

**European Conference on “The benefits of Diversity and Inclusion for Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)”.**  
**29-30 September 2006, Limassol, Cyprus.**

**Plenary session “Good practice examples from SMEs”, by (Eduardo Barbadillo).**

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**(Gratitude words to the European Commission – DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities)**

Since 2001 until March 2006 I have been working for the Adecco Group, the worldwide number one company in the Human Resources Services sector of activity, in different positions of responsibility at Corporate level. Among others, and in relation to the content of this European Conference, I was the Corporate Director for the United Nations Global Compact, the Corporate Director for the European Year of People with Disabilities that took place in 2003, as far as Adecco was one of the twelve Corporate Partners of the European Commission during that year, and the International Programmes’ Director of the Adecco Foundation. Those positions gave me the opportunity to work on non-discrimination within the Corporation from an internal perspective, and to be in contact with some companies and stakeholders interested on this issue.

The first thing I would like to highlight with regard to my experience in this matter, is the work carried out by the Adecco Foundation, not only as an SME with a clear internal policy of non-discrimination and inclusion, but also as an element that encourages implementation of these policies in corporations and as a key partner of Public Administrations in several projects I shall mention later on. I would like to focus on their activities in Spain, although those conducted in other countries are very similar.

The Adecco Foundation was created in 1999 with the purpose of facilitating labour integration of certain groups at risk of social exclusion, thus enhancing their social integration through employment, as well as encouraging companies to adopt non-discrimination and equality policies in the workplace. In other words, the Adecco Foundation strives to benefit both employees and employers.

With this aim, the Adecco Foundation, a non-profit charity organization, certified by the Spanish government as an agency of public interest, undertakes several work integration programmes with various groups:

- people with disabilities,
- women with sole family responsibilities or victims of domestic violence,
- unemployed people over 45 years of age,
- unskilled young people,
- long-term unemployed.

To fulfil their function, the Adecco Foundation relies on the support of a network of 350 offices throughout Spain and is in contact with Adecco's 35,000 operating customers in the country, with a continuous effort to raise awareness and educate on non-discrimination to access employment and on the job.

The Adecco Foundation carries out its social objective through Collaboration Agreements with various organisations and companies, designing and implementing Social Responsibility policies within Human Resources and undertaking Reorientation and Integration programmes to provide access to jobs to those people with the most difficulties.

Some of the services provided to companies to enhance employment of these groups are the following:

**Advice:** Together with the Adecco Foundation, any company can set up a Social Responsibility plan within Human Resources through joint actions:

- Identifying the jobs that can be filled by these groups in the company
- Setting up non-discrimination programmes inside the corporation
- Providing advice on legal compliance regarding incentives and contracts
- Supporting businesses to comply with the obligation of devoting 2% of their workforce to disabled people, and if this is not possible, guiding them on the steps to be taken to obtain a certificate of exception, a mandatory requirement to be eligible for the alternative measures contemplated by Law.

**Recruitment of candidates:** help is provided to companies through the various sources of recruitment used by Adecco as well as in the candidate selection process, always based on the applicant's ability to fulfil the professional profile sought and thus meet the client's requirements.

With all of this, the Adecco Foundation is able to improve and optimize the recruitment process in order to achieve the best candidate adaptation to the job.

A few figures will give you an idea of the importance of the work this institution has been carrying out in favour of non-discrimination. During its first five years of existence, the Adecco Foundation has achieved labour integration in multiple companies, most of them SMEs,

- 5,400 unemployed people over 45 years of age,
- 3,200 women with sole family responsibilities or victims of domestic violence,
- 3,250 people with disabilities.

Some SMEs have proactively carried out Diversity and Inclusion policies. In these cases, the reasons that drove them to do so were basically:

- Senior Management convinced that it was good for the company since enrichment of human capital can become a significant competitive advantage
- Wishing to become a mirror of the diversity in society, humanizing the company and making it more “normal”
- Also, complying with the Law, benefiting from incentives and subsidies for contracts and increasing the sources of candidate recruitment.

