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**“At the Open Border“**  
(orig. “An der offenen Grenze“)

and

**“Managing Diversity“**

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## W.I.T.H.

### Working with Individual Training and Help

### Four Approaches for Professional Integration for Disadvantaged Target Groups



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### Imprint

W.I.T.H. is a transnational Partnership within the EU-Initiative "EQUAL".

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## Managing Diversity



### Name of Development Partnership (DP)

Managing Diversity

### EQUAL Theme:

Lifelong Learning

### Region of the DP:

Sectoral DP

### Objective of the DP:

To develop models for better integration of various groups of employees who are facing discrimination due to their ethnic origin, gender, age, social position, sexual orientation, their physical or mental disposition and/or lack of qualification. Diversity should not be regarded as potential factor creating conflicts, but as variety which opens a broad setting of perspectives and options to find new solutions for work tasks.

### Target groups/Beneficiaries:

- 1) Employees who are facing discrimination due to their ethnic origin, gender, age, social position, sexual orientation, their physical or mental disposition and/or lack of qualification
- 2) Employers, decision makers in companies (HR managers, works council), multipliers from labour market policy and institutions, qualification and counselling institutions, social institutions in the environment of the employee

### Activities:

- 1) Labour market specific diversity: development laboratory for innovative approach and measures to support discriminated employees
- 2) Analysis of diversity problem areas and of potentials on employer's and employee's side in five selected companies
- 3) Qualification in the areas indicated during the analysis, implementation of innovatory qualification models in the companies
- 4) Creation of a social environment for de-problematizing employers with diversity problems
- 5) Training of HR managers and work councils, train the trainer
- 6) Evaluation and project escort

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## At the Open Border



### Name of Development Partnership (DP)

At the Open Border (orig. "An der offenen Grenze")

### EQUAL Theme

Employability

### Region of the DP

Lower Austria

### Objective of the DP

The Development Partnership supports, in two regions of Lower Austria, people facing exclusion from the labour market through innovatory pilot measures combined with new qualification and accompany elements. These measures are being considered as part of a regional perspective which combines different policy areas (labour market, social, economy and regional policy) to a common strategy for better employment chances in the region.

### Target groups/Beneficiaries

People who are excluded from the first labour market  
Longterm unemployed people, people with heavily "perforated" professional careers (but not longterm unemployed in the strict sense of the terminus, people living on social security, people with disabilities, young unemployed people (15 – 24 years), women returners, older people (over 50 years), people whose jobs are endangered

### Activities

- LOT-Workshop Weinviertel: region-related innovatory learning and qualification environment for the labour market target group
- LOT-Workshop Waldviertel: region-related innovatory learning and qualification environment for the labour market target group
- LOTSE networking of learning environments and transitory accompaniment into the professional life of the target group
- IMPULS new forms of learning and learning support systems in the region, competence development for trainers
- Dialogue platform for regional development perspectives with regional actors from various policy areas for better employment chances
- Evaluation, project escort and reflexion, investigation on transfer possibilities of the results into mainstream activities

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## Introduction

**One of the main concerns of European labour market policy is the integration of disadvantaged persons into the labour market. People suffering from various kinds of disadvantages face discrimination barriers as far as employment and social inclusion are concerned.**

Their most frequent problems are:

- low qualifications or insufficient qualification levels
- age
- physical or psychological disposition
- social position
- lack of cultural/mental flexibility concerning mobility, new ways of working etc.
- remarkable difficulties for foreign/migrant workers (racism, cultural differences, low qualifications, denial of recognition of their qualifications and work experience)
- difficult work situation for women, e.g. the lack of sufficient part time jobs or flexible working hours and insufficient child care opportunities
- poor public transport
- insufficient awareness of employers of the perspectives and potentials of diversity within their staff
- lack of individual empowerment and of holistic integration approaches
- insufficient implementation of gender mainstreaming policy and lack of adequate, appropriate measures for gender sensitive approach in vocational qualification or in the work field

Therefore, new and integrative models targeted at disadvantaged people are needed in order to develop their motivation and to activate their energies and potentials.

The four members of the Transnational Development Partnership "W.I.T.H." (Working with Individual Training and Help) have identified a range of services for disadvantaged people at a risk of both social and professional exclusion. The main purpose of these services is that disadvantaged people can remain in or be integrated into the labour market through the empowerment of competences. Through the services, the beneficiaries are able to develop their potentials and abilities to match the requirements of the labour market.

The activities of the four development partnerships have addressed the following target groups:

- low skilled workers
- workers and unemployed with specific disadvantages (disabled people, addicts, drop outs etc.) or belonging to different "diversity" cultures (race, language, religion, social or cultural background)
- migrant workers

For these target groups, the partnership has opened new learning, orientation and qualification possibilities. Through different approaches the four transnational partners have identified innovative solutions that will be described in this brochure:

- individual coaching and counselling
- e-learning
- diversity management
- self-directed learning

We hope that this brochure will give a new impetus on all trainers and tutors working with these target groups.

# Individual Coaching and Counselling

... in connection with the integration of disadvantaged persons into the job market.

## 1. What is coaching?

### Origin of coaching

The English word coaching means above all to train, to promote, to guide. Originally, the word "coach" is a sports term and means "personal trainer".

The coach guides a person or a group to reach a predefined goal. Coaching always implies a methodology which is very specific of the situation and a clear orientation towards problem solution and aims.

In the mid 1980ies, when the concept of coaching from the United States reached Germany, it was seen as an exclusive option for the management elites in industry. Gradually the narrow concept of caching for managers developed into a consulting option for everybody and everything. Today we define coaching as a psychological service with a wide field of activity: preparation for new tasks, support during times of extreme challenge and, similar to supervision, reflection of one's behaviour in one's job.

### Self-responsibility and empowerment

The basis for coaching is self-responsibility. Nobody is "carried" to reach his or her aims. Coaching, therefore, is not a one-sided process initiated by the coach, but it is interactive. The coach does not actively interfere with

processes by performing a task for the client, but by giving advice how to perform this task more effectively. This means that coaching consists of advice and counselling with the aim of assisting the client to develop his or her own solution for certain professional or private problems. Coaching develops potential, encourages, clarifies positions, expectations, aims and ways and finds possible solutions. Coaching places emphasis on the strong sides of a person, on his or her resources. The aim is further development.

Professional coaching should not be confused with careers guidance. „Coaching works with the personality, behaviour, the presentation or also the attitude of people“. Therefore, coaching is always and exclusively help to take matters into one's own hands.

### Process orientation and change

Coaching always consists of process work oriented towards solutions, future and actions, i.e. it is constantly checked whether the chosen path really leads to a certain aim or if other new provisions have to be made to reach the predetermined goal.

This means that the coach primarily deals with change of and transition to new forms of personality development. The coach accompanies the personality on its way to a new order. Every counselling or coaching more or less means to manage necessary, desired and intentional changes.

