



**Practices of providing reasonable accommodation
for persons with disabilities in the workplace**

24 company case studies across Europe

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Material for publication



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This study has been elaborated with reasonable care. The project co-ordinator and the project team does not, however, accept responsibility for printing errors and/or other imperfections and potential (consequential) damage resulting thereof.

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Introduction

The Council of the European Union adopted in 2000 the Framework Employment Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation to prevent people in the European Union from being discriminated because of religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. With regard to persons with disabilities Article 5 is the most far-reaching provision and can be seen as a consequence of this inclusive concept and social model. It has created an obligation for all employers to provide **reasonable accommodation** for persons with disabilities. This is a consequence of the paradigm shift, that society (and in this case the employer) is in charge of meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities to enable them to fully participate in social (and working) life. Article 5 in the Framework Employment Directive states:

“In order to guarantee compliance with the principle of equal treatment in relation to persons with disabilities, reasonable accommodation shall be provided. This means that employers shall take appropriate measures, where needed in a particular case, to enable a person with a disability to have access to, participate in, or advance in employment, or to undergo training, unless such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. This burden shall not be disproportionate when it is sufficiently remedied by measures existing within the framework of the disability policy of the Member State concerned.”¹

The approach of providing reasonable accommodation implies that any person with disabilities should be enabled “to have access to, participate in, or advance in employment”: The assessment of which accommodation is required has to be based on an individual analysis of the individual needs of the person and the specific working conditions. Therefore, an appropriate accommodation is always an **individually tailored solution**. Thus, it is not to define “reasonable accommodation” in general terms and counterproductive to the intention of Article 5 (Framework Employment Directive) to provide, e. g. in legislation, a list determining what kind of accommodation is required, as this would hamper individual solutions. Nevertheless the Directive itself gives an idea of what can be understood by “reasonable accommodation”. The preamble paragraph 20 speaks of *“appropriate measures as effective and practical measures to adapt the workplace to the disability, e. g. adapting premises and equipment, patterns of working time, the distribution of tasks or the provision of training or integration resources”²*.

The judgement of whether a required accommodation is a **disproportionate burden** is also to be made against the background of the individual case. The Directive gives as a guideline: *“To determine whether the measure in question give rise to a disproportionate burden, account should be taken in particular of the financial and other costs entailed, the scale and financial sources of the organisation or undertaking and the possibility of obtaining public funding or any other assistance.”³*

As the Commission’s policy guidelines and the Directive are addressing the issue of anti-discrimination policy in a broad sense and do not include detailed policy proposals it is up to the Member States to ensure that national policies and legislation meet the

¹ See Council Directive (2000/78/EC) Article 5

² See Council Directive (2000/78/EC) recital 20

³ See Council Directive (2000/78/EC) recital 21

principles of the Commission's policies and the Directive⁴. Therefore, the implementation of the principle of reasonable accommodation can vary according to national framework conditions and legislation. The Member States are adopting different approaches in response to the requirements of Article 5. Differences occur among others regarding where (in the constitution, employment legislation, social legislation etc.) and how the provisions are stipulated (new legislation versus adaptation of existing legislation) as well as the further specification of the terms *reasonable accommodation* and *disproportionate burden* and the role of the public sector. Although the implementation in national legislation in some cases has led to a further specification of what can be classified as reasonable accommodation it is crucial to illustrate the implications of this principle through practical examples.

Therefore, to foster the idea of what reasonable accommodation could be and to raise the awareness among the key players concerned, employers and employees, on how adaptation can lead to a better integration of persons with disabilities in the workplace, it appears essential to disseminate examples on successfully implemented accommodation. In the framework of the research project "Providing reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the workplace in the EU – good practices and financing schemes" cases have been identified and analysed where the concept of reasonable accommodation has worked on the ground.

This publication presents **selected cases of good practice** and shall illustrate how reasonable accommodation in these fields can be realised while reaching a proper balance between the interests of employees and employers. These examples shall contribute to raise the awareness among both, persons with disabilities on how they can achieve their right for appropriate accommodation in the workplace, and companies through showing that in many cases reasonable accommodation can be carried out without excessive difficulties and may lead to additional positive effects for the business and its entire staff.

As illustrated in the following, enterprises have set various measures to respond to the obligation implemented on the national level derived from Article 5 of the Directive 200/78/EC and to enable the integration of persons with disabilities into their workforce as illustrated in this report. Although these measures are necessarily always based on the analysis of the individual situation and attempt to meet the individual needs and requirements of the respective employee, similarities can be identified and allow for creating a **typology of reasonable accommodation in the workplace**. The following types can be distinguished and seem to be of practical relevance:

- **Technical solutions:** In many cases technical adaptations of the workplace constitute an indispensable prerequisite to enable a person with disabilities to start the employment. Solutions are often linked to a specific type of disability and are mostly required for employees with physical (e.g. wheelchair users) and sensory disabilities (mainly persons with visual impairments). Mostly they are related to structural modifications of the enterprise's premises (e.g. providing wheelchair access), adjustments of the office equipment and the workplace of the concerned employee or the provision of assistive technology (special computer soft and hardware). Although the concrete design depends on the individual needs of the employee certain general adaptations for some forms of disabilities are common and can be applicable in most of the cases.

⁴ See European Commission (2005): Disability mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy (EMCO/11/290605)

- **Organisational arrangements:** Modern work organisation has undergone a structural change and is now entailing new forms of work next to the “nine-to-five” fulltime employment. This is the consequence of new requirements in the production process, with a view to the customers’ habits and enabling a work-life balance. As the needs of persons with disabilities concerning recreation and rehabilitation periods, transport or environment are different than that of persons without disabilities, work arrangements (adjusting working hours, teleworking arrangements, periodically rehabilitation) are often provided to enable the employment. As a disability can result in the restraint to certain activities, the (further) employment of a person with disabilities is also often linked to a re-distribution of tasks between the members of a team.
- **Provision of assistance:** Some employees with disabilities (mainly persons with mental and intellectual disabilities, but also persons with physical and sensory disabilities) need the support of another person to get accustomed to the work situation. The work assistant or job coach prepares the employee for his/her daily duties, trains the work procedures (as this would be too time consuming for the other staff in the enterprise) and habituates his/her client to the work environment. Mainly at the beginning of an employment the services of a work assistant are required intensively. When the concerned employee gets accommodated, the work assistant often makes visits only from time to time or in case problems arise when he/she acts as trouble-shooter. Next to external work assistants and in the course of time, often a co-worker takes over assistant duties and supports his colleague with disabilities in the daily routines. Often such internal assistance is permanent.
- **Qualification measures:** Persons with disabilities often face discrimination in the educational system as the possibilities for further qualification after compulsory school are limited due to a lack of adequate and adapted training offers. Therefore, the employment of a person with disabilities in a certain job often presumes the further qualification of the concerned employee. As the qualification period is often limited and accompanied by NGOs specialised in training of persons with disabilities, the provision of training opportunities enables the enterprises to “test” the employee for a period of time and with the support of experts. Qualification measures are also required when an incumbent employee cannot fulfil his/her tasks after a disability emerged and the person should be enabled to change job within the enterprise.
- **Awareness raising measures:** Whereas the previously mentioned types of accommodation focus on the persons with disabilities and his/her impairments which should be balanced out or at least reduced – by providing him/her with technical equipment, qualification measures, assistance or by adjusting the work organisation – awareness raising measures target at the social environment. The management, colleagues, and customers are sensitised on how they can contribute to the integration of the person with disabilities (e. g. attitude change, modification of communication channels). The importance of such measures results from the social and human rights concept of disability where the problems persons with disabilities face are seen to be linked to individual rights and located in the social environment.

As much as reasonable accommodation measures vary from individual case to another the costs vary as well. The assessment of the real costs often seems to be difficult as many measures entail **direct and indirect costs**. Moreover, the net costs of the same measure may differ strongly depending on the given situation and the available funding.

The costs always have to be charged up against the **additional positive effects** such measures can have and which may benefit the entire staff and the enterprise itself. For example, older workers will welcome adaptations of the workplace or persons seeking for a better work-life balance will profit from flexible work arrangements. The integration of a person with disabilities can lead to a more positive climate and respect of the individual needs of all employees. Also, the presence of work assistance may ameliorate the work atmosphere. The reflection of the needs of persons with disabilities prepares the enterprise to better deal with an ageing workforce and may result in more loyalty of the staff. Moreover, as in the implementation of reasonable accommodation often NGOs are involved, this process can lead to fruitful and sustainable co-operation between enterprises and NGOs. As persons with disabilities face multiple discrimination at the labour market the enterprise willing to employ these persons can reckon with particularly loyal and highly motivated employees. Furthermore, the employment of persons with disabilities can help to gain new groups of customers (e.g. among the community of the persons with disabilities, socially motivated customers). Therefore, companies often receive acknowledgement in terms of awards and prizes which can be used for marketing purposes and lead to an improved image. Finally, all funding available (funding for reasonable accommodation in the workplace and e.g. wage subsidies which exist in almost all European countries) must be considered for a cost benefit analysis.

As mentioned before, the examples of providing reasonable accommodation vary strongly according to the individual situation of the person with disabilities and the enterprise. Nevertheless, some key success factors can be identified which seem to contribute to and facilitate a sustainable integration of persons with disabilities in the open labour market. It can be distinguished between internal factors located in the company and external factors located in the public sphere. **Internal company factors** include:

- **Commitment of management:** Diversity management agendas and CSR are top-down strategies as they imply a substantial change in the enterprises' policies. The management has to signalise that the integration of persons with disabilities is part of the company's philosophy and principles and that these issues are of importance for the executives.
- **Involvement of the staff:** The management's commitment must appeal in the whole workforce as the co-workers must accept and support the measures set in favour of the employee with disabilities to allow for a sustainable integration. Therefore, awareness raising measures among the staff should always accompany the implementation of (other) reasonable accommodation measures to attain a smooth integration process. Thus, such a process should be carried out top-down as well as bottom-up within the enterprise.
- **Clear responsibility:** In case conflicts or problems occur, it should be clear on whom to turn to. This can be either a person, e.g. a mentor, who advocates the interests of the concerned employee, and/or a unit in the company (e.g. disability manager). Anyway, the responsible person or unit has to have the authority to solve problems or at least has to be entitled to be heard in the decision making process concerning all agendas related to the employment of the person with disabilities.

- **Case assessment and consultation of experts:** The implementation of accommodation measures should be based on the assessment of experts concerning the specific situation in order to best meet the requirements of the concerned employee and of the enterprise in general and the workplace in particular. Such experts (doctors, ergonomists, social workers, work assistants, etc.) shall suggest an individually tailored solution based on an analysis of the individual needs of the person and the specific working conditions. These experts can be part of the workforce (mainly in large enterprises) and/or external experts.

External factors, respectively the complementary public support, form another important prerequisite for successful implementation of reasonable accommodation:

- **Provision of services/expertise:** Picking up the finding that the involvement of experts in the process of implementing reasonable accommodation represents an important internal success factor, this calls for the availability of such expertise. Thus, the existence of adequate services, a low threshold access (e.g. publicity, financial aspects) and co-ordinated structures form an important external success factor.
- **Financial support:** Next to the provision of such services, the financial aspect of reasonable accommodation has to be dealt with. The availability of funding covering an important part of the measures set and/or compensating possible extra costs linked to the employment of persons with disabilities represents an incentive to the enterprises and debilitates the cost argument of the companies when refusing the provision of reasonable accommodation.
- **Flexible public support:** The integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market must also benefit the person herself/himself. A flexible execution of disability pensions or other social benefits (e.g. where the benefit is not lost on the first day of employment) or combined models (e.g. the possibility of drawing benefits and a salary to a certain extent) can motivate more persons with disabilities to actively apply for a job without risking financial losses when failing. Moreover, such combined models take into account possible restrictions of persons with disabilities with a view to working hours without making impossible a partial integration in the labour market.
- **Adapted regulations:** An important incentive of employing a person with disabilities is to reduce the risk for the companies. Thus, longer trial periods or models where the person with disability first is employed through a NGO or a social enterprise to enable the enterprise to assess whether employing a person with disabilities is manageable or not, are favourable to the provision of reasonable accommodation and the integration of person with disabilities in the open labour market. This also helps to overcome prejudices from both sides (the employer and the employee with disabilities).

Company case studies

“L’Accueil de la Côte de Jade” Retirement Home (France)

A retirement home established a new unit and created new jobs for three incumbent employees who could not fulfil their tasks anymore due to occurring physical disabilities. External support was provided to arrange training and application for grants.

“L’Accueil de la Côte de Jade” retirement home is a non-profit association that has been set up in 1987 in accordance with the French law of 1901. The residents’ level of dependence is relatively high with 30 % to 40 % having dementia. There are **45 employees**, of which five are persons with disabilities. Three have recently had their employee status reclassified.

Concerned employees and job

The three employees whose status has been reclassified are women who have worked at the retirement home for more than twenty years and whose disability has arisen during the course of their employment. Ms. A. is 42 years old, Ms. B. is 44 years and Ms. C. is 51 years. Their health problems resulted in an inability to carry heavy objects and support elderly people. **Ms. C. has problems with her back** that resulted in a wear of the shoulder tendons. **Ms. B. has osseous decalcification**, pulling numerous fractures. **Ms. A. has vertebral problems**.

At the same time when the health problems of these three employees were becoming more serious, the director wanted to create a special unit for the most highly dependent residents. Collaboration between the employees, the occupational health services and an employment support unit enabled the project to be combined with the issue of the employees’ disabilities.

Two of the employees still occupy their positions in the unit created: Ms. C. is a manager and specialised nursing assistant in the unit for the highly dependent and Ms. A. works in the unit’s daytime reception team. Ms. B. was initially also allocated to this unit, but then went back to a unit for independent residents. She has remained a nursing assistant in this unit.

These employees were all **initially trained as nursing assistants**. All three have unlimited contracts because they are long-standing employees. Ms. C. and Ms. A. have full-time positions and Ms. B. works part-time.

Accommodation

The Occupational Health Services helped the employer to determine the necessary adaptations of the facilities and put the retirement home in contact with an association offering support for workers with disabilities (employment support unit).

The purpose of these changes was to **facilitate performance of the employees’ daily tasks** and consisted of double leaf doors in the place of single doors to bedrooms; motorised shutters on windows; ultra-light equipment for the transfer of residents. Subsidies were obtained from the AGEFIPH (*Association de Gestion du Fonds pour l’Insertion des Personnes Handicapées*), which is the French agency which induces and finances, at national and local scales, actions in favour of work integration of people with disabilities.

Additionally, the employment support unit directed the employer to the CRAM (*Caisse Régionale d'Assurance Maladie*), which is the regional Social Insurance Agency, in order to **obtain funding** for 50 % of the annual gross salary of two employees (Ms. A. and Ms. C.) trained in the care of disorientated people in specialised establishments.

The employment support unit was a key factor in this case. It enabled the project to be completed quickly and satisfactorily due to its experience in arranging training and applications for grants.

Overall, the cost of creating the new positions were € 75,000.-; half of which was paid by the AGEFIPH. The employment support unit helped the employer to make the application. Everything went smoothly, and the funds were released quickly.

Conclusions

To **accept their disability** was not easy for the three employees, but they felt accepted and supported by the establishment, which gave them a second chance. This support was also much appreciated by the other staff who felt involved. Colleagues feel confident that the establishment would do whatever will be necessary to keep them if a similar situation were to arise in their own case.

Nevertheless, a **team approach** was emphasised in order to avoid any jealousy regarding the favourable treatment of the three employees who needed flexible working hours. At first it was hard for the other employees to accept that the three colleagues had **more flexible hours and lighter tasks**. But eventually solidarity prevailed.

The other positive factor was that the **new unit resulted in a relief for the personnel in other units**. The new unit enabled the channelling of disorientated people, who are always accompanied. Personnel allocated to other units therefore have more time for the other patients, who now complain less of loneliness. Patients and families find the system to be more balanced.

Residents and families are aware of the team's solidarity and are very satisfied with the family atmosphere in the high dependence unit.

In conclusion, while there is no doubt that the initial investment may seem high, the **establishment benefited enormously in terms of relations between its employees**, who felt supported and motivated in their work. The collaboration between the employer and the employment support unit enabled resources to be mobilised quickly. Nevertheless, the Director underlined that he spent some time with his employees in order to understand their impairment and to support them, as they were in despair the days after the diagnosis. They thought that they would lose their jobs and that their lives would change dramatically.

For the time being the establishment is not planning to employ any more workers with disabilities but would not exclude the possibility if a case were to arise.

Berliner Stadtreinigung, BSR – City Cleaning Berlin (Germany)

A public waste management company established an integration team and designed special projects to improve the integration of its employees with disabilities and its older workforce.

The **City Cleaning Berlin** (Berliner Stadtreinigung, BSR) was founded in 1951 and is the biggest **public waste management company** in Europe. The BSR provides Berlin with services in public waste management, city and street cleaning as well as winter street service. Furthermore, various subsidiaries of the BSR offer services around logistics and recycling of paper, glass, organic and electronic waste.

The company works on the basis of cost recovery without profit. Rising productivity levels, more effective cost management and increasing competition in the sector were reasons for job cuts throughout the last 15 years. After around 10,000 employees in 1992, the average number of employees (without interns and trainees) decreased to 5,317 in 2007. Due to demographic changes and a low turnover of personnel, the **average age of the workforce rose** from 45 in 2006 to 46.7 years in 2007. Along those lines, the amount of sickness days rose from 6.8 % in 2006 to 7.5 % in 2007. As the likelihood to be disabled rises with the age the quota of persons with disabilities among the workforce of the BSR went up as well. After 23 % in 2004, already **29 % of the workforce qualified as being disabled** in 2006. Half of the disabled workforce had a GdB (degree of disability) of more than 50 % and can thus be considered as severely disabled (11 % of the total workforce). Various reasons for disabilities can be found. Problems with the spinal column, the joints and psychological problems are mentioned with high frequency.

Integration management within the BSR

In 2005, the City Cleaning Berlin implemented a **professional integration management** scheme to ensure the productivity and work satisfaction of the disabled or (due to health problems) disadvantaged workforce. The goal is to preserve the working capacity and job security of affected employees. An **“integration team”** connects employers, employees and rehabilitation institutions, in order to find the best form of employment, avoid disability or at least stabilise the degree of disability. The integration team consists of 10 to 12 persons (line managers, representatives from the staff council, the disability council and the women’s council) and meets every two weeks to discuss current integration cases. Two members of the integration team are officially certified as disability managers, three more are currently undergoing the training offered by the German occupational accident insurance.