However this is not always easy. The obstacles they have had to overcome can be summarised as follows:

- Lack of understanding and collaboration from certain employees in the company. These are normally older employees who present a great resistance to change, whatever it may be.
- Investment required, such as adaptation of workstations in the case of disabled people, or facilities (uniforms and changing rooms, in the case of hiring women)
- The wish to obtain positive results in the short-term.

The challenge for the organizations is discovering the opportunities provided by diversity while at the same time, preventing and channelling the risks that reality (the melting pot) present (eg. a lack of cohesion that could destroy the unity required by any organization). The challenge, therefore, is to achieve inclusion of the various and diverse elements that keep the company alive.

The outcome of these experiences has been very positive in most cases:

- Humanization of the company
- Pride of belonging to the company and increased employee motivation.
- Increased employee loyalty, diminishing workforce turnover.
- Greater productivity.

These experiences have not only improved the image of the company and the employer, they have also helped develop a company culture based on values, equality, trust, efficiency and respect for and from society.

Notwithstanding the above, to be honest I must say that, in my opinion, there are still few SMEs in Spain undertaking serious non-discrimination and inclusion policies in the workplace. Thus, the SMEs that hire people with disabilities do so in order to comply with the Law requiring businesses with over 50 employees to fill at least 2% of their workforce with these people. And the incentive system in place to favour hiring of these groups is not the core reason either why SMEs consider hiring them. In most cases companies consider these groups in order to increase their sources of recruitment and to solve a problem. In other words, they act reactively, out of need, instead of adopting proactive measures. This is why I believe we still have a long way to go. And in my opinion, the role of Public Administrations is essential to increase society awareness, establishing measures to encourage Diversity in the workplace, increasing the functions of employment agencies, etc. It is not just a matter of focusing on caring for these people, increasing their skills to access the labour market, but also of acting upon this market, making it more accessible to these groups.

In this regard, the Public Administration in Spain has set up several initiatives encouraging non-discrimination and diversity in the workplace. Basically they aim at the social and labour integration of groups with particular difficulties to access the labour market, and to fight against discrimination. Participating companies agree to provide jobs to these groups under special conditions and to facilitate their continuance and promotion. In turn, they are distinguished as "Equal Opportunity Employers".

Worth highlighting are the Experimental Employment Programmes carried out by the National Employment Institute and several Regional Government Public Employment Services. These Programmes began in Spain about four years ago and the results so far have been very satisfactory. These are agreements signed between the Public Employment Services and private employment agencies through which the participating organisations commit to training certain people provided by the Public Employment Service (people belonging to groups with difficult access to the labour market) and to integrating them in the labour force at least for a period previously established. The participating company receives some money from the Public Employment Service for training and continuance in the company of each person, as long as they surpass the minimum period of employment established, which is usually six months. At the same time, the companies hiring these people are eligible for free recruitment and training of future employees, as well as incentives and subsidies for hiring these people. What this achieves, in my opinion, is helping agencies increase their customers' awareness, which is very important, as well as enabling employers to "try out and gain practical experience" hiring these people.

I would like to end my presentation with the following comments and recommendations:

- 1) Awareness of Diversity and Inclusion in the business community represents an essential element for the employment of these groups. It is necessary to encourage companies to assume as a value of their own, overcoming differences and striving for equality among these groups. **And in order for companies to engage in Diversity and Inclusion, it is necessary to involve their Senior Management, as this is a strategic issue, related to a change in company culture.**
- 2) To manage this, it is essential to count on the expertise of specialised organisations (eg. Temporary Employment Agencies, private placement companies, etc.). We have to be creative to find solutions to an issue that cannot be resolved with traditional methods. **And the first hiring experience must be a success. This ensures greater involvement of the whole workforce for future hires.**
- 3) In order for the activities carried out by the company as corporate citizen to bear the fruit expected by society, they must be accompanied by other measures in coordination with all other social agents. In this regard, the role played by families, educators, etc. is crucial, fostering values of responsibility and respect among the young in order to increase their awareness of these issues and facilitate integration in all areas of these groups with special difficulties. The Public Administration, in its turn,

should continue promoting measures that enhance integration of these groups, work/life balance, management of diversity, actions to promote employment and protect certain groups, etc. Since, although this is everybody's responsibility, the Public Administration must take on a leading role, setting up a network of information, training, advice and promotion for these special groups.