# Equal ROC



## Name of Development Partnership (DP)

Equal ROC: Network for the Development of Skills for a Qualified Employment

## EQUAL Theme

Adaptability

## Region of the DP

Modena Province

## Objective of the DP

The goal of the project is to support the adaptability to the labour market of different categories of disadvantaged workers through:

Ad hoc basic services provided by a network of organisations on the territory offering:

- counselling and advising
- training and retraining
- support to accessing basic services as housing, education, health and care

## Target groups/Beneficiaries

- low skilled workers
- migrant workers (from southern Italy, non EU migrants)
- disabled people or disadvantaged people
- "atypical" workers

## Activities

Analysis and study in order to gain:

- Substantial information on the competences needed from the different "sub markets"
- Information regarding the main paths and services for discriminated workers offering qualification, support and adaptability to the local market
- Basic information for modelling
  - Modelling
  - Testing of the models
  - Evaluation
  - Mainstreaming

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# Bridges to Work



**Name of Development Partnership (DP)**  
Bridges to Work (orig. "Brücken zur Arbeit")

**EQUAL Theme**  
Employability

**Region of the DP**  
Eastern Bavaria, including the districts of Passau, Freyung-Grafenau, Cham and Regen and the city of Passau.

**Objective of the DP**  
The objective of the DP "Bridges to Work" is to foster and maintain the employability of the region by reducing the disadvantages in Eastern Bavaria caused by the insufficient supply of education and integration offers, as well as the insufficient infrastructure. Its aim is to combine the basic pillars of consulting, qualification and employment into a joint approach. It will test, develop and validate innovative approaches to combat all types of discrimination and inequalities existing in the regional or labour market.

- Target groups/Beneficiaries**
- Older unemployed workers
  - Asylum seekers
  - Foreigners
  - Resettled German nationals
  - Disabled
  - Women
  - Long time unemployed
  - Socially disadvantaged youths

**Activities**  
Through various measures and projects the DP is providing support and aid during the process of integrating the target groups into the labour market. The 13 different projects of the Equal-Initiative within the region are:

- coaching offices in each district
- a newplacement consulting project for companies facing insolvency
- a non-profit temporary-employment agency
- different measures of orientation, qualification and integration
- a mobility project (grant a mobility allowance in addition to the mainstream job promotion)

The different projects of the DP are integrated in a regional network of operative and strategic partners (social services, labour exchange offices, labour unions, social institutions and NGOs, chamber of trade, chamber of commerce and industry, regional companies etc.) which are in close contact to each other and co-operate steadily.

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## 2. Role, self-conception, qualification and fields of activity of the coach

### Role and self-conception of the coach

A coach is an adviser. As an adviser the coach is an expert for the way to reach a solution. The person to be coached is the customer/client. The client is an expert for him- or herself, the one who knows. For this reason it is important that both the coach, but also the clients realise that they themselves are the experts for the solution of their problems. Their resources for change are at their disposal, only they can decide on their changes and pertaining strategies.

For the coach this means that he or she must not project his or her own ideas of what is right, appropriate or even objective to the client and that he or she must be aware of the basic fact that the client has all the required resources to define and reach the aim. The client himself must therefore define his or her goals, the coach only helps with methodical know-how to reach the goal. The "client" only gets incentives when talking to the coach. This means that there is no "right - wrong" or "good - bad" in coaching, there are only possibilities which may be of different advantage for one or the other.

### Qualification

If one extracts a list of qualities which are typical of a good coach from literature, one gets the picture of a "godlike person with universal capabilities" (Roth et al., 1995). One coach will therefore never have all these qualities. Coaches are different because of their

education, methodology, theoretical concepts and the techniques and procedures they use. Minimum qualifications of a coach are therefore methodical, personal and field-related competence. Coaching is therefore as a rule practised by counsellors with psychological and social-pedagogical background and practical experience with a view to the wishes of the coached persons ("field competence"), in order to be able to correctly assess the situation and to offer qualified counselling. As a matter of principle, the coach has to be well suited to the personal and substantial requirements of the client. One coach will never be suited for all clients and all tasks. Coaches should therefore know their personal limits and, if necessary, refer clients to better matching colleagues.

### Scope of activity of the coach

- The scope of activity of a coach includes
- Listening and observing
  - Asking
  - Giving support
  - Promoting self-expression
  - Clarifying meanings
  - Confrontations
  - Working proposals
  - Explaining and giving information

These interventions, which, of course, can also be components of counselling, supervision or therapy, aim at the creation of free room for alternative actions and choices for the client, which the latter can also perceive as such.



### 3. Characteristics of coaching

#### Process orientation

Coaching is an interactive, counselling and attendance process centred on the person, which can combine job-related and private subject matters.

#### Basis of relationship

Coaching is based on a sustainable counselling relationship which is characterised by mutual acceptance and trust and is desired by the client's own will.

#### Implicit goals

Coaching always aims at a (sometimes preventive) promotion of self-reflection and perception, awareness and responsibility to help the client to take matters into his or her own hands.

Coaching is not a therapy, but clarification and solution for individually difficult situations.

#### Transparency

Coaching uses transparent interventions to make the client aware of possible reasons and consequences of his or her own or other persons' actions.

#### Concept

Coaching has to be based on an elaborate coaching concept which explains the coach's actions and determines the interventions and methods to be used by the coach, anticipates intended processes and interaction of effects.

#### Duration

There are several coaching sessions within a limited period of time.

#### Target group

Coaching is targeted towards an individual with job-related problems.

### 4. Steps of a coaching process

#### The coaching process

Status evaluation	Counselling	Coaching
Causes	Methods	Accompanying phase
Personal condition	Documentation	Practical experience
Self- and outside perception	Proposals	Trial period
Identification of aims	Implementation	Decision

### 6. Planning for and creating short-term wins ... or error # 6: not systematically planning for and creating short-term wins

If urgency has been indicated for the change process at the beginning, success should be reported after app. 12 to 24 months, this has strengthening effects on the urgency mission.

### 7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change ...or error # 7: declaring victory too soon

In most cases, a change process takes five to ten years and must therefore be freshened up by long-term perspectives and new projects, topics, change agents etc. Here it is important to keep the balance with step 6, i.e. not to rest too soon on one's success and to open the doors for "opponents of change" to return to tradition.

### 8. Institutionalizing new approaches – or – error # 8: not anchoring changes in the corporation's culture

Here the suggested strategy is to name the interaction between new behaviour and company success to make employees aware of their contribution to change.

### Summary

Diversity Management is different from numerous other human resource management disciplines: staff members should no longer be identified by their belonging to a certain social group, but individual competence and resources which form the diversity of a person should be activated by mutually supplementary potential and be used for the company. Diversity Management should direct the view to the abilities and "performance" of the employees, away from outer characteristics or from being part of a community or social group.

Diversity Management aims at the integration of all staff groups in all hierarchy levels and wants to promote differences and Diversity. Diversity Management is a strategy which aims at the creation of an "all inclusive environment".

In a nutshell, Diversity Management comprises the following principles:

- Diversity has to be developed and nourished
- Diversity has to be made explicit
- Diversity must be an issue in organisational processes and activities
- Diversity must be a part of the overall strategy of a company
- Diversity is a source and a driver for learning





## Steps of implementation

A basic condition for the implementation of Diversity Management is that the staff is diverse. The degree of experience from Diversity acknowledging the necessity of Diversity Management, i. e. the understanding of Diversity Management is directly dependent on the real existence of Diversity.

