# Chapter 3

# Employment and Human Resource Development of Disabled People in Japan and Finland: A Comparative Study from the Perspective of Diversity, Inclusion, and Decent Work

**Shiho FUTAGAMI[1] and Erja KETTUNEN**

**Abstract** By analyzing the best practices in Japan and Finland, this study addresses the measures taken in those countries for enhancing the inclusion of disabled people in working life. The study reviews the existing research on diversity and inclusion, as well as the support programs for people with disabilities, and compares Japan and Finland in supporting the employment and Human Resource Development of disabled people from the perspective of diversity, inclusion, and decent work. The study considers the cases of the Accessibility Consortium of Enterprises (ACE) from Japan and the 'Leap to Labor!' and 'ILONA' projects of social firms from Finland in supporting the employment and HRD of disabled people. The conclusion section of the study highlights both the future challenges and opportunities in this area, and provides a list of the policy implications.

**Keywords** Employment, Human Resource Development (HRD), Diversity, Inclusion, Decent Work, Disabled People

## 1 Introduction

There are an estimated one billion people with disabilities globally, with about 80 % of them living in developing countries (WHO, 2011). Around 800 million disabled people are of working age, and many of them face challenges in finding equal opportunities for employment due to attitudinal, physical and informational barriers (ILO, 2015a). However, access of people

[1] Corresponding author; Graduate School of International Social Sciences, Yokohama National University, E-mail:futagami-shiho-hv@ynu.ac.jp

with disabilities to decent work is important both as an essential right and in terms of the economic advantages it brings (ILO, 2015b).

Disability is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested (WHO, 2011). While there is no internationally uniform way to precisely define disability or to compare data across countries (WHO, 2011), what is common is that disabilities often lead to unemployment, exclusion and poverty. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), adopted as the conceptual framework for the 2011 WHO *World Report on Disability*, understands functioning and disability as arising from a dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both environmental and personal (WHO, 2011, 4-5). It is called a "bio-psycho-social model' (see Figure 3.1).

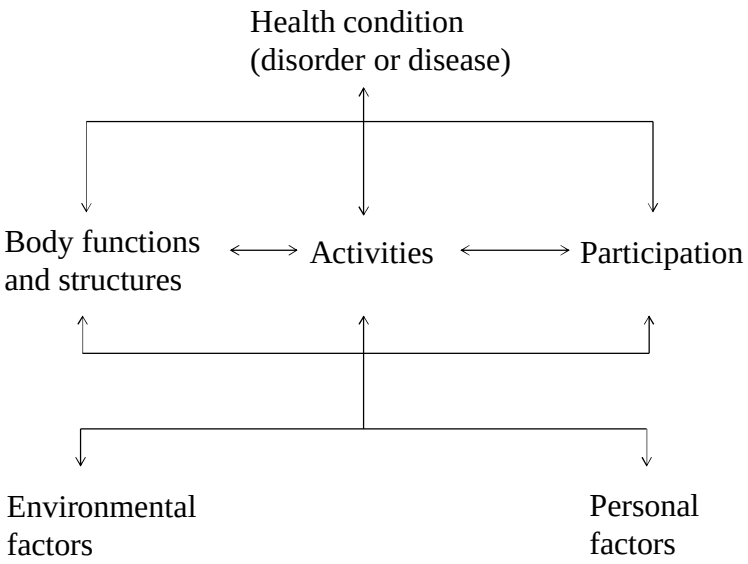


**Figure 3.1. Representation of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health**

**Source: WHO (2011)**

As shown in Figure 3.1, health conditions, together with environmental and personal factors, affect a person's possibilities in respect of activities and participation in society such as participation in employment. Environmental factors are diverse and include e.g., technology, support and relationships, services and policies. The environment can be improved by legislation, policy changes, capacity building, and technology in order to increase the accessibility of disabled people to support services and employment (WHO, 2011, 4).

Many countries such as Japan and Finland have introduced specific programs to support and enhance the employment prospects of disabled people and help them develop their employment capacities. Both Japan and Finland are advanced high-income countries with high levels of education and human development, and relatively homogeneous populations.[2] However, they also

[2] These are indicated by their GDP per capita (PPP) that is currently USD 51,000 for Finland and USD 42,000 for Japan (World Bank, 2021), as well as their human development index ranking where Finland ranks 11th and Japan 19th among 189 countries.

have marked differences, such as population size, societal histories, and social and value systems related to diversity and inclusion. These similarities and differences make it apposite to compare the two countries in respect of their support for the employment and human resource development (HRD) of disabled people. Thus, this study focuses on the employment and HRD of the disabled in Japan and Finland from the perspective of diversity, inclusion, and decent work. Here, HRD is defined as "a process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance" (Swanson and Holton, 2009, 4).

The aim of the study is to compare the current employment situation of disabled people and the respective HRD support measures in the two countries. Specific interest is focused on the HRD support organized by the private and non-governmental sectors to complement the state support for people with disabilities. Our research question is: *What kinds of measures are taken by non-state actors in Japan and Finland for enhancing the inclusion of disabled people in working life?* The measures are analyzed from the viewpoint of best practices in the employment and HRD of people with disabilities in the two countries. Best practices are understood in this study as practices that display their effectiveness in the employment and development of people with disabilities from the perspective of diversity, inclusion, and decent work. At the same time, these best practices balance business goals with disabled inclusion. Industry-university-government collaboration plays a role as an employment and HRD support cluster for people with disabilities in both countries.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: first, the existing literature on diversity, inclusion, and decent work is reviewed especially concerning people with disabilities in the workplace, as well as the extant research on support for the employment of disabled people. Second, the data and method of the study are described, and third, the findings from the case studies on the support programs from Japan and Finland are presented. Finally, the paper discusses the main findings of the research vis-à-vis prior research, and presents the study's conclusions and policy implications.

