

DIVERSEurope

Methodology for the identification of best practices in Cyprus

To compile two best practices identified in the rural Small-medium Enterprises (SMEs) context in Cyprus, the Center for Social Innovation (CSI) first utilized the results of WP2 T2.1 Mapping of the Current Situation in the Workplace to advise the next steps of its methodology. From a range of SMEs based in rural areas in Cyprus, CSI narrowed down the list based on the criteria of WP2 T2.2 which is to “identify success stories of diversity policies in the workplace [...] and provide practical advice on the means, tools and activities that have been used to achieve this goal”. As such, CSI first carried out preliminary research on several SMEs, including reviewing their website, vision, practices and principles, which further narrowed down the list of SMEs to be used as Best Practices. Afterwards, CSI contacted via email and/or via phone several businesses to ask them whether they wished to share a best practice they apply internally in the context of diversity policies in the workplace. Of the business that agreed to participate, CSI chose two Best Practices as the most relevant and suitable for the purposes of this analysis.

Both organizations are run by women with whom we had the interviews with. During the informal interviews over the phone, we collected relevant information in order to develop a rather comprehensive profile for each practice by using a questionnaire with open-ended questions. Below are the two practices:

Best Practices

Best Practice 1: Idaliades Chalkanor, Cyprus

Organisation:	<p><i>What type is the organization that has implemented this practice? Provide information of the sector, number of employees etc.</i></p> <p>Idaliades Chalkanor is a women-led department headed by young women and women of advanced age, operating under the SME of Chalkanoras Idaliou – a community-based organization, providing social and community services. (Approx number of employees 9)</p>
Objective:	<p><i>What is the objective or purpose of the practice? (Brief description)</i> <i>What are the requirements to implement the practice?</i></p> <p>The best practice identified as implemented by Idaliades Chalkanoras promotes diversity through the active inclusion of women of young and advanced age in the decision-making process, as well as in supporting local women in kicking-off their business idea through the provision of trainings.</p> <p>Internally, Idaliades Chalkanor is a workplace where its mainly women employees are in a position to make decisions, set up strategy and roll out local initiatives that support local women in various ways.</p> <p>Externally, Idaliades Chalkanor has a simple, yet challenging vision: to empower women of the rural area. With the help of the local women volunteers, Idaliades Chalkanor supports other women in starting their own business, promoting existing small businesses run by women, organising fairs, social activities (music nights, road trips) and upskilling women of the area through the hosting or by facilitating their participation in educational seminars.</p>

	<p>In order to achieve that, Idaliades Chalkanoras facilitated women's of the area attendance to educational courses offered by the government, while the volunteers help the women to complete the relevant applications. The courses are mainly in entrepreneurship, leadership, English as a second language etc.</p>
Beneficiaries:	<p><i>Who are the beneficiaries (direct or indirect) of the practice?</i></p> <p>The beneficiaries are women in the specific rural area who wish to participate in the activities of Idaliades Chalkanor in order to socialize, network and learn about how they could one day lead a business.</p>
Context:	<p><i>What was the initial situation and its specific context? What are the specific difficulties that the practice seeks to address?</i></p> <p>The practice aims to address common barriers faced by women who wish to kick-off a business idea, such as traditional gender stereotypes, lack of financial resources, low trust in their potential to succeed. This practice not only promotes women's overall professional empowerment, but also acts as a hub for inclusion for women of advanced age who are more likely to be excluded due to their age during recruitment processes by companies. Generally, in rural areas, women are more frequently employed in part-time and temporary jobs than in urban areas. Furthermore, there is a higher concentration of women in lower paid roles, which in turn has consequences on the social structure and women's financial independence in rural communities. Women are more likely to live in poverty or social exclusion than men (COPA, 2017), and these are some of the barriers that this organization seeks to alleviate in their area of operations.</p> <p>Rural areas in Cyprus tend to operate in a context where traditional gender roles are still strong, and thus, the opportunity that Idaliades Chalkanoras offers to women in the rural area to start their own SME is considered both very challenging and important in terms of empowering women's entrepreneurial endeavors and professional development.</p>
Process:	<p><i>Explain step by step the process of the practice to facilitate its understanding and reproduction.</i></p> <p>Two women decided to start their own business. The reason that motivated them to do this is because in the rural area where they live, they had no employment opportunities at all. Mainly, because of the culture that prevails in rural areas, the process of finding employment was hard to be successful. The founding women managed to build a successful organization by choosing mainly women to work with them, with flexible work schedule, mutual respect and a lot of benefits.</p>
Impact:	<p><i>What has been the impact (positive or negative) of this practice on the beneficiaries? Has the situation of the beneficiaries improved with respect to the objectives of D&I implementation?</i></p> <p>Beneficiaries of Idaliades Chalkanor appear to have found a place where they can extend their local network, have access to educational trainings, engage in social activities and empower each other in their personal professional endeavors.</p> <p>Consistent with research on the topic of diversity, such best practices reinforce the findings that majority of women in the workforce makes a company a better place to work, regardless of gender and age. Not only does a higher percentage of</p>

