

Workshop n°2

« How can handicap be seen as a factor of economic performance? »



Wednesday 24 October 2007

Speakers :

- Flávio DE OLIVEIRA (Brazil) : General Director of the disabled people department of the Minas Gerais government
- João RIBAS (Brazil) : Coordinator of the programme focused on Persons with Disabilities at Serasa, a major financial information and analysis firm

According to the UN, there are **610 millions of disabled people in the world**, nearly 80% of them in the countries of the southern hemisphere. For example, in Brazil, 24,5 millions people out of 180 millions are disabled (13%). Out of these 24,5 millions, 9 millions belong to the working age bracket but only 1,5 million actually work.

Flavio de Oliveira is blind. He started by highlightening the undeniable talent of disabled people like Ray Charles, Henri Toulouse Lautrec or Beethoven before presenting the three models coping with disability:

- *The segregation paradigm*, characterized by the existence of giving asylums or specialized facilities for education and treatment,
- *The integration paradigm*, in which disability is seen from a medical prospective,
- *The inclusion paradigm*, in which disability is seen from a social prospective.

According to him, **disabled people can increase their employability by raising up certain challenges along with their employers.**

On one side, employers must:

- Understand and accept the importance of diversity for its business,
- Prepare the workplace environment in terms of culture and organization,
- Recruit in accordance with organizations,
- Select talents and potentials rather than recruiting to comply with quotas.

On the other side, disabled people must:

- Get to know the labor market,
- Look for and develop new skills,
- Accept to deal with the challenges.

João Ribas was born with a physical handicap. He described in this workshop some practices aiming at integrating people with disabilities which were successfully implemented within his company. The first reason of his success is that the recruitment program for handicapped people was created as an institutional program and not as a project, providing it with a key position in the long term objectives of the company. Recruiters try to assess the potential and talents of the employees as well as their sense of responsibility and their independence. Furthermore, if they are unable to hire a person, they give him/her advice about other companies that would be able to recruit him/her.

Seresa received the Brazilian "Best Accessibility" Certificate thanks to the **numerous investments the company made in order to equip its facilities (railings, large doors, adapted toilets, Braille printers...)**. These investments have been continuously increased since 2001 and reach \$200 000 in 2008.

These testimonials show that being affected by a handicap is far from being incompatible with corporate performance. We often notice a strong involvement from disabled employees. So, it's in the best interest of the companies to recognize the potential and the talents of these employees and not simply their limitations or handicaps.