## 2 Diversity, inclusion, decent work, and the employment of disabled people

### 2.1 Diversity and inclusion

Diversity represents all the ways people are unlike and alike; differences and similarities in age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic background. Loden and Rosener (1991) suggest distinguishing between primary and secondary dimensions of diversity where the former includes immutable differences such as age, ethnicity, gender and physical abilities, and the latter includes mutable differences such as education, geographic location, income, religious beliefs, and work background. Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003)

develop the concept of diversity and include dimensions that exist as internal, external and organizational layers around personality. They have identified a 'diversity wheel' (see Figure 3.2) consisting of four layers of diversity: personality in the center of the wheel; internal dimensions such as age, gender, and disability in the second layer; external dimensions such as geographical location, religion, and educational background in the third layer; and organizational dimensions are in the outermost layer, and include work content or field, seniority etc. Disability should be respected as part of diversity (ILO, 2015a).

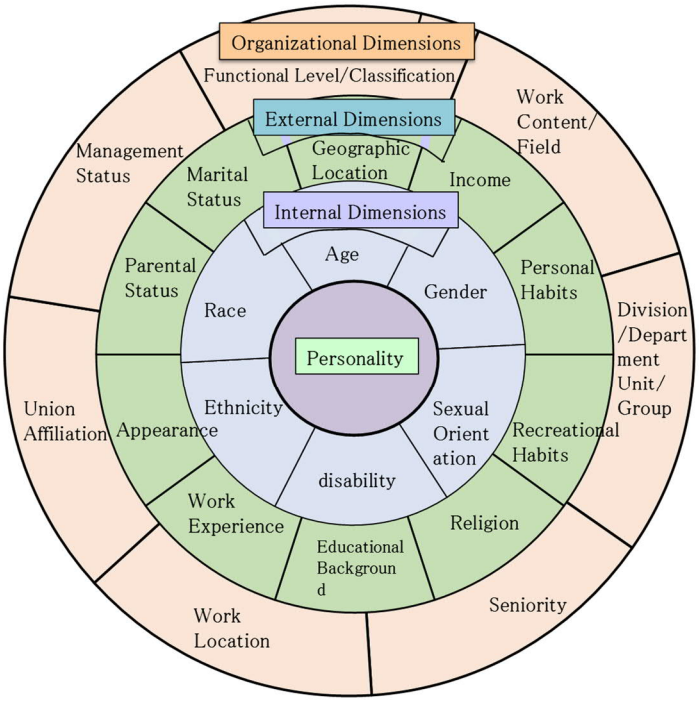


**Figure 3.2. The "Dimensions of Diversity" Wheel**
**Source: Loden and Rosener (1991), and Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003)**

Diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably where the two are not clearly distinguished, but the two are different concepts. Inclusion is a sense of belonging; feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of support and commitment from others so that you can do your best (Miller and Katz, 2002). Shore et al. (2011) define inclusion as the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness. A person's perception of high belongingness and high uniqueness results in a feeling of inclusion, whereas perceiving low belongingness and low uniqueness turns into a feeling of exclusion. Shore et al. (2011) present this as a 2×2 framework of inclusion in which they propose that uniqueness and belongingness work together to create feelings of inclusion (Figure 3.3). An individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group. Therefore, from this definition of inclusion, it also emerges that inclusion is more advanced than

diversity because inclusion moves beyond counting demographic differences to showing how these demographic differences can make a difference if people are working together to achieve organizational objectives (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011). It can be assumed that the employment and HRD support programs have the potential to increase the feelings of inclusion for people with disabilities.


**Figure 3.3. Inclusion Framework**
**Source : Shore et al. (2011)**

Inclusion is also an important concept for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 17 globally agreed goals that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted at its summit in 2015. They pledge that no one will be left behind and envisage a world in which every country enjoys inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all (United Nations, 2015). By 2030, Goal number 10 aims to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) has become a key concept for Human Resource Management (HRM) and refers to the strategy of fair treatment, equal opportunities and non-discrimination of actual and potential workforce in organizations. Diversity management is an increasingly researched topic (Jonsen et al., 2019; Farndale et al., 2015) addressing the advantages and disadvantages of diversity as performance effects on the company. The advantages include positive effects on performance; gender diversity, age diversity and nationality diversity especially lead to a positive performance by the company (Catalyst, 2015; Farndale et al., 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2012). The performance effects are primarily analyzed on the premise of the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) stipulating that the heterogeneity of human

resources rather than homogeneity of human resources leads to competitive advantages and thus motivate diversity and its management.

Therefore, D&I is nowadays part of company branding, as indicated by Jonsen et al. (2019) who examined the websites of 75 major companies in five countries: France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. They show that D&I branding has become mainstream with two main implications: a focus on diversity is particularly useful to attract talent, while a focus on inclusion seems particularly beneficial when a company aims to appear to be an employer of choice. According to Jonsen et al. (2019), disability is one of the most frequently listed dimensions among diversity dimensions, as 65 % of the companies mention it and often list concrete measures taken to promote awareness as well as the inclusion of people with disabilities. In their survey, most French companies report having action plans for disabled employment given that the financial consequences of not complying with the rules governing disability is high when companies do not reach the mandatory quota of 6% of employees (Jonsen et al., 2019; Klarsfeld, 2009). A similar process is in place in Germany. In these cases in both countries, companies employ people with disabilities because of mandatory compliance requirements. However, not all countries impose such compliance rules on companies; the employment of the disabled is voluntary and supported financially by government, such as in Finland.

## 2.2 Decent work

Decent work is defined by the ILO (2015b, 157) as “productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection.” In other words, decent work guarantees a fair income with protection of human rights and safety at work. The problem of disabled people, however, is the lack of employment altogether. People with disabilities have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to be economically inactive than non-disabled people (ILO, 2015b). Access of people with disabilities to decent work is important both as an essential right and in terms of the economic advantages it brings (ILO, 2015c). Work is central to people’s well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives (ILO, 2015b).