From January 2007 till September 2008, around 80 cases were discussed within the integration team: 45 % could be fully re-integrated into the BSR workforce, either into their former area of expertise or into a new working place. With half of the cases still in progress a rising success rate is expected. One of the successful cases was Udo Heese. After a **motorcycle accident**, Mr. Heese had compound fractures in both feet and his left leg was completely wrecked. More than two years of hospital and rehabilitation followed. For Mr. Heese it was important – also financially – that he could keep his position in the BSR. "I am in my **mid fifties**. To stay at home for the rest of my life is no option for me." said Mr. Heese. With the assistance of the integration team, a disability **specific combination of tasks and working hours** could be found and 31 months after his accident Mr. Heese could restart working: "The contact to my colleagues is very important for me, even if I can only work for five hours a day."

According to Helmfried Hauch, representative of the severely disabled employees in the BSR, 80 % of all cases of severe disabilities are caused by a disease and not an accident or disability by birth. Therefore, the integration management of the BSR also includes a whole **set of prevention measures**, such as the **pre-accommodation of workplaces, training of staff, adaptations of job descriptions** according to age, sports activities and counselling on addictions, nutrition and health.

Reasonable accommodation projects

Next to the regular integration management on a case by case basis, the City Cleaning Berlin designed and completed a couple of **special integration projects** in the last years.

Maintenance of 20,000 public waste bins of the city of Berlin used to be outsourced to an external provider. The project "**waste bin workshop**" re-integrated the maintenance back into the company in 2004. All steps of the process (removal, cleaning, repairing and varnishing) are now completely under responsibility of a BSR-internal division, where only disabled or disadvantaged employees work. The working conditions including tools and workbenches, but also **working hours and job descriptions** are **adapted to their abilities and needs**. For example, the maintaining area is built according to ergonomic and disability specific requirements. The initial investment costs of the project, which also included the purchase of five vehicles to ease the logistics, amounted to 110,000 Euro, **85 % were covered by the integration office**. In 2008, a polishing machine was bought with support of the integration office in order to further reduce the physical strain. According to Mr. Hauch further investments into the workshop are planned: "We are continuously trying to improve the working conditions of the disabled workforce. Right now we are thinking about an **ergonomic production line** for an even more effective maintenance of the waste bins."

So far **25 full-time and fully-paid workplaces for disabled or disadvantaged employees** were created in the waste bin workshop. The success of the project can be described by the **improvements in sick-leave days**: At the beginning of the project, the sick-leave days of the team amounted to over 1,000 days a year. Two years after the project's start less than 500 days were counted – a reduction by more than 50 %. Furthermore, the overall costs for the maintenance of the waste bins are lower than it used to be before. But even more importantly, the City Cleaning Berlin mentions the **increased motivation and satisfaction** within the workforce, since job description and work environment match their qualifications.

In 2005, the project "waste bin workshop" was awarded the "**Reha Preis**" of € 10,000 by the association of compensation insurances for commercial and industrial workers (*Hauptverband der gewerblichen Berufsgenossenschaften*). In the same year, the City Cleaning Berlin received the **Integration Prize of Berlin** for extraordinary commitment for the integration of disabled persons into the labour market.

For the second project called "**BSR Scouts**" a task force for special cleaning jobs and to educate and advise pedestrians on questions of a clean Berlin was created in 2006. Seven days a week from 5 am to 9 pm, two shifts of the BSR scouts are on the road to work for a cleaner Berlin, especially in highly frequented areas. The "waste-police", as the BSR scouts are called in the local press, started with a team of **12 persons with severe disabilities and five vehicles**. The integration office supported the investments with 80,000 Euro. Within one year after the project had started, the sick-leave days of the team members went down by 63 %. The acceptance in the population of Berlin was high and with the upcoming soccer world cup in mind, the team of the BSR

scouts was expanded up to **25 employees with severe disabilities** in 2007 – all full-time. Five new vehicles could be purchased with financial assistance of the integration office.

Thanks to the positive experiences, **further projects are planned**. For example, a workshop similar to the waste bin workshop is planned for parts of the maintenance process of vehicles and cars.

The key to success

To keep up with the good results, the BSR management and the integration team continuously analyse the outcomes of different measures and projects in order to steadily improve the integration processes. “Disability management is a lot about **trying different things out**. At the beginning, changes within the company are always hard to sell. But if the management and the employees work closely together nothing is impossible.” concludes Mr. Hauch.

The good practice is transferred into the **networking activities** of the BSR: The company is a founding member of the ddn – Das Demographie Netzwerk (Demography Network) and took part in various cross-company projects such as the ISO-project “Integration Management for Managers” or a project called “Age-adapted working conditions” by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Cosmetics Enterprise (France)

A cosmetics company employed a former trainee with autism. With the help of an ergonomist and a consultant for psychological/social aspects they later on succeeded in managing the shift to another workplace and thereby keep this job.

The industrial company has specialised in plant-based cosmetics since 1920 in Switzerland and since 1924 in France (where 60 % to 70 % of the sales are effected). The company also produces homeopathic medicine (30 % to 40 % of turnover). Switzerland, France and Germany are the three main countries where production sites are located.

The group employs a total of 1,600 to 1,800 people, 380 thereof are in France. Of the 380 employees in France, slightly more than 6 % are persons with disabilities, reflecting a long-standing policy of employing these people.

One of the employees with disabilities is a 25 year old **autistic man** who has been in institutional care for a long time but has made enormous progress. His problem is that the slightest unforeseen event makes him very worried, generating attacks and destabilisation. He is completely thrown when he has to make a decision in an environment that has changed. The slightest unforeseen event can result in situations that are dangerous for the employee and those around him.

Employment and accommodation measures

At the end of the 1990ies the young man did **some training courses** at the company, for just a few days at a time, accompanied by a special needs teacher. Gradually, the teacher came less often and the training periods became longer. In 1999, on account of the progress that he had made, a **fixed term contract** for part-time employment was offered. Everything went smoothly and this subsequently became an open-ended full-time contract.

Initially, constant supervision was necessary in order to deal with unforeseen events. His needs were assessed with the **special needs teacher**.

In 2003, a project for integration into the workplace was developed with a tutor and a specific apprenticeship programme. The objective was that the person could work officially on a long-term basis on a packaging machine for tubes of cream. For help with this project, the employer contacted the AGEFIPH (*Association de Gestion du Fonds pour l'Insertion des Personnes Handicapées*) – an association that manages the fund for the inclusion of persons with disabilities – and an association for the integration of people with disabilities into the workplace called “Action et Compétences”.

Support in employment

In 2007, the packaging machine for tubes of cream on which the employee worked had to be removed from the production chain. The management would have had to make him redundant if no other machine for him to work on could have been found. The employer contacted the AGEFIPH's ergonomic platform to try to come up with a solution. The ergonomists considered moving the employee to the pharmaceutical sector to carry out secondary packaging of injection vials.

This **change involved a three-stage support and integration process**, consisting of:

1. the employee successfully leaving the old job;
2. assessment of the feasibility of the new job;
3. consideration of the adaptations of the facilities for the new job.

At the end of 2006, an agreement was signed with the AGEFIPH to assign an ergonomist for the practical and technical aspects. "Actions et Compétences" assigned a **consultant for the psychological and social aspects**. These two professionals worked on a complementary basis and successfully accompanied the employee in changing his role within the company. He kept his work contract.

He currently is still in this position. The company has had to deal with a few issues such as more frequent sick leave and attacks while he was working, making it necessary to have another employee available to immediately take over. However, he is a **perfectionist and his work is very consistent**. This is what enables him to keep on track.

For this employment **support**, the company applied for a grant of € 20,000.- from the AGEFIPH to be used for the consultation with the ergonomist, modifications to the machine and an ergonomic chair. Another grant is now being requested in order to carry out further modifications to the machine, at an estimated cost of € 22,900.-. A request for € 3,980.- has also been made for an ergonomic table.

Conclusions

This project, like other projects for the integration of people with disabilities, resulted in an **increase in solidarity within the teams**. The employer states: "We know that it is a plus for a team when people with disabilities are integrated, not many companies hold this view, but we know this to be true. Experience has proved it."

In terms of recommendations, the company thinks that the employee's colleagues and the managerial staff are likely to feel that the **company is in touch regarding the issues** of persons with disabilities. Secondly, considerable support is necessary from the **occupational health services**. Lastly, managerial staff must be included in the organisation of the project in order to **avoid any misunderstandings**. For this type of project, there has to be a person within the company coordinating all the various aspects.

Regarding the future of the concerned employee, the company is expecting to have to make further adjustments as the mental condition is progressing.

Other projects for the employment or support in employment of people with disabilities are planned. The company is always looking for workers with disabilities, but with some difficulty, because often the people themselves find it hard to accept their situation.

Creativ Company A/S (Denmark)

A trading company offers flexible working hours, adapts the tasks to the abilities of the persons and runs a training centre for persons with disabilities. New employees can rely on their mentors.

Creativ Company A/S is a private company specialised in selling creative articles to institutions, wholesale, and private customers in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, England, Germany, and Holland. It was founded by the two managing directors in November 2000 in the city of Holstebro and is now a medium-sized company of 110 employees.

5-6 years ago, one of the company's managing directors overheard a couple of colleagues telling a discriminating joke. The joke itself was not a problem; it was the lack of irony in their voices. He decided to do something to fight this attitude and he promised himself that by the following year, 10-15 % of the company's employees must be people who for some reason had not been able to find or keep a regular job. Today the company employs **16 persons with psychological, physical or social problems**. Many have gone through several job training programmes elsewhere before finding a place for themselves at Creativ Company. **47 year old** Mrs. K. is one of them.

Mrs. K. used to work in the public home care system under highly stressful conditions. She always had an extremely high sense of responsibility and a very poor judgement of how much to demand of herself, which led her to put pressure on herself beyond all reasonable expectations. After 13 years she could no longer handle it and had to quit. She trained to become a hairdresser, and just one year into her education she bought her own hair salon. In 2006, after eight years with the salon, a long series of break-downs culminated with a year's permanent absence from work due to **psychological problems**.

Job and accommodations

When it came time to **test if she was ready for work**, Mrs. K. started out in a hospital, but it did not work out at all. Instead she asked her social worker about Creativ Company. Within Creative Company, she started out in the Service Centre managed by Mr. M. The Service Centre is a "company in the company" and functions as a training centre for persons whose capacity for work is uncertain.

Before their first meeting, Mr. M. had received some information about Mrs. K. and her former employment from the local job centre. Mrs. K. seemed very anxious and troubled, but he decided to give it a try. In fact, he has never turned anyone down. Mrs. K. was hired as a trainee for 13 weeks, allowing Mr. M. to get a feel for both her weaknesses and strengths. During her trial period, Mrs. K. continuously took on **new tasks and responsibilities**. "*She rose to every occasion*", says Mr. M. This also meant that he had to be extra watchful to make sure that she did not pressure herself too much, and that colleagues would not inadvertently take advantage of her.

After prolonging her trial period to a total of one year, it was concluded that even though Mrs. K. is bright and effective, she would not be able to live up to the requirements of a regular job. Too much responsibility and time pressure still waken her demons, causes her brain to spin and make her feel like she is suffocating. Her psychological problems also mean that she is easily exhausted. Instead Mr. M. proposed that Mrs. K. be permanently hired in a customised **flex job**. A flex job is a job with flexible working arrangements where half or two thirds of wages are subsidised by the local authorities, depending on the reduction of the capacity for work.

In August 2008 Mrs. K. was hired in a flex job at Creativ Company. She works 24 hours a week but is only expected to work effectively for about 13 hours. Her job is made up of **different tasks** that she can combine according to her current condition: Some are interesting and require her to think; some are pure routine. She prefers working in the department where packages are prepared for customers, but in the year's busiest season this is often too stressful for her. Then she relocates and instead assists a colleague in the warehouse. Having been at the company for a year now, she is also good at helping new colleagues in the Service Centre get settled and find out what they can and cannot do.

The people who start out in the Service Centre have very different backgrounds; some have physical problems, others have mental disabilities; one lived half his life as a drug addict. When they feel ready, they are relocated to different parts of the company, but they always have the opportunity to return to the Service Centre if it does not work out. Some are hired in flex jobs like Mrs. K. and others end up holding regular jobs, e.g. in the kitchen or warehouse. Others again move on to jobs in other companies: Creativ Company has initiated a **network of 40 local companies** who are interested in hiring people after their job training at the Service Centre.

Accommodations are made in the form of **flexible working hours, tasks that match abilities**, and the **“safe base” of the Service Centre**. Every new employee also has two **“mentors”** in the first weeks – one responsible for job-related questions, and one responsible for social integration; e.g. making sure that the new colleague will join the group for coffee or sit with everyone else for lunch. In the warehouse there are accommodations in the form of **of trolleys and rolling hoops**, which ensures that no one will have to do heavy lifting. The company is ready to pay for other accommodation measures if needed – but as Mr. M. puts it: *“The real cost when hiring these people is **attention and consideration**. This is not something that you can just buy with money.”*

Conclusions

Consideration and individual accommodations are a part of the company culture; as the manager says: *“By treating everyone differently, we are treating everyone alike”*. His philosophy is to always ask himself: *“Why not allow this?”* By being considerate to personal needs and wishes, **everyone profits**: The company gets the most out of every single employee, and the employees are happy and proud to work there. Everyone enjoys telling the stories of colleagues who have found a new life for themselves. According to the manager, many have changed their view on social issues along the way, and the satisfaction of the employees shows on every account.

In the beginning, the manager explains, it was very difficult to figure out where to start and whom to ask for advice. The bureaucracy and inflexibility of the authorities caused many headaches; especially when different authorities had to work together, e.g. doctors and social workers. However, many things have changed over time, most of all attitudes. What started out with difficulties is now a brilliant **partnership between the private and the public** of which everybody is very proud – including Mrs. L., who is the social worker in charge of Mrs. K.'s case and also the company's contact person at the local job centre. Mrs. L. works closely with Mr. M. to find out which clients are most eligible when a spot opens up in the Service Centre. She knows many local workplaces through her work and she has no doubt in her mind what makes Creativ Company so special: *“It's the way they see people; their positive attitude that brings out the best in everyone. It's a little magic”*, she says.

The magic has been noticed by others as well. In 2007, Creativ Company was elected the 5th best workplace in Denmark. The company also won a special **Diversity Management Award** as well as the Network Award for extraordinary social initiatives in relation to prevention, accommodation and integration of employees. Different business clubs and associations have shown a great interest in the company's activities. They come for guided tours and take away inspiration.

One of the most important **success factors** of the story of Mrs. K. and the other employees at Creativ Company is that there is **will behind the words**. The managers truly believe that everyone deserves a chance and is worth as much as the next person. They make a great effort to communicate their ideas and keep everyone informed about what is happening and why. This means that their attitude and philosophy is passed on to every single employee and creates an **encouraging spirit of community**.

Creativ Company is very interested in developing new initiatives and partnerships in **the future**. For now, they will continue co-operating with the job centre to help as many as possible back or into a working life. Says Mr. M: *"There are so many people out there who need a helping hand."*

Curvados Quintin SL (Spain)

Three employees with congenital intellectual disabilities were integrated into a small family business with the support of a coach (supported employment).

Curvados Quintin SL is a small family business located in the province of Biscay (in the Basque Country) and founded in 1973. The company works both on the national and the international markets, and its main activities include bending of tubes and sections, as well as special equipments and coils manufacturing.

Curvados Quintin SL, has 40 employees, and it boasts modern spacious installations and facilities at its disposal (5,000 m² indoor and 1,500 m² outdoor), as well as an extensive range of the most up-to-date technology in terms of bending machines. According to the last balance presented at the Trade Register, the company had a capital stock over € 60,000.

Among the workforce are **3 employees with disabilities** (i.e. 8 % of the current workforce). With regard to the sociodemographic characteristics of these persons, it is remarkable that these 3 are all men having a **congenital intellectual disability**, and that they are all between 25 and 35 years old. For these 3 employees, it is their first working experience in a standard company. Before that, they worked at a Special Employment Centre, which was part of *Lantegi Batuak*, a non-profit association.

Job and accommodation

In October 2005, given the necessity to form a stable workforce in jobs related to quality control of manufactured parts, the Executive Board of the company decided to employ people with disabilities to cover these posts.

This decision was based on the idea that people with intellectual disabilities are more persistent and resilient when developing **monotonous and repetitive tasks**. In fact, the performance of the employees with disabilities has proved this initial hypothesis, since they are very methodical and they feel secure when doing the same job (they do not like changing tasks), rigorously working on their quality control responsibilities on the finished product.

The process of hiring and company integration was **supported by** the organisation *Lantegi Batuak*. This **non-profit organisation**, located in Biscay, aims at creating work opportunities, as standard as possible, for people with disabilities, especially for those with intellectual disabilities.

Curvados Quintín and Ehlabe, member of *Lantegi Batuak*, applied a scheme known as “**employment with support**”, which consists of achieving the insertion of every person with disabilities in an ordinary environment.

First, Ehlabe elaborated a description of the jobs existing in the company, analysing their characteristics and requirements, and identified those posts which could be covered by persons with intellectual disabilities. Next, Ehlabe selected the ideal candidates, looking for the persons who could best suit each post. Finally, the organisation presented the possible candidates to Curvados Quintín, and it was the company itself who selected the definitive candidates to employ.

Once the new employees had been chosen, Ehlabe **trained them in the workplace**, with the help of a coach. Thus, during the first days, an intensive training process was carried out, developing both social and technical skills. Then, the **coach** gradually stopped supporting them as he considered that the persons with disabilities were totally adapted to the company. Nowadays, this coach supervises the employees just on an annual basis. Anyway, whenever the company needs his help, the coach comes again and he trains the employees in any new assigned task.

Concerning contract terms, the three people with intellectual disabilities working in this company have a full-time contract, with the same conditions as the other employees. In the three cases, the contract has been extended for the last three years on an annual basis, and it is about to be **converted into a permanent contract**.

The company has received a **subsidy** for each worker with disabilities employed, which consists of an amount of between € 3,500 and € 5,300 per year to be discounted in the payments to the Social Security.

With regard to the job, the tasks accomplished by these 3 workers are similar to the tasks developed by any other worker in the same category. Specifically, their responsibilities include the elaboration of curved parts in the machine, and the later quality verification with the corresponding template. As well as this, they count and store the manufactured parts.

In order to adapt the tasks to the specific characteristics of each individual, the company has introduced some new machinery, which has allowed the job to be easier and better adjusted to the capacities of the employees. Every time a new machine is acquired, the supervisor of the workshop installs the corresponding software, which allows for an **individualised use of the machine**.

The initiative of employing people with disabilities implied some extra cost due to the need of buying new machinery. However, the company did not have to change or modify the workplace as a consequence of hiring people with disabilities.

Results and conclusions

The expectations of the employees with disabilities, as well as those of the employer and the rest of the workforce, have successfully been met.

Firstly, it is worth noting that the persons with disabilities employed in Curvados Quintín have achieved a **stable job in a standard company**, with the same working conditions as other workers.