Below we present an eight-step plan for a process which can become effective in the framework of Diversity Management:

### 1. Establish a sense of urgency

... or error # 1: **Not establishing a great enough sense of urgency**

Employees (especially those belonging to the dominant group) must be urged to leave the "comfort zones", which requires to indicate a certain degree of urgency (see staff communication). The degree of urgency is high enough "... when about 75% of a company's management is honestly convinced that business-as-usual is totally unacceptable".

### 2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition

... or error # 2: **Not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition**

Identification of the top management with the change plans is the key pre-condition. Depending on company size, apart from the president five to 50 persons, who do not only belong to the managerial level, but are also

distinguished by different characteristics are required. The Diversity composition in the guiding coalition is an important pre-condition for the success of change management.

### 3. Creating a vision

... or error # 3: **lacking a vision**

It is necessary to create a vision to communicate a clear image of the development intentions of the company managers to the employees; without a vision a process of change will move to the wrong direction or will not move at all. A vision is meaningful when it can be replicated in five minutes or less.

### 4. Communicating the vision

... or error # 4: **under-communicating the vision by a factor of ten**

This step refers to the consistent (in words and visible actions) communication of the "guiding coalition", making use of all available communication channels.

### 5. Empowering others to act on the vision

... or error # 5: **not progressing to the new vision**

This step aims at encouraging the employees to develop non-conformist ideas, activities and actions. It implies analyses of job descriptions, promotion programmes etc. which could impede empowerment. The central moment in the empowerment step is again the consistent (communication) behaviour of the managers.

## Coaching phases

### 1. Status evaluation/diagnosis

- Analysis of the real or "is" analysis to assess and clarify the present situation, personal conditions and causes and to harmonise self- and outside perception.

### 2. Identification of aims

- Identification of aims or "should be" analysis to define short-, medium- or long-term aims.
- Result: exactly matched and personalised definition of the coaching aims.

### 3. Choosing the right strategy

- Analysis of options, possible actions and strategies to reach the aim
- Analysis of involved persons and relevant topics: Who has to do what at what time? Who is willing to participate to which extent:
  - WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WILLINGNESS?
- Definition of a concrete plan of action: What will I do?
  - Work out an extension of the scope of actions and describe actual measures.
- Elaborate written target agreements
- Define the form of individual coaching and set an end date for the coaching process.

### 4. Adaptation and transfer

- Use of the chosen strategies and targets as required by the situation
- Adaptation to the social environment and the specific situation

- Adoption and reinforcement of positive experiences and results
  - If required, substantiation and adaptation of aims
- ### 5. Revision
- If required, new target agreements, a new plan of action or even restart of the diagnostic phase
- ### 6. Evaluation
- Regular check of the plan of action and the target agreements
  - Discussion and assessment of the measures carried out and their effectiveness, of achievements, problems that have occurred and results that have been perceived as success
  - Subjective assessment and evaluation by the customer/client
  - Measurement of objective achievement of pre-defined aims



## 5. Basic requirements and framework conditions for successful coaching of especially disadvantaged persons with the aim of integration into the job market

### 5.1. (Role) requirements for customers/clients/participants

According to *De Shazer* (1995), clients can, as a matter of principle, be categorised as three different types:

1. The visitor: This client does not have any problems and has been sent by a third party.
2. The complainer: This client has problems, but he or she blames it on his or her surroundings.
3. The customer: This client has problems and takes them into his own hands. He believes that these problems can be solved by his own activity, his own behaviour and/or changes of behaviour.

Fruitful cooperation is actually only possible with the third type of clients listed above, i.e. the basis for effective coaching is a freely desired and sustainable counselling relationship.

Another factor are different expectations of clients. There are clients who

1. seek help and support and are willing to cooperate,
2. expect assessment and justification,

3. expect concrete solutions (which contradicts the principles of coaching – the client is the best expert for him- or herself) and
4. clients who come to the (first) sessions with mistrust.

If a coaching and counselling process is to be successful, a client should be self-responsible and be willing to work on his or her topic with great openness and own motivation. As a rule, the innovative approach of coaching is only suitable for participants who have a minimum of initiative, perseverance and intellectual access. Here the “success rate” (e.g. start of a new job) is very high.

With especially disadvantaged persons, however, this is often not the case. The persons seeking advice are as a rule disadvantaged, because they have weaknesses in one or more aspects (physically, psychosocially, because of migration, qualification deficits, lack of mobility etc.). Especially those customers/clients whose coaching is financed by third parties and who are assigned by e.g. employment centres or social welfare offices often come to the (first) counselling session with scepticism and mistrust. Many of them have attended several training and education courses in the past and have gone through diverse counselling sessions with the aim of integration into the job market which have not been “successful”. In this case it is the coach’s task to present the coaching process in great detail and to correct possible distorted expectations.



disadvantaged and discriminating social groups and the developing sub-cultural values and particularities.

### Implementation

The topics dealt with above bring one central basic conclusion: If a company is willing to confront the promotion of Diversity in the enterprise, a holistic approach is necessary. Social-structural equality must be integrated into all business areas – from planning to human resource management and to practical daily decisions.

The Diversity Management process comprises cultural change of the organisation and includes changes on all levels and in all areas.

In the light of this complexity, the implementation of Diversity Management requires a **change-process** with balanced, carefully planned steps and long-term planning. Like every major organisation development project, also Diversity Management requires an appropriate time perspective: some experts talk about a time horizon of 3-5 years, others recommend slower implementation. “Diversity is an idea which needs time because it has to reach the people. A company cannot be transformed into the ‘new great Diversity’ from one day to the next, but one has to try to gradually change the ideas in the heads of employees” (Dr. Dana Sewi, member of the Diversity Council of Ford Germany)

As a matter of principle, a top-down *AND* bottom-up approach is advisable for implementation:

- Top-down: must be reliably represented by the company management, so that Diversity Management becomes recognisable as a strategic business decision. Starting from the upper management levels, the implementation of Diversity Management is, for example, carried out in the form of leadership commitment, by target agreements, by making use of existing leadership models and mechanisms and management training.
- Bottom-up: to broaden the idea of Diversity and to ensure participation and communication with employees, implementation strategies such as, e.g., the formation of focus groups, staff networks, brochures, intranet, competitions/awards/prizes, meetings/events etc. are employed.

In analogy to the above listed “overlapping” management disciplines, Diversity is a “**management concern**”. Engagement and obligation (i.e. “commitment”) must come from the upper level and has to be co-ordinated by the Managing Board. One basic task of the “management concern” is to keep informed about Diversity topics which concern the company. This is the only way to find out about risks; if one is not aware of a problem, nothing can be done to solve it.





- **Business-focus:** close and clear reference to the economical framework conditions and aims of a company.
- **Holistic approach:** joining the networks of human resources, marketing and business communication with other business functions to improve company success.
- **Coherence:** synergy of the employee's interests (staff representatives or participation bodies) and company management.
- **Unity in Diversity:** esteem and exploitation of Diversity and individuality as a common value.