The primary goal of the ILO is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human rights (ILO, 1999). Decent work is considered as being comprised of four components (Figure 3.4), that is, rights at work, employment, social security and social dialogue (Futagami and Muramoto, 2017; Ghai, 2002; 2003; 2006). Employment especially is a vital component of decent work (Ghai, 2005). Employment in the decent work paradigm refers not just to wage jobs, but to work of all kinds: self-employment, wage employment and work from home. It also refers to full-time, part-

time and temporary work, and to work done by women, men and children (Ghai, 2006). For decent work to be actualized, certain conditions must be satisfied. There should be adequate employment opportunities for all those who seek work (Ghai, 2006). Work should yield a remuneration that meets the essential needs of the worker and family members (Futagami and Muramoto, 2017; Ghai, 2006, 10).

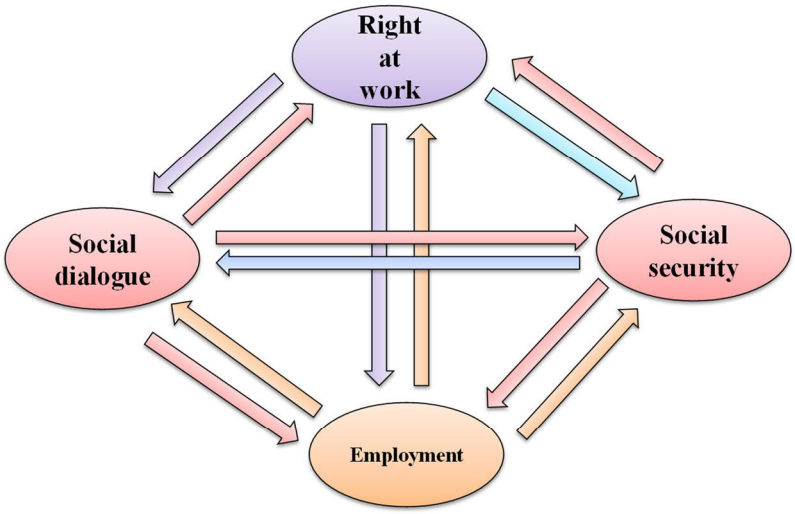


**Figure 3.4. Decent work components**
**Source: modified from Ghai（2006）.**

To achieve this goal, the ILO has implemented a Disability Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan. The ILO works to increase the employability of people with disabilities, to support employers becoming more inclusive and to promote enabling legislative and policy environments incorporating these goals (ILO, 2015c). Disability inclusion refers to promoting and ensuring the participation of people with disabilities in education, training and employment and all aspects of society and providing the necessary support and reasonable accommodation so that they can fully participate (ILO, 2015a). However, the implementation of this strategy is up to individual countries and their governments and other institutions on whether and how such support is carried out. Some countries have support programs for people with disabilities organized by non-governmental actors, such as networks of corporations, disability associations, or other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

To sum up, the employment and the human resource development of people with disabilities are important from the perspective of diversity, inclusion, and decent work in the workplace.

## 3 Data and method

This is a qualitative comparative study that draws from a variety of source materials, such as expert interviews, national reports, and international comparative reports (e.g., WHO, ILO, Eurostat). Triangulation from multiple sources helps establish evidence on the studied phenomena. Primary data were collected in personal interviews with a personnel manager who works in a consortium of business organizations for the case study on Japan, and with three professionals who work in disability organizations that promote the employment of people with disabilities for the case study on Finland. The interviews lasted from about half to one and a half hours and dealt with the aims and practices of the organizations and their projects in working towards diversity, inclusion, and decent work. Secondary data and further information were gathered from webpages, reports, articles in professional magazines and internet sources concerning both the interviewed organizations and their peer disability organizations as well as relevant Ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Japan, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, the Cabinet Office, Japan, and other public sector organizations.

A combination of qualitative content analysis and qualitative narrative research was carried out to analyze the data. For content analysis, relevant key words and phrases were picked from the material according to code words such as 'employment', 'support', 'social firm', 'education', 'training', and 'human resource development'. In addition, narrative research was conducted since all the interviewees represented organizations that implement the support programs and have been developing and carrying out the projects. Narrative research is a suitable method to explore the personal experiences and insights of the professionals about the processes and their outcomes (cf. Overcash, 2003). Based on in-depth theme interviews, it reaches beyond what can be achieved by questionnaire research.

## 4 Employment and human resource development of disabled people: Findings from Japan and Finland

### 4.1 The employment situation and support for disabled people in Japan

#### *4.1.1 Current situation of people with disabilities*

The number of people with disabilities in Japan is 9,635,000, which is 7.6% of the population. The number of people with physical disabilities is 4,360,000, the number with intellectual disabilities is 1,082,000 and the number with mental disabilities is 4,193,000. The number of people with physical and intellectual disabilities is based on a survey on the difficulties in life that is sent to people at home who have a disability certificate, and the number with mental disabilities is based on by the number of patients who have seen doctors in hospitals.

