

## CREATIV COMPANY

### 1. Organisations involved

Creativ Company, Holstebro, Denmark

The municipality of Holstebro, Denmark

### 2. Description of the case

#### 2.1. Introduction

Creativ Company is located in Holstebro in the western part of Denmark. Creativ Company sells hobby materials for privates as well as wholesale. The company was established in September 2000. During the past nine years the company has grown from 2 to 90 employees in Denmark, and Creativ Company also has divisions in Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom and China.

The founders of Creativ Company aimed at creating a workplace completely different from their previous workplaces. They wanted to create a “Dream Factory”, which they defined as an organisation:

- that provides a friendly working atmosphere, with warmth and team feeling, and with room for big thoughts, dreams, development and growth.
- that enables people to follow their hearts, and where the guiding star is not only money.
- with room for people regardless of their sex, age, appearance, educational, social, cultural or religious background.
- in which the mental health of each employee is considered to be the most important factor in creating a financially healthy and sustainable organisation.

#### 2.2. Aims

The founders of Creativ Company believed that it is possible to create an organisation in which corporate social responsibility, diversity, and financial results are compatible. They believe that a financially successful organisation can be built on workplaces with high levels of pride and family feeling, and that this will have a positive effect on the mental health and quality of life of the employees. These beliefs are the guiding principles of all actions within the organisation.

#### 2.3. What was done, and how?

The fundamental belief of Creativ Company – that all people should be treated as individuals with individual needs – is integrated into the daily life of the organisation and is expressed in a variety of ways. These include:

- Flexible working hours for all employees
- In order to support the continuous development of employees, Creativ Company is collaborating with an external development consultant who is available to all employees and managers two days per week. He offers advice to people regarding a variety of issues including career development and working life as well as free individual coaching
- Healthy food in the cafeteria and the opportunity to bring home a hot meal three times per week

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- Support (including financial) to employees that have an alcohol or drug problem, and financial support for smoking-cessation courses
- Physical training during breaks throughout the day
- Weekly information and knowledge sharing meetings and daily update meetings for all employees in all departments
- If an employee suffers from stress he/she is offered the opportunity to work on special terms such as reduced working hours, or other terms adjusted to the needs of the individual employee.
- 12 annual accounts: In order to further strengthen the credibility of the organisation, Creativ Company not only develops an annual financial account, but 12 different annual accounts. The purpose is to ensure that words are followed by action in all of the following areas: stress, image, well-being, concern for environmental problems, personal development, organisational development, economics, corporate social responsibility, conditions of employment, knowledge and communication. All employees fill out a questionnaire within each area. In the questionnaire they express their current opinion (how do I feel right now) as well as their expectations (how do I expect it to be). The annual accounts do not focus on financial results, but on values and perceptions.

Questions in the image questionnaire include:

“Our clients perceive us as a professional and credible supplier”

“Creativ Company is considered to be a great workplace by people outside the company”

“I am proud to be an employee in Creativ Company”.

Creativ Company has also developed a diversity and corporate social responsibility policy, which is integrated into the everyday life of the organisation in different ways. Again, this policy reflects the fundamental belief of the founders; that all people should be treated fairly, as this is considered to be an important factor in creating a psychologically and mentally healthy workplace with low levels of stress. This policy is integrated into the daily life of the organisation and is expressed in a variety of ways, including:

- Employees on special terms: In 2004 the founders decided to take social responsibility towards the group of people, who for certain reasons has difficulties getting a foothold on the labour market. The founders believed this would have a positive impact on the workplace culture, and would benefit all employees. Today, 10-15% of the employees are employed on special terms such as light jobs.
- In-house Service Centre: in the spring of 2006 Creativ Company decided to go a step further, and established a department, the Service Centre, for unemployed people, and people in clarification programmes. The Centre was established in cooperation with the Municipality of Holstebro. The Service Centre offers a clarification programme of thirteen weeks to 15 unemployed people at a time. Hereby the unemployed get the opportunity to try different job functions according to their abilities, interests and health. Employees in the Service Centre are considered equal to all other employees, and therefore also participate in information meetings, department meetings and all other personnel activities. In 2007, the company created its own network based employment service to facilitate jobs for former interns. At the moment 40 local companies have become part of the network.
- “The job should fit the person” mindset: The fundamental belief, that all people should be treated fairly, is not only reflected in the Service Centre but in the entire recruitment procedure. Instead of fitting people into a certain job, Creativ Company makes the job fit the person. The professional and personal competencies of the existing employees as well as applicants are assessed. This provides a basis for creating jobs that fit the person professionally and personally – and not the other way around, which is considered to have a positive impact on the mental health of employees. Below are some examples:

