



**REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA**



## **CASES OF GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**



## **The Verlata co-operative**

### **Areas**

Integration of a type-A co-operative with a type-B one  
Employment opportunities in the local labour market

### **Abstract**

Verlata is a social co-operative society composed of two units: the type-A co-operative Verlata, which mainly offers social assistance to young disabled people, and Verlata Lavoro, a type-B co-operative, which is dedicated to employment opportunity activities in favour of the above-mentioned people.

The two co-operatives share the same mission: to promote the employment of young disabled people through a gradual and tailored curriculum to be developed within both units.

Verlata's activities are based on an original entrepreneurial project featuring, on one side, a strong internal integration between the two co-operatives on various levels (operational, logistic, organisational, managerial, economic, financial) and, on the other side, openness and integration with external public/private organisations that Verlata has involved in the employment opportunities process, so to achieve good results.

Verlata is therefore an unusual social co-operative because its activities are different from the most renowned methods of social co-operation. In order to reach its primary goal, which is to promote the thorough social inclusion of disabled people, the co-operative features a curriculum for people's personal and professional growth to be developed within the two units and to be completed with some actual employment opportunities in the local market.

## THE SOCIAL CO-OPERATIVE

### Registry

Name: Verlata Società Cooperativa Sociale a r.l.; Verlata Lavoro Società Cooperativa Sociale a r.l

No. of members (Verlata + Verlata Lavoro): 61

No. of non-members (Verlata + Verlata Lavoro): 13

Headquarters: Via De Gasperi n. 6, Villaverla (VI)

### Established in

1984

### Business

Verlata (the type-A co-operative) offers social assistance services. Verlata Lavoro (the type-B co-operative) manages the production activities where the training of the young disabled people takes place.

#### *Activities*

Verlata offers the following:

- residential and semi-residential services (a day-time educational employment centre, home-delivered assistance, shelter community);
- employment-oriented services (employment centre);
- vocational training services (employment preparation centre);
- home-delivered educational and family assistance services.

Verlata Lavoro's activities cover five sectors:

- assembly;
- mechanics;
- carpentry;
- green areas maintenance;
- IT services.

### Geographical context

Province of Vicenza

### Web site

[www.verlata.it](http://www.verlata.it)

### History

Verlata is a social co-operative that was established in Villaverla (VI) in 1984. It originally was an Association, which was founded by a group of volunteers who dealt with disabled people and promoted their integration in the local schools and recreational activities.

At the beginning, the co-operative assisted people with any kind of disability. These people found in the Verlata centre a place where to employ their time in very simple works and the centre promoted their inclusion in the labour market.

In 1987, based on its experience, the association turned into a co-operative for social solidarity.

Since the late 80s the Centre has offered its services to people with mental disabilities of medium seriousness. The co-operative dealt with disabled people who had a psychic handicap and who had a hard time finding a job, even after the completion of their schooling programmes. In the years that followed, the co-operative's activities gradually started including also people with other problems or conditions: the elderly, drug addicted, convicted or formerly convicted people, even though the main activity still pertained to services addressed to young people with psychic disabilities.

During this period, the Verlata co-operative became aware that the needs of the people they were helping were manifold and acknowledged that, with some situations, before focusing the attention on people's vocational training (thus providing professional skills), it was necessary to make those people more self-sufficient, that meant able to independently carry out every day's activities.

Based on this consideration and taking into account the Italian law regarding social co-operatives (dated 1991), in 1994 the Verlata was split into two separate entities: the actual Verlata (a type-A co-operative) featuring social assistance services, and Verlata Lavoro (a type-B co-operative), which runs the activities pertaining to the professional training of the disabled people. Even though the two social co-operatives are separately administered, they pursue common goals through a complete and steady collaboration.

At the moment, the mission of Verlata and Verlata Lavoro is to ensure the "well-being of disabled people by giving value to their communicational, relational and professional skills, so to promote their integration in the community" and their "social integration through labour".

Verlata has now a staff of over 100 people, and 22 of them are disadvantaged people. In 2005, the two co-operatives produced a total turnover of over 2.5 million euros.

Table 1 and 2 show the evolution of the turnover and the number and composition of members from 2000 to 2005.

