

Presentation of the Co-opetition Network of Berlin Integration Companys.

Hallo, my name is Anne Lau. I'm the Co-ordinator of the Co-opetition Network of Berlin Integration Companys, a network of 40 non-profit organizations.

These Companys operate in a variety of fields: as Moving companys, Painting and Renovation Services, House-Cleaning Services, Laundries, Gardeners, Restaurants, Cafés, Cafeterias, Catering Services, Party Suppliers, Retail shops with Health Food and Bakeries, Flowers and Second-hand Shops, Accounting Services, Lettershop, Computer Training and Industrial Services.

The name of the network „Co-opetition“ is a combination of Co-operation & Competition, to signify that despite competition in the marketplace and for the same subsidys the companys develop new ideas, from which each firm benefits because they are co-operating with one another. The aim is to create future jobs for handicapped people and to strategically develop the integration companys.

The idea to create a Co-opetition Network of Integration Companys came from a number of firms together with the FAF a kind of business advisor for Integration companys. It's development began in 2001 with a two year project that received 80 % financing from „Aktion Mensch“, which is a lottery fund aimed at integrating, accepting and supporting handicapped people in German society. The budget would cover schooling, public relations work and my co-ordinating position.

All involved companys regardless of size and field of operation agreed on training the employees in the appropriate skills. Over two years, 31 seminars were held in social competence and business management and 22 computer training seminars were organized to train a total of 230 individuals. The establishment of these training programs was possible only through the combined involvement of all of the companys. In addition to the new qualifications gained, mutual trust, exchange of ideas and networking was fostered at all employee levels.

Concerning Public Relations : the integration companys organized in 2001 CEFEC in Berlin. In 2002 a website was enhanced to represent conceptually and professionally all of the Socially-founded Businesses in Berlin that employ mainly handicapped people, www.sociale-unternehmen-berlin.de. In this context we created the first directory of Integration companies as a basis of information, mutual reference, and services. In the same year I initiated the production of the half-hour long TV piece „Nobody looks at you funny - Work for handicapped people“ by Susanne Heim.

Another milestone was an Open Space Day, a kind of enormous workshop with over 50 participants. After a year of regular meetings and working groups 3 defining key points of co-operation crystallized:

1. to establish a lasting qualification network for the further education and training specially tailored to the needs of Integration Companys.
2. to establish a network to support training especially for severely handicapped young adults.
3. to set up strategic alliances, for instance in the second hand area, a mutual event management company of those who are in food services, and quality management and benchmarking.

And that's where we are now: In the upcoming six month we want to finish the project development of this co-operation in the frame-work of a Berlin wide pilot project. This is necessary in order to apply for further two to three year funding with the Integration office.

In general it takes a great deal of stamina to lead such a large and diverse network to a successful co-operative result. Most important is to engender trust and be in constant dialogue to be effective. The result is a co-operative network that enables projects beneficial to all participants as well as operations designed for a single sector, which can be used as a model for others.