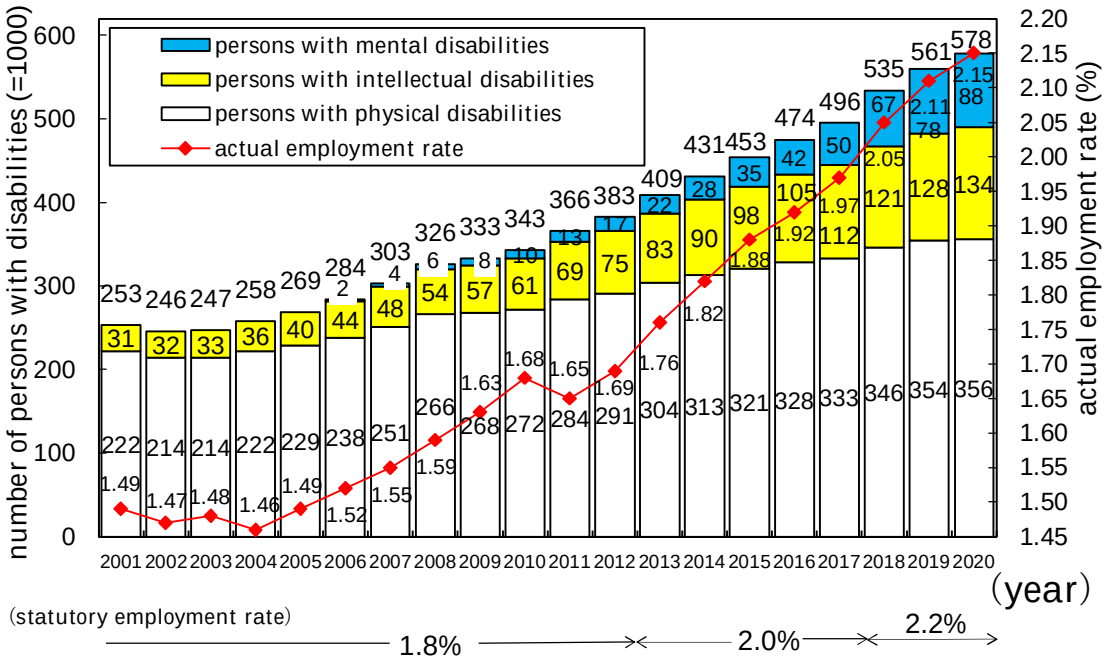


**Figure 3.5. The number of people with disabilities in regular employment**
**Source: Cabinet Office, Government of Japan (2021)** ***Annual Report on Government Measures for Persons with Disabilities 2021***

In Japan, the Act on Employment Promotion of People with Disabilities was originally enacted in 1960. It regulates the quota system for the employment of people with disabilities since 1976. The statutory employment rate was originally set at 1.5 percent, and was raised to 1.6 percent in 1988, 1.8 percent in 1998, 2.0 percent in 2013, and 2.2 percent in 2018. Since April 2021, the statutory employment rate has been increased to 2.3 percent. Under the levy and grant system for the employment of people with disabilities, employers in companies that do not satisfy the statutory employment rate are required to pay levies, while employers whose percentage of employees with disabilities exceeds the specified levels receive grants.

The base for the calculation of the statutory employment rate originally included only people with physical disabilities; since 1998 it has also included people with intellectual disabilities, and since 2018 people with mental disabilities.

However, the number of people with disabilities in regular employment who are working in regular firms in Japan was only 578,292[3] in 2020, which means that their actual employment rate is 2.15 percent, as seen in Figure 3.5. The number with physical disabilities in regular employment is 356,069, the number of with intellectual disabilities is 134,207 and the number with mental disabilities is 88,016. As such, only 48.6 percent of regular firms in Japan attained

[3] One part-time disabled worker is counted as 0.5 and one full-time severely disabled people as two in the Japanese statistics.

the 2.2 percent disabled employment quota required by law in 2020. Therefore, the employment challenges of the disabled are very severe, even though a quota system for the employment of people with disabilities exists in Japan.

*4.1.2 Case Study in Japan: Accessibility Consortium of Enterprises (ACE)*

This section discusses the case study on the Accessibility Consortium of Enterprises (ACE) as one of the most successful endeavors by Japanese companies to promote diversity, inclusion, and decent work in the workplace. Originally, ACE was initiated by IBM Japan and was joined by other Japanese big companies such as Japan Airlines, All Nippon Airways, Nissan motor company and Asahi Beer. There were 24 companies involved at its establishment in September 2013. In 2021 the number of member companies was increased to 34. The main aim of ACE is the realization of an inclusive society and the employment of people with disabilities in Japan (interview, with ACE (2016)). This target is to be reached through a three step process, as shown in Figure 3.6.

As can be seen in Figure 3.6, the 1st step in the process is called Compliance. In this step, the ACE member companies aim to attain the statutory employment rate, that is, to employ disabled people to make up 2.3 percent of the companies' workforce. Many of the companies have already attained this objective. The 2nd step is formulated as Corporate Social Responsibility. In this step, ACE member companies aim to employ more people with disabilities in response to their Corporate Social Responsibility obligations, for example, to promote the employment of the disabled. Some of the companies have already reached this step. The 3rd step is named Realization of Inclusive Society. In this step, the ACE companies aim to employ and develop people with disabilities from the perspective of diversity and to realize an inclusive society. They employ people with disabilities in their core businesses, and utilize them as strategic human resources in tasks that require high-skilled employees such as in research and development (R&D) in order to secure competitive advantages, instead of recruiting them for low-skilled routine work. In the future, ACE aims to promote this kind of employment throughout Japan. Currently the objective of ACE is in the fulfillment this step. It is a target for the future, not yet fully realized.


**Figure 3.6. Vision of Accessibility Consortium of Enterprises (ACE)**
**Source: the interview with ACE**

In addition to employing people with disabilities, ACE carries out other activities to promote diversity, inclusion, and decent work for them. The main activities of ACE can be divided into three parts, as can be seen in Figure 3.7.

The first type of activity is the *creation of a role model* for employees with disabilities, as shown in the upper left side of Figure 3.7. This is done by networking and sharing information and knowledge among the member companies, which also includes increasing the general awareness and the promotion of an inclusive employment policy. Events such as ACE FORUM are arranged where experts give lectures on disability, and good practice companies and employees are awarded as role models. The ACE FORUM takes place regularly once a year. An ACE award is given to a role model employee and also to a role model company every year. As an example of awarding an employee, ACE in 2019 awarded its highest honor to an employee with a hearing disability for their contribution on co-developing an innovative hearing device to be used with smartphones (Nikkei Asia, 2020).

Seminars and workshops take place to promote awareness on diversity and the employment of people with disabilities. For example, ACE Challenge seminars provide disabled workers of member companies with guidance for career development. The seminars also provide an opportunity to develop the strengths of disabled workers using a tool called strength finder. Seminars take place regularly mainly in big member companies premises in Tokyo; the latest seminar was held at IBM Japan.

The second type of ACE's activity is *collaboration with academics*, as shown in the upper right side of Figure 3.7 University lecturers specialized in HRM, disability and inclusion give lectures at ACE FORUMs on disability management. ACE understands disabled students' needs

for employment, and gives advice on employment and provides internship opportunities to university students with disabilities. For example, 15 member companies of ACE accepted 95 university disabled students as interns from 31 universities in 2019. Collaborating with universities, ACE conducts career seminars to promote positive mindsets by students with disabilities towards work.