*Table 1 - Verlata (type-A co-operative)*

Year	Total turnover (Euro)	Turnover with public institutions	Members	Member employees	Member volunteers	Other members
2000	530,961.00	432,044.00	18	12	5	1
2001	491,768.00	479,707.00	23	17	5	1
2002	661,767.00	651,962.00	31	25	5	1
2003	935,875.00	895,714.00	34	27	6	1
2004	1,101,165.00	1,048,443.00	41	34	6	1
2005	1,165,387.00	1,086,294.00	43	36	6	1

*Table 2 - Verlata Lavoro (type-B co-operative)*

Year	Total turnover (Euro)	Turnover with public instit.	Turnover for tutoring	Members	Member employees	Member volunteers	Other members
2000	964,046.00	67,195.00	50,109.00	33	23	9	1
2001	929,348.00	79,199.00	51,564.00	36	24	11	1
2002	1,089,724.00	81,946.00	56,615.00	36	25	10	1
2003	1,088,710.00	83,797.00	54,887.00	32	23	8	1
2004	1,110,464.00	104,128.00	46,345.00	34	25	8	1
2005	1,337,535.00	186,987.00	51,354.00	33	25	7	1

### **Working context**

**Verlata (a type-A co-operative)** offers social assistance services and is active in the field of disability and social segregation/alienation, with an organisation on various levels.

Here below are the manifold services that the Verlata co-op offers:

- residential and semi-residential services that are strongly oriented to people and with specific places for the education and rehabilitation of individuals (a day-time educational employment centre, home-delivered assistance, shelter community);
- employment-oriented services (employment centre);

- vocational training services (employment preparation centre);
- home-delivered educational and family assistance services.

The above-listed services are addressed to people, who receive a customised assistance, so to help them become more independent and maintain their status (housekeeping, physical, hygienic, eating abilities) and also increase their operative skills (social, learning, communicational); such a project includes an observation period when the adequacy of each choice is evaluated and periodical assessments and reviews are made.

Professional activities are carried out gradually: at first, simple basic competencies are taught, then small groups are organised with increasing steps according to people's abilities, but always ensuring that each learning experience is unique and personalised.

In the professional world, the Employment Preparation Centre has become very important, as it is a distinctive and innovative element with respect to other co-operatives and is the link between Verlata and Verlata Lavoro. Thanks to this centre, there is a protected approach to the labour context and young people are actively involved in it in an actual integration experience. This ensures that the disabled people are not "abandoned" in the day-time educational employment centre, but the opportunity of being assisted and guided through professional learning is available to them, so they can later become members of the type-B co-operative.

A dedicated team takes care of the training curricula with an accurate and precise design, weekly internal feedback meetings with all involved operators and ongoing updating of information on the cases.

**Verlata Lavoro (a type-B co-operative)** runs the production activities that are mainly carried out for private individuals. These activities are developed in five different sectors:

- assembly: assembly of plastic and metal products, micro parts, manual packaging, adhesive labels, personalisation, set up of samples, other preparations;
- mechanics: manual and semi-automatic assembly of electronic-mechanical components and articles;
- carpentry: wood working and wood derivatives, a sector where even some machines are used, such as pantographs, isolators, perforators, etc.;
- green areas maintenance: maintenance and care of parks, green areas and sports grounds of public property, green areas and decorations of business companies, gardens and lawns in private locations; lawn mowing, pruning of shrubs, hedges, bushes, trees, plants, etc.
- IT services: work assignments for third parties (transfer of data from paper to digital format), processing of manuals and handbooks, outsourcing management of archives and data bases; consultancy for the implementation of administrative solutions (hardware and software) to small and medium-sized enterprises.

The services Verlata Lavoro offers are addressed to disadvantaged people that are recommended by the employment agency of the Prisma consortium Verlata Lavoro is a member of. They aim at creating and delivering training initiatives for the development of people's professional skills through customised and gradual curricula development that take into consideration people's potentials and possibly involve an individual in the project along with his/her own family. The curricula are constantly monitored by a person in charge of the project who is called a "business tutor". The tutor is the main referent for the development of the project: he/she plans, monitors and assesses the person's progress (in periodical written reviews). Periodic checking takes place in co-operation with the organisation that recommended the disabled person, with the co-operative's tutor, with the disabled person, with the family and with other staff members.

