

SIMPACT SOCIAL INNOVATION BUSINESS CASE STUDY

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Specialist People Foundation Enabling One Million Jobs for People with Autism and Similar Challenges

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SIMPACT Social Innovation Business Case Study

Covers research on the «Economic Foundation of Social Innovation» related to the components, objectives and principles of the social innovation process and measurement of social innovations at micro-level to inform policymakers, investors and other interested stakeholders.

SIMPACT

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SPECIALIST PEOPLE FOUNDATION



1

OVERVIEW

City, Country	Denmark
Addressed theme(s)	Job creation
Target Group	People with autism and similar challenges
Development Stage	Scaled
Established in	2004 (Specialisterne) 2008 (Specialist People Foundation)
Type of Organisation	Social enterprise (Specialisterne) and Non-profit (Specialist People Foundation)
Size of Organisation	Medium (<250)

The problem being addressed is the high rate of unemployment of people with autism and similar challenges. They do have peculiar skills that well suit specific jobs but it is not an easy task to detect them and stress their relevance in a traditional curriculum. For this reason peculiar features of these people are usually unknown by employers, thus cutting them out the current job recruitment system. The Specialist People Foundation works to enable one million jobs for these people through social entrepreneurship, corporate sector engagement and a global change in mind-set. Specialisterne, which translates from Danish as «the specialists», is an innovative social enterprise, where most of the employees are people with autism. It provides assessment, training and education to autistic people and their families in order to include them in the IT consultancy service offered to companies. The Foundation owns Specialisterne concept and trademark, and works to achieve its goal by supporting the growth of new social enterprises using the same brand.

2

PROBLEM TO BE ADDRESSED AND IDEA

The testing process in IT companies is often treated as an afterthought at immature IT organizations but this attitude is unwise, because the sooner bugs are caught, the easier and cheaper they are to correct. The testing – checking and rechecking outcomes, documenting test plans, and maintaining follow-through – makes use of the high intelligence, precision-oriented skills, deep concentration, and patience that can be positive features sometimes accompanying autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

On the other hand autistic people face difficulties in finding and keeping a job because their capacities and peculiar skills are not highlighted in a standard curriculum and thus not known by potential employers.

The idea behind the social innovation of the Specialist People Foundation is to promote the use of the characteristics typical of autistic people as a strength for specific jobs, requiring that attitudes and abilities. The opportunity came out because of the mix of Torkil Sonne's, the founder of the social enterprise Specialisterne, 15 years career in telecommunications IT and it's private life.

Indeed he was well aware of the issues related to the testing process in IT companies and their potential negative effects on an enterprise outcomes when he discovered his 3 years old son had ASD. After few years he became president of a local chapter of Autism Denmark where he learned that people with ASD seldom have a chance to use their special skills in the labour market. Here he saw an opportunity and need for entrepreneurship. His family background –and the potential for addressing an industry niche, along with his commitment to raising the profile of hidden talents of individuals with ASD –led him to found the

Danish enterprise. Thanks to the support of his family, Thorkil was able to start up *Specialisterne* based on a loan in their house and his family's belief in his vision.

Figure 1. Thorkil Sonne, *Specialisterne* and SPF founder.



At the time of the creation of *Specialisterne* in Denmark, in 2004, unemployment was at its highest point (6%) for the last 10 years and unemployment rate for people with ASD was around 85%. From 2004 to 2008, unemployment rate in Denmark and in many industrialized countries has steadily decreased. Since 2008-09 it has increased again as economies of these countries became sluggish and political turmoil was noticed in many countries and the EU. The rights of people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) to access a job are based on the United Nations' Convention, The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. But this does not prevent that for example, according to research by the National Autistic Society (NAS - <http://www.autism.org.uk>), in UK just 15% of people with ASD are estimated to be in full-time employment.

The number of people diagnosed with mental health disorders entering the workforce is rising. Paddy Cooney, a programme leader at the National Mental Health Development Centre and also the line manager of bipolar sufferer Robert Westhead, says that showing that you are willing to be supportive as an employer will ease the pressure on employees who are struggling with problems. 'When people feel they can talk about it, they are more engaged and, actually, their sickness rate - and turnover rate - are both very low.' (Haslett, 2010). Despite that people with autism or similar challenges remain marginalised on the labour market, with an estimate of a mere 15% in full time employment in UK, as reported by NAS research (<http://www.autism.org.uk>). Most jobs vacancies today ask candidates to be team players, work well under stress and exhibit flexibility, traits that tend to exclude people with autism or similar challenges, despite their ability and willingness to work.