## Realisation

For the realisation of Managing Diversity three management strategies have emerged:

### Promotion of the individual Diversity competence of employees

Model concepts must also be supported by the staff, because it is the employees who have to implement the company aims in daily routine. Special training has to be provided to the employee's council or staff council (if existing). The members of these bodies have to acquire the skill to proceed against discrimination, be it as advisors of employers or as employee's lobby. In small enterprises or companies without staff council, e.g. one person could be trained as a mentor. It is important that

employees can speak about their problems with a qualified person.

### Implementation of the overall concept in the organisational structure (e.g. in recruitment)

In larger enterprises (companies or administrative units) "competence centres" or "Diversity-teams" are set up who are responsible for the implementation of the concept – a well-established practice in personnel policy. In some European countries "transparent recruitment procedures" have been established which permit a fair recruitment policy without discrimination:

- For example, job advertisements are also distributed to the ethnical and sub-cultural press,
- Application documents must not contain a photograph,
- Creation of standard application forms in which all applicants have to answer the same questions. In a separate detachable form candidates enter their personal data (name, sex, date of birth, ethnical origin). The jury who pre-select candidates for job interviews do not have access to the second form.

### Group-specific aspects of Diversity

In case of persons who have created joint places and networks (e.g. women, homosexuals, migrants, handicapped persons) group-specific aspects of Diversity have to be considered. The sub-culture is among other things a platform to build up collective self-conception. The group-specific approach of Diversity policy does not imply individually different forms of behaviour and characteristics and to learn acceptance thereof, but it aims at the creation of a basis for acceptance by collective experience of

For this reason it is especially important to get to know the disadvantaged persons as closely as possible to be able to find out about his or her strong sides and to recognise possibilities for expansion to broaden his or her profile. As the job market proves to be more and more difficult to access for disadvantaged persons, it is important that the coach looks even closer, concentrates even more on the individual to be able to reduce multiple handicaps (e.g. lacking language competence and professional qualifications, no driver's licence and personal problems) as far as possible in order to make the client "employable". The most important aim of coaching for these target groups must always be to strengthen self-confidence and motivation of the persons concerned.

Experience with measures for the integration of disadvantaged persons into the job market also shows that clients' judgement of their possibilities on the regional job market is often rather unrealistic. They often completely overestimate their own capabilities and realistic salaries. Many clients are not aware that the chances to find new employment decline with every day of unemployment. Many persons concerned want to primarily dedicate the time of unemployment to the family, to build a house or to renovate their flat, to projects of neighbourly help etc. The idea of using the time of unemployment for further education does not occur to most of them. Counselling with a view to realistic self-perception as a basis for searching suitable employment brought little success in the short term. In most cases, a realistic self-perception of the professional possibilities could only be reached by long-term counselling with practical training phases.

During the practical training phases the clients could test their abilities and were often able to correct their self-perception by negative experience. On the whole, experience often shows that, as a rule, customers/clients who have been "forced" to attend counselling, coaching or even to take a job often break agreements, even quit counselling and coaching or lose their job.

A large group of especially disadvantaged persons are migrants, applicants for asylum and emigrants. Lacking knowledge of the language of the host country sets narrow limits to counselling and placement. Even in case of minor difficulties of understanding the coach can never be sure whether the client has understood all the advice correctly. Conversations on complex topics or abstract matters are practically impossible. Counselling in this context is often very time-consuming and ineffective.

In spite of these limitations and negative experiences, case-oriented individual counselling and coaching is seen very positively by the participants, as there is no "assembly-line" procedure like with official authorities. The minor administrative requirements (if existing at all), voluntary participation and independence of education institutes/authorities permit intensive coaching. Because of the absolute confidentiality of the coach, problems for personal or family-related reasons can be discussed openly and in great detail.





### 5.2. (Role) requirements for the coach

As mentioned before, the coach must always be aware that the client is the expert for him- or herself and the solution of his or her problems. The coach, however, helps the client as a neutral provider of feedback. Coaching is a combination of individual, supportive coping with problems and personal counselling. In coaching there are no fixed guidelines, the coach has to be free of stereotypes and generalisation and react individually to the situation of the client/customer. It is of particular importance to "pick the client/customer up from where he or she is standing". To be able to do this, the coach must be familiar with the principles of counselling and conversation guidance and must have empathy, understanding and acceptance for the customer/client. This means that the coach has to really listen to his counterpart, has to be really interested in the history or life circumstances of the customer/client and has to take the client seriously.

The coach also has the additional function of a guide who can offer orientation in a network that provides the clients with resources which may be necessary, for example, to start a job (childcare resources, housing cooperatives, interpreters etc.). In case of indications of drug addiction or psychological problems, the coach should refer the clients/customers to competent services (e.g. social-psychiatric service).

As a matter of principle it is counter-productive to chaperon the client too much and to do too many things for him or her. The coach must therefore not do any work for the client, but has to advise him or her on the process level.

### 5.3. Requirements for the relationship between coach and customer/client

At the beginning of a coaching process there should be a precise order to guarantee clarity and cooperation within the relationship. The contract should define, among other things, the aims, the framework conditions and the duration of coaching. These contract provisions permit the coach to constantly check during the individual sessions whether his or her actions are still in line with the overall agreement or the agreement for the particular session. In relation to contractual provisions, however, one has to differentiate between the formal contract and the psychological contract, the working alliance. The formal "service contract" regulates, among other things, the scope, fees, time and place and the obligation of confidentiality of the coach at the beginning of a coaching process. The psychological contract, however, defines the contents of the coaching such as the topics and aims of the cooperation, criteria and dates for achieving the aims and the rules of conduct for the coaching. All agreements should - also during the coaching process - be laid down in writing, this creates stable working conditions for both sides.

The most important task of the customer/client and the coach during the coaching is to stick to the thread, i.e. both should stick to the topics and keep an eye on the agreed aims. Of course it is possible that other, new topics emerge in the course of this process, but it is the coach's task to bring the result orientation to the front.

### Framework concept

Diversity Management is thus defined as a strategic attempt to optimise profits and productivity by the exploitation and promotion of individual competences and resources in organisations. Diversity Management is, in other words, a pragmatic company strategy, on the one hand used to maximise creativity and commitment of employees (internal dimension of Diversity Management) and on the other hand used to react to the interest of diverse (often marginalised) consumer groups to optimise profit (external dimension of Diversity Management). Diversity Management is more or less equivalent to the business case for "Valuing Diversity".

Moreover, Diversity Management is an instrumental management discipline to continually adapt organisation processes to actual demographic cultural and communicative framework conditions.

It becomes clear that Diversity Management requires a comprehensive, institutionalised change management which is anchored in all business processes and levels. The concept does not work if it is restricted to prestigious topics which are assumedly easier to communicate. A little bit of Diversity is not possible. The idea is based on the inclusion of all employees and customers, their way of life, their needs and ideas.