The third type of activity is *public relations*, as shown on the bottom of Figure 3.7 ACE shares the results of its activities with the top management, HR personnel, and experts in Japanese companies, and they, in turn, share their advice on the needs of society. ACE also provides policy advice to the government at different levels, including related government ministries, local governments, and supporting organizations. For example, ACE provides advice on developing screen reading software for people with visual disabilities to enable them to become independent. Thus, ACE collaborates with universities and educational institutes, supplies disabled employment information packages to companies and provides policy advice to the government in order to solve problems on the employment of people with disabilities.

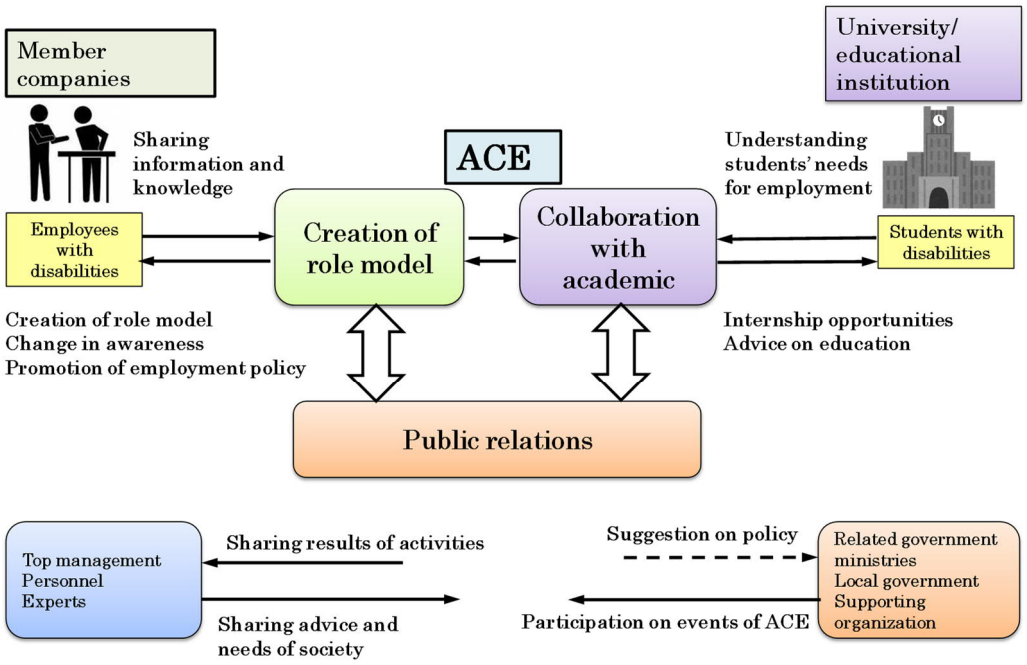


**Figure 3.7. Activities of Accessibility Consortium of Enterprises(ACE)**
**Source: the interview with ACE**

As previously stated, ACE utilizes a 'strength finder' to train and develop disabled workers. The strength finder was originally a self-assessment tool for Human Resource Development introduced by Gallup in the United States (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001). ACE has modified and developed the strength finder for disabled workers. Disabled workers in ACE programs focus on developing their strengths and talents rather than fixing their shortcomings. It is therefore a

‘resource-oriented approach’ instead of a ‘deficit-oriented approach’ and is popular among the disabled in the workplace.

For example, the All Nippon Airways (ANA) group, a member company of ACE, employs over 1,200 disabled employees out of a total 45,849 employees, which is 2.68% of the total employment. The disabled employees include those with physical disabilities (50%), employees with intellectual disabilities (25%) and employees with mental disabilities (25%) (ANA, 2021).

In 2012, the ANA Group established the Employment Promotion Office for people with disabilities aimed at increasing the employment of people with disabilities at the ANA Group (Futagami and Muraki, 2017). In 2015, the CEO of the ANA Group launched the ANA Group Diversity & Inclusion Promise (Futagami and Muraki, 2017). In order to promote greater understanding and the employment of people with disabilities throughout the Group, in 2015 more than 50 human resources staff from the Group companies gathered to discuss 'the 36K-Employee Kickoff ', the ANA Group's Code of Conduct for the Employment of People with Disabilities (ANA, 2021). Based on 'the 36K-Employee Kickoff ' the ANA Group aims at increasing employee understanding of the Group policies regarding the employment of people with disabilities and how all employees can play an active role in improving the work environment (ANA, 2021).

In sum, ACE can be considered as a best practice organization because of three success factors. The 1st success factor for ACE is the setting up of a consortium or network of companies which aims to realize an inclusive society, and to employ and develop people with disabilities. The 2nd success factor for ACE is the industry-university-government nature of its collaboration activities. Thus, not only companies, but also universities and the government collaborate in order to solve problems on the employment and HRD of people with disabilities. It is an employment and HRD support cluster for the disabled. The 3rd success factor for ACE is its resource-oriented approach to HRD for employees with disabilities which is very important from the perspective of diversity, inclusion, and decent work.

## 4.2 Employment and support for disabled people in Finland

### *4.2.1 Current status of people with disabilities*

In Finland, the number of working-age people who have a disability or a chronic illness is 1.9 million; however, this figure also includes e.g., people with food allergies which do not hinder employment. The number of people who get benefits for disabilities is about 240,000, which is

7per cent of the working-age population and comparable to other Nordic countries (6-8 %). According to surveys, around 600,000 people in Finland find that their illness or disability affects their work or work opportunities. Therefore, the Finnish social and health sector commonly refers to 'partial work ability' instead of 'disability'. Over 300,000 people with partial work ability are constantly in employment either part-time, temporarily or permanently (Mattila-Wiro and Tiainen, 2019). Compared to other European Union countries, Finland ranks high in the employment of disabled people which in 2011 was 61 % for people aged 15-64 (Eurostat, 2014, 2), exceeded only by Sweden (66 %) and Luxembourg (63 %).[4] These figures are much higher than the 23 % for Japan in 2003 (WHO, 2011, 238) although there is a time gap and definitions may vary between the two data sources. In many European countries, the employment rate of disabled people has increased between 2003 and 2011 as shown by the WHO and Eurostat figures.