ASD is not a single condition but rather a spectrum of neurodevelopmental impairments. It is part of the same family of impairments as classic autism and Asperger syndrome. Many ASD sufferers prefer routine to novelty, and exhibit steady focus and repetitive behavior patterns. If employed, they frequently face obstacles when workplaces don't recognize their particular skills and needs. People with ASD may also have little preparation or capacity for the common social interactions required on a daily basis at work. Autistics are generally defined by their disability and what skills they lack, rather than what they have to offer. Limited ability to function in social settings coupled with particular personality characteristics, including trouble coping with stress, a need for clearly delineated tasks, and lack of flexibility, makes them difficult to employ. Autistic people also fare poorly in high-pressure job interview settings, where social norms and ease in conversation may be weighed as heavily as skill sets.

Employment itself carries great benefits for autistic people: some of the little research available on autistic people in the workforce indicates that some supported employment initiatives may actually improve the cognitive performance of adults with autism and generally improve their quality of life. Compared with adults with other disabilities, some 75% of whom are typically unemployed in developed country settings, approximately 90% of autistic adults are unemployed. Lifetimes of joblessness, coupled in the usual case with financial dependence on the state, result in huge economic losses attributable to autism. Recent estimates indicate that such losses are in the range of US\$4.7M over the lifetime of one person with autism, some eighteen percent of which are associated with lost productivity for a high functioning autistic (Ashoka, 2009).

3

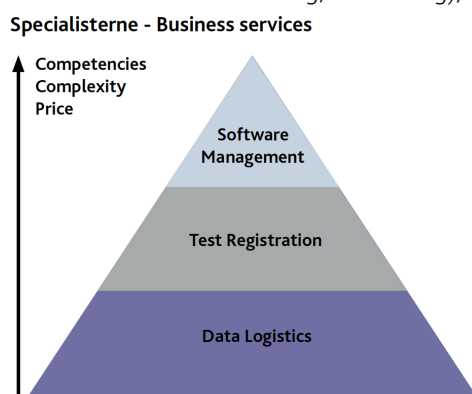
CORE SOLUTION AND MOTIVATIONS

The Specialist People Foundation (SPF) works to create employment opportunities worldwide for people with ASD, by ensuring adequate working conditions in which the unique competencies of people with ASD can be maximised. SPF is a no-profit organization founded in 2008, which became the main owner of Specialisterne, the for profit social enterprise. SPF supports other social entrepreneurs who want to start a new Specialisterne business by using a specifically developed step by step programme called «The Road to Partnership» synthesized in the following steps: The Planning Process; Planning Process Triggers; Feasibility Study; Local Partners & Founding Customers; Business Plan; Establishing the local business operations (<http://specialistpeople.com/about/become-a-partner/becoming-a-specialisterne-partner/>).

When operating, each Specialisterne company provides the following services by training and employing autistic people :

- Software management services (programming, data base optimization, algorithm construction etc.).
- Testing and registration (functionality testing for software, hardware, web-sites and applications usability);
- Data logistics (data conversion and migration, data cleansing, scanning);

Figure 2. Specialisterne services.



For people with autism, working for Specialisterne starts with a personal assessment and training. The assessment is meant to determine their personal strengths, aptitudes, capabilities and interests, as well as identify their needs for guidance and support in order to perform in a specific job context. Then potential consultants for Specialisterne undergo a three to five-month training process that familiarizes them with the intricacies of LEGO Mindstorms technology.

When a company begins to work with Specialisterne, a contact person, empathetic to the skills and limitations of autistic people, is appointed and trained for working with them. Other company employees are given a short introduction to autism, and things to keep in mind when working with autistic people. Several client companies have reported that their employees who are in frequent contact with the autistic software testers have begun to speak more clearly and directly with one another as a result of working with people who require a very explicit style of communication (Ashoka, 2009).