To adopt only single initiatives does not bring the desired return-on-investment effect; this is the result of a study conducted among 500 executives which pleads for a holistic Diversity Management approach. The study

classifies companies according to their Diversity Management concept and effectiveness into three categories:

- At the lower end of the spectrum are those companies who are not successful in the cultivation of Diversity. Their lack of success is caused by their little esteem of Diversity, and they do not undertake any efforts to promote and comprehensively integrate Diversity. Such companies often transform into "anachronists" who in the best case recognise that lacking Diversity has been the main reason for their disadvantage in competition.
- Moderately successful companies understand the intrinsic value of Diversity and mobilise resources for it, they launch single initiatives with specific aims (e.g. increase of Diversity in the Management Board) and possibly promote Diversity as a company value. These companies miss, however, the holistic approach and can therefore not benefit substantially from Diversity. According to Accenture the majority of US companies fall into this category.
- Leading companies in the cultivation of Diversity recognise its market value and promote Diversity and also – and this is the decisive distinctive feature – perform active Diversity Management. "Leaders" do not only pay lip service, but institutionalise Diversity in all business fields.
- General success factors and achievement of objectives for Diversity Management are:
- **Acceptance:** avoiding the impression of favouring certain groups by considering the overall Diversity of all stakeholders.



# Managing Diversity

## Starting position

In the course of globalisation tendencies the acceleration of the market is confronting companies with a number of challenges which can only be met by means of suitable strategies:

- Recruiting and long-term employment of talented employees
- Innovative products, services and market presence
- Acquirement and expansion of new market segments
- Effective operation across national borders and cultures
- Growth of reputation
- Confrontation with new rule systems and social responsibility

Such a remarkable change within an organisation calls for the development of new strategies to meet a situation which will become steadily established in the business world and with which companies will have to cope to a greater extent. The simple integration of individuals into the otherwise homogeneous organisation structure is no longer sufficient to guarantee an efficient and conflict-free personnel structure in an organisation. As variations of Watzlawick's communication axiom "people cannot not communicate", the theories "we cannot be not international" and "we cannot be not diverse" have developed.

Diversity is therefore not primarily a question of the size and degree of internationalisation of a company, but concerns every company with its postulate of "its staff as

the most important capital". "Diversity Management" is an overall concept for these strategies which themselves are as diverse as the aspects they intend to address.

Diversity Management is a management instrument which pursues the targeted internal and external consideration and the deliberate exploitation and promotion of Diversity to increase a company's success. Diversity as a principle of managing a company describes the complete and consistent orientation of a company towards Diversity and esteems the individuality of all stakeholders as the most valuable property.

Diversity Management is a relatively young management discipline and is at present defined in a broad framework. Also the term Diversity is described by a broad spectrum of underlying concepts.

Diversity are all those human identities and characteristics which make us different from other people. In this respect, Diversity can mean forms of appearance, which does not only refer to the classical, i.e. visible differences such as sex, age or ethnical origin, but also to characteristics which are not visible right away, such as religious creed, sexual orientation, cultural background, caretaking responsibilities, job roles and functions or working style.

Diversity describes the phenomenon that human beings are different in many aspects – and resemble each other in other aspects. Diversity stands for individuality. Diversity describes an open attitude towards variety and the awareness of the influence of being different on daily social life.

The coach can experience role conflicts, if the ordering party, i.e. the "buyer" of the coaching (i.e. employment centre, education institution) is not the client (e.g. a long-term unemployed person): on the one hand, the coach should establish a transparent and trusting working relationship with the client and elaborate his individual aims (e.g. reduction of personal deficits and problems), on the other hand he has to pursue the aims of the buyer (e.g. job placement) at the same time. This means that the relationship between coach and customer/client is strongly influenced by external circumstances. The coach must have special skills to manage this balancing act between different requirements and interests.

## 5.4. Basic requirements and framework conditions on the level of the subsidising organisation

Good and close cooperation with authorities, subsidising organisations and employment centres is very important, because it helps to eliminate problems and obstacles more quickly, and also because it helps to be able to advise the client/customer correctly with regard to analysis and choice of options, possible actions and strategies to reach the predefined goal. Because of this close cooperation the coach can determine before starting the coaching process which options are really viable for the client/customer (e.g. support of qualification measures, cost coverage of certain services etc.). On the other hand it is of advantage if subsidising organisations can be convinced of the effectiveness of the coaching. Under such circumstances they are able to support and promote the coaching process with their financial possibilities rather than to impair it.

## 5.5. Basic requirements on the level of employers

For the coach or counsellor good contacts to and cooperation with companies are very important: Close contact can make the coaching a lot more effective, as the coach can more easily get information on what the employers need. This is the only possibility to achieve good matching between employer and client/customer. It is also easier for the client to adapt to the employer's requirements. For a successful coaching in the sense of help to find a job it is of special importance that the persons to be placed match the profile and requirements of the employer as closely as possible. This is seldom easy, because the coach cannot "observe" the clients/customers in every day life, how they behave with other people or what is their attitude towards work.

In case of internships the clients should try themselves to find a place for practical training, as "placed or assigned" internships are often terminated by the clients and take-over into employment is more seldom. To avoid that clients get frustrated in internships, it is important that clients only go in for practical training in companies where there is a basic chance of being employed and where they are not exploited as "labour at no cost". Close cooperation with the companies is also important for the coaching process: It has proved to be of advantage to have a responsible employee of the company take part in counselling sessions and assessment conversations after phases of internship. In this manner different interpretations of the course of the internship by the client and company representatives can be avoided, misunderstanding can be eliminated immediately and excuses ("I was not treated well", "other employees were treated better",



“I was only late for half a minute once”) can be invalidated on the spot. With respect to the assessment of technical qualifications company representatives are more competent and their opinion on technical qualifications is accepted more often by the client.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the best coaching cannot compensate for lacking jobs for persons with low qualifications or for persons with disadvantages. For people with handicaps which cannot be minimised, but are deteriorating, the situation is almost hopeless at the moment. Such handicaps are health limitations, e.g. backaches, heart attacks, diabetes etc., which weaken those affected too much so that they can simply not cope for a longer time with the high requirements of the market. Also for older employees the situation is very bad. Here the only possibility is to look for companies who are open towards those persons – and this search more and more resembles the search for a needle in a hay-stack. The unfavourable economic situations where highly qualified employees apply for jobs with low qualifications have made the situation even worse for disadvantaged persons. In these cases jobs in special employment projects (e.g. job creation measures, non-profit leasing of employees etc.) are the only possibilities for employment.

#### 5.6. Time frame and duration of the coaching

The time frame and duration of coaching depend on the individual motives and aims and the personality of the client. A coaching series of app. 10 sessions has proved advantageous, but also shorter coaching contacts can be very effective. Coaching for a longer period of time brings the danger of creating dependence and does not fulfil the

coaching principle of limited time and help to take affairs into one’s own hands. It is also important that the client determines the time frame of the coaching under consideration of his or her time budget.

The coaching session or the coaching contact itself should at least be long enough to enable the customer/client to implement the next steps successfully. The length of the session should be such that the client can participate with (full) concentration until the end of the session or contact. Depending on topics and learning speed of the client there should be a longer time interval between the sessions so that the customer/client can realise the envisaged aims. The client is expected to test incentives from the coaching in his every-day work experience. After longer transfer phases the following session will have to be longer. As a rule one coaching session is between 50 minutes and 2 hours long; intensive coaching, however, could take several days. Short contacts (e.g. on the telephone) make sense if they bring new insight for implementation. As a matter of principle, the rhythm of appointments and the duration of individual sessions should be adapted to the style of learning of the client.

