



Inclusive Job Design works

What 321 analyses tell us about work, inclusion and the conditions that make it succeed

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A different conversation about inclusion

For decades, efforts to improve the employment position of people with disabilities or other labour market disadvantages have largely followed the same logic: raise awareness among employers, appeal to their social conscience, offer subsidies as an incentive, and hope that enough of them open their doors. Some do. Most do not, because goodwill is not a sustainable basis for a hiring decision. Inclusive Job Design (Inclusive Job Design), known in the Netherlands as ‘Functiecreatie’ and in Norway as ‘Inkluderende jobbdesign’, is built on a different premise entirely. It does not begin with the candidate's needs. It does not ask employers to be generous. It begins by looking at what is already happening inside an organisation. Specifically the gap between what highly qualified professionals are trained to do and what they actually spend a significant part of their day doing. It maps the supportive tasks embedded in their roles, separates them out, bundles them into a new position, and shows the employer that filling that position with someone from the target group solves a problem they already have.

That shift, from asking employers for a favour to offering them a solution is a structural difference in approach, with measurable consequences for uptake, sustainability and scale. Understanding it matters for anyone responsible for shaping inclusive employment policy, running a vocational rehabilitation organisation, or advising employers on inclusion at a strategic level.

This article draws on a database of 321 Inclusive Job Design analyses conducted across nine European countries between 2011 and 2025. It describes what the evidence shows: where the approach works, why employers engage with it, what the real challenges are, and what the field still needs to do better. Organisation names and advisor names are not included.

What is Inclusive Job Design?

Inclusive Job Design is the umbrella term for the reorganisation of business processes and the reallocation of tasks, so that highly skilled personnel can be deployed more effectively for the work they were actually trained to do. Administrative, logistical, organisational and facility tasks, mostly repetitive in nature and not part of anyone's core professional role, are identified, separated out and bundled into one or more new work packages. These packages are then embedded back into the organisation's work processes as new positions. Because these positions are designed around supportive tasks rather than professional qualifications, they are accessible to people who would otherwise remain outside the labour market.

The consequences for the existing workforce are consistently positive. Professionals freed from tasks that distract from their core work report higher job satisfaction and are able to contribute more fully within their area of expertise. The new positions are real jobs, embedded in normal working environments, doing work that has genuine operational value to the organisation. Since the new job is created around work the organisation already needs done.

What makes Inclusive Job Design distinct from most other disability employment approaches is where the analysis starts. It starts with the organisation. The first question is always: where is qualified time being spent on work that does not require those qualifications? The answer to that question is what creates the space for an inclusive role. The candidate fills a need that already exists. That is a fundamentally different conversation from the one most employers are used to having about inclusion.



Where is it being used?

The database covers 321 analyses across nine countries. The Netherlands accounts for 256 cases (80%), reflecting both the density of the practitioner network and the distinctiveness of the Dutch legislative context. The Participatiewet (2015) and the Banenafspraak create concrete employment obligations for a large share of Dutch employers, supported by a subsidy infrastructure, wage cost subsidies, no-risk policies, mobility bonuses, that lowers the practical threshold. For policymakers, the Dutch case is instructive: Inclusive Job Design does not flourish in a vacuum. It flourishes where the policy environment makes inclusive employment a real business consideration, not just a moral aspiration.

Norway contributes 30 cases (9%), Belgium 20 (6%), with the remaining cases from Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The Norwegian cases are notable for their financial rigour, 86% include a quantified business case, compared to 67% in the Netherlands, and for increasingly framing Inclusive Job Design as a workforce strategy in response to structural staffing shortages, particularly in healthcare. Belgium's growing case count reflects a maturing policy environment around the Individueel Maatwerk instrument in Flanders. Switzerland's 6 cases (2%), concentrated in 2025, reflect early-stage adoption of the methodology. The core business case is the same as elsewhere: separating support tasks from qualified professionals frees capacity, improving productivity, quality and workforce efficiency.

The sectors represented span healthcare (93 cases, 27%), production and manufacturing (65, 19%), government (38, 11%) and education (30, 9%), with retail, transport, construction and energy making up most of the remainder. This spread is significant: Inclusive Job Design is not a niche methodology for a specific type of organisation. It has been applied, tested and validated across the full breadth of the economy.