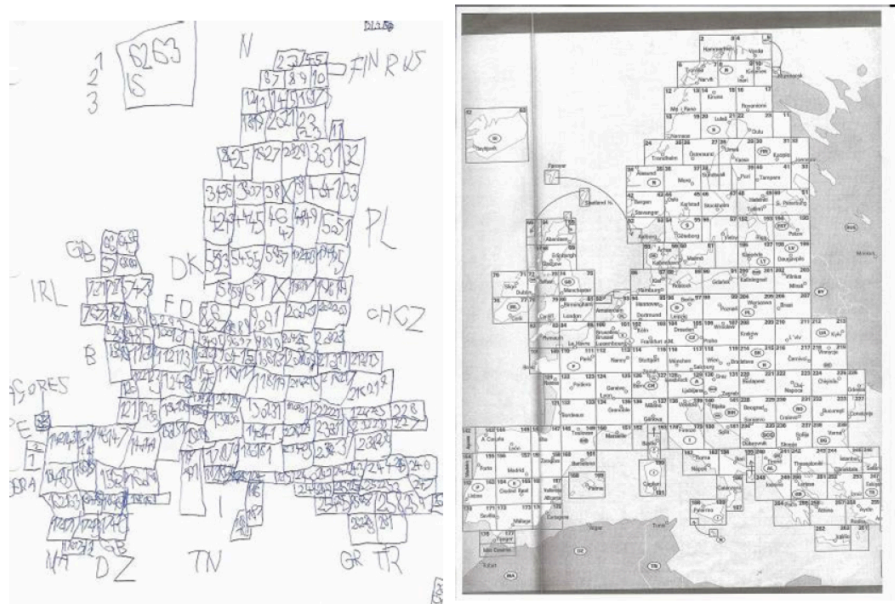
Because people with autism often experience high anxiety levels, Specialisterne has done everything possible to cut down on its causes. An example is the heightened sensory awareness, so instead of an open-plan office, employees work in small rooms, cutting down on noise levels and distractions. In case anxiety leads to bad behaviour, the team understands why and handles it accordingly. Collaboration is one area that can present autistic individuals with problems, so the office includes a range of facilities designed to teach its employees how to share: from the Lego Mindstorm robots they'll have to programme during their interview to the games consoles in the breakout room, which will only be equipped with collaborative games.

Specialisterne's founder, Thorkil Sonne, launched the company in 2004 following a high-level career in telecommunications IT. (Specialisterne is Danish for «the Specialists.») As already mentioned in previous paragraphs, Thorkil was already deeply familiar with the challenges facing people with ASD: when his son was about three years old, the boy's development of speech and social skills seemed delayed. This was his main motivation in starting a new business addressing a problem that touched him and his family directly.

The trigger of the idea probably came jointly to the discovery of a drawing his son made (figure 3). The figure shows an example of the abilities of some people with ASD. The sketch on the left hand side of the figure was drawn by Thorkil Sonne young son at the age of 7. The right hand side is

the index page of the Book of European Road Maps. Thorkil's son made the sketch from memory. Only later Thorkil did find the book on the shelf and recognize that the drawing was derived from it. The numbers are references to the other pages in the book. Thorkil found no errors in comparing the sketch with the actual index page. This sketch reinforced Thorkil's conviction that people with ASD have skills that deserve to be made visible and accessible to society.

Figure 3. On the left: sketch drawn by memory by Thorkil Sonne's young son at the age of 7.



4 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND VALUE CHAIN

Torkil Sonne has an extensive background in the IT field, and on the day he signed his resignation letter from his long-time employer, he also signed a contract with his former firm, who became Specialisterne's first client. Torkil begins by seeking out and measuring the skills of potential employees through a five-month assessment and training program, which

was initially funded by municipal authorities. Then it created new partnerships as the occasion occurred, as it happened for example with Lego toys as explained below.

Starting with the understanding that autistic people are very gifted at systems and linear construction, Torkil began using the Lego construction toys that many autistics loved as children as a basic tool to discern their skill levels. Specialisterne's assessment and training staff, several of who are practitioners schooled in other autism therapies, do not ask direct questions (since autism is generally accompanied by anxiety and difficulty in direct communication), but they use the toys to observe and interpret abilities and motivation. Taking advantage of that use of Lego toys, unintended by their producer, Torkil has also built an ongoing partnership with Lego to support his work.

LEGO has assisted Specialisterne in several ways, but the two most significant contributions are a donation on 750,000 DKK to get the Specialist People Foundation established in 2008 and LEGO-Mindstorm products to Specialisterne's assessment training program.