#### 5.7. Basic requirements and framework conditions concerning the place of the coaching

As a rule, coaching is held in rooms of the coach. In addition to regular appointments, the coaching can be supplemented by telephone contacts. Depending on the wishes and personality of the client, coaching sessions or contacts at work or in another quiet, discrete and undisturbed environment are possible. Depending on the needs of

In Austria self-directed and transfer-oriented learning for persons outside the labour market is at present neither implemented in theory (no training possibilities) nor in practice (no model measures). SOLE could counteract this situation on various levels. Educators in education institutes working in the labour-market related context could be **made aware** of the necessity of new learning concepts.

Furthermore, SOLE was above all geared to **develop the competence of multipliers** (educating personnel and decision makers) in the field of labour-market related education in the region Wald-/Weinviertel. The development of competence of multipliers in the framework of SOLE started from concrete questions, circumstances and practice. It was intended to present models as guidance towards self-organised learning and to jointly develop corresponding didactic-methodological concepts. By sustainable implementation of these concepts in adult education institutions and positioning of self-directed learning in the regional labour market policy, reliable models for the problem groups of the regional labour market were developed.





### From pilot project to sustainability: the training course SOLE

SOLE (short for „Selbst-Organisiertes Lernen Erwachsener“ – “self-organised learning of adults”) was a short course on organisation, didactics and methods of self-directed learning for educators with target-groups outside the labour market. It was held in the regions of Wald- and Weinviertel, Lower Austria, in the framework of the development partnership “At the Open Border”.

#### Target groups of SOLE

The course SOLE was directed towards multipliers in the area of labour-market related training in the region northern Lower Austria with institutional background in three fields:

- a) Educators of the LOT houses of the development partnership “At the Open Border”
- b) Educators of other Austrian development partnerships with similar contents (topic: re-integration of groups of persons outside the labour market, EQUAL 1A)
- c) Educators of other regional education institutions

Apart from these acquisition fields, two groups of persons were especially relevant for the sustainability of the implementation of models of self-directed learning.

One of these groups were **decision makers** in regional labour-market oriented education, business managers, heads or personnel departments, training or qualification coordinators in adult education institutions. For this target

group SOLE offered a 2 days workshop on framework conditions for the implementation of models for self-directed learning.

The participants were familiarised with the requirements of the learning concept of self-directed learning. They were enabled and supported to establish the framework for new ways and models for target groups outside the labour market in their education institutions and to integrate elements of self-directed learning into their service range.

The following 8 days training course SOLE was targeted to persons who **educate** problem groups on the labour market: adult education trainers, persons in charge of qualification and learning and professional educators in adult education institutions learned about new methodical-didactic concepts of self-directed learning and how to implement them. The participants worked with concepts of self-directed learning on three levels:

- Methodical-didactic concepts of self-directed learning
- Reflection of learning – counselling – transfer design
- Arrangement of learning - social environment

the client, a broad spectrum of suitable places is possible, the coach should go by the requirements of the topic and by the client’s wishes.

To create a positive and constructive conversation atmosphere, the following conditions are relevant:

- The room must be quiet, discrete and undisturbed.
- The room should be functional (equipped with various working materials), but also comfortable (here the light plays an important role).
- There should be several seats; the participants should not be seated opposite each other, but at an angle of about 90 to 120 degrees.

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# eLearning for Disadvantaged

## 1. Macro aims

One of the partners of the Development Partnership, “Equal ROC: Network for the Development of a Qualified Occupation”, has already for some time been provided with a methodological-didactic model for the distribution of e-learning courses. Although this methodology is predominantly suited to users with advanced I.T. foundation skills, testing of this method on groups of lower skilled workers has been carried out and was particularly successful. Therefore, the aim of this article is to share this experience with foreign partners (FP) who are also involved in the process of integration with lower skilled workers in the employment market, in order to create a foundation for future testing on the target users in their own transnational W.I.T.H. projects.

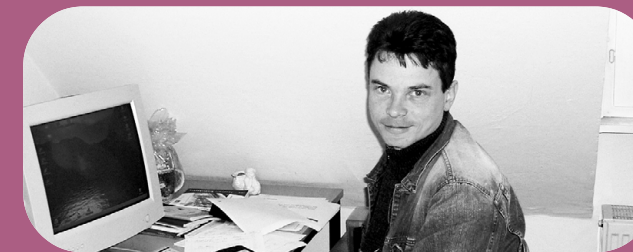
### Methodology

Distance Teaching is a training method that is particularly interesting for people who do not have the opportunity to follow traditional training methods (i.e. in a classroom with an instructor). The possibility offered to the DT student to manage time and study methods independently represents, paradoxically, one of the major criticisms of these methods: the user is exposed to the risk of a fall in motivation and a dispersion of resources in the absence of the continual stimulation of the presence and communication with the instructor / expert in the subject and with the other students in the classroom. Therefore, the use of this methodology with reference to lesser skilled groups in the employment market is still limited for the reason that

this particular user target group often needs the physical presence of a trainer or consultant and, at times, does not possess the basic IT-skills necessary to use this method of teaching. Even so, the method can be used by several different groups of lesser skilled workers, such as, for example, women returning to work, people who are qualified but whose skills need updating or simply young people or adults who need support in the difficult period of accessing the employment market.

These criticisms need to be taken into consideration during the planning phase of a DT course, providing an ad hoc workbook that takes account of the different skills that can guide the learner in a dynamic and engaging way, but that are at the same time precise and detailed during the whole of the training period. The language used in the workbook is intentionally colloquial with lots of exercises and references to other sources of information (books, articles, internet sites) in order to encourage closer examination and focus the attention of the pupil.

Another strong point of the model developed with reference to the target groups of the DP is represented by tutoring; the tutor is, effectively, the distinguishing element between self-study and distance teaching. This fundamental factor of IFOA's DT represents not only the link between instructor and pupils, but also has the responsibility of constantly monitoring the progress of the participants, as well as keeping any falls in motivation under control, acting immediately to correct these in the most suitable way. This flexibility allows it to be used for lesser skilled user target groups with only the minimum indispensable skills available.



The conference is integrated into planning of the learning process with at least two hours per week. It consists of

- ☆ personal reflection
- ☆ discussion/spotlight
- ☆ interaction and group reflection
- ☆ feedback.

### Learning conference functioning as planning

**conference:** Quoting from the learning diary in the section “overview on organisation”, “*The project is subdivided into different learning phases. You will receive a new syllabus for each individual learning phase. Before that we will discuss and harmonise learning targets and wishes.*”

Learning phases are the realisation of a partly open course planning. Towards the end of a learning phase results are evaluated and decisions with a view to topical and organisational planning of the next learning phase are taken. In this context learning conferences are converted into planning conferences with the aim of finding binding and – with regard to available resources – realistic solutions for the joint and individual pursuit of the learning targets.