Secondly, the company has fulfilled its need to create a stable workforce to deal with parts manufacturing and quality control, activities which are carried out very rigorously. It is interesting to note that, since the employees with disabilities started working for Curvados Quintín, **no faulty manufactured parts have left the plant**.

Finally, the employment of people with disabilities has provoked a **change in how the whole staff perceives disabilities**, as well as an improvement in the relationship among people with disabilities and the rest of the workforce.

According to the opinion of the company, the integration of these persons in the company did not have any direct effect on the relationship with clients, and the corporate image has not changed. Anyway, the company has pointed out that they have not made the general public know about this initiative.

With regard to barriers found in the process, members of the company remark that at the beginning they did not know how to deal with people with disabilities, so the role played by *Lantegi Batuak* was essential. Interestingly also, the company pointed out that the relationship between the persons with disabilities and the rest of the workforce highly improved thanks to the decision of appointing a person from the company itself as a speaker and caretaker. This person currently helps employees with disabilities through coaching and support.

Future perspectives

Finally, concerning future perspectives, Curvados Quintín is planning to convert the fixed-term contracts these persons have into **permanent contracts**. On the other hand, the company states that the employment of more people with disabilities will depend on the market trends. Anyway, they will keep investing in the modernisation of the machinery, to get more work suitable for people with disabilities. Moreover, Curvados Quintín is currently introducing some general measures to adapt the premises to **facilitate the access** of people with disabilities.

Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH (Germany)

The adaption of a production machine and a fork-lift truck enabled a man who lost his right arm to work in a company producing organic oil and animal food.

The **Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH** based in Echem (Lower Saxony) was founded in 2001 by Mr. Martin-Peter Lähn und Mr. Karsten Reinstorf, who still own and run the company up until today. The company is active in the production and vending of organic oils and animal food. The products are generated by processing rapeseeds, flax, soya or sunflower seeds. The oils are either used for human consumption or in the case of rapeseed oil also for fuelling re-engineered diesel-engined vehicles. The rapeseed oil is sold at the company-owned fuelling station (since 2002). Since 2003, the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH is officially certified for the production of organic products. In 2008, the company received the “DGF-Rapsöl-Medaille 2007/2008” – an award for the production of rapeseed oil of extraordinary high quality.

Having started with two employees in 2001, both of them severely disabled, the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH today employs nine persons, four of them have physical disabilities. Amongst the first employees of the oil mill was Mr. P. (29 years, born in 1980). Due to a malignant tumour Mr. P. **lost his right arm** at the age of twelve. Nonetheless, Mr. P. decided to start a vocational training in the agricultural sector. During the training it turned out that the physically demanding work of a farmer would not be suitable for Mr. P. in the long run. After finishing his training in 2000, he went through one year of unemployment. His efforts to find an agriculture-related employment were assisted by the local Employment Agency. In 2001, Mr. P. was finally offered a four week-long internship position at the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH. Thanks to his good performance during the internship, Mr. P. was carried over into an unlimited employment contract and now works for the oil mill for over seven years.

Job and accommodation

At the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH Mr. P. is **in charge of the production process**. This includes filling the various oil presses, monitoring process as well as product quality and cleaning the presses. Furthermore, Mr. P. is also involved in selling the products of the oil mill. As Mr. P. was part of the workforce of the oil mill from the very first beginning on, the specific investments to adapt Mr. P.'s workplace and equipment according to his needs, were combined with the general investments in order to build up the company. **Disability-specific accommodations** were made at the **production facilities and company-owned vehicles**: The bottling machine, which fills the fresh oil into the specific bins and bottles, usually needs to be operated with two hands. The **machine was adapted** to Mr. P.'s physical disability and can now be operated with only one hand. Furthermore, a **fork-lift truck**, which is necessary for the logistics within the oil mill, was **converted** to be run single-handed. The total expenses for the initial investments were supported by the Employment Agency. In addition to the financial support, it was also the technical advisory service that was of special value to the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH. “The assistance of the Employment Agency and the Integration Office (Lüneburger Assistenz GmbH) was very helpful and the overall experiences can be described as very positive.” concludes Mr. Lähn, one of the managers of the oil mill. In that regard, he recommends to other companies to have a long-term perspective in mind when the investment and the recruitment decisions are made.

Experiences and results

After the internship, the managers of the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH, were not only convinced by the qualifications of Mr. P. but also by his work attitude. It was very well appreciated that Mr. P. was able to fulfil his task only after a short orientation period. But even more importantly he has ideas and gives recommendations to improve the work and production processes within the company. His positive attitude is recognised by colleagues and customers and thus, Mr. P. is fully integrated into the daily business of the oil mill. Mr. Lähn: "For us and our employees the first priority is to simply create a **"normal" work environment** for all of us. If disabled or not comes second."

Despite all good experiences, the managers can also report some little drawbacks. The daily tasks are well organised and trained, but when it comes to ad hoc activities, Mr. P. is in some cases **dependent on the assistance** of other colleagues. In 2007, a locksmith was hired, who can amongst other things help with the accommodation of special equipment and tools.

As for Mr. P. himself, only positive experiences can be reported. Being originally trained as a farmer, for him it was important to stay in the agricultural sector, which is his passion up until today.

Not only thanks to the good experiences with Mr. P., but also due to the extraordinary high rate of persons with disabilities in the workforce, the engagement of the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH was documented within the two year-long campaign **"Examples of the integration of persons with severe disabilities into the labour market"** in 2003. The public campaign, which also included a field-visit at the oil mill by media, representatives from various public administrations and other small and medium-sized enterprises, was initiated by the representative of persons with disabilities in Lower Saxony and the Integration Office.

Conclusions

The intense coordination with the Employment Agency and the Integration Office and the discussion of employment-related topics throughout the process gave helpful insights into human resource management in general. That contributed to the overall success of the young enterprise at that time. The **good advisory service** of the Integration Office is mentioned as one reason for the high rate of people with disabilities in the workforce of the oil mill. It was the direct, permanent and honest contact to the assistants that was crucial for the success of the integration process. **Financial support and organisational assistance** of the public administrations can contribute to create secure jobs for people who need and deserve them. But at the end of the day the most important thing would be to have a qualified, motivated and stable workforce, because all support and assistance come to an end at some point, says Mr. Lähn. Thus, he recommends to check if a person with disability could fit into the job description for every open position. "It is worth it – for business and social reasons!" resumes the manager of the Elbmarsch Ölmühle GmbH.

Eurobank EFG (Greece)

An internationally operating bank adjusted the working hours and adapted the tasks of its manic depressive employee to enable a further employment.

The enterprise

The Bank was established in December 1990 under the name of “Euromerchant Bank S.A.”, offering mainly investment and private banking services. The Bank changed its strategic focus in the mid-1990s, in view of the deregulation of the Greek retail banking sector. Since then, **EFG Eurobank Ergasias** has followed a successful course based on dynamic organic growth and has engaged in a series of profitable mergers and acquisitions. Today Eurobank EFG Group is an **international banking organisation**. The Group employs more than 24.500 people and offers its products and services both through its network of over 1.700 branches and points of sale and through alternative distribution channels.

In Greece, Eurobank EFG Group is leading in consumer lending, mutual fund management, investment banking, equity brokerage and life insurance. It is also the largest lender to small businesses in the country and among the largest lenders to big domestic corporations of the private sector.

In the wider region of Southeastern and Central Europe, Eurobank EFG Group ranks among the top banks in all countries where it has an established presence, namely Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. Since 2006, Eurobank EFG Group has also entered the markets of Poland, Turkey, Ukraine and Cyprus. Eurobank EFG is a member of EFG Group, the third largest banking group in Switzerland, following UBS and Credit Suisse and is also among Greece’s largest listed companies by market capitalisation.

The concerned employee

S. G. is male, 34 years old (born in 1974), and has a **mental disability (manic depressive)**. He is a compulsory school leaver. The disability appeared in 1998, after his mother’s suicide due to family problems. Mr. G. was working for Eurobank EFG Group at that time (he had no previous working experience) as a **cashier** in the Eurobank EFG Group, in Athens. He had excellent relations with all bank personnel and everybody liked him. He was very useful for the bank and very productive. After his mental disability occurred, he refused to go for work and he was denying any form of social life. He was isolated to his home under the protection of his father and sister. As the time passed away and after medical support he was able to return to his job but not in his previous working status.

Employment and accommodation measures

Before his mental problems appeared, Mr. G. used to work at the same bank as a cashier (he was working full-time, 5 days per week, from 7:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day), but due to the new situation the bank manager rotated him in different administrative positions (cashier, credit cards, sales, and customer service). After many failures of Mr. G to adjust with a view to the demands of the different working positions the manager was searching for a sustainable solution.

Due to his mental disability and daily unusual changes in his mood, energy, and ability to function, Mr. G. could not work under a strict timetable and have strict job obligations. The manager had to offer Mr. G. a new employment status in order to make him

feel better and be useful for the bank. The manager had no previous experience with such a situation, therefore he was advised by a doctor: Mr. G. needed more flexible working hours, less obligations, more understanding and no oppression at all. The manager, after having a meeting with the employee's father and the employee, offered him an **alternative working status** as follows:

- **Adjusted and flexible working hours:** Mr. G. had to come to the bank daily only by about 10am in the morning (2 hours late in comparison with the normal employees' time-table). After 2 to 3 hours in-office administrative work he can leave the bank and make appointments with customers in order to sell them financial products & services. Furthermore, he has no obligation to return in the bank until the next day.
- **New tasks:** Mr. G. is meeting customers, existing clients etc. outside the bank anytime he wants and through these professional appointments Mr G. is selling the bank's products and services.

These accommodation measures were not a part of a bank's special disability formal programme but were the result of a customised-personalised solution, which was initiated by the manager and decided after several meetings of the manager with the bank's doctor, the father of the concerned person and the employee himself. No NGOs had interfered to propose a solution.

No financial costs arose for the accommodation set. It was a matter of changing his working hours and altering his job position. Furthermore, the employee is not receiving a disability benefit from the State (he is not registered as a disabled person) and is not using any special equipment or other accommodation facilities provided by the company outside work.

Results and additional effects

Mr G. is feeling much better since he is working most of the time outside the bank, in the natural and social environment and is meeting (for professional purposes) many new people, but also people he already knows (relatives, friends, existing clients). This **social aspect of the job** and the **flexible time-schedule** is helping him a lot to **overcome his initial psychological problem**.

The bank found the best way to make use of Mr. G.'s abilities and as a matter of fact he is very **productive and efficient** (he is selling the bank products and services better than the average salesperson). His relationships with other employees are excellent (as they always have been).

The **crucial success factors** which led to the integration of Mr. G. are:

- The initiative taken by the manager to "understand" the psychological problem of Mr. G.
- The excellent communication of the manager with the doctor, the father and the employee.
- The general anthropocentric philosophy and the humanitarian values of the Group.

The company is well known and awarded for its beneficial attitude towards the society and its **Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes**. The Eurobank EFG group has based its existence and leading position on the following vision: "To be the Bank of first

choice in the region of S.E. Europe, while operating with a sense of responsibility towards its employees, its customers, its shareholders and the society.” An example of the Bank’s CSR associated with disability issues is that in October 2007, the Group became the sponsor of the “Neuropsychological Rehabilitation Programme for Brain Injured People”, a new pilot programme of the Hellenic Society for Disabled Children (ELEPAP). The Corporate Social Responsibility strategy implemented by Eurobank EFG bolsters the organisation’s vision, by creating an environment of prosperity and development for employees, a responsible partner for customers and an added-value creator for shareholders. Moreover, this strategy ensures the development of the wider society in which the Group operates. In 2007, the Group’s sponsorship and social contribution outlays reached €29 million, i.e. more than tripled as compared to 2006.

Conclusions and future perspectives

For the time being, the integration of Mr. G. seems to be **sustainable**, but no one can be 100 % sure considering the nature of the psychological problem (a manic depressive shows cyclical behaviour, once positive mood, then negative mood, etc.). The manager is willing to maintain the employment. He is even monitoring the psychological condition of the person and, when he is stable psychologically, the manager is going to offer him a more structured schedule (working hours) inside the bank (for example, he could serve as first referral for clients providing basic information). As the manager states: “Employees with psychological problems need **understanding** and through face-to-face communication and **trust** you can successfully integrate them in the working environment.” The bank’s organisational values and philosophy encompass the accommodation of the bank’s working environment, but “each case is unique and **unique measures** should be taken, rather than the implementation of general accommodation disability programmes”.

Grundfos A/S (Denmark)

Technical adaptations and reduced working hours as well as the support of a company's social worker allowed for the further employment of a laboratory technician with physical disabilities in a large pump manufacture.

Grundfos A/S was founded in the city of Bjerringbro in 1945 by Poul Due Jensen. It is now one of the **world largest pump manufacturers**, represented by 75 companies in 42 countries. Grundfos products are also merchandised by distributors in many different countries. With more than 4,500 employees in Denmark and more than 14,700 employees worldwide, it is one of Denmark's largest companies. The Poul Due Jensen Foundation, which was established in 1975 as a self-governing institution, owns about 85.1 % of the shares in Grundfos Holding AG. Staff owns about 2.9 % and the founder's family about 12 %.

Of the 4,500 employees in Denmark, about 150 have a physical or mental disability. They are employed in a wide range of jobs; from production to research to administration. One of the people **working at Grundfos on special terms is Mrs. J.**

Mrs. J. has been working as a **laboratory technician** at Grundfos since the autumn of 2002. She is now 49 years old. When she first started working at Grundfos, it was in a regular full-time job in the laboratory. After a while, she began having difficulties with heavy lifts and it became hard for her to stand up all day, as is often required in laboratory work. She experienced occasional pain in her former job as well, as she was once involved in an accident and still has **whiplash** as a result. Over time, she also developed painful **degenerative arthritis**.

Job and accommodation

Many **accommodations** were made over time to help Mrs. J. Heavy equipment was put on **trolleys** so she could move it around without having to lift it. Later, she was transferred to an area where the nature of the analyses made it possible to sit rather than stand and allowed her to **take a break** when she needed it. She also had electric height **adjustable desks** for her computer and apparatus.

For a while, things were better, but not good enough. She got to a point where she had to use all of her energy just to get her work done; her free time was spent in bed trying to regain her strength, and she could hardly sleep due to the pain. Finally, in May 2007, she had a serious talk with her doctor, and she decided to talk to the manager about getting a **flex job** – a job with flexible working requirements for persons with reduced working capacity, where wages are subsidised after approval by the local authorities.

When Mrs. J. told the manager that she considered applying for a flex job, he was very supportive. He left no doubt that Mrs. J. was a valued employee and that they would do everything they could to keep her. He suggested that she talked to one of **the company's social workers** and made an appointment for her the following day.

The social worker helped Mrs. J. to contact the local authorities of her home town, and then the casework began. In Mrs. J.'s own words, *"it takes a lot of strength to make it through the system when you are ill"*. During **the consideration of her case**, the social worker at Grundfos was a great help to her. After a meeting between her manager, the social worker, the HR manager, the authorities of her home town, and Mrs. J. herself, the flex job was finally approved in February 2008.

Mrs. J. has the same job in the laboratory and the tasks are the same as before: Analysing different materials, conducting experiments, and chemical analyses. But the **working hours have been reduced**. She now only works from Monday to Thursday; a total of 20 hours a week. She describes it as a *“gigantic relief”*. Mrs. J.’s colleague, who has worked with her the whole time, explains how the group of 10 laboratory technicians has the freedom to divide the different tasks between them according to their schedule and ability: *“It is pure routine”, she says, “there really are no problems”*. Mrs. J can do most of the same tasks as her colleagues, but the **flexibility** allows her to prefer tasks where she can sit down and to avoid tasks that would be problematic for her.

Mrs. J.’s story does not stand alone. At Grundfos, **corporate social responsibility** is incorporated on the highest policy levels and applies to Grundfos Group companies all over the world. One of the common goals is that 3 % of employees in each company or branch are hired on special terms. Another goal is that as many employees as possible should be able to continue working at Grundfos if their working capacity is reduced due to disability, illness or other incidents. In the company headquarters in Denmark, three social workers function as consultants for employees as well as managers on all levels in order to coordinate and improve the efforts made.

A crucial part of Grundfos’ social responsibility strategy is six **sheltered workshops**, which celebrate their 40 year anniversary in 2008. The conditions here are very similar to normal production, but job requirements are adapted to each individual employee’s ability to work. Everyone has a work station adjusted to their special needs in forms of chairs, desks, etc. and they are free to take a break whenever they need to. The 120 employees who work here have physical, psychological or social disabilities or disorders. Their wages are partly subsidised by the local authorities.

Besides the sheltered workshops, Grundfos implemented a **wide range of other accommodation measures**; e.g. ramps for wheelchair users and electric height adjustable desks for everyone. An ergo therapist advises employees about healthy working positions, and there is also a gym that everyone can use – except when it is reserved for long-term absent employees, who are frequently invited to “network meetings” at the gym. Here they can exercise without pressure or unwanted attention, talk to each other or meet with a social worker – in other words, stay connected and maybe find the solution, inspiration or courage that enables them to return to work; e.g. in a flex job.

Conclusions

According to the CSR manager, it is very important to the **successful and sustainable employment** of persons with disabilities and/or reduced working capacity, that the social responsibility strategy is implemented on the highest possible level. This allows everyone to make flexibility and consideration a high priority. The general assurance that they will not be let down if something should happen to them makes all employees feel more secure and appreciated, which creates a better working environment for everyone. Mrs. J. also emphasises how the support from her manager helped make the process a very positive experience. Looking back, the only thing she regrets is not asking for help much sooner, instead of pressuring herself as she did.

When it comes to her everyday work, Mrs. J. feels that flexibility and freedom are crucial success factors; along with the fact that the job she is doing is a **real job**. This view is shared by the CSR manager who is careful to point out that the parts produced and assembled in the sheltered workshops are needed in other parts of the production:

They are actual workplaces with meaningful tasks, not asylums for the unfit. But at the same time, it is important to create room and working conditions that allow for the necessary considerations.

The Grundfos Group has received much recognition for its social responsibility, including a large number of **prizes and awards**. In 2006, Grundfos A/S in Denmark was chosen as EFQM Award winner. The award was given by The European Foundation for Quality Management, a joint organisation for all companies working with the Business Excellence model. Grundfos also received two special awards for Corporate Social Responsibility and People Development and Involvement. In 2005, Grundfos was placed on the list of the 100 best workplaces in Europe.

Grundfos continuously keeps an eye open for new groups of people who could be in need of support; lately there has been a particular focus on young people with psychological problems. **Plans for the future** involve keeping up the work done now as well as developing new initiatives – hopefully in closer cooperation with the local authorities.

