-out, sometimes with a gradual and accompanied return to our work environment, sometimes with an orientation on other directions."

### Concept 4

**The mentorship of a worker who is considering leaving the company (e.g. due to retirement, or the completion of a project) to apply their skill-set in a different role within the company**

"In our sector, the experience of the business is irreplaceable and creates value. We put our employees in a position where they will be able to share their experience as much as possible with the youngest employees, in an informal way. This type of mentorship is organised as an internal dynamic, but it is also done in a societal perspective, towards the external. We have also developed the VO Academy, a programme of online courses taught by collaborators and open to all in order to share expertise with everyone."

### Concept 5

**Categorising the skill set of workers with a view to planning and implementation of worker-centred strategies that optimise the categorised skills set within a company ecosystem.**

In professions related to events, the issue of sustainability is central. "The future of our industry depends on projects that must be sustainable and integrate digitalisation. On the theme of circularity, we have set up a program to take ownership of our Toolkit, through training and collective intelligence workshops. In this type of process, the injunction does not work. There is a need by employees to take ownership of the values, that they participate in the reflection and nourish it." More broadly, VO Event has been organising trainings in collective intelligence since three years to integrate it into the day-to-day management of the company. "It is essential that each person is able to participate and contribute to the develop-

ment of strategies and concepts using this method, by integrating more people, more external expertise, into creative thinking. Each person in the organisation can contribute and bring value to topics that are not their direct responsibility.”

### Concept 7

**Supporting the transition of worker into the external job market where a worker is no longer meeting the requirements of their current contractual obligations or when the needs of the company are changing**

VO Event has a coaching program that can be activated depending on certain situations, different problems that need to be solved. "If a person is too tensed or tired, a coaching can help take a step back," he says. Among our four coaches, one specialises in career changes and accompanies people to think about what a new life could be if they wish so. People who have experienced professional burnout and want to explore other paths can use it, even if sometimes they prefer to distance themselves from the company. We try to be the most open about the different possibilities that can be found so that a departure takes place in the best conditions.”