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- When Annette was in the beginning of her fifties she was involved in a car accident, and due to her injuries she could no longer maintain her work as a sales consultant. She was allotted flexitime by her local government, and was offered a new job in a different line within the company. However, Annette was not happy as she missed her former job as a sales consultant. She therefore contacted Creativ Company that offered her a job as sales manager 20 hours a week on flexible terms. Annette had the perfect profile, and Creativ Company therefore decided that she was the right person for the job – regardless of her reduced working capacity. Annette is now responsible for nine external sales consultants.
- Birgitte had to sell her store when she was divorced at the age of 41. She had two children to take care of, and was engaged as a cleaner at Creativ Company. Soon Birgitte revealed her creative skills, and today she is an employee in the product development unit, in charge of coordinating purchase fairs.

Creating a workplace in which diversity is the central dogma may be challenging for employees. They need to be tolerant and open to colleagues with diverse backgrounds. To create this commitment among employees and ensure they understand the culture and values of the organisation, so called “culture bearer seminars” are held several times each year. All employees attend these seminars and the purpose is to get a deeper understanding of the philosophy, culture and values of the organisation.

## **2.4. What was achieved?**

Creativ Company has managed to continually help people, who for certain reasons have difficulties getting a foothold on the labour market. A statement of the Service Centre’s first ten months shows that 55 percent of the employees who have participated in the programme, now have a job, are in job training or have a light job.

As a consequence, the actions taken have strengthened capaciousness and diversity within the company, which has added another dimension to the job. The actions thus strengthen the mental health in the workplace, as the diverse workforce and high tolerance among employees implies that people feel comfortable showing who they really are.

Employees at Creativ Company are proud of being part of a company, which holds itself responsible for social support and social inclusion, as exemplified in the following employee comments:

- “I am very proud of being part of a company that takes social responsibility. It is crazy to see the difference you can make for a person that has been outside the labour market for a long period”.
- “It is very satisfying to be able to help people that do not have an easy life – a push in the right direction for those who need it”.
- “I cannot find words that are big enough, but this is a workplace that I would rather not leave. If it is up to me I will stay with the company until I retire”.

Creativ Company has received several awards for the social actions and the promotion of diversity in the workplace.

- In December 2008 the company received the Danish Networking award (netværksprisen), for their extraordinary social effort.
- In November 2008 the company was elected as the third best workplace in Denmark, by Great Place to Work® Institute, and received the Institute’s Diversity Award.
- In Marts 2009 Creativ Company received the MIA-award (Danish Diversity Award) from the Institute of Human Rights, because of “the company’s great effort in promoting job satisfaction and equality among their employees”.

Within the past year, 1,000 people have applied for a job at Creativ Company, and the company receives on average 20 unsolicited applications each month. This should be seen in the context of Creativ Company’s geographical position in a remote part of Denmark.

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The annual absence rate of Creativ Company is 3.8% (2008), including “Service Centre” employees who are employed on special terms, and often have higher absence rates than other employees. However, despite of this, the absence rate is slightly below the Danish national average of 3.9%.

## **2.5. Success factors**

The success criteria for Creativ Company’s approach to creating a psychologically healthy workplace characterised by diversity and fairness, include the following:

- Strong commitment from senior management.
- Integration of policies and practices into daily life, and a continuous focus on developing the workplace and keep momentum.
- Willingness from management to take social responsibility both internally (towards employees) and externally (towards the surrounding community).
- Strong commitment from employees to be open to colleagues with diverse backgrounds.

## **2.6. Further information**

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## **2.7. Transferability**

Creativ Company’s approach to mental health promotion is unique in the sense that it is an integral part of the culture and values. It is based on a fundamental belief that diversity will have a positive impact on all aspects of the organisation, and that a psychologically healthy workplace is a prerequisite for financial success.

The combined approach of promoting diversity by integrating it into the daily life and values of the organisation may thus be what distinguishes Creativ Company from other organisations that aim at promoting diversity and mental health.

Most of the actions of Creativ Company can be transferred and adjusted to other organisations. However, Creativ Company’s holistic approach to diversity is rooted in the values of the organisation, and it therefore requires a strong commitment from senior management as well as employees. In order to transfer Creativ Company’s approach to another organisation, it will be necessary to evaluate if the values, history, vision, mission and other activities of the organisation are in agreement with the holistic approach to diversity and mental health, and thus if the values need to be adjusted. At the same time, it will be important to involve employees as they will be strongly influenced by an initiative like e.g. the Service Centre.