Asked about **recommendations and hints** for other companies, the CSR manager's advice is to start somewhere conceivable. Do not think that you have to do everything at once; it is enough to do something. Often the problem, especially for small and medium-sized companies, is that they do not know what to do or how to do it. A good idea is to use existing business networks. Talk to others and ask what they have done. Talk to the authorities and figure out whom to call. Knowing where to start makes it easier to take the first step when an applicant or employee needs special support.

Inštitut “Jožef Stefan” (Slovenia)

Assistive technological tools and the change of work tasks were offered to a technician after an accident which entailed an impairment of his sight. All technical equipment in the research institute has been adapted to the needs of employees to foster the integration of persons with disabilities and to prevent injuries.

The Institute

The **Inštitut “Jožef Stefan”** (Jožef Stefan Institute; IJS) is a leading Slovenian research institute, covering a broad spectrum of basic and applied research. The basic activities of the Institute are carried out within 26 research departments, involved in the areas of natural sciences, life sciences and engineering sciences. IJS is a public institution headquartered in Ljubljana. Its researchers promote technological and economic development throughout Slovenia. They want to use and transfer obtained knowledge to industry with the intention to solve different complex problems. They are also working closely with a number of other organisations in Slovenia and abroad.

The Institute was founded in 1949, when the Institute for Physics within the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU) started with research connected to the peaceful use of atomic energy. At the end of 2007, the Institute employed 854 persons, of whom a good majority have PhDs or are PhD students. Among these employees, there are 20 persons with disabilities of different categories and types, different educational levels (from technicians to scientists), as well as of different age and gender.

The concerned employee

One of the employees with disabilities is **Mr. M. N.**, born in 1971. He is employed full-time at IJS and works regular hours. Mr. M. N. finished secondary school and qualified for a technician. He has been working for the Institute since February 2002 and had been responsible for metal work on a fixed grinding machine. Occasionally, he also worked with other tools or performed other jobs instructed by his superior.

In 2007, Mr. M. N. was **injured during his work**. When he was sharpening small knives the grindstone (disc) on the machine cracked. His right eye was injured and he was inflicted with open wounds on his face. Because of that, he needed a plastic surgery at an eye clinic. He has been recognised as a person with sensory disability because he **lost his sight on the right eye**. Consequently he was unable to work at the previous workplace as he lost his ability of sensing one of the perspectives i.e. the depth. There also appeared a fear to injure the healthy eye.

Employment and accommodation measures

Soon after the accident the **employer had changed work tasks** of Mr. M. N. and adjusted his workplace. Mr. M. N. is now working as independent turner (scraper) in workshops, which produce metal products for the purposes of IJS R&D.

The adjustments enabled him to continue his work on a **special computer conducted machine**. This machine also enables people lacking the deep sight to work. He also received other assignments concerning planning, control, material supply, organisational and other suitable work in the workshop. Beside this Mr. M. N. does not carry out batch work, nor works with chemicals or on open machines, as this could possibly injure him again.

After the accident his work time had been turned into **flexible (adaptable) time**, but after a certain period it has become fixed hours again. The employer has qualified him appropriately for work with the modified machine and for additional tasks. Mr. M. N. was also given a **possibility for further education**, but as for now he refused to use this option.

During the process of internal qualification IJS assigned a special mentor for Mr. M. N. and provided him with all necessary assistance. The employer also arranged for the installation of adequate air-conditions in workshops to prevent temperature changes and draught.

For the reorganisation of the workplace and for adapted machinery the Institute provided approximately € 200,000. For employees with disabilities IJS benefits from reduced quotas for mandatory contributions and receives some **funds** from the government because they surpass the employment quota for persons with disabilities required by Slovenian law. But these benefits do not cover all costs which arise from providing the reasonable adaptation of workplaces and other accommodations for persons with disabilities. The larger share of the expenses has to be covered by the employer from the Institute's resources.

Results and conclusions

The experiences of the employer concerning Mr. M. N. are very positive. In spite of the accident the employee remained productive and **creates value** for the Institute. Mr. M. N. himself is also very satisfied, because IJS enabled him to continue working. After the injury the employee has also received compensation from Institute, as well as compensation for the disability from the Institute of pension and invalidity insurance of Slovenia (ZPIZ).

IJS purchases machinery, electronic equipment and different devices (e. g. hoists) to facilitate work for its employees. The intention is to help persons with disabilities but also **prevent further injuries** and other disorders. The machine purchased for Mr. M. N. is also used by some other employees (mechanical engineers), if necessary. At the Institute they strive to organise each work task in a way to increase productivity. They want to provide successful integration of persons with disabilities into the work environment with the intention to ensure their personal satisfaction. All of this leads to positive responses from partners of IJS. In May 2007, IJS received a **certificate** "Family Friendly Company" from a NGO. In the context of this certificate they express their commitment to implement appropriate health protection measures.

The Institute **treats all employees equally**. They believe that people with disabilities – in the long run – are even more motivated for work, further education, obtaining additional qualifications, etc. and that any company or organisation should offer all this. However, greater commitment from social services and more concrete help from government in this area would be much appreciated.

Future perspectives

For Mr. M. N., the employer sees **promising possibilities for his further development** (further qualification); he could qualify for working on a measuring machine. The Institute wants to support him in undertaking additional internal or external education.

The IJS always takes appropriate care for employees, when their disability occurs during the job. Provided that they are appropriate for a vacancy, new people with disabilities can also be employed. Based on the Institute's values special attention is paid to people with disabilities, because healthy people can easily help themselves. The only obstacle is a lack of adequately qualified experts for working with people with disabilities. IJS advocates the importance of occasional **cooperation with local non-profit organisations** for persons with disabilities and with ZPIZ. In the near future, IJS wants to expand this collaboration.

The Institute strives to enable persons with disabilities so that they could manage the quality of their working life by themselves. In this way, IJS wants to contribute to the integration of persons with disabilities and persons with special needs **into the working environment and the society as a whole**.

Konstruktiv AB (Sweden)

After a training period accompanied by an NGO and the provision of assistive technology a woman with sensory and intellectual disabilities was employed in a family-owned sales company.

Konstruktiv AB was founded as a registered company in 1981 by the present CEO Ulf Lundgren and his wife. From the beginning the company mostly did technical consulting but slowly the present business was developed and today there is almost no consulting left. The main activity for Konstruktiv AB is, instead, **sales of machines for metal cutting with use of plasma**, and service parts for such machines. Konstruktiv AB is the only distributor in Sweden of the American plasma cutter brand Hypertherm. The company is a small, family-owned establishment with its headquarters in central Örebro. Classified as a small company, they have five employees.

In early 2007, the management couple Mr. and Mrs. Lundgren met a young woman, Ms. T., who was working at the welfare center they attended. Ms. T. was a social and outgoing individual with **limited tunnel vision, hearing on only one ear** and a **reduced short term memory**, due to an accident at the age of nine. Her work tasks at the welfare centre was to clean, do the dishes and socialise the customers. Ms. T.'s general idea about her job, at that time, was that she had too little to do, no colleagues and at the times of the day when she was working, there were only a limited number of customers – hence, she was pretty lonely. The job was simply not very appropriate for someone with social skills. Much due to Ms. T.'s social nature and positive attitude, the question came up whether Ms. T. could apply as warehouse worker at Konstruktiv AB.

Ms. T. is 26 years old and has upper secondary education with natural science orientation. Before Konstruktiv AB, she has done work training at e. g. the local disability institute and at a café. She worked for about a year at the welfare centre as mentioned above. Her sensory disabilities reduce her capacity for memorising what she's been told, something that makes the process of her work take a somewhat longer time, due to her having to ask one or two times extra. Her visual disability can be compensated for by accommodations, but she gets **tired faster than her co-workers** and can, hence, only work **part-time**. The hearing disability does, however, not reduce her capacity to work substantially.

Job and accommodation

Ms. T. was, at the time of her start at Konstruktiv AB, involved in the work of Activa, a local foundation who she had come in contact with through school. Activa's concept is to guide and support persons who involuntarily lack access to the labour market, due to their disabilities. They have a close cooperation with the municipality, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service and their purpose is simply to establish work opportunities for individuals with disabilities and help with the accommodations needed. Through Activa, Ms. T. had received her former jobs, and the foundation consultant, in cooperation with Ms. T. herself, was in a process of finding Ms. T. a new job that she could enjoy more than the lonely and not so stimulating work at the welfare centre. Consequently, Konstruktiv AB called Ms. T.'s **consultant** at Activa and **cooperation was established**.

At first, Ms. T. was working as a **trainee** at Konstruktiv AB. During this period, Ms. T. and the management had **time to find out** what were the best work tasks for Ms. T., how long she was able to work per day, what specific times of the day suited her best,

what problems her disabilities caused her when working in the warehouse and **what accommodation was needed**. Activa also helped by being involved in the process, **teaching the management and co-workers** about the nature of Ms. T.'s disabilities and the accommodations she needed in her work. Activa also functioned as a safety net, always there to answer questions and help out if any problems arose during the way.

Activa established a contact with the Swedish Public Employment Agency, who made an investigation of Ms. T.'s needs at her workplace and provided accommodation through the grant for physical investments in the workplace. Ms. T received a common **magnifying glass** to use when looking for machine parts at the storage shelves, **adaptable table**, **magnifying software for her computer**, a **keyboard with large keys** and an **enlargement device for papers with much text**, showing the magnified text on the computer.

After about half a year as apprentice, Ms. T. received a regular employment at Konstruktiv AB, however employed *through* Activa. This procedure is the second step in Activa's programme and the **salary is financed by a wage grant**. During this time, Activa is still an active part in the relationship between worker and management and follows the process closely by visiting the workplace and by having regular contact with both parties. In July 2008 Ms. T. was **regularly employed** by Konstruktiv AB and Activa's work was thereby officially finished. Konstruktiv AB still has a **wage grant for about 50 %** of Ms. T.'s wage, compensating for the extra time it sometimes takes for Ms. T., relative to other employees, due to her disabilities. Ms. T. also, of course, still has her technical accommodation tools at her help.

Ms. T.'s work tasks involve receiving and sending goods, organising at the storage shelves, writing packing slips, and inventorying. On occasions, when the management has not been present at the company, Ms. T. has also handled orderings. The **process** has, according to the management, Ms. T. herself and the consultant at Activa, been **very positive**. Ms. T. feels secure enough to ask if there is anything she is in doubt of and the management is always there to give her the extra support she needs. The management believes strongly in encouraging Ms. T to grow both professionally and personally. They e. g. encourage her to try and learn English better, both as a way to be able to help international customers at the company and to evolve her personal self esteem and capabilities.

Konstruktiv AB has no plans on employing another person with disabilities. The employment of Ms. T. has more to do about her being a nice and capable individual, rather than a part in an overall strategy. Also, the company is very small, with only five employees, and has no obvious ambitions to expand. However, the management is happy to be able to help out by taking in a person who might otherwise have difficulties receiving a job.

Conclusions

The overall reactions to Ms. T. working at Konstruktiv AB have been very positive. The management feels that Ms. T. is a sympathetic and reasonable co-worker, always taking responsibility and being a fresh breath at the company. One of Ms. T.'s co-workers says that he *"doesn't even notice anymore that Ms. T. cannot hear or see very well. She is just one in the team"*. Ms. T., herself, claims that she is very satisfied with going to work every day. She also believes that the accommodations made on her behalf are well enough. Due to her not working more than part-time, she still has strength left after work to have a rich personal life. Finally, the Activa consultant is

pleased with the situation as well. According to her experience, Ms. T. and the management at Konstruktiv AB have a very close and sound relationship that implies **security and progress for both Ms. T. and the company.**

The recommendations the involved persons have to give to other companies thinking about employing a person with some kind of disability, are that it is rewarding to be able to help someone in need. Also, the process is really not as troublesome as it might seem at first. Most people, even with disabilities, are capable of most things as long as they receive the right accommodation. The **help** from Activa has been **substantial** and the **financing through wage grants and the grant for physical investments in the workplace** make it inexpensive for companies to hire someone with reduced capacity to work.

In 2008 Konstruktiv AB was **rewarded** with the Activa dragon, a price handed out by Activa in cooperation with the Municipality of Örebro, for extraordinary well accommodation of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. The price was handed out at an open breakfast meeting with representatives from commercial and business life in Örebro, in order to inspire more companies to make the same effort with the similar fine results as Konstruktiv AB has done.

Mc Donald's (Latvia)

A co-operation between a fast-food restaurant and an NGO aims at the integration of persons with intellectual and mental disabilities into the first labour market. Shorter working periods and the assistance of a social worker have proven crucial.

The enterprise

Mc Donald's first restaurant in Latvia opened in 1994 in the capital city of Riga. Today the company runs 6 restaurants in Latvia, all of them in Riga. In 2007 these restaurants served 3 million customers.

McDonald's restaurants in Latvia and the Baltic States are operated under franchise agreements. More than 70 % of the management of McDonald's restaurants worldwide have been passed to regional and local businesses. In 2008, McDonald's in Latvia employed 547 people in total and the number of personnel has doubled since 2000.

Jobs and accommodations

In general the work for all staff at McDonalds is very intensive. **Work is done in 3 shifts**; from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m., from 3 p.m. to 12 p.m. and a night shift from 11/12 p.m. to 7 a.m. The pay is per hour and the manager's task is to make sure that time is not wasted. The shift team is consolidated and there is no spare time to talk. Performance actions in the kitchen are measured in seconds. Working in the kitchen requires tight attention to cooking time and serving time.

Mc Donald's Latvia started to employ **persons with intellectual/mental disabilities** in 2000, aiming to have at least 2 people in each of the restaurants. Employees with disabilities **work as cleaners** and usually are not involved in the kitchen duties and cash counter responsibilities. The work involves clearing and cleaning tasks that are well defined. It is cleaning of the eating area, working premises, gardening and sweeping of the outside area. The company values the good quality of the work results.

The work shift system allows for **shorter working periods** and a shorter working week where required. Working hours for persons with mental disabilities due to shifts are normally 4-6 hours. Each case varies; some employees with disabilities work a 4-hour shift for a couple of days a week, some can cope with an 8 hour shift.

Applicants with mental disabilities are selected in cooperation with the NGO "Saule". A **social worker assists** the person very closely from the start in the workplace. In most cases newly recruited people with disabilities do not have knowledge and skills for the cleaning jobs and they need assistance in the workplace to learn how to do it and get used to not forgetting something and how to deal with other staff and to be on time. The social worker spends several hours every day with the trainee with mental disabilities in the workplace in the restaurant.

Though part of the job, a special challenge for the social worker is to **achieve mutual understanding** and acceptance among a mixed team (persons with disabilities and other staff). As typical in the food service industry, also Mc Donald's has **high staff turnover** and managers on average change at least every 3 years. NGO mentors then have to commit more time and effort to liaise between people with disabilities and new staff to explain the specificities of working with mentally less developed people.

Recently, there has been more competition for workplaces at Mc Donald's because of the weakening economic situation. Consequently the supported job is needed even more to avoid people with disabilities being pushed out of the open labour market when losing their opportunity to work at Mc Donald's.

The Supported Employment Agency of the NGO "Saule" in Latvia

The concept of the Agency started in 1999 with an EU Phare/Lien project, under which a group of specialists from Finland introduced NGOs in Latvia to the supported employment concept. During the training the Finnish consultants presented some good practice examples, amongst which they described the Mc Donald's case in other countries. Ms Irēna Jēkabsone from the NGO Saule was amongst the first social workers/mentors who actively organised this form of reasonable accommodation in Latvia. Ms Jēkabsone described how she visited the management of the Mc Donald's restaurants in Riga to try to find jobs for her clients and surprisingly found that Mc Donald's was quite willing to engage in the activity. However it must be mentioned that the NGO has worked hard to soften the general public's stereotypes about mental disability. Also they have organised extensive training of job mentors/social workers. In 2000 NGO Saule established the Supported Employment Agency offering a supported employment service to people with mental disabilities.

By 2008, NGO Saule's "**Supported Employment Agency**" had provided supported employment service to about 60 people with mental disabilities working for McDonald's and elsewhere in Latvia. The Agency assists with an assessment of the person's skills and abilities (most of their clients have disability group 2, assessed by the State Medical Commission, which is the basis for receiving State social benefits) and the selection of a suitable type of work, creatively helping to find the job and negotiate terms with the potential employer. Assistance is also provided with starting a job, training and adjusting in the workplace, allocation of a mentor / social worker assistance.

The NGO started recruiting people for supported employment from their **day centre** for persons with disabilities, but also advertised the service to the social service department of Riga Municipality and other municipalities, schools and specialised schools, State Employment Agency, and psychiatric hospitals, because amongst their patients are people who receive some treatment from time to time and their families can receive information about opportunities there.

Financing

The support services provided by the NGO are **financed by the Riga Municipality**. While until 2005 financing was flowing evenly and there was more time to allocate for the support in the workplace, now financing is provided on a project basis, which enables the Municipality to keep control over NGOs. In general, NGOs today have fewer financial resources and it has become more difficult for the NGO to keep up continuity of support to those who are working while also preparing new recruits for work. With less social workers' time allocated for support, some of the employed people had less assistance and so problems arose from uncertainties, misunderstandings or intolerance of other employees.

As an alternative for a person with mental disabilities to apply for assistance of a mentor-social worker to solve reasonable accommodation needs, there also is the Social Service Department of the municipality. Unfortunately, this service is rather expensive (approx. € 10.- per hour while the earnings at Mc Donald's are approx. € 3.-) and only granted for free to the person with disabilities when he/she classifies to be below poverty line (which is unlikely for most people concerned if they are working and their parents' income is taken into account).

Experiences and conclusions

By 2003 Mc Donald's in Latvia employed 5 people with disabilities with mentor assistance provided from the NGO Saule and enabled by Riga Municipality financing. As per September 2008 Mc Donald's employs 19 people with disabilities and a social worker mentor is still provided by the NGO. The age of the employed disabled basically is between 20 and 40 years, only one person is 50 years old. The ratio of men and women is 50:50.

While it is Mc Donald's international policy to support people with disabilities, from the Baltic States only Latvia has engaged in employing people with mental disabilities on such a scale. In Riga, cooperation between Mc Donald's and NGO Saule has continued for 8 years and the **cooperation has evolved into a well running system.**

The staff at Mc Donald's **appreciates the diligence of the people with disabilities** who do the cleaning jobs because they know that in most cases the job will be done conscientiously and with good quality. Other employees respect that their colleagues with disabilities work different / shorter shifts and accept that it might take them a little longer to complete the tasks.

When persons with disabilities work for 3 years, their social benefit grows into a state pension. This is a great motivation for employees and involved parties to achieve the 3 year goal. Nevertheless, each case is different. Some adjust easily and quickly to the working conditions and are able to commit for a longer time. Some have tried and not succeeded to continue.

