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COMMET

SOCIAL PARTNERS AND COMPETENCE BASED JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Finnish social partners constitute a good example of how entrepreneurial spirit, sound planning, good will and local cooperation with stakeholders can turn out beneficial. Two metal companies, Karelia Welding Oy and Carelmet Oy, decided to set up their headquarters in Kitee (city located 135 km from Joensuu), knowing that the local area is famous for its high rate of machinery capacity and abundant in motivated labour force. Karelia Welding Oy and Carelmet Oy opted for a mutual cooperation, bearing in mind that entrepreneurial unity amongst little local companies could not be overrated, especially if the total of order portfolio comes from the outside of Kitee.

From the very beginning of their activities, the entrepreneurs received a substantial help from the local authorities, which facilitated a provision of the necessary working space (already existing, yet empty or abandoned workshops and halls). The most crucial link in the production chain - qualified workers - was yet still missing. The companies decided to take the initiative into own hands and agreed to train potential future employees, so that their profiles perfectly match the companies' needs and professional requirements.

The logistical and formal assistance came from other local implementers interested in the innovative approach of Karelia Welding Oy and Carelmet Oy. Development Company of Central Karelia, KETI, together with Varfer Oy, agreed to act as intermediaries. The former is providing professional business advisory, while the latter is a medium-sized engineering workshop specialising in flexible, individual customer service. It includes comprehensive machining assignments, pipe work installations, the processing of plates and steel constructions, welding and related installation jobs.

Karelia Welding Oy and Carelmet Oy estimated their labour force need for 10-15 skilled workers. In order to train and recruit them the companies needed to organize a special set of tailored trainings arranged together with public and educational authorities. The entrepreneurs found indispensable and reliable partners in local employment agency, who provided their assistance in identification of potential candidates for training. The educational coverage was furnished by the North Karelia Adult Education Centre, specialised in vocational trainings for adults in collaboration with working life.

The tailored courses for 14 apprentices and future employees in the metal companies (8 sheet iron workers and welders, as well as 6 machinists) started in September 2008 and will continue until the end of February 2009. The principal aim of the course is to prepare the future workers to work in the field of sheet metal work, welding, assemblage and steel construction, as well as in lathe work, milling, boring, grinding and trimming.

The course's content is as follows:

- Introduction to the professional field of machinist and welder (35 hrs)
- Reading of blueprints (35 hrs)
- Material technology (35 hrs)
- Machining technology (35 hrs)
- Measuring technology (35 hrs)
- Automation technology (35 hrs)
- Industrial safety (14 hrs)

For welders:

- Introduction to the field of metal and machinist industry (70 hrs)
- Sheet metal work and welding (140 hrs)
- Sheet metal work and steel construction (140 hrs)
- Manual metal arc welding (70 hrs)
- MIG/MAG welding (70 hrs)
- TIK welding (70 hrs)

For machinists:

- Digital machining technology (140 hrs)
- CNC technology, CAD/CAM (140 hrs)
- Lathe work (rounding-off) (140 hrs)
- Milling and boring (140 hrs)
- Grinding and trimming (140 hrs)

The example depicted above mirrors the general trend in Finland. According to the long tradition in the field of education, training and labour market policy in Finland, most of the working groups and committees preparing new legislation have social partners as members. For instance, Council of Adult Education (independent expert advisory body to the Ministry of Education) and National Board of Education are composed partly of social partners. They exercise their active role in shaping new regulations concerning labour market through permanent or ad hoc working groups. The social partners produced a position paper on the key educational and training challenges faced currently by the adults in Finland. Globalisation, rapid technological and demographic changes are main elements influencing these challenges. The working group also dealt with concrete matters in the field of apprenticeships for in-company training, as well as for the improvement and development of the competence-based qualification system, which recognises informal and non-formal learning.

The activity of various social partners in Finland is reinforced by actions undertaken by other public actors. For instance, the Confederation of Finnish Industries is involved in two important initiatives, "Services 2020" and "Educational Intelligence", implemented together with the social partners throughout the whole Finland in order to define the future requirements related to employees' skills and competencies in companies.

Moreover, the social partners asked the government to put more resources in the central budget for adult education and training. Specifically the social partners wanted the government to raise certain quotas in the competence-based qualifications system and create conditions allowing young apprentices to exercise their acquired scope of competencies in a real working situation, like in the case depicted at the beginning of this research paper. The social partners emphasized the importance of personnel development in companies and recommend launching sectoral action programmes promoting best practices, guidance and individual training plans at enterprise level.

In the light of this, it is evident that a scope of competencies is perceived by social partners as a matter undergoing constant transformations. Currently we can observe a fluid shift from national professional curricula to tailored grids of competencies, varying from one company to another.

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