Table 1. Distribution by sector, with the proportion of cases that include a financial case

Sector	Cases (n)	% of total	Financial case: Yes
Healthcare	93	27%	70%
Production / Manufacturing	65	19%	72%
Government / Public sector	38	11%	68%
Education	30	9%	66%
Energy / Utilities	15	4%	73%
Retail	14	4%	64%
Transport / Logistics	12	4%	83%
Other	53	16%	-

Percentages rounded to whole numbers. Financial case % calculated on cases with known value only.

Why employers engage, and what that tells us

Understanding employer motivation is important for anyone designing policy, developing training programmes for rehabilitation professionals, or building the case for Inclusive Job Design within an employer federation.



The most frequently cited motivation, in 86% of cases, is labour inclusion and social responsibility. But that figure is easily misread. Look at what sits alongside it: legal obligations and quota pressure (42%), cost savings (41%), the operational need to free up qualified staff for core work (36%), overtime reduction (25%), and staffing shortages (21%).

The picture that emerges is of organisations that come to Inclusive Job Design because they have a real problem and discover that the solution also happens to be an inclusive one.

That sequence matters enormously for policy design. An approach that works when employers have an operational problem to solve is fundamentally more scalable than one that depends on their goodwill. It means the conditions for success are partly within the control of policymakers and rehabilitation organisations: create the right incentive structures, train advisors to lead with the employer's problem rather than the candidate's needs and make the financial and operational case visible before the social case is even mentioned.

Quote: The company operates in an industry with a significant shortage of skilled labour. A regional workforce analysis projected a 17% shortfall in skilled construction workers by 2030. To address this shortage, the company wanted to investigate whether Inclusive Job Design could be used to deploy support workers so that skilled workers could focus exclusively on their core tasks.

For vocational rehabilitation organisations in particular, this framing has direct implications. The traditional positioning of a rehabilitation centre, as an organisation that prepares candidates and then approaches employers on their behalf, is subtly but importantly different from positioning as an organisation that helps employers solve workforce problems, with the candidate as part of that solution. The first asks for a favour. The second offers a service. The evidence suggests the second is considerably more effective.

Table 2. Frequency of employer motivation themes across 321 cases (multiple themes per case possible)

Motivation theme	Cases (n)	% of cases
Labour inclusion / social responsibility	277	86%
Legal obligations / quota	135	42%
Cost savings / financial gain	133	41%
Freeing up qualified staff for core work	117	36%
Reducing overtime and workload pressure	82	25%
Staffing shortages / recruitment difficulties	69	21%
Productivity / efficiency improvement	42	13%

What work gets redesigned?

The task mapping process at the heart of every Inclusive Job Design analysis asks a deceptively simple question: what do the people in this organisation actually spend their time on, and which of those activities do not require the qualifications of the person performing them? Cleaning and tidying tasks appear in 77% of cases; logistics and materials handling in 71%; administrative support, scanning, registering, scheduling, answering phones, in 52%; catering and food preparation in 51%. The pattern is consistent enough to be predictable: in almost every sector, a significant portion of a qualified professional's day is spent on tasks that are routine, repetitive and separable.



Quote: A ward with ten nurses, each spending 45 minutes per shift on supply restocking, equipment movement and room tidying, represents 37.5 hours per week, not spent on patients; nearly a full-time equivalent of nursing hours in most European countries. Multiplied across a hospital or a care network, the scale of misallocated professional time becomes a compelling policy argument in itself.

Most analyses find between 0.3 and 1.0 Full-Time Equivalent of supportive tasks within a single department. That is enough to build a real job around. For rehabilitation organisations, this is significant: the positions that emerge from Inclusive Job Design analyses are genuine, full-participation jobs, embedded in normal working environments, doing work the organisation genuinely needs done.

What the evidence shows

Across 321 analyses, 79% result in a positive recommendation to proceed. In 48% of cases, a concrete new role is defined with a full task profile, estimated hours and candidate requirements. Only 2% conclude that no viable opportunity exists, almost always because task volume is too small or too irregular.