One reason is that the reaction of persons with mental disability is difficult to predict and that they were – despite all efforts made – **not able to continue with the job.** Another reason is that in some cases, the – often very helpful – mediation of a social worker could not be provided, due to a lack of financing. For persons with mental disabilities it is especially hard to cope with fluctuations in staff or management (when persons they got acquainted with disappear and new trust and understanding needs to be built). Some employees with mental disabilities also have great difficulties to judge their situation and job perspectives – after some time they want a change and be promoted, although they would not be able to fulfil the tasks of a higher position.

According to Ms Irēna Jēkabsone at NGO Saule, the optimal mentor support would be for the first 3 months every day for three hours, then for the next 3 months every day for one hour, and then for the next year every month for at least an hour. Presently the State has **not included in legislation** an entitlement to mentors' official support for employed people with mental disabilities.

Despite these difficulties, there are also many **examples for a successful and sustainable integration** of employees with disabilities at Mc Donald's restaurants in Latvia. The longest a person with mental disabilities has worked for Mc Donald's in Riga is 8 years. From the total of 28 people with disabilities who have been employed since 2000, 4 people have worked for 4 to 5 years, 4 have worked for 6 years, 6 of them have worked for 7 to 8 years; amongst the latter the eldest is a now 50 years old man.

Mercator d.d. (Slovenia)

A trading chain promoted an employee having lost his sight on one eye after an accident to another department and supported his further education. Another employee was offered the possibility to work at home part-time after a surgery.

Poslovni sistem Mercator, d.d. (Business System Mercator, d.d.) is a company with headquarters in the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana. It is the controlling company of a group of associated companies in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The Mercator Group is the leading trading chain in Slovenia and one of the largest chains in Southeastern Europe. Mercator has two key tasks, it performs commercial activities (retailing mainly food and similar products) and carries out various tasks for other companies of its group. Mercator is a Slovenian private joint stock company, listed on the Slovenian stock exchange.

The company has been in business since 1949 and has gone public in 1989. It is a large company having 12,607 employees (end of 2007), and 6.6 % of this staff are persons with disabilities. The company Mercator employs persons with disabilities in excess of the quota prescribed by the state.

One of the persons with disabilities is **Mr. J. I.**. He is 37 years old and he works full-time in Mercator since he has finished secondary school. He has a sensory disability. In the year 1995 he was injured during his work in a shop (chemical burn of the eye), and now he is almost completely **blind on his right eye**.

Another employee with disabilities is **Mrs. M. A.** who is over 55 years old. She is a professor of English and Russian languages. Mercator has employed her since she has graduated from university. In 1996 she underwent a **surgery due to a breast cancer**. Since then she has been recognised as a person with disabilities.

Employment

After the injury Mr. J. I. has been **promoted to assistant shop manager**. The employer has supported and financed his further education. Mr. J. I. has successfully finished higher school and later on the university. Since 2000 he has been working in the merchandising department. He was unable to work in his previous job because of intensive oscillation of temperature commonly present in shops. He needed more adequate working conditions, which would offer lower burdening for his eye. Currently he is working as team coordinator of the micro merchandising and packaging programme.

The other employee with disabilities, Mrs. M. A. worked as a translator before her illness and was the **promoted manager in the translation department**. Due to the intellectual nature of her job she was able to continue her work in the same department also after the surgery but only for 4 hours per day. Two years ago Mercator reorganised the translation department and now Mrs. M. A. is working in the Department for Education of Employees. She is responsible for different administrative and other professional tasks.

Accommodation measures

Mercator is aware that employees with disabilities contribute significantly to the company's success. Therefore, special care is dedicated to persons with disabilities as a specially protected category of employees.

Soon after his injury, the employer transferred Mr. J. I. to a more appropriate workplace. First within the shop, but then because of his dysfunction he was promoted to the merchandise department. On his own initiative Mr. J. I. **educated and qualified** himself for the job he is still carrying out. He now works on programmes where temperature changes are not present. As well, he was given the **right to reject work** that he can not accomplish because of his injury (e. g. permanent work with a computer). The employer has also organised for the best and the newest computer monitors for his use. In case of Mrs. M. A., Mercator enabled her to **work at home** for a few months after the surgery. The employer covered part of the telephone and electricity costs. After she returned to work at the company premises again, they had relieved her and she started to work 4 hours per day. Because she has been driving to work by bus, she was given a possibility to choose her daily working hours liberally. After transferring her to a new job this option has changed to a mode that one week she works at mornings and next week in the afternoons. Help from her collaborators has also been at her disposal.

Due to the fact that Mercator surpasses the quota of employed persons with disabilities required by the Slovenian law, the company **received funds** amounting to € 620,000 from the government in 2007. Mercator has used this money for assuring the reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities; however, the company has covered a large share of the incurred expenses from its own sources. In the cases of the two employees with disabilities described above, the employer financed Mr. J. I.'s education and qualification expenses and the provision of the latest technology. In the case of Mrs. M. A. the employer also covered a part of her expenses that incurred while she worked from home.

Results and conclusions

Mercator acknowledges the problems resulting from the increasing number of workers with disabilities, high restrictions at their work and consecutively the lack of suitable workplaces. Due to the trading operations Mercator is rather limited in offering a person with disability a suitable job. Because of this, they are very satisfied when the integration of a person with disabilities is successful. Mercator is aware that the adaptation to a new workplace was very difficult for both, Mr. J. I. and for Mrs. M. A., but they managed to integrate themselves into the new working environment and now **contribute successfully to the business results.**

Mercator provides satisfying work environment for employees with disabilities with a special **voluntary project** called "Persons' with Disabilities Friendly Company". In the frame of the project two goals are pursued - to improve the satisfaction of customers with disabilities and to assure reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. In 2008, Mercator also established a special (daughter) "**company for persons with disabilities**", with the intention to provide persons with disabilities (existing and newly recruited) with better working conditions and to introduce new jobs (tasks) for them. Within the "company for persons with disabilities" (with the main activity making and selling cosmetics and eco-products) managers and specialists are creating many new activities to accommodate for persons with disabilities to fully utilise their capabilities. The possibilities to work from home shall also be expanded.

Providing supportive working environment, team inclusion and tolerance towards employees with disabilities has brought a positive impact on the satisfaction of a larger number of employees. Accommodation measures are not only applicable for persons with disabilities; they are useful also for large and increasing group of people with special needs, such as the ageing workforce.

Due to its commitment to corporate social responsibility values, Mercator **was awarded** a certificate called “Family Friendly Company”. This award underlines the harmony of employees’ occupational and family life. Different company stakeholders accepted Mercator’s project “Persons’ with Disabilities Friendly Company” very positively.

To **ensure better work conditions** Mercator collaborates with the Slovene association for mental health - ŠENT, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the organisation ŠENT Prima. The latter trained some of Mercator’s employees to become specialists for working with persons with disabilities (mentors). The management of Mercator considers that the main success factor in achieving the personal satisfaction of persons with disabilities is the time when they discover that they are still fully useful for the company.

Future perspectives

The company has always been inclined to a most suitable settlement of employment problems of persons with disabilities. They are aware that disability will increase, irrespective of new supportive technologies introduced to their activities. This was also one of the main reasons for establishing the “company for persons with disabilities”, which will provide new jobs for their own and other persons with disabilities. Beside its main activity, new activities like creating different hand made products and gifts under its own brand name MercArt are being developed. With new job tasks, workplace adaptations and further trainings, the **company wants to offer new opportunities for persons with disabilities**. That is also why the project “Safety and Health of the Employees”, in which a special team provides for an ergonomic arrangement of workplaces, has been started. Mercator has organised its own Mountaineering Club for relaxation, prevention and as a motivation for employees to stay active. The company established a humanitarian foundation, which finances health examinations for employees.

In future, Mercator considers the **possibility of collaboration with local organisations** of persons with disabilities or non-profit organisations. Mercator also wants to establish more extensive interaction between doctors, committees for evaluation of disabilities and employers.

Multi-D Analysis AB (Sweden)

An enterprise developing computer software employed a man who had performed his master degree project in the company, although he lost his vision in the meantime. The public employment service provided assistive technology. The company offered a part-time job, a co-worker assists in external meetings.

Multi-D Analysis was founded in 2001 by leading scientists and software engineers from Swedish top universities who had discovered new facts about 3-dimensional data, opening possibilities to analyse test samples and study chemical equilibrium in entirely new ways. The company develops and sells software for analyses of multidimensional data, with focus on the health care sector and sickness diagnoses. Multi-D Analysis is a small private company with two permanent employees. Also, there are usually one or two temporary employees working at the company in different projects, often funded by the European Union. The office is located in central Gothenburg.

In the semester of 2005/2006 an engineer student, **Mr. L**, performed his degree project (master thesis) at Multi-D, developing neural networks for diagnoses of cancer through coding and testing (in other words, chemical substances from several known cases of cancer were collected in a software network, which was then “trained” to recognise these and consequently sort out other cases as “not cancer”). When graduated, Mr. L was temporary employed on a number of occasions by the company during 2 ½ years, working on different projects. Last summer, in 2007, Mr. L was supposed to have started an open-ended employment at Multi-D, when suddenly he lost his vision almost completely. In two days Mr. L’s vision decreased to about 1 % of normal eyesight at the doctors’ great surprise. His planned employment at Multi-D, hence, had to be postponed.

Mr. L is a 28 year old graduated civil engineer in chemistry and physics. The employment as research and development engineer at Multi-D is his first “real” employment. His main work tasks at Multi-D include developing new modules and measuring systems in the company’s software programme, but since there are only two employees the work tasks also involve general problem solving, dealing with customers and simply answering the phone.

Job and accommodation

When Mr. L lost his vision the pre-conditions of his up-coming employment were of course profoundly altered. Mr. L could no longer manage with the ordinary computer equipment necessary for his work. Mr. L and the management hence joined efforts and contacted the Public Employment Service to investigate the possibilities for work accommodation. An administrator from the Public Employment Service visited the company and Mr. L got to try out accommodation equipment. Receiving necessary equipment was never a problem and the accommodation could take place fairly rapidly. On June 1st 2008 Mr. L started his open-ended employment at Multi-D Analysis.

From the Public Employment Service, through the funding scheme “**Grant for Physical investments in the workplace**”, Mr. L received magnification software for his computer, a large computer screen, voice synthesis, voice control and a magnifying camera for reading printed text masses (the magnifying camera looks like a web camera, showing the photographed page on the computer screen where it can be magnified as much as needed). All equipment belongs to Mr. L and he can take it with him if changing to another job. Multi-D Analysis also receives a 50 % **wage grant** for Mr. L.

Every third to sixth month Mr. L sees a specialist who, in cooperation with Mr. L, decides the length of the hours Mr. L is capable of working. At the moment Mr. L works part-time (50 %) but he is aiming at working 75 % as of November this year. For the time Mr. L cannot work he receives a **disability pension** from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency.

Mr. L's work tasks do not require work on remote sites on a regular basis. Hence, no equipment outside the office is required. Mr. L, however, has yet another set of accommodation equipment at home, enabling him to work on a distance from home on occasion. Mr. L's work tasks *do* include meetings with other companies in the different EU projects Multi-D takes part in. On those occasions, Mr. L uses the magnifying software on his portable lap-top and so far he has always needed a co-worker to go with him, mostly since he experiences difficulties fully managing outdoors. Having to have a co-worker to go with him of course brings extra expenses to the company. These are however compensated by the funding scheme "**Support for personal assistance**" administrated by the Public Employment Service. The funding can be given at a maximum amount of SEK 50 000 (€ 5 250) per year.

Conclusions

The general attitude, of both Mr. L himself and the management, is that the employment has started of very well and the experiences are nothing but positive. The management describes Mr. L as utterly motivated and a resource at the company and Mr. L himself is pleased with having received a really good job. Mr. L does the same job today, with the help of accommodation equipment, which he was supposed to do in 2007 when the employment was first brought up.

Mr. L's vision rapidly improved in August 2008. Over one night he regained his eyesight to almost 30 % of normal level. The doctors do not know whether the vision will come back entirely but Mr. L is anyhow aiming at working full-time at Multi-D on a longer perspective, starting with 75 % in November.

Mr. L concludes that when it comes to computer jobs, having a vision disability is almost an advantage, due to all **outstanding accommodation equipment available**. Through the voice control, Mr. L can talk instead of write texts. The voice control adapts to the user's voice and improves its correctness over time. Hence, after a while the disabled person finishes faster than his/her non-disabled co-workers since people generally talk faster than they write. Consequently, Mr. L recommends any company using computers on a regular basis to employ persons with vision disabilities. "*Furthermore, the wage grant is an incentive*" he declares.

The **experiences** of everyone involved with receiving necessary aid from the Public Employment Service are **very good**. The process was rapid and efficient and the administrators were well-informed. The experiences from cooperating with the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, on the other hand, are not as positive. Mr. L experienced too much pushing towards working full-time and thinks that the administrators are not experienced enough when it comes to his kind of disability.

Multi-D Analysis has no active plans of employing another person with disabilities and the company has no overall strategy in that matter. For such a small, high technology company it is the knowledge that is important. Mr. L is well aware of that and he knows his value on the labour market. "*With my education it is the competence that counts, not who you are*", he concludes.

Multigas Ltd. (Malta)

A gas production company provided reading and writing training and further qualification to its illiterate employee who due to back problems could not fulfil his tasks as heavy truck driver anymore. He is now a driver of the managing director and a messenger.

Multigas Ltd. is a producer and importer of gases. Primarily they are involved in the **production of medical gases**; however the company also produces **industrial gases**, a mixture of gases, decanting, carbon dioxide and dry ice. They also import gases and after decanting they supply the local market according to customer needs. Multigas Ltd. is also a leading local supplier of tools and welding equipment. The company was established way back in 1926 and to date employs 62 persons of which 3 are disabled.

One of the persons with disabilities employed by Multigas Ltd. is a 46 year old male with a **physical form of disability (back problems)**. He was employed by the company in 1979 and his disability has occurred and needed immediate interventions in 1998. Due to persevering on-the-job back problems he had to be operated on the spine. Whilst the back problems are likely to have been job related, there was also a certain degree of inherent problems. Despite the fact that he is still mobile he cannot carry any form of weight and needs to be seated for more than 50 % of his working time.

Job and accommodation

After the disability occurred, the person's job duties had to be entirely adjusted from that of a heavy truck driver to a **driver of the managing director and a messenger**. When he was originally employed by the company, the person had no formal education and was illiterate. In order to carry out his new job duties the person had to be **trained to a literate level** where he could read and write. The employee also currently receives ongoing **training in communication skills** and customer orientation. Driving as a chauffeur is his leading role and this requires optimum skills for dealing with all levels of employees as well as customers and third parties. His new job mainly involves driving all company "light" vehicles which are "easier" to handle and which would include a power steering, an adaptable driver's seat, air-conditioning and "easy viable mirrors". The person is employed on a full-time basis.

Given that there was no need to change the physical environment in which the person worked, no additional costs were incurred in providing physical accommodation. However, there were additional costs incurred in the sense that this "**new**" job was created in order to accommodate the person and keep him employed within the company. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, **formal reading and writing training** was provided to the employee prior to commencement of his "new" job and the employee also receives ongoing training in communication skills and customer orientation. All costs incurred in relation to the employment of this person have ultimately been borne by the employer.

Conclusions

The employer is very satisfied with the person's performance and is also satisfied that the employee has adapted well to his new duties and circumstances. The employee was originally employed as a general labourer with very minimal skills and today he has been transformed into "**one of our most trusted employees** who can handle delicate information and provide a professional level to both our colleagues and clients".

The employee is also very satisfied with his experience and is very grateful that the company has shown the **necessary flexibility** for him to be offered a new job within the same company. Whilst still suffering from the injury sustained he is fully determined to continue working within the firm for as long as possible.

The accommodation of this person within the company has created a **positive attitude** towards other employees with other forms of disabilities, some of which are work related or even related to ageing. The human resources manager believes that the "most notable aspect is when the company has to accommodate employees who have to perform their duties working wounded on a temporary basis, be it either recovering from a medical intervention or perhaps an injury on duty. The overall approach to such situations has improved considerably".

The company has an overall **Corporate Social Responsibility** strategy in place and the integration of persons with disabilities into the workforce is considered to be a very important aspect in the company's CSR agenda. The company's premises is properly designed and equipped to receive persons with disabilities and they are continuously updating standards to further facilitate persons with disabilities. In the Human Resources manager's words, "we shall continue striving to accommodate as many as possible whenever needed and as occurring".

Nestlé AD (Bulgaria)

After the assessment of a labour medicine expert an employee was offered a new position in a company producing and selling nourishment as he is regarded as a person with disabilities after a heart attack. He can also profit from longer paid leave.

Nestle Bulgaria AD is a joint stock company with the main activity in manufacturing and distribution of **foods and beverages**. In 1994, Nestlé S.A. acquired a Bulgarian production unit which was established in 1939 (and converted into a state owned firm in the late 1940ies. The company has introduced ISO 14001.2004 and OHSAS 18001.1999.

Nestle Bulgaria AD has been ranked first among food and beverages companies in 2006 in the Business Week ranking “Top 50 of the most dynamic and successful Bulgarian companies” and in the Capital weekly ranking “Top 100 employers”.

The enterprise has around **1,500 employees**, around 1,050 of which are women. 42 people with disabilities are on the payroll – 37 are women and 5 men. 30 people are with over 50 % disability and 12 have disabilities under 50 %.

One of these employees with disabilities working for Nestlé Bulgaria AD is Mr. X. The 51 years old man has a secondary education. He had a **heart attack** at home in the late 1990ies and now has a disability over 50 % (which is regarded as permanent disability in Bulgaria), as recognised by the labour experts’ medicine commission.

Job and accommodation

Before 1993, Mr. X. worked in a laser factory in Sofia. He has been with Nestle Bulgaria AD since 1993. The first several years with Nestle Bulgaria AD he worked as a line technician. After the heart attack he was hospitalised. Subsequent to the treatment he was **offered a new position** as an operator of the factory’s electronic balance/scales.

This offer was based on the **assessment of the labour medicine experts**. Their recommendation was to move Mr. X. to a working place “*without hard physical labour and psychological overload*”. The aim of the recommendation was to have Mr. X. work on a **less dynamic workplace**. Subsequently he passed the appropriate training for the position. Today Mr. X. is working with a PC as an information operator, processing data about in-coming and out-going trucks loaded with materials and production.

This accommodation (job rearrangement) of Mr. X. appears to be successful. No additional adaptation was necessary beyond the specific workplace requirements. The assessment of the management is that Mr. X. is handling his job very well. Mr. X. is working on daily shifts with another man with disabilities. As most of his colleagues, Mr. X. has an unlimited employment contract and he works full-time. He receives full salary and an individual pension for disability over 50 %. He personally is happy with his job and with the possibilities to “*rest and to have a good vacation*”. In this respect he is treated as all other workers in the factory with the exception of **longer paid leave**. The integration of Mr. X. is a sustainable one.