People with disabilities are represented and their employment is promoted by several disability organizations with different objectives in Finland, all of which are monitored by the Finnish Disability Forum (*Vammaisfoorumi*). One central organization is the Finnish Neuromuscular Disorders Association (*Lihastautiliitto*) that represents people with difficult physical disabilities such as the motor neurone disease ALS[5]. People with neuromuscular disabilities often need a wheelchair and/or a personal assistant and therefore have difficulties in finding employment, even if they are highly educated.

In Finland, special-needs education is organized for disabled children and young people from the pre-school level to high school and vocational school level. Depending on the level of a person's disability, these are placed either within regular schools or in special schools. There are several special vocational schools for disabled people. Special services for people with intellectual disabilities include, for example, work activities and non-work daytime activities (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2021). Around 9,000 people with intellectual disabilities participate in work activities, and ca. 5,000-6,000 people in other daytime activities in sheltered workshops or day centers (FAIDD, n.d.).

One longstanding problem in Finland for people with disabilities was the existence of the national income policy[6] that hindered efforts to improve their employment situation. Young disabled people were already granted a pension at the age of 16. The pensions were very small, and many recipients lived in poverty. Furthermore, because of these pensions they could not apply to the employment office for job opportunities, and thus the system did not support part-time work even if they wanted to work, according to the interview with Verainen (2019). However, the

[4] In Eurostat, the employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of people with disabilities aged 15 to 64 in employment by the total population in the same age group. Disability is defined as a self-reported limitation in the activities of everyday life. (Eurostat 2014, 5) For further information on national differences in data collection, see e.g., Eurostat (2015) and on different definitions for disabilities, see Eurostat (ibid., 94-95).

[5] *Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis*

[6] Up to 2008, the national income policy in Finland was based on tripartite agreements between trade unions, employers' organizations and the Finnish government.

Government subsequently initiated a key project for the employment of people with partial work ability. The project 'Career opportunities for people with partial work ability' (Osatyökykyisille tie työelämään), known as the OTE key project, was carried out in 2015-2018 as a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Table 3.1 shows the impact of the OTE on employers, people with partial work ability, and society as a whole.

**Table 3.1** Objectives of the OTE project

| | |
|---|---|
| **Employer** | • Increased availability of work<br>• Proven methods for enabling persons with partial work ability to stay in their work<br>• Lower threshold for employing persons with partial work ability<br>• Less prejudice towards persons with partial work ability |
| **Person with partial work ability** | • Easier access to employment<br>• Support for access to employment, returning to work and continuing in one's work<br>• Increased income<br>• Increase in equality, participation and wellbeing |
| **System/society** | • Efficient and customer-oriented service system<br>• Collaboration between different parties brings results<br>• Reduced costs from non-participation in society and employment<br>• Reduced inequality |

Source: adapted from Mattila-Wiro and Tiainen (2019).

Currently people with partial work ability are allowed to search for work, and there have been good results. The methods of the OTE project were to train 700 work ability coordinators (i.e., professionals who help disabled people to identify their personal strengths and find a place in working life)[7], develop online services, and organize seminars and promotional events on working life. Furthermore, OTE strategies included increasing their media visibility and promoting changes to legislation to improve the position of people with partial work ability in the labor market. The main changes achieved by OTE include the increased employment rate of people with partial work ability; promoting positive attitudes by employers towards people with partial work ability; promoting the passing of new legislation to improve the position of people

[7] Work ability coordinators may work in social care services, health care, occupational health care, educational institutions, and companies.

with partial work ability in the labor market; and making the support service system more efficient and customer-oriented (Mattila-Wiro and Tiainen, 2019).

In addition, Finnish disability organizations have initiated two projects that are considered in this study as best practices in Finland: the *Leap to Labor!* project for employing people with disabilities, and the ILONA project supporting social firms, as discussed next.

### *4.2.2 Case Study in Finland: the Leap to Labor! and ILONA projects*

*Leap to Labor!*

In 2006-2008, the Finnish Neuromuscular Disorders Association[8] launched the project *Leap to Labour! (Sisäänheitto työelämään)* aimed at creating a model to enhance the employment of people with disabilities through cooperation with companies and disability organizations. The project was financially supported by RAY (Finland's Slot Machine Association).[9] Eleven disability organizations were involved and brought together their job-seeking members with companies that needed workers. The project also aimed at encouraging public debate about corporate social responsibility. Publicity campaigns were carried out in order to promote awareness on disabilities in companies, influence attitudes and gradually change organizational cultures. Breaking down prejudices create the conditions for negotiating work contracts (Idström and Stenroos, 2013, 10). Altogether 231 disabled people took part by providing their CVs which was a prerequisite for participating. Of the participants, 40 % were either wholly or partially on pension support, or on supported rehabilitation.

Crucially, the interaction between the disabled and the companies was based on face-to-face meetings. The person who roll called the disabled job seekers to visit the companies was a disabled person herself. Working as the project manager, she could exemplify to employers the capabilities of disabled people, according to the interview with Verainen (2019). This had a strong positive impact on the attitudes of the company managers and helped get rid of the stereotype that disabled people cannot operate without help from others (ibid.). By providing this example, the project manager enhanced the perception among employers that people with disabilities can be very capable employees. They also have diverse capabilities. Furthermore, the participating disability organizations provided information on the various special needs of the disabled applicants which proved to be very useful for the companies concerned.

[8] This is an association that represents the around 15,000 people in Finland with some kind of neuromuscular disease or disorder.

[9] RAY (Raha-automaattiyhdistys) was a government-owned non-profit gaming association that by law distributed its profits to domestic charities. In 2017, RAY was merged with Veikkaus Oy, the Finnish government-owned betting agency, which, as well, distributes its profits as determined by law to Finnish Ministry-specific beneficiaries to support health and social welfare, sports, science, arts, and youth work. In 2019, Veikkaus distributed over one billion euros to these functions through different Ministries (Veikkaus, 2020).