Before consultants could become «billable» at client sites, Specialisterne had to identify individuals with appropriate combinations of whatever skills they needed to deliver services on commercially viable terms. This was not easy, as people with ASD often don't know how to tell another person what they can and cannot do. To manage the assessment and training challenges, Specialisterne had developed sophisticated tools to analyse the profile of an ASD individual's disorder. Torkil and his managers needed to understand how a consultant might react if a task was too easy or too hard, and what would happen if instructions were not understood. Based on careful interviews, **Torkil and his colleagues could construct a «job profile» for an individual, which told them the kinds of work for which that person would be suited.** Specialisterne consultants initially required careful support and handling and Specialisterne maintained an on-call response staff, who knew how to solve issues that might arise, and that client companies didn't know how to address.

Its niche market is testing when the cost of establishing automated testing is too expensive and complex. Some testing may be automated, but other elements cannot when the work requires a lot of iteration and close proximity to the client, particularly during a time crunch (Austin et al., 2008).

Specialisterne provides both economic and social values for companies engaging with the consultancy. Clients working with Specialisterne have to do some extra efforts to include its consultants but they generally

recognize the excellence of the firm’s work and the morale boost that came from working with Torkil’s company. In the early 21st century, in the IT world at least, companies no longer bought time from employees. Instead, success in a technology business required obtaining from employees their good ideas. Working with Specialisterne forced managers to think a lot about how to situate employees for maximum performance (ibid.).

According to an October 2007 forecast, Specialisterne’s annual revenue would have reached 10 million DKK (approximately 1.5 million Euro); the number of clients would have continued to increase. After four years of operation, Torkil oversaw a staff of some 50 part time consultants, 75% of them diagnosed with Asperger’s or some other form of ASD. Customers included multinationals such as CSC, LEGO, Microsoft, and Oracle. Specialisterne’s financials were strengthening. According to CEO Lisbeth Andersen, «the firm is reaching its break even and its sustainability is based on its business revenue. We do not receive any financial help from government» (ibid.). In fact even if Specialisterne received public funds for its starting up, its operational economic sustainability was assured by its consultancy services only, that mainly applied to corporate social responsibilities funds. It is important to notice that the founder was firmly motivated to create a self-sustainable business with market prices for its client and not to rely on public founding or charity to support its activity in full operation.

In 2008, Torkil’s companies had twenty-five clients who were serviced by forty-four Specialisterne staff members, and twenty additional staff members were in training. In 2008, his companies earned the equivalent of US\$3.3M in revenue, resulting in a profit in 2008 of US\$170,000. All Specialisterne operations were managed via the Dandelion model that focuses on how best to make people with autism feel wanted in the workforce and how to create the right environment in which they can excel (Ashoka, 2009).

Figure 4. Key figures for Specilisterne - Danish Kroner, in thousands. Source: Financial statements for the years 2005-2010 (www.nnerhverv.dk).

<i>DKK '000</i>	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Revenue	15,792	13,918	17,130	9,780	6,982	4,761
Profit/loss for the year	164	-2,983	851	-418	-618	-221
Equity capital	-2,691	-2,855	127	-724	-306	147
Number of employees	51	42	60	50	40	-

Source: Financial statements for the years 2005-2010⁴⁵

Having demonstrated the effectiveness of Specialisterne’s concept, in December 2008 Thorkil Sonne stepped back from the post of CEO in order

to focus most of his energies on spurring the global spread of his «idea» by donating all shares of Specialisterne to the Specialist People Foundation, the nonprofit organization founded by him, that became the owner of Specialisterne brand. In fact although the company has emerged in Denmark, there is nothing uniquely Danish about it and it could be anywhere. This is in fact the purpose of the Foundation, to support the scaling up of the Specialisterne solution in other countries (Austin et al., 2008).

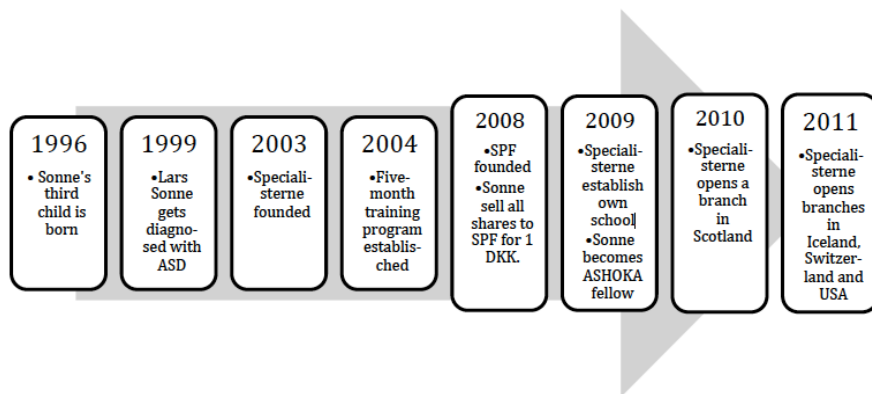


Figure 5. Specialisterne timeline (Elkjær Jensen, 2011).