Generally, most of the company's persons with disabilities benefit from the **production lines** for arranging bonbons which are situated in order **to minimise the movement of the workers**. At the same time, the salaries of all production line workers in the factory are not dependent on the production volume. There are also persons with disabilities who work in administration positions, e. g. as foreman or quality supervisor.

A special programme for persons with disabilities has not yet been designed by the employer, but the company has a social benefits programme. The factory till now has **not utilised public financing** for such projects from labour and/or social institutions.

Conclusions

The Company has traditionally shown **engagement in social and work safety issues**. It appears therefore logic to employ people with disabilities. Nestlé Bulgaria AD is known as a socially responsible enterprise.

The **management is willing to continue** its productive work with persons with disabilities. Respective measures include:

- a new lift is under construction in the administrative building;
- the air conditioning is expanded;
- a loading path for persons with disabilities is under construction in the administrative building;
- the successful cooperation with the local labour bureau is further developed;
- every year one or two workers are provided accommodation on the basis of a needs assessment of their health problems;

There is a tendency in Bulgaria that more customers buy products of socially responsible employers.

Prodakta S.A. (Greece)

A regional plant created a new job in the office's call centre for an incumbent employee who now uses a wheelchair due to a car accident. The office has been ergonomically designed, wheelchair ramps have been installed and the premises adapted. The woman has been trained accordingly and is expanding her working duties continuously.

Prodakta S.A. is a 25 years old regional plant, processing **agricultural commodities for tomato-paste products and fruity juices**. Prodakta S.A. is a family-owned medium-sized business with 55 full-time and 15 part-time employees (during the summer season). The location of the plant is close to a village in the centre of Greece (Thessaly), and it is one of the biggest plants in this region. Most of the company's employees are from the near villages surrounding Prodakta's plant. Moreover, the local community plays a significant role for the operation of the company because it is one of the major suppliers in agricultural commodities.

Ms. L. P. was working as **cleaning staff** at the offices of Prodakta since 1985. Ms. L. P. is 49 years old (born in 1959), mother of 3 children and she has basic educational standards as a high school graduate. In 1995, Ms. L. P. had a car accident and is since then **using a wheelchair**. Beside her new role in her family, she had to deal with the limited opportunities with view to her disability. Most of the accommodation opportunities offered in her local region were either insufficient or out of scope, and the only support was a small fund from her insurance.

The company never before had any employees with disabilities, so there were not any policies established. According to her manager (Ms. C. K.), "there was nothing we could do in order to adjust her previous work according to her new situation. Nevertheless, in a medium-sized company, where everybody knows each other, from the top management to the part-time workers, there was a growing interest for helping Ms. L. P. to face her economic and social problems deriving from her disability". Ms. L. P. is a very pleasant person to work or speak with. Her good relationship with the office employees was an additional motive for their interest.

Job and accommodation

According to the manager, there were a lot of considerations on how the company could transfer Ms. L. P. to a new job position. Finally, the manager offered her a job at the **office's call centre**, although until then such a position did not exist formally. Because of the employee's individual personality, the manager believed that she was qualified for this task, and after 2 months she made this job offer. There were specific modifications that needed to take place before Ms. L. P. was integrated into Prodakta's work force again. Beside the **new ergonomically designed office** that was needed to accomplish her duties, there were some other ergonomic modifications that the company should take care of. One of that was the **special wheelchair ramp** for persons with physical disabilities, which the manager had considered then as an overlooked obligation which should immediately be overcome. Another accommodation took place in the **toilets** of the building, which were needed to be **redesigned** accordingly.

There was not any official training regarding Ms. L. P.'s new tasks. Because of her previous working experience in the company, she was aware of all the personnel and their responsibilities. She was only **trained to use the call centre operations**, and there was no special training treatment considering her disability. Her only drawback in communication skills was her lack of knowledge of any foreign language, so the

manager decided to divert these calls to another employee. Produkta doesn't usually have calls from abroad, and those few are directed to the responsible persons (through the software in the call centre options).

After six months Ms. L. P. was well adjusted to her new working environment. "She never let us down", says the manager, and "she has well managed to help people communicate issues along the building and connect the right persons". What has truly been a surprise for the manager was that, though she was PC illiterate, she asked for **expanding her working duties** involving e-mail forwarding, e-mail queries and internet research. There was no special training course for that. So she was trained step-by-step to these new tasks by expert colleagues inside the company.

There were no significant costs attached to the accommodation programme, apart from minor modifications on the toilets and a special wheelchair ramp. Furthermore, there was no financial support from any funding schemes concerning these modifications.

Conclusions

This accommodation initiative helped Ms. L. P. not only to maintain her job but to **realise other talents**, like communication with customers and suppliers, her organising skills and her inquiring on the internet. In fact, due to this reallocation she was introduced to internet technology, which helped her learn other things of her interest. All these have secured her a full pension for her retirement, which was a significant issue. Both the company and Ms. L. P. found that this experience had positive effects for both parties. It was the first time that the company had to make a decision to support a person with disabilities.

Ms. L. P.'s case was **reported by the local press**, which has underlined that Produkta should be an example for other companies to follow. Apart from that, the local community decided to respond by producing more tomatoes, which is the basic raw material for Produkta's production plans.

The case of Ms. L. P. brought up issues concerning loyalty to the company. The employees have seen this case as a chance of the company to prove the loyalty towards them and its support to whatever the conditions are. The most crucial success factor, however, was the **ethical and practical support provided by the employees**. They have trained Ms. P. to all her new duties and provided her support concerning her mobility. Out of gratitude Ms. P. has exceeded her boundaries in order to prove herself worthy of this support.

The company's financial manager (Mr. E. P.) stated: "We have always believed that people are the company's most valuable asset. The case of Ms. L. P. has been proved a challenge to this belief, a challenge that we had to overcome immediately and effectively. This case has **raised the moral of all employees** and had a significant impact on the company's overall performance". However, the company does not consider any additional employment of persons with disabilities in the near future. They believe that there is a difference between "accommodating a company's disabled employee" and "recruiting a new one".

Ms. P.'s accommodation was not part of any Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy. However, this experience has moved the company to seek further **cooperation with NGOs** in order to view the possibilities of employing persons with disabilities. According, to the HR manager (Ms. C.K.), the company initially was very insecure on how they could accommodate a person with disabilities. "The case of Ms. P. was an

easy one considering her experience inside the company and her form of disability. That is why we looked at Ms. P.'s case not as part of a social responsibility strategy but rather as the company's responsibility toward its employees. There would be a very different story if Ms. P. was blind or had other forms of disabilities. This is the reason why we are trying now to work closer with NGOs and seek opportunities for the future in similar cases".

PPCT Finland Oy (Finland)

An ICT company with status as social enterprise employs a man with MS by offering flexible working hours and a special computer programme. A co-worker guides him. All employees with disabilities start with a limited rehabilitation job with the aim to create a permanent employment.

PPCT Finland Oy was founded in 1994 and is located in Tampere. The company offers ICT, positioning and call centre services and has 25 employees. PPCT Finland Oy is a private, limited company. It has a status of a social enterprise since 2005. Eight employees out of 25 have disabilities or were long-term unemployed.

J. V., a 40 years old man, has **multiple sclerosis** (MS), which broke out ten years ago. MS is a neurological disease, which can have various physical and cognitive symptoms. J. V. has ataxia, tremble, memory disorders and strong fatigue attacks. He uses a walker. He is a bit slower than on average in adapting to new circumstances.

Mr. V. has a **Masters degree of Science and Technology**. Before the MS disease was diagnosed he worked as a university teacher and researcher in technology related projects. Those employments were fixed-term, and after the disease broke out, the contracts were not renewed any more. So, he has been out of the labour market – on a disability pension – for around ten years before this employment.

Employment and accommodation measures

J. V. got the job at PPCT with the help of the “Bounced into the Working Life - Project” (*Sisäänheitto työelämään*). This is a national project administrated by The Finnish Neuromuscular Disorders Association (*Lihastautiliitto ry*). The project works to endorse the employment of people with disabilities and chronic diseases into the open labour market. This kind of work is very important, since the employment services for persons who are on a disability pension are very scarce. In the eyes of employment offices they are not unemployed, since they have a steady income.

PPCT Finland Oy had left an advert for a job to the project. Mr. V. found the ad at a notice board of a local MS association and applied for the job. At the beginning J. V. got a **rehabilitation job** at PPCT Finland Oy for 3 months. After that PPCT Finland Oy and J. V. intended to conclude the contract of employment, but it got complicated, since there were no models on how to do it. The terms of employment had to be approved by the Service Union United (*PAM*), which represents the employees of the firm. Next the contract was evaluated by a lawyer of the Finnish MS Society. PPCT Finland Oy wanted the contract to be morally, ethically and legally “correct”. The daily working time would normally be 7.5 hours, but J. V. is not able to work such a long time non-stop. Hence, he has to rest every now and then. But the resting times may also vary, because some days he is more active and some days less. Therefore, the **actual working time may vary** widely and the contract had to cover those issues, too.

The job was originally in a marketing department, but the capabilities of J. V. were better equipped for the **maintenance in the customer services**, which was established in the firm at the same time. Therefore, the work tasks of other persons were moulded by both, the new employee and the new tasks of customer service team.

The work tasks of J. V. include the monitoring of the functioning of customers' positioning devices from his computer monitor, and rebooting them with his mouse when necessary. The work is done in an office with the computer. Basically he **works fulltime** from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. However, due to his fatigue attacks the effective working hours can be less than half of that.

A **special computer programme** has been developed in PPCT for J. V. which enables him to do his work. The software enables him to reboot the devices he is monitoring with a mouse click instead of typing in the number codes. It also directs the work process preventing J. V. of "*getting stuck on*" one situation, which is typical for him.

There is also a mattress in the office **where he can rest** (have a nap) when he gets very tired. It usually takes him about 5 to 20 minutes at a time to regain his strength. One doorstep has also been removed from the washroom door, so that he can enter the room with his walker. A **co-worker** is guiding and helping him daily. For instance, after the naps he tells J. V. what he has done last and where he should continue his work. He also "wakes" him up when there are laps of concentration.

Designing of the accommodation measures was partly based on the co-operation between the company and the Finnish MS Society. A researcher from the MS Society had been in the workplace to observe, to videotape and to analyse the potential pitfalls of the work tasks and recommended the ways to overcome them.

The employment of disabled people is a value of the firm. It is a social enterprise. Originally the concept of social enterprise was introduced and explained to the company by the local Employment and Economic Development Centre. Being a social enterprise was marketed as a way to get committed employees when there is a lack of supply of employees in some industries.

For the company acting in a socially responsible way is one of their values. The diversity of the personnel must be taken into consideration already in the business plan, in the choice of the **occupational health care** service provider and in the legal know-how in the company.

The company does not only recruit to employ hard to place people, but based on the needs of the company. However, they are open to new ideas. If a person starts a rehabilitation period in the firm, already then the target is to proceed into normal employment. However, there is also a principle in the firm that the **first contract is always done for six months** only. Hence, also the employee gets an opportunity to re-evaluate if the job is suitable to him/her or if his/her life in such an order that daily working is possible. The situation of life and the control of it are normally revealed either implicitly or explicitly during this first half year. In case there were an unlimited contract the employee would move into sick leave, when he/she realises that he/she is not fit or motivated to work. This alternative is not good for either parties – the employee and the employer. The **aim is always to create a permanent employment**. There has been only one occasion when the contract was not continued after the first six months. Three of the employed persons with disabilities have left the firm during its history and got another job. Although these occasions can be regarded regrettable from the firm's point of view, they are – on the other hand – success stories for the employees' themselves.

PPCT Finland Oy has got **support for arrangement of working conditions** from the employment office. The support is given to compensate working time of another employee, who is giving guidance to a worker with disabilities. The amount of the support is € 350 a month. The need for the guidance is permanent. The support is paid to the employer. Also **pay subsidy and additional pay subsidy** (that can be granted when the employer is committed to increasing the skills and employability of the employee through training or otherwise) are received. They cover 50 % of the employment costs.

Results and conclusions

Overall, the experiences of the employment of Mr. V. have been positive. His condition has improved during the employment and the company has been very satisfied with him. He has also **regained his self-confidence** and thinks that being part of the working community is very important to his self-respect.

Mr. V. receives a disability pension simultaneously with the employment. The salary has by his request been adjusted downwards so he does not lose his pension. The company is now employing two new persons who have disabilities. Unfortunately, it seems that they will have to face the same difficulties with the authorities as in the case of J. V. Hence, no new workable practices have been created since the last case. The company thinks that the sometimes quite rigid working methods of the employment office or other authorities do not support the employment process as well as they should.

At the company level, working with many persons with disabilities in the same organisation may become stressful, if there is not enough personnel in the staff management or there is a lack of support for the staff management. This is true in particular, if there are many people with mental problems. It is not always clear, where one should ask for help within the firm. On the other hand, **working in a diversified workplace is also very rewarding.**

The company had to argue very strongly, in fact they made an administrative complaint to the local employment office, of the right to start the employments with a fixed-term contract and still receive all the pay subsidies that social enterprises are entitled to. This has led to a new definition of policy among employment authorities.

The **continuous learning** and maintenance of mental well-being of all the people involved in recruiting of staff must be taken care of in the company. The role of occupational health care is a bit different in a company which has employed many persons with disabilities or formerly long term unemployed people. A more holistic approach and more vivid communication than usually between the firm and the health care professionals are needed. Moreover, starting with this kind of human resource policy **demand a good financial standing.** There can be substantial costs of employing persons with disabilities. There was a hiccup in the profitability also in PPCT Finland Oy, but now the productivity has recovered.

Future perspectives

The company is now starting to bring out its social responsiveness policy more openly. They are planning to tell about their values on their internet site. By now, there have been no negative responses from the customers. The employment of Mr. V. will be maintained as long as his health allows it. The company will be recruiting new staff – persons with or without disabilities – in the future, too. They emphasise that the intention is to create permanent jobs and offer the jobs based on peoples abilities, not disabilities.

Siemens AG (Austria)

A large electronics enterprise is training hearing and deaf youth together. Thereby teaching modalities for all apprentices have been ameliorated, new sign language gestures have been invented and modified tools have raised safety.

The **Vienna based Siemens Group Austria** (that also is responsible for an economic region comprising nine countries in Central and South Eastern Europe) is the largest foreign subsidiary of the multinational Siemens group of companies and also one of the largest and oldest companies within the Austrian electrical and electronics industry, respectively the overall Austrian industry. The company develops, produces and sells a large variety of goods and services related to electronics and IT.

At the end of the fiscal year 2007, the Siemens Group Austria had a **staff** of more than 30.000 persons and in addition was training roughly 700 apprentices (thereof 83 % in technical and 17 % in commercial fields) at its facilities in Vienna, Graz, Linz, Innsbruck, and Weiz, having one of the largest apprentice programmes in the country.

Technology forms the basis for the **socially responsible action** of the company, as it is its core competency. Siemens Group Austria makes frequent use of technology as a medium to eliminate barriers. The strong commitment to **research and innovation** is another of the Siemens Group's defining characteristics. As proclaimed in the **mission statement**, Siemens has always taken its social responsibility seriously.

Being the core company within the Siemens Group Austria, Siemens AG is a large private joint stock company and at the end of the fiscal year 2007 had a total of 7,928 employees in Austria, of which 338 were apprentices. Of these, 24 persons were **apprentices with special needs**.

The apprenticeship programme

Siemens AG is offering training for apprentices with hearing impairments at its facilities in Vienna since 1996. As of September 30, 2007, 13 deaf youths are receiving their first vocational education together with 35 other electronics apprentices benefiting from **virtually seamless integration** into the apprenticeship programme.

The **idea to implement an integrative apprenticeship programme** for both, hearing and deaf persons, was born in informal talks between the Austrian Federal Social Welfare Authority (*Bundessozialamt*) and the Head of Education and Training at Siemens AG, Mr. K more than a decade ago and still the programme is unique in Austria. In the **Austrian system**, participation in an apprenticeship with a company can be started after finalisation of compulsory school. The technical apprenticeship programme in electronics including deaf persons at Siemens AG Austria starts annually in September, lasts for 3.5 years, and is offered on full-time basis; as common in Austria the apprentices receive training on the job as well as lectures at vocational school. Working in electronics requires manual abilities and technical competence.

Accommodation measures and additional effects

Before the start of the apprenticeship programme, all persons involved receive a specific course to experience the difficulties of deaf persons themselves. Supervisions with psychologists and communication training help to reduce and avoid conflicts due to stress. Thereby a frictionless and efficient apprenticeship shall be ensured.

Besides **target group specific special courses** (such as speech therapy to facilitate communication) all apprentices learn synchronically. Four **sign language translators** allow for best possible communication, in the apprenticeship workshop, during lectures; within the group of apprentices as well as among apprentices and other staff. After all these years of translating, the sign language translators do not only facilitate communication, but also have acquired **profound technical knowledge**.

The **training facilities have been adapted** regarding seat configuration, distant-noise level, technical equipment and illumination. In general, during the lectures, the deaf apprentices are sitting closer to the teacher (who has the interpreter aside). Not-hearing apprentices are also working close to each other at the apprenticeship workshop when translation is necessary. Concerning the technical equipment, acoustic warning signals have been changed / combined with vibrations or stroboscope lamps. These adapted technical devices can be used by both, hearing and deaf persons. Notebooks, that can also be used privately, are borrowed to the apprentices (these can be bought at a low price upon finalisation of the training).

Interestingly, the inclusion of deaf persons led to some changes in the **training method** that proved beneficial to all apprentices. As persons who are deaf from birth e.g. use less copulas, and to facilitate translation, the teachers have to use a language that concentrates on the essential things. They also have to speak clearly and slowly, and summarise the most important information. This method also serves hearing persons who learn less easily. In sign language, some gestures for technical vocabulary had to be newly invented; these gestures are now acknowledged in the Austrian Sign Language and also used internationally.

There are **leisure facilities** (e. g. the break room, sports facilities) that are commonly used by the apprentices and any events are attended together (and with interpreters). It also happens that hearing apprentices are starting to learn lip-reading and / or sign language to facilitate communication with their colleagues and friends.

One apprentice

So far, only few of the deaf apprentices have already benefited from **integrative education with hearing children at school** (nevertheless, the Austrian school system is changing and integrative approaches have become more popular in the past years). Ms. A. is 16 years old and just started with her apprenticeship at Siemens in September 2008. She is one of the still rather few Austrian girls interested in electronics and she was born deaf.

