

DISABILITY MANAGEMENT FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE GERMAN AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

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Descriptive Abstract

The presented study deals with prospects and barriers in the recruitment process of young disabled individuals in the German automobile industry and consequences for DM.

Extended Abstract

Objectives:

The working group of the researcher network of the IFDM 2008 dealt with the question as to whether research regarding young adults with disabilities belongs to the field of DM or not. It was agreed that it is part of DM, as young adults are being discriminated at the stage when they want to enter work life. The transition from school to a training place or workplace is a crucial stage for further participation and it is, therefore, a stage of particular importance for young disabled individuals. It is important for disabled persons to have access to working life. This is expressed in the UN Convention (Article 27) including „the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities“. That is, employers may express a willingness to bring youth and adults with disabilities into their workplaces,

but are typically at a loss as to how to identify resources that will make this happen effectively in a way that will benefit their enterprise. It could be argued, that part of the reason for unacceptably high rates of unemployment for youth and young adults with disabilities is that there is still a very basic lack of appreciation or understanding of the employer perspective (Lueking, 2008).

Discrimination towards disabled persons seeking employment is well known (Peck & Kirkbride, 2001), but there is a lack of knowledge of barriers for young adults with disabilities. In which training positions are all the young people with disabilities? How can they manage to get a job? And how can the employers manage to recruit them?

The overall goal of the study is to secure sustainable apprenticeship opportunities for severely disabled adolescents by overcoming barriers that exist both for the potential applicants, as well as for those responsible for appointing and employing candidates (Niehaus & Jaeger, 2009). The focus of the project is on developing and implementing barrier-free apprenticeship opportunities and application procedures in order to recruit severely disabled adolescents into industrial training programs.

Methods:

The research project is developed together with people with disabilities and elected representatives. The Social Code Book in Germany constitutes this representation in companies. And so the representatives of severely disabled employees and the union and works council function as the 'door opener' for disabled people into the companies.

Point of departure is an analysis of the existing opportunities and cooperative structures for the appointment of severely disabled adolescents within the following enterprises:

- Daimler AG Gaggenau
- Daimler AG Bremen
- Hans Hess Autoteile GmbH Koeln
- Kolbenschmidt – Pierburg AG Neckarsulm
- Rheinmetall Defence AG Duesseldorf
- Rheinmetall Landsysteme GmbH Kassel
- Volkswagen AG Braunschweig

We analyze the statistics in Germany concerning the situation of adolescents with disabilities in schools and on the labour market. Since the statistics are not very conclusive, we evaluate company data as well. In the focus of our study we conduct interviews with the relevant protagonists of the recruitment process.

In this qualitative research we have interviewed more than 60 actors involved into the process from the job posting to the selection procedure (HR personnel, trainers, the severely disabled trainees, the works council, the representatives for the severely disabled, the representatives for adolescents and trainees, the corporate medical service, and the representatives of the employer). The interviews with a mean length of 40 minutes dealt with the questions: How is the recruitment process structured? Who is involved into the process? What are the main technical, social, mental or financial barriers? What are appropriate strategies to overcome those barriers? How are the experiences in the apprenticeship of both sides, the disabled apprentice and the protagonists of the company involved in the industrial training.

Results:

Adolescents with disabilities don't have the same chances to get a vocational training position as adolescents without disabilities do. They are underrepresented (as roughly 5 % of those seeking a training position are severely disabled). This leads to the question of existing barriers, and the try to advise the companies on how and at which points to enhance the integration of the disabled.

By analysing the interviews, barriers in all phases of the application process, training and employment: prior and during the application, training, and employment are detected.

1. Barriers prior to the application

The disabled adolescents are advised by school, job center and parents to pass their training in special institutions for disabled apprentices. The result is that they ultimately have worse chances in the labour market. .

2. Barriers during the application process

Barriers emerge at the outset: the application procedures and associated aptitude tests of a company may create insurmountable obstacles for the severely disabled. The nature of these barriers may be technical, social or communicative, and may also involve reservations and concerns on the part of human resources personnel (Luecking, 2003, 2008). A lot of the large companies use online application procedures. Such procedures might not be barrier-free especially for visual and hearing-impaired applicants. In addition it can be assumed that in many cases, severely disabled adolescents decide not to apply because they do not expect to have any chance on the regular job market.

3. Barrier knowledge and attitude

Many companies are not aware of the various possibilities to promote and support people with disabilities provided by governmental subsidy (e.g. wage cost subsidies, workplace equipment, work assistance, etc.).

The attitude of the companies towards disabled trainees depends on their experiences. After positive experiences with the disabled youngsters they are more willing to train other disabled (snowball effect).

According to the participatory research approach the results will be presented to disability managers and other relevant protagonists of the companies as well as to the disabled youngsters to overcome barriers in the recruiting of new apprentices.

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