In order to be prepared to answer the many requests for opening a Specialisterne business coming from other potential entrepreneurs, the firm recruited Lars Henriksen, a retired Accenture Senior Partner, for the Specialisterne Board of Directors to help them expand operations to other markets in Europe and beyond (Austin et al., 2008). To achieve maximum impact, he established a new management model in which daughter companies were launched under the foundation's auspices, and external companies that complete a certification process will be permitted to use his logo. Torkil built a complementary program that helped inject his model into other businesses not under the direct purview of his own organizations. In order to achieve the mission of creating one million jobs for people with autism, Specialisterne and SPF have also developed a set of management tools (The Dandelion Model) that enable both the public and the private sector to assess, employ and manage people with autism. Indeed after the original Danish Specialisterne became economically sustainable, it emerged the need to have a double organizational form. On one hand the Foundation, with a primary social objective, on the other the for profit enterprise focusing on the consulting activity. More specifically the Specialist People Foundation (SPF), that owns the Specialisterne brand, is focused on supporting job creation for people with ASD flanking new Specialisterne operations in their start up phase with services and management tools (The Dandelion Model) fostering the model replicability and enabling both the public and the private sector to assess, employ and

manage people with autism; while each Specialisterne operation pursues the social enterprise's objectives: to obtain a profit through a social purpose.

In September 2009 Specialisterne started a school for people between 16-25 years of age diagnosed with ASD. The program was equal to that of a Danish high school and had the goal to develop personal, social and professional skills, for people diagnosed with ASD, so they would be better equipped later to participate actively in the job market. The school was funded with help from the Lego Foundation and the Danish Ministry of Education and in 2011 this education program had around 40 students enrolled (Elkjær Jensen, 2011).

Torkil initiated his endeavor in Aarhus, Denmark, and he has subsequently established a sister company in Copenhagen (2004), then the business model has been extended firstly to Scotland (funded in 2010 but currently closed). In 2011 the company has spread in USA through a sister foundation, the Specialisterne Foundation, Inc., that established a regional organizational structure with a main social enterprise operating in different states (<http://specialistpeople.com>):

- Specialisterne Mid Atlantic region (2013). Delaware is the location for the first US Specialisterne operation and hosts the headquarter of Specialisterne USA;
- Specialisterne Southwest Region (2014) is headquartered in Denver, Colorado, and is comprised of Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah and Wyoming
- Specialisterne Midwest Region (2015), headquartered in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, is comprised of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

The scaling process has gone through different steps and was supported by various foundings' opportunities, as better explained below. The Specialist People Foundation in 2010 developed an 'Operational Model License Package'. This license package is marketed towards internationally operators of the Specialisterne-concept. SPF operates as a franchising offering a step-by-step pathway through the starting up of a new Specialisterne operation. Interested actors contact the Foundation and pay to receive support in opening a new for profit social enterprise. This support is based on a very detailed partnership planning process that consists of 5 steps (Preparation; Feasibility Study; Local Partner; Business

Planning and Licence Agreement) and includes mentoring activities, a set of tools, consulting and legal support. SPF provides also an introduction to the Specialisterne operational model with an in depth description of the assessment and business process and financial model (Specialist People Foundation, 2011).

Torkil built various partnerships and collaborations with public and private bodies to support specific programs of the Specialist People Foundation (SPF), maintaining the core business of Specialisterne autonomous and economically sustainable.