Ms. A. attended the Federal Institute for the Education of Deaf Persons (*Bundesinstitut für Gehörlosenbildung; BIG*), in Vienna that is a highly specialised institution offering mobile pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, primary school and secondary school education thereby applying school curriculums that enable teaching hearing and deaf children together in integrative classes. She finalised her compulsory school education at the BIG and got the information on the existence of the apprenticeship programme at Siemens AG from her mother. Ms. A. says that she feels very well in her first days at Siemens AG, she is **part of a team**.

Financing

Siemens AG Austria receives financial support for the inclusive apprenticeship programme from the **Public Employment Service** and the **Federal Social Welfare Authority** as well as the **European Social Fund**. It is clear that additional costs arise

when adaptations become necessary, but there are also very effective adaptations that do not need financing (e.g. the change in the training method). **In general, all apprentices entail costs** to the company in their first years.

Results and conclusions

Since the beginning of the apprenticeship programme including deaf youth in 1996, **approx. 60 not-hearing persons** have finalised their apprenticeship. A large part of the deaf skilled workers could be transferred into an unlimited working **contract with the company** or are employed in affiliated companies. As any other former apprentice, they have the possibility to advance in their career within the company; currently approx. 10 % of the managers at Siemens AG are former apprentices.

On the one hand, it is a **societal obligation** to engage in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, while on the other hand, there also is an **economic factor**. These persons have their potential and deaf employees are able to contribute to the success of a company, as any other well educated employees can.

Mr. K. was surprised to see how **fast and clear** the apprenticeship programme for deaf persons showed **results**. His experience from the past 12 years is that, in general, deaf persons are very deftly in working with their hands and they also often have a better vision. They notice things a hearing person would easily overlook. Looking back, the most difficult part was to “**do the first step**”, as Mr. K. states. But once the decision on such a project has been made, real commitment and energy are needed to convert the concept into a successful programme. There are always constructive options to overcome difficult phases, and Siemens has not gone all the way alone. For example, the application process involving the deaf persons is carried out in close cooperation with the Federal Social Welfare Authority (*Bundessozialamt*). The Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice*) is another important partner.

Siemens AG has been awarded the **TRIGOS price** in 2006 in the category workplace / large company for this apprenticeship programme including deaf youth. The TRIGOS is awarded by a platform from economy and NGOs to projects of Austrian companies that assume their corporate social responsibility in a way that they are role models and that have successfully implemented sustainable action into their corporate strategy.

Future perspectives

Siemens AG Austria will continue this apprenticeship programme in the future. The intention would also be to **expand (including other disabilities) such trainings**. Although the possibility to launch another apprenticeship project for deaf adults in principle exists, currently there is a lack of applications. Siemens AG has also carried out training programmes for blind persons (in 2003), but there also appears to be very little demand at present.

Mr. K. is doing **presentations on the Siemens AG's approach** for an inclusive apprenticeship with hearing and not-hearing young persons and has also talked to managers from abroad who were interested in implementing such training in their companies. He is convinced that it can work – given that the first step is done and real efforts to provide an optimal mix of reasonable accommodation are made. It is **important to make such initiatives known** – among interested entrepreneurs as well as among potential employees with disabilities.

Steiermärkische Sparkasse AG (Austria)

A bank restructured its call centre and employed a blind woman. The work assistant assessed the needs of both, employer and employee to suggest the necessary adaptations of the workplace while a specific training was offered.

The **Steiermärkische Bank und Sparkasse AG** (Steiermärkische Sparkasse) is a 183 year old regional universal bank headquartered in Graz (the capital of the Federal Province of Styria). The bank was founded in 1825 as associative savings bank and has been brought into a private joint stock company in 1991. The shareholders of the bank are: Steiermärkische Verwaltungssparkasse (73 %), Erste Bank (25 %) and the employees (2 %). Steiermärkische Sparkasse is the largest Styrian bank and the largest credit institution in the south of Austria. Throughout Styria, 168 branches and regional consulting centres are available for the customers and in total approx. 1,650 persons are employed with the bank; thereof 40 persons with disabilities.

One of these persons with disabilities working for Steiermärkische Sparkasse is Ms. N. The 28 years old woman (born in 1980) has a **sensory disability (completely blind)** since the age of 6 years. Due to a tumour in her head she lost her sight in her early childhood, before she was supposed to start school. Ms. N. then attended a special school for blind children in Graz, at the Odilien-Institut where she finalised primary school and lower secondary school. The Odilien-Institut is a specialised NGO for severely visually impaired or blind persons that offers a range of services, not only covering compulsory school education (including a boarding school) but also putting special emphasis on early support of children and vocational training of (young) adults, thus offering comprehensive guidance as well as work assistance. After compulsory school Ms. N. completed the apprenticeship for basket and wickerwork furniture weavers. Ms. N. had been looking for a job for 2 years, when she got in contact with the bank via the Odilien-Institut, where she had been registered at the work assistance. At the same time, she also got an offer to work in the job she did the apprenticeship for. Ms. N. decided to attend re-training and work for the bank, as working in the bank's Call Centre appeared to offer more perspectives for the future.

Job and accommodation

In January 2001, the **first contact** took place between Ms. N. and the personnel manager as well as the shop steward for persons with disabilities of Steiermärkische Sparkasse. The bank has traditionally shown engagement in social issues and is, among others, supporting and sponsoring projects for children, as well as a hospice project for the Caritas. The bank is implementing its principle "*in every relationship, it's the people that count*" and already had blind employees (who retired) working at the telephone information desk before. It appeared only realistic and logic, to look for a blind person for the new Call Centre.

At the time when Ms. N. applied for her first job, the bank was undergoing an organisational restructuring process that delayed her employment until spring 2002. Nevertheless, she was offered the **position in the Call Centre** she had applied for and she also needed some time for her re-training. Via the Supported Employment Programme (as offered by the Austrian Federal Social Welfare Authority), Ms. N. had a personal assistant in the application process who also informed the prospective employer on necessary steps and possibilities for support.

In a co-operation between the Public Employment Service, the work assistant of the Odilien-Institut and the future employer, the **needs of Ms. N. and her employer were assessed**. On this basis, a tailored vocational training programme has been elaborated for Ms. N. and her future employer also received advice on the adaptation of the workplace and on possible subsidies. While the restructuring process at the bank proceeded and the administrative issues were settled, Ms. N. attended vocational training.

Ms. N.'s **qualification training** to become Call Centre Agent was carried out by an external training institution and consisted of mainstream training (where Ms. N. had an assistant) but also some disability and technology specific introduction to the computer devices. For this specific training she had the possibility to use already adapted workplaces of other companies. In addition, she also received a so-called "orientation and mobility training" (carried out by the Odilien-Institute); among others to study her way to/from work and to allow for orientation at the new workplace. The way to and from work proved to be more difficult at the time when Ms. N. actually started to work at the head offices of the bank in Graz, as the city started with a lot of road- and construction work around the building at that time. But Ms. N. kept her good mood and managed the challenges.

In its restructuring process, the bank's Facility Management also completely renewed the telephone exchange and thereby considered the necessary **adaptations** to offer the future blind employee **optimal working conditions**. One of the new workplaces has been equipped with a Braille keyboard and specific software, as well as a reader for the blind. Specific software that verbalises contents has not been implemented as this would have interfered with the colleagues around.

Her work assistant together with a colleague at the bank then introduced her to the **tasks at work**. Ms. N. is handling the telephone exchange, answering calls and connecting the requested positions. In addition, she serves as first referral for clients and provides basic information. As her colleagues, Ms. N. has an unlimited employment contract and is working full-time. All of her colleagues are supporting her when questions or difficulties arise. An interesting aspect therein is that, due to technical reasons, information on her computer workplace may be arranged in another way than in the workplaces of the colleagues and therefore a simple question from her can not be simply answered by the colleagues just checking the information on their screen.

The technical adaption of the workplace has been partly **financed by** the Pension Insurance Authority and the Federal Social Welfare Authority. The Federal Social Welfare Authority completely financed the orientation and mobility training and granted an integration subsidy (wage subsidy) for the first 1.5 years of employment. The "Call Centre Agent" course Ms. N. attended has been completely financed by the PES.

Conclusions

Looking back, Mr. M., Head of the Personnel Department, admits that the organisational and financial efforts to employ a blind person have not been in the centre of the decision. There also is the possibility to receive subsidies. The bank believes that such investments more than pay off over time and that persons with disabilities are often more dedicated to work than the average. Moreover, unless suffering from strong pain, they appear to have fewer ups and downs than other persons. Of course, there are always things that can not be foreseen, but it is absolutely necessary to accept and overcome these comparatively small barriers that occur in the first place to experience the positive effects in the long run. Also, within a

mixed team, social competency is rising – there is more giving and taking. Any enterprise can benefit from the decision to take persons with disabilities on board, given that the necessary accommodation measures are implemented and that the path is procured consequently.

He **describes Ms. N.** as a person *“full of life and very alert, who does her work with a lot of patience”* – especially on the gray days of November, when clients tend to be more direct on the telephone, she never loses her temper. She also has a very good sense on how to react to feelings that can be recognised in the voice of clients. While her colleagues can see who is calling on their telephone display, Ms. N. recognises the voice and it is amazing how well she can tell from the voice who is calling – there appears to be no difference to the seeing colleagues.

Ms. N. herself likes to be in contact with lots of persons during the day, and she sees her challenge in helping them as far as possible in her job position. She likes answering questions, giving directions and connecting the right persons, which of course is not always easy. The adapted workplace allows her to work with routine and the best is that the person on the other end of the line is not aware that she is blind and she is treated *“like any other person”*.

The **crucial success factors** which led to the sustainable integration of Ms. N. was the mix of accommodation measures which enable her to fulfil her tasks at work like her colleagues do; the co-operation and mutual understanding within the team and, last but not least, the philosophy and engagement of the employer.

The bank has an overall **Corporate Social Responsibility strategy** and a person responsible for CSR matters. The integration of persons with disabilities is part of the company’s philosophy. Moreover, the bank holds the basic certificate “family and career” and the Austrian cachet for health promotion. The CSR engagement of the bank has been awarded several times, in 2007; the bank won the large-scale enterprises category as “women and family friendly business” in Styria as well as nationwide. Already in 2002 the bank won the JobOscar for the vocational integration of persons with disabilities. As the first Austrian company, the bank has received the “easy entrance” (appreciated barrier-freeness) certificate in 2007.

The bank has **two shop stewards committees**, the “regular” and one of persons with disabilities. The chair person of the latter committee has a seat in the regular shop stewards committee to represent the persons with disabilities there.

Ms. N. started to work with the Steiermärkische Sparkasse in May 2002 and since then is part of the team. Also in the future, the Steiermärkische Sparkasse will emphasise on diversity and on matching job positions with the right persons, considering personal and professional abilities. Mr. M. says that **it is a question of abilities, not of disabilities**.

Telenor (Norway)

A semi-public telecommunications company offers a training and practice programme for young persons with physical or sensory disabilities and creates a win-win situation for these new employees and the company.

Telenor is the incumbent **telecommunications company** in Norway, with headquarters located in Oslo. Telenor is today mostly an international wireless carrier with operations in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and Asia. The company is currently ranked as the seventh largest carrier in the world, with 143 million subscribers. In addition, Telenor has extensive broadband and TV distribution in the four Nordic Countries. It is a **semi-public organisation** with about 3,000 employees in Norway. Telenor is mainly active within area telecommunications. During the last decades the number of employees in foreign countries has become higher than in Norway.

Telenor Open Mind is a department of Telenor. In 1994, the organisation "April Data" started a programme to help disabled persons get into the labour market. When Telenor bought up April Data in 1996, the programme was continued under the name "The Disability Programme". In June 2007 the programme changed names to Telenor Open Minds. The Open Mind programme has had about **100 participants**, where **75 % have gone back to ordinary work**. About 70 – 80 % of them start working in Telenor after the programme is completed. This has saved, according to Telenor's homepage, the Norwegian government for about 25 million kroner in disability insurance.

Employment and accommodation measures

The prioritised beneficiaries of the programme are mainly **young persons** of both genders with **physical disabilities, and with hearing and sight challenges**, who have problems getting entry to the labour market because of lacking work practice. Older persons may also be qualified, if they've fell outside the labour market as a consequence of injury, or sickness which has come into being in the last years. As a trial arrangement this year, also participants with finalised treatment of psychical illness are qualified.

The participants have to be highly motivated to get into the labour market, and of formal education they should at least have finished the **upper secondary school**, or other relevant experience, if they are a bit older. Another important criterion is that the participants have to be within the NAV-system (the welfare arrangements of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration).

The jobs the participants do are all types of **administration and clerical work**. Each position gets its own job description. The main idea is that the job should provide the participants a long period of work experience with the type of work that they are supposed to do. The participant is also treated as a regular employee during the work training period. The degree of occupation is individual, mainly not less than 50 %.

The Open Mind programme is divided into **two parts**: After an interview, close to a normal job interview situation, the chosen participants go through a **qualification period of three months** in the localities of Telenor Open Mind. This phase contains computer training and courses, combined with self studies. If the participant is further qualified, there is a **work practice period of 21 months**, which gives actual work experience. The period of work practise might be prolonged with one year, if there is a need for that. The work practice can be carried out within the Telenor Corporation, or in one of Telenor Open Minds cooperating companies, e.g. Storebrand, Manpower, IBM,

NHO, different governmental ministries, Gjensidige, ProX, Agenten, EDB. The **long work training period**, where the participants are able to show their qualifications, and have the possibility to become a natural part of the working environment, is seen as one of the success factors of the programme. The programme has three start up-dates a year, and each course has up to five participants.

Two of these persons with disabilities working in Telenor and being participants in the program, are Mr. J. (46) and Mr. A. (34). Both have **hearing disabilities**. Mr. J. got his hearing problems in a grown up age, while Mr. A has a congenital hearing problem. Mr. A. has also the ability to conversant with sign language. They both have an education in information technology. Mr. J. has been working in Telenor for about one year, while Mr. A. has worked for about two years in the department (practice as a part of the program). They both work with computers, where they transfer customers' orders into ancillary systems, which are normal tasks in the department where they work. They both have also permanent full-time employment in this period, and they do **not need any special measures** in their workplace.

Overall, participation in the programme costs approx. € 10,300.- (NOK 100,000) in a period of two years. The costs for the use of the interpreter support is paid by NAV, it does not lead to costs for the employer. The **participant fee** and the **participants' wages** are paid by NAV as well, mainly as rehabilitation money or as wage subsidies. NAV also pays the costs/wages for Mr. A. and Mr. J. in the Telenor Open Mind programme. The participants are responsible to find a job after the programme is completed. The prospects of finding a job after completion of the programme are very good (see above).

Results and additional effects

Telenor considers the programme as a **“win-win-win”-situation**, all parts wins, the participant by all the advantages a paid and permanent employment brings, the enterprise by the mobilisation of untapped labour resources and highly motivated employees, and the society by the relocation of people from the social security expenditure budget to the tax income budget. The Head of department sees the integration as a success story, and he will have no second thoughts recruiting employees from Telenor Open Mind at a later point of time. He also stresses that the employees are doing their work very well, and they are also popular among the other staff and in the company. He also stresses that it is a good thing that the Telenor Open Mind gives the participants the possibility to get back into work. They also are an important and needed supply of labour in today's society.

Telenor Open Minds is not considered as a part of an **overall strategy**, even if it is closely linked to the “IA-avtalen” (“Letter of Intent regarding a more inclusive working life”), because it's similarity to today's measures to reduce the number of people outside the labour market. The fore runner “The Disability Programme” was started before IA-avtalen was signed by the enterprise. The Programme was considered as a pioneer by the government, and was held out as an important example of how measures to overcome the challenges of the future working life could be shaped.

In 1999 the programme was **awarded** with the “Budstikkaprisen”, an annual price awarded to an enterprise, which contributes to dismantle disabling obstacles. In 2006 the MS-foreningen (Multiple Sclerosis-association) awarded them the **MS-Price**, because of their contribution to inclusion of persons with disabilities in the society.

Valcea Prefect's Office (Romania)

The public authorities hired a wheelchair user and have adapted the office according to her needs. Her incumbent colleague with mammary carcinoma has been offered part-time work at full payment and free psychological assistance.

Valcea Prefect's Office is a **public institution**, established in 1992 according to Law nr. 69/26.11.1991. The mission of the institution is to represent the Romanian government in Valcea county, observe the legality of the documents emitted by the authorities of public local administration, assure the reconstruction of property rights, assure the safety of the citizens lives and goods as well as achieve the objectives of the governmental programme. The activity of the institution is financed by the State budget through the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform and from other legal sources. At Valcea Prefect's Office **85 persons are employed** of which 30 are persons with disabilities.

One of these persons with disabilities working for the Valcea Prefect's Office is **Ms. B.** The 55 years old woman (born in 1953) finished an economic high school and has a seniority of 25 years. She works as an adviser in the Financial Accountancy Office since 1992. Before, she worked at different institutions from Ramnicu Valcea City in the field of economics. She has a physical disability; both of her breasts have been amputated as a result of a disease (**mammary carcinoma**) that appeared 7 years ago in 2001.

Another person with disabilities who is working for the Valcea Prefect's Office is a 34 years old woman, **Ms. C.** She graduated from high school and she has a licence in justice (juridical degree), with a seniority of 10 years. She works as a juridical adviser in the Legal Control, Appliance of Law and Administrative Disputed Claims Office since 2003. Before working at the Valcea Prefect's Office she worked from home as a collaborator juridical adviser in another public institution "Ocnele Mari City Hall". Ms. C has a physical disability (**wheelchair user**), as a result of a disease (**diabetes insulin-dependent**) diagnosed in 1997, that appeared from accumulated stress during her juridical degree exams.

Employment and accommodation measures

Ms. B. and Ms. C. have an unlimited employment contract and are working full-time.

Ms. B. was **employed before her disability appeared**, and after this she needed about 6 months to recover from this psychological trauma. The employer allowed her, for this critical period of time in her life, to come to her job only for **4 hours per day** with no changes regarding her salary (she was paid as if she worked 8 hours/day). They offered her **free psychological assistance** to deal with her trauma for a year. Also, some **colleagues** were very supportive and tried to encourage her self-confidence. After that critical period she continued working full-time like before, without the implementation of any other measures.

The **disability did not affect the way that she fulfils her job**. So, her responsibilities on the job are: Assuring the correct administration; depositing and conserving fix instruments, inventory objects, material resources, fuels and assuring the good administration of the institution's patrimony. She is in charge of logistical issues and with keeping the headquarters of Valcea Prefect's Office in good condition. She also has to do the payroll accounting and she has to watch that salaries are paid on time.

Ms. C. was employed after her disability appeared. In 2003 she attended an interview and passed a test regarding her skills and qualifications obtaining the best evaluation for the job description at Valcea Prefect's Office.

Ms. C. as a juridical adviser has to keep the evidence of administrative documents adopted and emitted by the authorities of local public administration and delivered to the prefect for legal verification. She keeps the evidence of juridical actions and files. She has to verify the legality of the contracts and agreements contracted by the local public administration.