**Pool of learning resources:** In self-directed learning and individualised and flexible structuring of learning, materials and media for learning become more important. The German word “Lernquellenpool” (pool of learning resources) alludes to the “source” as a “well” of flowing water which fills the (collecting) pool, out of which the learners can actively select and freely “scoop” materials, information and various learning media.

**Feedback:** The trainers have to be informed by the learners how they judge their own learning, if learning options are accepted and how learning topics correspond to the expectations of the learners. Feedback is necessary to reach this aim. The learners communicate experiences and impressions out of which they develop wishes and interests for further work. They assess cooperation within the group and the learning atmosphere. Feedback comes at the end of a training/learning unit.

Reflection of the technical contents is a structured choice for the individual and collective orientation of the learners in the learning/training process. The group interrupts the course of learning to check subjective learning targets, to assess the development of technical competence and to keep record of success, but also of difficulties. After written self-reflection, learning steps are discussed in interaction with the group. The process of joint interaction helps to assess individual and collective success with the aim of passing joint decisions for the further training process, focussing on the development of technical competence. This interaction between trainers and learners offers the chance to leave the principle of one-way street communication, the so-called “Nürnberger Trichter” model. Reflection on technical contents is a structured option which is integrated into the training process and is held in intervals of four weeks – in the sense of an assessment of interim results in the current learning phase or module. Reflection of technical contents is performed in three steps focussing on review, present-situation assessment and preview of technical learning and contents.





When implementing the concept, we realised that planning times became shorter and non-foreseeable incidents were constructively taken up and integrated into process planning.

The practical course of the project showed that the implementation of these concepts to make learning processes more individual and flexible demanded an enormous amount of openness and flexibility on the side of all partners, if the diverse interests, aims, circumstances and motivation of the learners were to be taken seriously and implemented in planning and practice. To prevent this openness and flexibility as practiced in the LOT houses from changing into unproductive chaos, structural characteristics, limits, possibilities and design elements were necessary which helped all partners to orient themselves and made the new responsibilities and possibilities to participate in decisions and design transparent.

The additionally required support structures to fill the counselling concept with life were manifested in the following "core elements":

- Learning diary
- Learning conference/planning conference
- Pool for learning resources
- Feedback
- Reflection of the technical contents

**The learning diary** is one of the central elements of the counselling concept, a spectrum of methods for personal reflection, setting and evaluation of targets and thus planning of the learning process. The learning diary is a file which is gradually filled with various reflection and working sheets which concretely refer to the learning situation. For the learners, the diary collects necessary information and contains options for reflection and planning of the learning/teaching process. The learners are invited to reflect their learning experience in writing, to take note of technical, social and personal abilities, to assess learning results, to keep track of learning success (and difficulties), to determine and pursue learning interests and to design an individual syllabus. With a view to practical implementation it should be noted that individual reflection is followed by discussion in a learning group (see learning conference) or a counselling session.

**Learning conference:** Quoting from the information section on organisation of learning/teaching in the learning diary, *"Once a week a conference for reflection of learning is held. Attendance is obligatory for all participants."*

Conferences in schools have been and still are the forums where questions are asked in areas where the learners do not have a right to say. The designation "learning conference" builds on this concept, but at the same time amplifies it in the sense of our target formulation. "Conference" means joint discussion of all persons who participate in the learning process. The word conference emphasises the seriousness.

To facilitate the DT tutors in their tasks of supervision and teaching support, a platform aimed at on-line tutoring has been planned. With this in mind, the means of synchronous and asynchronous communication become fundamental, provided by internet: email and forums (asynchronous modalities: they do not require the simultaneous online connection of two or more network users) and chat lines (synchronous modality: requires two or more users to be connected to the internet at the same time). Promoting and supporting communication between students and tutor, and, via the latter, between students and teachers, allows the creation of emotional involvement and the formation of the class-group which makes up some of the major learning stimuli (virtual classroom).

## 2. The software platform

The software platform is a kind of "virtual classroom". It represents the technological tool which makes the creation of a virtual classroom possible and acts as a virtual library for the consultation, closer examination and study of the different teaching modules of which a training course is generally made up.

Within the platform there are different utilities, aimed at a double function:

1. To create a virtual class, establishing a connection between the students on the course and with the tutor. An active and constant participation in the virtual class by the instructor is intentionally not provided, in order to leave the tutor in the role of the link between the instructors and the virtual class. The utilities responding to this requirement are:
  - a) The discussion forum, which allows asynchronous communication between the students of the DT course and the tutor, participating in discussions, sharing concepts relative to the thematic areas, which are the subject of the course.
  - b) The chat line, which instead allows synchronous communication between students and the tutor or between students and instructors who are available for in depth conversations via the web.
2. To continuously support the course and the motivation of each single student. This aim is followed by continuously "keeping in mind" the following utilities:
  - a) Training plan. Contains indications of the time distribution of the course, classroom days, exam dates, etc.;
  - b) FAQs. Answers are published to the most important questions asked by the students, referring to single teaching modules or to more general course themes;
  - c) Bibliography. This is inserted and updated continuously and can be consulted by single teaching modules;





- d) Interesting websites. In this section, the list of websites of the course is entered and continuously updated; it can be consulted by single teaching modules;
- e) Teaching aids. This section contains information relative to intermediate tests, relative answers, case studies, additional teaching material provided by instructors etc.;
- f) Evaluation. A summary of the evaluations of each single student, arranged by module or by course;
- g) Diary. Information tool for important course dates such as exams, classroom days and upcoming deadlines;
- h) Exercises. In this section it is possible to take self-evaluation tests or checking tests, either with an automatic answer or corrected by experts according to the subject dealt with and teaching requirements.

The DT platform also has the advantage of being extremely simple and therefore easy to use, even for students who are not particularly familiar with computer tools. In order to use the web platform, several hours of training are provided for DT students, as well as for tutors.

### 3. Non-virtual teaching aids

The fundamental reason for non-virtual teaching aids is to guide the student through the course of study in such a way as to ease individual learning in each teaching module. The guide is guaranteed by a tool named workbook, which is structured so as to lead the users step by step in the preparation and achievement of their study targets, through single working sessions in which the specific contents of the course are explained. Teaching support and further study materials are also provided.

The workbook is a tool with a certain design complexity and its predisposition requires a notable input from the teaching leader (expert in the subject). It provides different sessions, each of which is about 2 hours of individual study in which the student can find

- Aims of the session
- Explanation of the fundamental contents of the session
- Bibliographical and website references
- Practical exercises and case studies
- Results achieved at the end of the session

Learning and employment possibilities were joined in a network and harmonised, so that the participants could be supported and accompanied at the interface. The joined qualification and accompanying elements were intended to prepare the target group for starting a job, to accompany them into employment and to support them in stabilising in their job.

Central elements were the two "LOT-houses" (LOT is short for "Lernen" - learning - "Orientieren" - orientation - "Tun" - doing) which were established in the region. In these houses the target group was offered a great variety of places and methods for learning, which joined qualifying elements and fields of activity in an innovative way. These new concepts of self-directed learning, the opening up of activity areas (regional training, internship and probation places) and accompanying guidance when starting a job led to social stabilisation of the target group and increased the chances of integration into the first labour market.