The SPF received in 2010 the Bikuben Foundation funds that supported for the «One Million Jobs» project, which stretched from January 1st 2010 to December 31st 2011. The aim of the project was to create jobs for people with autism by taking the knowledge and know-how accrued over time by the Specialist People Foundation, and turning it into an education toolkit for employers and managers, and for those planning on starting up a Specialisterne operation in their country. In the same year (2010) the Lemvig-Müller Foundation, a Danish foundation that supports cultural, social and productive goals for the benefits of Danish society, granted 750,000 DKK to the SPF (approximately 100,000 €) to help to develop the internship to match the skills of people with autism, and for knowledge-sharing with the organizations where Specialisterne interns work. This project helped to build momentum for SPF and Specialisterne both in Denmark and overseas. 2010 brought also the support of the Velux Foundation aimed at the three-year project «Creating Jobs for People with Autism in Poland». This project received a grant of 5,357,448 DKK (approximately 715,000 €) from the foundation, and has enabled the SPF, in association with local Polish partners, to adapt and localize the Specialisterne model for Poland (Specialist People Foundation, 2014). In 2013, after the end of the previously founded project, the same foundation donated just under 5,400,000 DKK (approximately 725,000 €) to the SPF initiative entitled «1000 Jobs in Denmark». This initiative is driven by the Specialist People Foundation through partnerships with the corporate sector, public institutions and other stakeholders in the labor market. The ultimate goal – together with the creation of 1000 jobs – is to **change existing attitudes among Danish employers towards hiring people with autism**, and to generate interest among employers in placing people with autism into meaningful jobs where their unique competencies can create maximum value. Moreover the SPF has received numerous grants from the European Union to help further its goal of creating one million jobs for people with autism. To date, SPF has been part of the following projects (<http://specialistpeople.com/sponsors/>):

- Leonardo da Vinci – Transfer of Innovation, Year 2010 – 2012
- Progress – Year 2012 – 2013
- European Social Fund – Year 2012 – 2013
- Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation – Year 2012 – 2014

Currently the company is operating in the following countries: Denmark, USA, Canada, Poland, Switzerland, Spain, United Kingdom, Germany, Austria (<http://specialistpeople.com/about/specialisterne/specialisterne-licenses/>).

Specialisterne received various awards. Among them:

- Initiative Award 2005, Mid Jutland IT Association
- Network Special Award 2005, the Danish National Network of Business Leaders
- Best Large Social Firm Europe 2006, CE FEC, the European confederation of Social Firms

Thorkil Sonne has personally received the following recognitions:

- Autism Award 2004, Autism Denmark
- Best Track Presentation, EuroSTAR 2005
- Best Keynote Presentation, EuroSTAR 2006
- IT Award 2008, Danish IT Industry Association

To achieve greater social impact during the years Torkil Sonne has been **experimenting with tweaking the criteria used in recruiting new employees to focus on personality types, recruiting for specific qualities rather than explicitly seeking autistic people, in order to avoid any possible «charity for the disabled» consideration in decisions to use his companies' services.**

Many other fields of endeavor, in addition to software testing, are well suited for autistic employees—pharmacy, accounting, motor repair, and piano tuning, to cite only a few examples. Torkil plans to use his foundation to expand into at least a few new fields as he estimated that one to five percent of the tasks undertaken by business firms could make good use of his employees' skill sets (Ashoka, 2009).

Business structure

Specialisterne business concept consists of three elements: the education unit called STU, the assessment and training unit called AEA, and the

business consulting unit called BIZ. The STU is an education unit addressing students in the age of 16-25 years who has been diagnosed with ASD. The aim of the education program is to develop the students' personal, social, and professional skills. The AEA is a three to five month individual assessment and training program for people with ASD. This program, founded in 2004 is used by Specialisterne to pointing out each candidate's strengths, weaknesses, special skills, competences, and interests, for being able to map the candidate's needs for support, guidance, and environmental adjustments in order to perform optimal in a job situation. The BIZ is the business consulting unit, which identifies and solves IT-consulting tasks for Specialisterne's clients (Elkjær Jensen, 2011).

Ownership structure

Specialisterne is 100% owned by Specialist Resources Holding ApS, which is 100% owned by SPF.

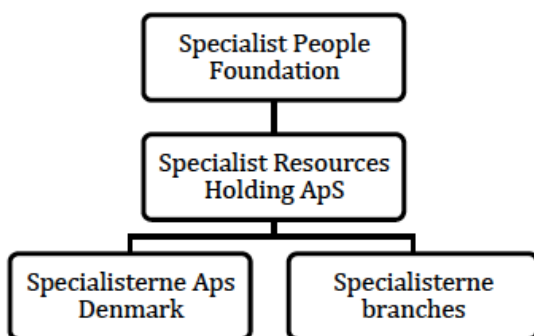


Figure 6. Ownership structure (Elkjær Jensen, 2011).

The establishment of a holding might be explain with three arguments: firstly, the profit from Specialisterne can be transferred directly to the foundation without paying any taxes. Secondly, if Specialisterne suffers from bad business and becomes insolvent it is not possible for creditors to claim money that already has been transferred to the foundation through the holding company. Lastly, if SPF chooses to sell Specialisterne after a three-year period, the revenue from the sale could be transferred to the foundation free of any taxes (ibid.).