Table 3. Conclusions and recommendations across 321 cases

Conclusion category	Cases (n)	% of cases
Positive recommendation / proceed	256	79%
Concrete new position defined and described	155	48%
Financial benefit confirmed or described	148	46%
Reduced overtime / workload identified as benefit	106	33%
Social / inclusion value highlighted	95	29%
Not feasible (insufficient task volume)	5	2%

That 79% feasibility rate holds across sectors, countries and organisation sizes. It is the product of a systematic approach applied consistently across an enormously varied landscape of workplaces.

One important caveat: these analyses were commissioned by employers who were already open to exploring the approach. Organisations that found it unworkable before reaching the point of commissioning a formal analysis are not represented. The 79% figure applies to a self-selected group, and is still, in the context of labour market inclusion, a striking result.

The financial case, and why it matters for policy

More than two third, 70% of analyses include a financial case. This proportion is a signal about what makes the methodology persuasive at scale. The most common financial logic is straightforward: a qualified professional costs significantly more than a worker without formal qualifications, and if that professional is spending part of every day on tasks that do not require their expertise, the organisation is paying premium rates for basic work. In 39 cases (12%), a viable role is recommended, and actual figures are calculated, like wage cost comparisons, subsidy amounts, overtime savings in financial amounts. These are the strongest cases. In a further 67 cases (21%), the financial logic is explained in substantive detail. Think of referencing wage differentials, subsidy structures, and expected efficiency gains, though without arriving at a precise total. Together these two tiers represent 106 cases (33%) where a genuine, argued business case accompanies the feasibility finding.



A further 84 cases (26%) record a positive feasibility conclusion, with no further content. It was noted that a financial case exists but did not elaborate. And in 70 cases (21%), a viable role is confirmed, though no financial case is made. This appears typically where the employer's motivation is primarily compliance or social responsibility.

The most common financial logic, where it is properly spelled out, is straightforward: a qualified professional costs significantly more than a worker without formal qualifications, and if that professional is spending part of every day on tasks that do not require their expertise, the organisation is overpaying for basic work.

Quote: In the Netherlands, the gap between a nurse's total employment cost (often EUR 55,000 to EUR 65,000 per year) and a detached target-group worker (EUR 20,000 to EUR 25,000 per year) represents a structural annual saving of EUR 30,000 to EUR 40,000 per FTE — before subsidies are applied.

For policymakers, these figures have a broader significance. They suggest that the financial case for Inclusive Job Design is positive on its own terms. Subsidies, wage cost supplements, no-risk policies, mentor grants, make the case stronger, but they are not what creates it. That is important for the design of incentive frameworks: the goal should be to remove barriers and reduce transaction costs, not to artificially manufacture a financial case that does not otherwise exist.

Norway stands out with 86% of analyses including a quantified financial case, compared to 67% in the Netherlands. This likely reflects an advisory culture in which the business case is front and centre from the first conversation with the employer.

What the data also shows, the full picture

A methodology that is worth investing in is one that can be examined honestly. The database contains genuine signals about what is difficult, what sometimes fails, and where the evidence remains incomplete. These are reasons policymakers, rehabilitation directors and employer organisation need to understand in order to support it effectively.

Staff resistance is real, and needs active management

In 31% of cases, advisors explicitly flag that existing staff may resist or feel uncomfortable with the changes. The concern is usually uncertainty: will this new colleague create extra work? Will existing tasks be reassigned without consultation? Will there be an expectation to supervise someone nobody asked for? This is a consistent finding with a consistent solution: early, transparent communication with existing teams, involving them in the process rather than presenting the outcome as a fait accompli. For employer organisations advising their members on inclusion, this is one of the most practical and transferable lessons in the entire dataset. The technical side of Inclusive Job Design, the task mapping, the role design, is learnable. Managing the human dynamics of change in an existing team is where implementations succeed or fail.

The guidance burden is real, and needs to be resourced

In 38% of cases, the cost and time of mentoring and onboarding a new employee is named as a material consideration. This is where subsidy design matters directly.

Mentor grants, coaching contributions from employment organisations, and structured onboarding support are what makes the difference. Policymakers who design these instruments need to understand these guidance instruments make inclusion more appealing as well as in some contexts make it also financially viable.



What creates the conditions for success?