The employer **adapted the workplace** of Ms. C for using a wheelchair. Her office furniture has been adapted (special desk for her needs, lower shelves, cupboards, smaller hallstands) and the employer also **replaced the office floor** (carpet with parquet) so she can easily handle her wheelchair. The doors of the office and the toilet have been enlarged so that she can enter with her wheelchair; the toilet seat has been put 15 cm higher. At the **entrance** of the building, a special platform has been installed in order to facilitate Ms. C.'s access to the building. Her **colleagues** are very understanding and offer to help her when she needs it, besides that they treat her like any other person.

The technical adaptation of Ms. C.'s workplace has been financed by Valcea Prefect's Office, the total cost summed up to approx. € 7,000.-.

Conclusions

Looking back **Ms. B. is now very pleased** with the support that the employer and her colleagues offered her both in financial and psychological terms. She realised that without their support her life would be different in a bad way (if they did not help her when she was in need she would not have kept her job and she would have been without social contacts).

Ms. C. thought that she will never work again in the field that she prepared for (i.e. juridical work), but Valcea Prefect's Office gave her an interesting chance by offering her this job. Before this job opportunity she thought that with the newly developed disability her life had no meaning, but now she learned that with the help of her colleagues and her employer persons with disabilities can be treated as normal people. Over the 5 years that passed since she is employed at the Prefect's Office, she gained her self-trust and she again became the person that she used to be (friendly, warm, optimistic and patient).

As a positive additional effect, due to the integration of persons with disabilities, **tolerance and understanding among the employees** within the institution has grown. Ms. B. and Ms. C. are considered to be equal members of the institution and are integrated fully into the team with all their strengths and weaknesses.

The integration of persons with disabilities is part of a **governmental programme** implemented by Law nr. 448/2006 that specifies that Romanian organisations public or private with less than 50 employees have the obligation to employ people with disabilities in a rate of 4 % of the total number of the organisation's employees, otherwise they have to pay to the state budget an amount that represents 50 % of the minimum basic pay multiplied by the number of jobs for which people with disabilities have not been hired.

Vantaan Antikvariaatti Oy (Finland)

A bookshop based on internet sales invited a deaf woman to a job interview without knowing about her disability. As she was suitable, the employers desisted from taking orders by telephone, advised the customers to speak slowly and with eye contact to the employee. The owners began to learn sign language.

Vantaan Antikvariaatti Oy is a family-owned antiquarian bookshop. In addition to the owning couple there are at the moment four part-time employees. Two of them have disabilities. They work part-time by their own request.

The private limited company was established in 2005, is located in Vantaa, near the capital of Finland, and has one outlet. Internet sales have increased in volume during the last years, and now most of the annual revenue stems from there. The owner describes their business strategy to be bolder than the other businesses on the antiquarian sector.

S. N. is a woman who has been **deaf** all her life. She is now 33 years old. Ms. N. has an education as assistant nurse. Previously she has been working in the social and health care sector for 10 years. After that she was at home with her two children for a while. In Vantaan Antikvariaatti she has been working for three years now.

Except that all the communication must be based on vision, there are no other special requirements from her side with regard to the work environment. Therefore, telephone can not be used.

Job and accommodation

Ms. N. got the job by adding her CV to the national CV register that is maintained by the employment offices. Vantaan Antikvariaatti was looking for a new employee by browsing the ads. There they found Ms. N ready for the interview. They were not looking for a person with disabilities, but a suitable one. In fact, they **did not even know of her deafness** when they invited her to the interview. When it became obvious, it was not a matter of importance.

S. N. started with an **unlimited contract**. She was the first employee in the firm and has already introduced many new employees – who have been recruited after herself – to the work tasks of the company.

In the store she is responsible for the **same activities as everybody else**. She is taking in the orders from internet and e-mail, collecting the books from the warehouse, packing and sending them. She is also responsible for the payments and bills of the firm. In addition she works behind the counter in the store. Half of her time she spends on typing information into data bases. The **only restriction** in her work is that she is **not able to use the telephone**. She can read the lips, so she can handle most of the customer service duties. In more complicated matters paper and pen are used.

The employment of S. N. was not part of any strategy or plan, it happened by accident. The company needed more staff and Ms. N. was available. The employers have been thinking of applying for the status of a social enterprise, but they have not decided yet.

The only measure of accommodation needed has been a sign on the console which says that S. N. is deaf and therefore the **customers need to speak slowly** and with an **eye contact** towards her. There is also a notice on the website that the company will not be able to take in the orders by telephone.

The owners of the firm have been looking for suitable **courses of the Finnish language** for Ms. N., as the native language of S. N. is sign language and there are some shortages in her Finnish skills. However, these skills have improved a lot recently. On the other hand, the **owners have studied some sign language** themselves, too.

The costs of the above mentioned measures were very minor. Therefore, **no financial subsidy** was needed. However, the company has received pay subsidy for the employment of Ms. N.. The amount of the subsidy has been € 800.-/month, which represents around 40 % of the employment cost. For small firms the subsidy is an important incentive to make the decision to hire a new employee. It also compensates the extra time needed for the training period of a person with disabilities. However, in this case the company previously was not aware of the possibility to get a subsidy. S. N. then told them about this possibility. S. N. has never got any pension, but has always been on the open labour market.

Experiences and results

The communication and co-operation with other employees has worked well. Pen and paper as well as some self-made sign language are used. Usually the customers at first get a bit confused, but on their second visit they often already prepared a note on a piece of paper. No effect on the company's productivity has been noticed. The company has steadily grown and still keeps on growing, but the employment policy of the company has not been recognised to be associated with this.

The experiences of the employment have been very positive to the company. They have got **a lot of new contacts** (and potential customers) from the community of the deaf. Also the **feedback** from the "old" customers has been **very good**. In this line of business the things are usually not so hectic that the customers would not have time to make an extra effort in their communication with the salesperson behind the desk.

The **company was awarded** the price "The Exemplary Employer" for the year 2006. The price brought a lot of publicity to them at that time. Also Ms. N. herself has been in many interviews and television programmes. This positive publicity has evoked positive feedback from the customers.

Deafness itself is not a reason for disability pension in Finland. Therefore, if the deaf person has no problems with his/her health, he/she is regarded employable in the eyes of the employment authorities. Often the employment problems of deaf people are due to the negative attitudes towards them from the side of the companies.

Regardless of whether or not there are people with disabilities among the staff, it is important **to be able to cope with the differences of others**, design the work processes properly and train employees accordingly, as well as to spot and resolve the potential misunderstandings as soon as they emerge.

The employment of Ms. N. will certainly continue. The company is growing and new employees will be recruited. There is no meaning whether they have disabilities or not.

Wexford Farmers Co-Operative (Ireland)

A farmer co-operative offered workplaces to three men with mental/intellectual disabilities and carefully placed them in a working environment where, in addition to a job coach, colleagues assist as “buddies”.

Wexford Farmers Co-Operative Society Ltd (WFC) is a farmer co-operative registered under The Friendly Societies Act. One of the oldest co-operatives in Ireland, WFC operates eleven branches at strategic locations in the South East of Ireland, including the original Enniscorthy Co-Op which was founded in 1885. WFC provides a comprehensive range of goods and services to the farming and wider community through its various divisions and subsidiary companies. Services include a Livestock Mart, Real Estate brokerage, Oil Distribution, and Forecourt Retail Operations comprising Oil Filling Stations and Convenience Stores. The Group employs more than 200 people.

The employees

WFC has a very positive attitude to the employment of people with disabilities as evidenced by the fact that there are currently seven working in the company. This case study profiles three such employees who work for 25 hours or more per week in WFC.

Employee A is a 52 year old unmarried man who has a **mental health disability** presenting as an episodic depression. After pursuing his education to intermediate secondary level he entered the workforce and held a series of employment positions in the retail sector. Following the onset of his disability in 2003 A sought to ease his way back into regular employment via the County Wexford Community Workshop (CWCW) — an independent organisation, founded in 1975 to provide community integration services to people with disabilities in the South East catchment area. Through the CWCW A was put in contact with FÁS, the national employment and training agency, and the County Wexford Consortium for Supported Employment (WCSE). The WCSE job coach secured A's current position with WFC by responding to WFC's local newspaper advertisement placed in April 2007. After a 6 weeks “workplace” trial period A was offered a permanent job.

Employee B is a 30 year old man who has **short term memory loss** as a result of a car accident when he was eighteen years old. Prior to his accident B had completed three years in a secondary level vocational school. When B recovered sufficiently from his accident he participated in a FÁS Community Employment programme, and worked as a caretaker of local community properties. Following this experience he availed of the FÁS Supported Employment programme to source a series of jobs in the unskilled labour market including farm work, construction work and car valeting. The WCSE job coach secured B's current position with WFC by responding to a newspaper advertisement in December 2007.

Employee C is in his twenties and has a severe shyness and a **lack of social skills**. C who was very much protected by his parents has attained a secondary level education. His job in WFC was his first real employment.

Employment

Mr. A works as an **attendant** at one of WFC's Forecourt operations dispensing diesel fuel for WFC customers. He is extremely meticulous in his duties and displays a high degree of competence provided that there is not too much customer traffic. He has settled well into the job and has recently increased his weekly hours from 24 to 39.

Mr. B performs general **cleaning and message duties** in a convenience store and filling station at another of WFC's Forecourt operations. Because of his short-term memory disability he requires close supervision to keep him on track. B works a 24 hour week.

Mr. C also works a 24 hour week in **merchandising tasks** for a WFC retail store that deals mainly with construction-related products. He is very capable in this "back-of-shop" environment and shows particular competence in IT tasks such as digital stock recording. However, because of his shyness, he lacks the confidence to serve customers face-to-face and his WFC colleagues have to work hard to build up his confidence.

A key concern of their managers is that these employees don't become stressed as a result of their work duties. The aim is to ensure that they are always operating within their comfort zone.

Experiences and results

The employment of A, B and C has been very satisfactory for both the employees and the company. From the **perspective of the employees** there are a number of very positive outcomes. One obvious advantage is the pay they earn and the attendant sense of independence. Working in the real economy as opposed to sheltered employment or community employment adds to their sense of independence. They take pride in the skills acquired and the responsibilities they are given. Not to be underestimated is the regular social contact, both with customers and, particularly, with work colleagues.

WFC, too, obtains several **benefits** from the employment of people with disabilities. It affords an opportunity for WFC to express its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Seeing and being able to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life of these employees engenders a feel-good factor among their work colleagues and creates a good team spirit. There is also a commercial bonus – while WFC does not seek a public profile for their CSR activity, the employment of people with disabilities no doubt reaps some local dividends in terms of customer loyalty.

Accommodation and success factors

A number of factors underpinned the successful employment outcome of the three employees. The crowning factor was the **positive attitude** among key senior WFC executives towards the employment of people with disabilities; indeed, the WFC chief executive officer is the chairman of the CWCW; and the WFC HR manager had previously worked in a large Irish supermarket group that had won awards for the employment of people with disabilities. An associated factor was the HR manager's **knowledge and sensitivity** which enabled her to place the employees in branches of the company where she was confident that work colleagues would assist as "buddies" in their smooth integration into the workforce.

A third critical factor was the **range of support measures** that FÁS was able to provide to assist the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market.

- Because the three employees operate below average productivity rates WFC avails of the FÁS Wage Subsidy Scheme which provides a financial incentive to the company in the form of a wage subsidy payment to compensate for any productivity shortfall.
- The employees availed of the Back to Work allowance (BTWA) granted to employees by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The BTWA allowed them to retain a reducing proportion of their social welfare payment plus secondary benefits – such as entitlements to free healthcare – on a reducing scale over the first three years of their employment.
- Both employees and the company benefit greatly from the contribution of the FÁS Supported Employment programme. The job coach plays an important training and re-assurance role at the induction phase when the employee commences work and subsequently performs a continuous assessment role.
- The job coach can use the cost-free FÁS Workplace programme to get a foot in the door with employers. This programme matches jobseekers with employers who have a vacancy and allows them to assess them as prospective employees over a 6 week trial period. Jobseekers are paid a flat rate of €31 per week towards travel and meal allowances; this subsidy is paid by the employer who is subsequently reimbursed by FÁS. The Jobseekers retain their normal social welfare status and entitlements.

In conclusion, the WFC case study illustrates the importance of **internal company factors** (a highly supportive management attitude and the identification of an informal network of “buddies” in the workplace) and the availability of a wide range of **complementary public support measures** to assist people with disabilities to find, gain and retain employment in the open labour market.

Future perspectives

The future employment outlook for both employee A and B is good; the company is satisfied with their progress and is happy with their contribution to the business. The rapid and severe downturn in the construction sector has, however, negatively impacted on employee C who has been made redundant. WFC would take C back if market conditions improved.

WFC remains very positive towards the employment of people with disabilities and is open to future approaches by people with disabilities and associated support organisations in relation to job opportunities. However it stresses the need to retain the range of publicly funded support measures that make this CSR work feasible.

Zamel (Poland)

A producer of electro-technical items modified a private home and established a special shuttle service. This enabled a man with physical disabilities to work from home and adapt the working time according to his current health condition.

Zamel Sp.J, Polska belongs to the Zamel CET Group with registered offices in Pszczyna (Silesia Province). Currently it is a leading producer of bells and chimes in Central and Eastern Europe and one of the main Polish producers and exporters of electro-technical items. The firm operates in the electro-technical sector since 1989 and for almost 20 years it is a family-owned company with 100 % Polish capital. Nowadays the company employs 189 persons, including 50 persons with disabilities, on various levels, from production to managing posts.

Mr. A. B. is one of the persons with disabilities employed at Zamel. He is a 36 year old man having a significant physical disability and using a **wheelchair**. In 1992, as a result of an unfortunate dive into the water he sustained an injury of the spine and since then has paresis of lower limbs.

Employment and accommodations

In general, employees with disabilities are hired to work **in positions adjusted to their disability**, in production as well as in administration. The devices at their disposal are constantly being updated, which enables professional development and the acquisition of new skills. Aids, such as orthopaedic objects, rehabilitation devices (e. g. chairs for epileptics, footrests, head rests, etc.) are also available. The buildings and facilities of the plant meet the requirements of occupational health and safety rules and regulations, taking under particular consideration the needs of persons with disabilities. The stock of machines is continuously modernised, which considerably contributes to a significant improvement in working conditions and ergonomics.

The **organisation of the technological processes** enables the significant majority of workers employed in direct production to perform their duties while sitting. Additionally, the company has prepared places, where persons with disabilities may rest during work.

The **company has employed a psychologist**, who integrates the workers and organises meetings and conversation for both, the persons with disabilities and other employees. Each employee could also benefit from the possibility of individual meetings with an expert. Currently, the company employs a specific person for hiring people with disabilities. This person bears the responsibility for all formalities, as well as health and disposition of these workers.

The Zamel company also uses **work performed at the home of the employee**. Such a solution is a convenient form of employment, particularly for the persons who, due to their conditions, can not or do not want to leave home. Employees working at home are accounted for the results of their work at the end of each month.

Mr. A. B. is employed on a full-time basis. He is an **electronic bells fitter and works at home**, where he has a specially adapted workplace. Due to such organisation of the production, the employee might adjust his responsibilities according to his condition and mood. Results of his work are transported to Zamel company by means of a special vehicle adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.

The company has partially financed the purchase of a wheelchair, the construction of entrance ramps at Mr. A. B.'s house and the purchase of a mobile phone to allow free communication with the employer. At the employee's home, the company has arranged for a **workplace equipped** with a soldering iron and special ventilating fans preventing from inhaling fumes created during work.

Financing and financial support

Zamel continuously cooperates with Pszczyna District Prefect Office, PFRON (National Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled) – Silesian Service Office of the SEE, the Tax Office as well as Pszczyna City and Commune Office. The company may benefit from **support programmes** for employees and employers, as well as from allowances resulting from various regulations, in particular:

- funding for expenditures for organising new work positions;
- subsidies for the participation in rehabilitation stays;
- subsidies for the monthly remunerations paid to the staff with disabilities;
- special subsidies for the remuneration of employees with diagnosed psychical disease, mental disabilities or epilepsy;
- allowance for part of the tax related to the remuneration of persons with disabilities;
- allowance related to social insurance premiums;
- exemption from the obligatory NFRD premiums.

The **plant's fund for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (PFRD)**, on the application of the employees with disabilities, provides individual help in the form of non-returnable benefits and loans without interest rates, which are partially or totally written off. This fund may provide help mainly for stay and treatment in hospitals, (sanatoriums, care and curative institution); diagnostic-medical materials and medicines; purchase and repair of rehabilitation-orthopaedic devices and aids; demolition of architectural barriers; training in high schools and colleges as well as rehabilitation stays (or other forms of relaxation).

The **creation of the driveway** to the house of Mr. A. B. is an example of co-financing the demolition of architectural barriers by the company. The firm has also subsidised rehabilitation stays for Mr. A. B., cost of medicines and corrective glasses as well as expenses related to transport insurance.

Moreover, the **company provides help in raising and improving qualifications/** trainings of persons with disabilities by launching individual rehabilitation programmes (IRP). Zamel has subsidised the secondary education fees and intends to co-finance further education of Mr. A. B.. At the moment, Mr. A. B. has secondary education; he had vocational education when he has started working at Zamel. He plans to further improve his qualifications by studying.

Results and conclusions

Throughout all the years of employing persons with disabilities, no conflicts related with this mixed team have been reported. **Employees create an integrated team**, and the company employs whole generations of families. The company pays attention to treat all employees equally and to avoid any divisions or conflicts. Additionally, the company organises leisure integration trips for the employees and their families, which also contribute to integration outside the working hours.

Values realised in the Zamel company might be summarised under the following motto: "**Work creates a person**". Being aware of the fact that the work makes a better person and helps to overcome numerous difficulties, it is not only a source of income, but also a source of satisfaction. Zamel wants to offer a chance to work for everybody willing to undertake it. For many years they have conducted a responsible personnel policy and as an employer the company is aware that a person with disabilities is a fully valuable employee, quite often surpassing other personnel with their commitment and skills.

Mr. A. B. has found a chance of safe and satisfying work in the company. He appreciates the possibility to **work in comfortable conditions**. The company owners value the fact that they have gained so many **dedicated and active employees**, who commit themselves to the work and are willing to share their skills.

Zamel has been awarded several times. On May 17th, 2007 the Polish Organisation of Employers of Persons with Disabilities – organiser of the "Icebreakers 2007" competition – has honoured, at the central level, Zamel in the open market category with the first price. Zamel was highlighted as a company successfully combining economic success and providing work for persons with disabilities, and for special social sensibility and responsible personnel policy, taking into consideration the needs of the personnel with disabilities as far as social and health rehabilitation is concerned.