5

EVIDENCE FROM THE CASES

5.1

Problem to be Addressed and Idea

Specialist People Foundation (SPF) is the non-profit organization that owns the Specialisterne brand, that is the for profit social enterprise that aims at creating working opportunities for people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and similar challenges. The main idea of Specialisterne is that of turning a disadvantage into a strength for specific tasks, such as IT testing, where a skill-based curriculum might provide the right information for employing people with ASD. This arose thanks to a mix of private life experience of the founder, who was directly involved in the problem due to his child condition, and his working life as an IT consultant that allowed him to connect the characteristics of people affected by ASD with specific market's needs.

The main SI contribution is the change of perspective that turns disadvantages of autistic people into abilities for well suited jobs.

Indeed in the SPF case the **capacities** of the people involved **become the object of innovation**. The idea of the social entrepreneur of looking at disadvantaged people as a resource is the core of the innovation that turns autistic people from cost for the society, in terms of financial dependence on the state, to an added value for the job market, reducing unemployment and generating economic value.

In this case SI can be seen as an innovation that changes the social perception of some issues such as diversity vs. disability or in other cases this duality might be sharing vs. owning or again opportunity vs. sentence. Thus **Sis can have an important cultural impact, radically changing the point of view on diffuse problems.**

Core Solution and Motivations

5.2

The Specialist People Foundation offers a step-by-step pathway through the starting up of a new Specialisterne operation. Interested actors can contact the Foundation and pay to receive support in opening a new for profit social enterprise. This support is based on a very detailed partnership planning process and includes mentoring activities, a set of tools, consulting and legal support. SPF provides also an introduction to the Specialisterne operational model with an in depth description of the assessment and business process and financial model (Specialist People Foundation, 2011).

This very **well structured organization** for selling the Foundation services is the result of a strategic view of the founder **to achieve the solution scalability**. He borrowed the franchising format from the business sector to diffuse his idea, thus amplifying its social mission and pursuing a greater impact in terms of number of ASD people employed.

The SPF was born from the personal motivation of Torkil Sonne that was struggling to assure a future to his child affected by ASD and become an operating solution thanks to his professional skills and scaling strategy. The ASD condition is diffused in other countries, thus creating the conditions for its scaling.

The case describes a SI where **the social entrepreneur was able to join a strong personal motivation with the identification of a new area of business opportunity**, having a very sharp and clear social and business objective.

Development Process and Value Chain

5.3

The main innovation created by the SPF and Specialisterne seems to be the new perspective brought in including people with ASD in the labor market. **In fact the case looks at the disadvantage as strength by proposing to evaluate these people on the basis of their effective skills to find a proper job.** In this perspective companies have to recruit for specific qualities rather than explicitly seeking autistic people, in order to avoid any possible «charity for the disabled» consideration in decisions to use Specialisterne companies' services. In fact Torkil and his colleagues can

construct a «job profile» for an individual, which told them the kinds of work for which that person would be suited.

The main drivers of the solution were the founder's motivation and professional competences that matched together provided the spark for the innovative idea and assured its initial development. The advocacy activities undertaken brought his idea to receive several awards such as the election to the Ashoka Fellowship in 2009. This gave to Specialisterne brand great visibility, and supported its scaling process and the possibility to achieve public and private funds thanks to international recognition. Indeed **the startup phase of a new Specialisterne operation**, as it happened for the first Danish for profit social enterprise, **requires public or private funds** dedicated to the feasibility study, business model definition and to the 5 months evaluation of the first group of consultants' competences. The economic sustainability is in fact achieved just when fully employing more than 20 consultants (Specialist People Foundation, 2011).

This implies that **the successful implementation of a new Specialisterne enterprise partially depend on the local context condition**, especially for what regards the **possibility to get public or private funds** to start up the assessment and training of the disadvantaged people and to established a local supporter network including public institutions and potential clients. To assure the initiative success, SPF addresses significant efforts to the feasibility study and assessment of each initiative and potential entrepreneur.

The idea of creating the Foundation, thus differentiating the work of the for profit enterprise from the non-profit organization, allowed the **scalability** of the solution. SPF advocacy activity aims at pursuing the vision of creating one million jobs for disadvantaged people while each for profit can achieve its economic sustainability through the counseling work for other companies. This **multiple business structure** highlight the need of differentiating the source of financing for the various initiatives and underline the double identity and scope of the social innovation, that is a balance in between economic sustainability and social mission.