Contacts with the business sector were established through two main employer partners of the project, the Finnish Business & Society (FIBS) and Manpower Inclusive. The FIBS is a network of over 300 Finnish companies and organizations promoting sustainable and responsible businesses that aims to raise awareness about diversity management, human rights, and the SDGs (FIBS, 2020). Manpower Inclusive is a temporary employment agency that hires out workers that has social firm status and promotes workplace diversity and equality (Lämsä, 2012, 13). Cooperation between disability organizations and FIBS started in 2003 when the CVs of disabled job seekers were circulated to FIBS member companies. In 2006, the project *Leap to Labour!* enabled its project manager to start visiting the companies and present both the skills and special needs of the potential employees, and if needed, also to arrange face-to-face meetings in the companies premises. A website was created listing open positions and sharing related information. Local and regional meetings were arranged in five cities in Finland to bring together job seekers, companies and employment officials and to share information about support methods that help disabled people's employment prospects. This turned out to be important in increasing the number of people who were eventually hired (Verainen, 2013, 139-141).

Of the 231 disabled people who took part in the project, 76 got employment: 18 got permanent employment, 31 fixed-term employment, 10 an internship, and 12 a work trial and five salaried freelance work. These relatively high employment numbers derived from the personal meetings and the local and regional meetings. The jobs were diverse, such as IT support, financial administration, IT manager, administrative assistant, and purchase ledger (interview, Verainen, 2019). Typically it was office work: help desk, customer guidance and customer service. The employers were social and health sector associations, the third sector, and private companies.

The project has been successful and information about the project has been widely circulated. Since 2011, the project has a Facebook page *Sisäänheitto työelämään* (Leap to Labor!) for announcing job vacancies. The page is followed by about 500 disabled people searching for work. The open positions are mostly in the third sector, in the social and health sector associations. In order to help the associations hire new employees, a support funding program *Vacant Job* has been established. This program gives funding to social and health sector associations, such as disability organizations and NGOs in the health and social sector, for employing 1) people with partial work ability or 2) people under 30 years of age who are outside of working life. The grants are issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and associations can apply for one-year funding for 100 percent of salary costs to employ people for 12 months; the maximum sum is 50,000 euros per person per year (Paikka auki, 2020). This funding is important because by law, associations cannot make a profit and thus they do not have extra money to hire new people. A related project is *Yritystä!* (*Entrepreneurship*)[10] that aims to develop and enhance the employment prospects of disabled people via entrepreneurship as well as promoting their networking and

[10] Translation by authors. The Finnish word *yritystä* has many meanings, such as "making an effort", "a company", or "a trial".

creation of new businesses (interview, Verainen, 2019). This project was funded by the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations during 2016-2019 and administered by the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities (Yritystä, 2020).

The *Leap to Labor!* project is an example of good practice because of its contribution to the disability field at large. The project is innovative in creating cooperation networks between the disability organizations and companies – a practice which was unknown in Finland until 2006. It offers consulting services and information to companies and has a register of job seekers. It is essentially an experiment in marketing the skills of disabled people and giving accurate information about disabilities to the companies. The project manager, a disabled person herself with an academic education, is a positive example in influencing the perceptions of both potential employees and employers. As a result, some companies have modified their recruitment procedures to promote equality, for example by emphasizing positive attitudes towards diversity in job advertisements, restructuring electronic application forms to help the disabled to apply for vacancies, and arranging job interviews to provide fair treatment to all interviewees (Verainen, 2013, 144-145). The project has enhanced awareness on diversity, inclusion, and social responsibility among Finnish businesses.

*ILONA project*

The second example of best practice is the ILONA project that focuses on social firms and social entrepreneurship as a path to meaningful employment for partially disabled people. A social firm is a business that creates added value for society and aims to support the employment of people who have difficulties getting work. There are different operational definitions in the different EU countries for social enterprises. In Finland, their institutionalized forms include the legally approved and registered 'Work integration social enterprises' (WISE) and those that have received the social enterprise hallmark, Social Enterprise Mark (SEM).[11] Currently, there are 37 WISE and 214 SEM social enterprises in Finland, in addition to non-profit welfare organizations and cooperatives that operate similarly to social enterprises (European Commission, 2019). According to Finland's law on social enterprises, social firms can get support for salaries from the public employment and business services provider (*TE-palvelut*)[12] when at least 30 % of their staff are people with disabilities, long-term illness or are long-term unemployed (TEM, 2020). The total number of employees in WISE and SEM types of social enterprises is 272 and 18,750, respectively (European Commission, 2019, 33).

[11] Whereas a WISE entity (*sosiaalinen yritys*) offers employment opportunities to the disabled and long-term unemployed, SEMs (*yhteiskunnallinen yritys*) are intended for businesses that address social or ecological issues and invest the majority of their profits in promoting their social aims (European Commission, 2019, 18).

[12] TE is an abbreviation for *työ ja elinkeino* (work and business).

The ILONA project is being carried out between 2018 and 2021 and is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). The main executor of the project, Silta-Valmennusyhdistys is a non-profit association that offers services to the public sector in coaching hard-to-employ people to improve their vocational and studying abilities.[13] Its collaborators are Vates Foundation, Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre Ltd., Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak), and the National Institute for Health and Welfare. In the preparatory phase of the ILONA project, a study was conducted on domestic and international experiments in social entrepreneurship for partially disabled people (Siltavalmennus, 2020). A cooperation network between Finland and Europe was created.

The purpose of ILONA is to find innovative solutions for people who are the most challenged in finding employment. The project is carried out in cooperation with international partners with whom best practices and models are shared. With comparative information from abroad, the project assesses different international models to advance the employment of people with partial work ability, and to decide which model would be best suited for Finland. A special interest is maintained in the policies and good practices related to social firms and social entrepreneurship, and the aim is to create better prerequisites for them, according to the interview with Lindberg (2019). This is done by evaluating them against the Finnish societal and legislative framework. The project tests new methods for employment in social firms and in social entrepreneurship in sectors where labor demand is high such as social and health care, and elderly care (Ilonahanke, 2020a). The circular economy and sustainable development are also emphasized.