The analyses converge on a set of factors that consistently separate implementations that work from those that stall. For those responsible for building the infrastructure around Inclusive Job Design, policy frameworks, advisor networks, rehabilitation services, employer support, the following are the levers worth understanding.

The legislative and incentive environment

The Netherlands has produced the most cases by far. The 'Disability Employment Agreement' creates a concrete, measurable target, the subsidy infrastructure reduces transaction costs. And the network of trained Inclusive Job Designers makes high-quality analysis accessible. Countries and regions where Inclusive Job Design is in earlier stages of development might look at the Dutch ecosystem as a design blueprint.

The quality of the analysis

An Inclusive Job Design analysis is only as good as the Inclusive Job Designer conducting it. The task mapping needs to be rigorous enough to identify genuine volume; the role design needs to be specific enough to be actionable; the implementation guidance needs to be clear. Experience matters, and structured quality assurance matters. Vocational rehabilitation organisations that deploy Inclusive Job Design advisors have a direct responsibility for the quality of what those advisors produce.

The employer's own motivation

Employers who engage from genuine operational need, a staffing problem, a cost pressure, a workload crisis, stay committed when implementation gets difficult. Those motivated primarily by compliance tend to do what is minimally required. For employer organisations advising their members, this suggests a clear priority: spend less time explaining the social case for inclusion, and more time helping employers identify the operational problem that Inclusive Job Design can solve for them; the social outcome follows from that conversation.

Is it worth investing in?

This analysis is based on 321 reports. The analytical methodology is reliable. In 79% of cases across a varied set of organisations, sectors and national contexts, a trained Inclusive Job Designer finds a genuine, viable opportunity to create an accessible role. That figure holds across healthcare, manufacturing, government, education, logistics and beyond; a robust finding about a methodology that works.

The financial logic is sound in the majority of cases. Almost two thirds of analyses include a 'financial' case, and most show meaningful savings. The challenges are real but addressable; staff resistance, guidance burden, implementation complexity are barriers to overcome. They are conditions that need active management, and the database shows clearly what helps: early staff communication, properly resourced onboarding, specific rather than boilerplate implementation guidance, and a committed line manager who takes ownership rather than delegating to HR.

The available reports do not contain information about the follow-up, that is the actual placements results. It is yet no part of the advisory procedure and reporting. Having this information would have made the results and this analysis complete. Including this information in a follow-up report is strongly recommended for the future.



Building that evidence base is a shared responsibility, for policymakers who can mandate outcome tracking, for vocational rehabilitation organisations that can build follow-up into their service model, and for employer federations that can make long-term outcome reporting a condition of membership in inclusion programmes.

But the most important thing to say, and to say clearly, is this: Inclusive Job Design is one of the very few approaches in disability employment that begins by identifying where organisations are losing time and money and offering a solution that works on the employer's own terms. The fact that this solution involves employing someone who would otherwise struggle to find work is the outcome.

For policymakers, that means investing in the infrastructure that makes good analyses possible at scale: legislation that creates employer incentives, subsidy instruments that reduce real barriers, and quality standards for the advisor community.

For directors of vocational rehabilitation organisations, it means reframing the service offer, leading with the employer's problem, not the candidate's profile, and building follow-up into the methodology rather than treating it as optional.

For those within employer organisations responsible for inclusion, it means helping members find the operational conversation that makes Inclusive Job Design relevant to them specifically, rather than relying on social obligation to do work that operational logic can do better.

The evidence from 321 analyses in nine countries is that, when those conditions are in place, Inclusive Job Design delivers; consistently, practically, and in a way that makes sense to employers on their own terms. That is a foundation worth building on.

About this analysis

This article is based on a database of 321 Inclusive Job Design analyses conducted between 2011 and 2025 across nine European countries. All organisation names and advisor names have been anonymised. Quantitative findings are derived from systematic coding of the full dataset. The structured database underlying this analysis was built with the support of the Claude API (Anthropic), which was used to systematically extract and code key variables from the source documents. This approach made systematic analysis at this scale feasible. The resulting dataset and article were reviewed and verified by the authors. Percentages are rounded to whole numbers. Cases where source documents were unreadable (18 cases) are excluded from thematic analyses.

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