The scaling process has been successful up to date with many operations opened in EU and non-EU countries. This was driven by various factors such as the founding of the foundation, the franchising model and the funds received by the SPF both as donations and grants.

This scaling process was achieved thanks to the recognition of Torkil of his real **capacities**. He knew **he needed an expert to scale up in the right**

direction and for this reason he recruited Lars Henriksen, a retired Accenture Senior Partner, for the Specialisterne Board of Directors to help them expand operations to other markets in Europe and beyond.

The role of the institutions seems to be important for the case public recognition that catalyzes the attention on its social purposes and for obtaining grants and funds to open new Specialisterne operations. In fact among the key success factors for starting up Specialisterne, the SPF highlight the capacity of the future entrepreneur to secure local government/municipal support and active engagement and the analysis of the potential local stakeholder network (Specialist People Foundation, 2011). Media as well served primarily as a marketing tool for Specialisterne and SPF.

6

DISCUSSION OF EVIDENCES IN SIMPACT'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Innovation Components

6.1

Actors

6.1.1

Torkil Sonne is the founder of the initiative pushed by a strong personal motivation to achieve a social objective, and invested money and personal efforts in its development. Specialisterne operations' entrepreneurs are quite often already working with people affected by ASD and use their existing actors' networks to start up a new social enterprise.

Public and private institutions, as already mentioned, play a major role in the solution recognition through prizes and awards but most of all provide accountability and funds for the starting up of new enterprises.

Specialisterne clients are both public and private companies and have different benefits from working in partnership with the social enterprise. The most include the partnership in the corporate social responsibility perspective having a return in terms of company's public reputation while others, such as Lego, have a direct economic return by increasing their sales performance.

6.1.2 Resources

The SPF revenues come from different sources. It receives funds from: donations; by offering consulting services to new Specialisterne operations; and by participating to EU funded projects to further its goal of creating one million jobs for people with autism. Each Specialisterne operation is economically autonomous from the SPF, starting with public or private funds and reaching its sustainability after having 20+ consultants employed full time by other companies.

Looking at human resources the Specialisterne's business relies on the skills of its consultants and this is the reason why the initial assessment process of potential employees requires time (3 to 5 months) and attention. For the success of Specialisterne it is fundamental to define the skills of each autistic person in order to match him/her with the suited job position.

6.1.3 Institutions

Institutions on a local scale play a major role in obtaining legitimacy and providing recognition of its social purpose, thus amplifying its network. In some cases they also finance the start up phase of the local Specialisterne operation.

By working in different cultural and institutional framework, the SPF has to adapt its operational model to the changing context.

6.2 Social Innovation Objectives

The social goal of employing one million people diagnosed with ASD is somehow in conflict with the economic sustainability objective of both

Specialisterne and SPF. In fact in order to achieve this high level social objective the best strategy would be to diffuse as much as possible the knowledge connected to Specialisterne concept. On the other hand the services offered by the SPF for scaling the approach and the ones offered by Specialisterne to clients companies are the main source of revenues.

The balance between social and economic objectives seems to be a recurrent issue when dealing with social enterprises that have this intrinsic conflict by definition. By the way has to be noted that Specialisterne's objective is also to avoid any dependency on external fundings' and any charitable approach in employing ASD people, thus directly aiming both at the solution economic and social purpose.

Clients companies have mainly a reputation objective as corporate social responsibility but some of them have at the same time an economic advantage in term of products and services sold.

Social Innovation Principles

6.3

Modes of Efficiency

6.3.1

On the basis of the information collected for the case study it seems that SPF uses its economic resources mainly to cover costs of operations and personnel. It works both on short term objectives, such as the establishment of Specialisterne branches but this work flow into its long term objective of creating one million jobs for autistic people. SPF seems to rely on external funds for developing specific projects but for its daily operation seems to be economically autonomous thanks to its licencing activity. Each Specialisterne branch is economically self sustainable.

The overall organization is supported in terms of reputation, visibility and non-tangible resources by its wide network of partnerships with public and private institutions and companies.

Modes of Governance

6.3.2

The SPF organization is centralized then each local operation is autonomous in its financial management, paying an annual fee for the licence, and in the construction of the local actors' network. This mode of governance can be defined as self-regulation.

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