	women in an organization predict less burnout, but more job satisfaction, organizational dedication and meaningful work as well.
Limitations:	<p><i>What constraints or difficulties were encountered in implementing the practice, how were they addressed? And what other constraints may be encountered in replicating this practice?</i></p> <p>Some limitations faced by the implementation of this practice include the difficulty to navigate state bureaucracy to start a business, as well as lack of financial resources.</p> <p>Potential constraints that may occur during the replication of such practice can be the reluctance of women in rural areas to join such initiatives and engage in activities like building a business that are not aligned traditional with persistent gender stereotypes.</p>
Related resources/Links:	<p><i>Establish a list of references related to the practice.</i></p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009409292247</p>

Best practice 2: Nature me – Handmade Cosmetics

Organization:	<p><i>What type is the organisation that has implemented this practice? Provide information of the sector, number of employees etc.</i></p> <p>The name of the second rural SME is Nature me – Handmade Cosmetics, and is located in Lympia village, in Nicosia, Cyprus. Nature me operates in the field health and beauty, and more specifically in creating handmade cosmetics and ointments. (Approx number of employees 12)</p>
Objective:	<p><i>What is the objective or purpose of the practice? (Brief description)</i></p> <p><i>What are the requirements to implement the practice?</i></p> <p>Nature me – Handmade Cosmetics is a women-led business. The best practice identified in this SME is the overall working environment, as it provides flexibility for its employees to work from home, which allows women to create the handmade products in their own time, in their own place. This practice can increase productivity, as people enjoy whenever they choose to come to work and feel appreciated and their work acknowledged. Moreover, the organization sets out to achieve its goals in ethical, environmentally sustainable ways with an elevated sense of purpose to improving the environment and humanity. There are no signs of fear domination bullying or harassment among the ranks of this SME. Furthermore, according to its director, everyone communicates transparently, and there is a climate where differences are resolved peacefully and constructively.</p>
Beneficiaries:	<p><i>Who are the beneficiaries (direct or indirect) of the practice?</i></p> <p>The beneficiaries of this practice are all the employees, who in their diverse backgrounds and characteristics reflect a microcosm of the society. Based on the interview with the founder, the employees are</p>

	<p>balanced in terms of gender, including mothers, employees of all ages, various religions and cultural backgrounds, as well as language skills, physical ability, sexual orientation and area of residence.</p>
Context:	<p><i>What was the initial situation and its specific context? What are the specific difficulties that the practice seeks to address?</i></p> <p>The founder wanted to build a business based on her vision, she wanted to provide flexibility, make the employees feel appreciated, in order to increase productivity. The difficulties they faced on the process were the work-life balance and the dilemma of managing both work obligations and personal affairs.</p>
Process:	<p><i>Explain step by step the process of the practice to facilitate its understanding and reproduction.</i></p> <p>The organization and its employees embrace change, accommodate new trends and technology, and incorporate new skills. As they mentioned “Change is the only constant”. Maintaining a positive work environment helps boost employee morale and productivity, according to the founder. In doing so, the work from home option, gives employees space and privacy to do their work while it establishes communication based on transparency, trust and respect.</p>
Impact:	<p><i>What has been the impact (positive or negative) of this practice on the beneficiaries? Has the situation of the beneficiaries improved with respect to the objectives of D&I implementation?</i></p> <p>The founder wanted to build a business based on her understanding that the work environment can impact the mood, drive, mental health and performance of the employees. If employees work at a dreary office setting with unfriendly co-workers, they likely won’t have enough confidence to speak up. That’s why creating a positive, inclusive and diverse work environment was in the priorities of this business, as this can also lead to the organization’s success.</p>
Limitations:	<p><i>What constraints or difficulties were encountered in implementing the practice, how were they addressed? And what other constraints maybe encountered in replicating this practice?</i></p> <p>While the work from home option can bring new perspectives, it can also increase conflict. More specific, it can develop blurred work-life boundaries and increase isolation.</p>
Related resources/Links:	<p><i>Establish a list of references related to the practice. (If possible)</i></p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063657454918</p>

Conclusion

This list of Best Practices could be much longer. But the key point is that there is a great potential to put entrepreneurship on the map in Nicosia’s rural areas.

What it will take is continued efforts by organizations and SMEs to raise awareness and understanding, identify innovative and good practices, provide opportunities for learning and sharing among public, private, and non-profit organizations and SMEs. A workplace using best practices can bring high value to its employees. Respecting individual differences and creating competitive edge, can be a brave starting point for SMEs in rural areas.