### Self-directed learning in the LOT-house

The following section describes the principles of counselling which **formed the didactic environment for self-directed learning**.

In this context, counselling was the description of a modified and enriched training concept. Pedagogical training remained a partial function of teaching, but was amplified by the counselling function and thus modified at the same time: learning processes are no longer considered primarily from the aspect of teaching acts, but efforts concentrate on the learning acts. The question "With which methods can a trainer transfer knowledge and promote competence?" was replaced by the question "Which inner and outer circumstances are necessary for a learner, that he/she can get access to knowledge or amplify her/his competence?"

From the point of view of the learners, learning in the context of counselling opens the possibility

- to follow his/her own ways of learning in the social context,
- to formulate learning targets out of their own learning interests and needs,
- to reflect, evaluate, test and, if necessary, correct learning processes,
- to play an active part in directing, designing and deciding on various levels of learning/teaching.





## Self-Directed Learning for Low-Skilled Adults

**According to forecasts of employment trends, skill requirements for jobs are rising, while the job opportunities for low-skilled and unskilled workers are facing a dramatic decline. Since learning becomes a necessary precondition for successful employment, there is an urgent need for providing appropriate training models for developing the skills of low-skilled unemployed people.**

Against this background, the following failure has been identified: School education continues to produce people inadequately equipped and unprepared for lifelong learning, adult education tends to replicate the school system and therefore fails to attract low-skilled individuals. Barriers to (lifelong) learning are related to motivation to learn, aptitude to learn and assessment of the possible benefits of learning or training offers that do not match the interests and capacities of people.

Investigations have shown that low-skilled people do not fully benefit from participating in traditional training:

- They receive knowledge and/or skills which they do not need
- They cannot cope with the presentation of learning contents
- They are not motivated and flexible to adjust their newly acquired knowledge to their future work situation
- Because they remain unemployed, they will be sent to another course, and subsequently, to a third course etc. They show a "training course career" instead of a job career.

The development partnership "At the Open Border" ("An der offenen Grenze") has helped to integrate unemployed persons in two regions of Lower Austria into the first job market by innovative pilot measures. Thus an exclusion of these groups from the labour market could be prevented.

On the individual level, the measures of the development partnership aimed at a flexible, demand-oriented qualification for and assisting accompaniment into the first labour market.

The target group were long-term unemployed persons ("strongly perforated" career, statistically, however, not long-term unemployed); recipients of long-term unemployment benefits and social welfare benefits; persons with special needs (with handicaps under 50%); adolescents (15-24 years); women returning to work; older persons (from 50 years onwards); employees "in danger of losing their job" (until 6 months after starting work).

Whereas concepts for self-directed learning exist for higher education (post-graduates, university education, eLearning and management trainings, self-directed learning does not offer concepts for training low-qualified individuals.

In the specific setting of the development partnership "At the Open Border", further development of concepts and methods of self-directed learning proved to make sense in various respects:

### 4. Virtual teaching aids

These are made up of additional teaching aids inserted within the web environment normally by the tutor, on the direction of an expert in the subject. These can consist of:

- Practical exercises, case studies and relative answers
- Bibliographical references for in-depth study
- Lists of articles/magazines relative to the sector
- Study plans and materials provided by the instructor
- Intermediate tests and relative answers
- Updates of module contents

Furthermore, among the utilities of the website, as already illustrated when speaking of the web platform, there is the discussion forum and the online chat facility which give the possibility of exchange between tutor and pupils, between subject experts and students and between students and other students.

### 5. Online tutoring

The tutor represents the key figure, the interface between students and instructors, and is constantly available for explanations, suggestions and to monitor the progress of DT courses. The tutor can be seen as a kind of consultant/assistant for the preparation of DT students, able to establish if each student has achieved a level of preparation sufficient to pass the module and, in the case that problems are found or there are delays in preparation, is able to indicate the subjects which need to be revised, providing the necessary direction for individual study.

Among the tasks of the tutor are:

- The supply and updating of virtual teaching aids in coordination with the expert in the subject;
- The stimulus, via email and discussion forums, of the individual study of the students;
- The allocation and correction of intermediate exercises;
- The updating of the DT modules on the web platform, with reference to teaching aids, FAQs and additional bibliography;
- The constant monitoring of learning progress;
- The provision, together with the subject expert, of the necessary compensatory measures in the case of falls in motivation or delays/problems in learning.



## 6. Technological tutoring

As a result of the prevalently online management of the course, the presence of a relevant resource is provided, the technological tutor, who is responsible for the resolving of any problems linked to the use of the software platform and guarantees constant online assistance to instructors, tutors and students.

### Example: The work experience project

The training course "Direction and Assistance towards Employment through Work Experience" which took place in 2003 was directed at unemployed/jobless women and aimed to promote work experience within companies in the Emilia Romagna region through individual orientation; assessment of skills; distance teaching (DT); internship (a practical work experience).

The project involved 51 women aged between 20 and 54 years, 26 of them had a high school diploma and 25 were graduates. Of these 51 women, 22 had been unemployed for a long period of time (over 6 months), 14 were unemployed for a short period of time and 15 were looking for their first employment.

The course was laid out as follows:

1. Individual orientation (4 hours)
2. Assessment of skills (9 hours -optional)
3. Distance teaching (120 hours - optional)
4. Internship (560 hours)
5. Publication of declaration of skills acquired

The distance teaching (DT), (prior to or following the internship), covered the following subjects:

- Safety at Work
- Economics, Finance and Business Control
- Strategic and Operative Marketing
- Internationalization
- Internet Marketing
- Business Planning
- Personal Empowerment
- Labour Law
- Tax Law
- Social Welfare Law
- Internet, Excel, Word, Power Point, Access

This course provided the necessary tools to allow employment or re-employment. At the end of the project, 30 participants had been hired by the same company in which they carried out their work experience, whilst 3 paid internships had been extended.

The phase of distance teaching proved to be very useful to the participants in the project as it allowed them to follow training courses from home and therefore combined well with their family lives. Furthermore, many of them acquired greater familiarity with the IT tools and this helped them to feel more confident in themselves and their capacities.

## Concluding considerations

Distance teaching (DT) can be aimed at the adaptation of skills in preparation for a period of internship and can reply to the needs often felt by work experienced candidates and the companies hosting them to integrate the practical experience with a more in depth look at the specific skills directly linked to the professional profile covered by the candidate, at the same time strengthening their basic and transverse skills.

DT allows the updating of skills of certain target users, in particular those whose skills at the time of entry are inadequate for an effective beginning of employment, e.g. women wanting to return to work, and who need usable and efficient tools to promote the approach and entry to the employment market.

Furthermore, the route of experience used within companies (with internships) combined with complementary classroom teaching and DT guarantees a real possibility for employment for the participant by responding to the needs for qualification required by the companies and by the workers.

Within the process of re/qualification like this, the role of the tutor becomes crucial. The tutor is the reference figure who follows the users throughout the process, accompanying them in the preparation and the overcoming of obstacles along the way by supporting motivation and learning.