In practice, the ILONA project creates new forms and models of training that are effective in orienting disabled people to the open labor market. It includes two innovative group experiments and targeted training for the promotion of operational capacity and the employment of people with partial work ability. The two experiments are organized by the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre (in Helsinki) and Silta-Valmennusyhdistys (in Tampere). The Diaconia University of Applied Sciences has an advisory role in both experiments.

The first employment promotion experiment was held in spring 2019 at the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre Ltd.[14] This was a recruiting event for drivers in the logistics section of the Reuse Centre in cooperation with two medium-sized companies. Furthermore, the Reuse Centre has started group training programs that last 2-6 months aimed at improving the working capacity and performance of their workers. The ILONA project also develops methods for Finnish language training for drivers from migrant backgrounds. Recruitment events will be further developed into a permanent feature of the Reuse Centre in cooperation with large- and

[13] Silta-Valmennusyhdistys provides supported learning environments, work coaching, and workshops for working age people with disabilities and people suffering from long-term unemployment, young people, and substance abuse rehabilitees with the aim of increasing societal equality, participation and welfare.

[14] The Reuse Centre is a social firm that employs people with partial work ability.

medium-sized companies in order to create opportunities for employment going from the intermediate labor market towards long-term employment in the open job market (Ilonahanke, 2020b; interview, Munther, 2020).

In addition, the second employment promotion experiment of the ILONA project will be organized in the city of Tampere. This will be training programs for disabled people to work in elderly care, organized by Silta-Valmennus in the Tampere region (ibid.).

The results of these two employment promotion experiments are evaluated by the project partner, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare with the help of the *Abilitator* (*Kykyviisari*, 'ability pointer') for the measurement of the participants work ability. The Abilitator is a method originally developed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for the assessment of people's work ability, a project funded during 2014-2020 by the European Social Fund (Kykyviisari, 2020). Good work ability is not only worth pursuing for the sake of coping with and continuing to work, but it also supports well-being in other areas of life. Promoting work ability can also increase well-being and happiness, as well as the employment rate (Gould et al., 2008). In 2018, the Abilitator program was renewed and opened as a web service for free use by all social and health service providers (THL, 2019). It is in the form of a questionnaire that provides an indicative evaluation of the respondent's perceived work ability and functioning, social inclusion and well-being.

Since the ILONA project is still ongoing, its final results are not yet available. However, the project aims at creating a cost-effective and carefully assessed structural solution to enhance the employment of partially disabled people that can be implemented at the national level. The methodology highlights innovative group-based experiments in bringing capacity to action and in targeted training. Projected outcomes include concrete results, such as the provisioning of a material package on an employment model that supports the employment of the most challenged people; a prescription of legislative changes that may be required to further enhance the employability of the disabled; the provisioning of communication material and publications on best practices written in cooperation with international partners, and employment creation in sectors with labor shortages (Ilonahanke, 2020). According to an interview with Munther (2020), the material package will be either a printed publication, or more likely, an electronic publication that will have been distributed to relevant agencies in October 2021 when the project ends. The publication will most likely be in two parts: 1) an investigation into the employment situation of people with partial work ability in Finland (i.e., the current 'ecosystem' in this field), and 2) examples of practical experiments in improving the situation to support the employment of such people. The material package will be disseminated to decision-makers (e.g., the Ministry of Employment and the Economy), to the media, and to the organizations in the third sector (i.e., the associations and NGOs) that provide the training and carry out the practical experiments.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has compared the employment and HRD of people with disabilities in Japan and Finland. The aim has been to explore the current employment situation as well as to look at the measures taken in Japan and Finland for enhancing the inclusion of disabled people in working life. These measures are regarded as best practices in supporting diversity, inclusion, and decent work in the two countries. The findings indicate some differences between the two countries both in the current employment situation and in the best practices to support the HRD of people with disabilities.

Although there is the quota system for the employment of people with disabilities in Japan, their employment rate in Japan is low, at 23 percent in comparison with 61 percent in Finland (WHO, 2011). Thus, the best practices in Finland look like a suitable model for the enhancing the employment and HRD of people with disabilities in Japan.

The project *Leap to Labor!* is a cooperation network between Finnish disability organizations and companies. This network shares information and offers consulting services and face-to-face meetings for employers and job-seekers with disabilities. Thus, it promotes positive perceptions and attitudes towards disabilities and leads to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This network plays a big role as an employment and HRD support cluster for people with disabilities.

The *ILONA* project is a collaborative consortium or network of social firms, disability organizations, universities and government. This consortium provides disabled people with lists of recruiting events, vocational education and training programs in order to develop their potential and future employability. Thus, the company-university-government collaboration network also plays a big role as an employment and HRD support cluster for people with disabilities.

What is common to both projects in Finland is, first, the central role of disability organizations – which are NGOs – that may initiate the projects and collaborate with companies, government agencies and other service providers in raising funding and executing the projects. Second, the projects are mostly funded by the EU, the main source of funding being the European Social Fund, which emphasizes the role of the EU in supporting the inclusion of disabled people in Europe, including Finland.

In Japan there is a consortium of companies in the ACE network providing employment assistance as previously discussed. ACE also collaborates with universities and educational institutes. The industry-university-government collaboration helps solve the employment and HRD problems of people with disabilities. ACE is like an employment and HRD support cluster. In this case, big companies in particular take initiatives in the cluster. The main difference with Finland is the emphasis on big companies and at the same time the lack of involvement of disability organizations in this process in Japan which stem from the fundamental differences in the societal systems between the two countries. Japan is characterized by a corporate-led economy

and society in comparison with Finland which has a relatively strong civil society similar to many other Western countries. There still remain many challenges in improving the employment rate of people with disabilities in Japan, and the best practices in Finland look like a suitable model for enhancing the employment and HRD of people with disabilities in Japan.

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