Verlata starts the employment preparation project with an internship, whose longest term is "theoretically" 24 months. Verlata Lavoro's actual goal, though, is to reduce this time and start with a real job contract as soon as possible.

This decision was made because Verlata Lavoro managers believe that a job improves rather quickly a disabled person's conditions, not only on the social and ethical level but also on the

economic level. This choice is undoubtedly really expensive for Verlata Lavoro, but it is the most consistent with the co-operative's mission and goals.

An individual who has already a quite good production ability, although he/she is not ready to be hired in a regular company yet, is usually employed in the co-operative under a short-term contract of max. 36 months and during this time the person receives an initial salary which is in line with his/her real working capacity.

Those who have reached an adequate professional level, and have met the necessary goals so they can be hired by a company, are then transferred to the Employment Integration Services, which begin the process for the employment of the people in an external company, in collaboration with the local Employment Centres. Even in this case, before the final employment contract is drawn up, there can be an internship period in the company.

If the disabled person has not acquired sufficient skills and he/she seems likely not to make any further progress, the co-operative itself hires the person either as an actual associate member or as an employee under a long-term contract.

Verlata has numerous strengths, but its actual distinctive feature is its location and operation in the local territory, the active participation of its associates in the administration and organisation of the activities and the ongoing research of new better opportunities, so to offer people high quality services, as well as customised projects that meet the needs of disadvantaged individuals.

## THE AREA OF MANAGERIAL EXCELLENCE

In 1994 the co-operative was divided into two separate entities: Verlata and Verlata Lavoro. At that moment there was a risk for the two societies to become further apart, but in order to be true to the choice of actual integration of the co-operatives, a lot of internal work was done to connect the type-A and type-B co-operatives, with improvements on the various levels (operational-logistic, organisational-administrative-economic-financial) and work was also done to integrate the co-operatives with external organisations.

### **Human resources dedicated to the project**

- Internal person in charge: President Mr. Franco Balzi
- Other partners involved in the project of managerial development: none
- Number of dedicated people: all.

### **Partners and external organisations**

The excellent employment results of the people assisted are also possible through the close co-operation with other organizations involved in the productive network Verlata has been building along the years.

Although Verlata does not directly deal with the employment contracts that companies offer to the young people, it provides useful indications on the job function and tasks that would better suit these people, starting from the experience made in the various production areas of the co-operative. In order to promote an actual employment opportunity, Verlata works with other organisations, such as local schools and social & health-care services, the Labour Integration Service of the local social & health-care unit and the Provincial Labour Office, trade unions and other offices like the Provincial Equal Opportunities Commission.

The training opportunities the co-operative offers are included in a bigger project involving other organisations – e.g. the Prisma Consortium. In collaboration with the local trade unions, the Prisma Consortium is trying to build a strategy to promote improvements in co-operation with Public Administrations, public welfare associations and nursing homes, so to avoid to reduce the quality of the services delivered. Therefore a thorough social integration occurs when there is an intense interaction between the local social institutions and the production network.

### **Critical aspects of success**

Verlata is a place of transition where disadvantaged people recover social values and professional skills that they can later on use in “normal” enterprises. The rehabilitation and labour preparation process of a disadvantaged person becomes a long and complex action that begins at the social & health-care services, goes through vocational training and ends with an employment opportunity in the production world.

Verlata has chosen to specialise professional training services, considering that the preparation for a job is very important. Verlata offers each disadvantaged person a chance to gradually approach the labour market feeling protected. Both scheduling and methods to do this take into account the individual's special needs and include support through mates who will help him/her along the way.

Verlata has been trying to provide the most complete service it could afford, as all members believe that the best way to do that is to create an original entrepreneurial project where the thorough integration and synergy of the type-A co-operative with the type-B co-operatives takes place. This strategy has not only guaranteed assistance to a larger number of people, but it has also enriched and completed the range of services following the continuous evolution of people's needs, which are increasing and require greater capacity of replying through interconnected activities.

Although the integration, which is supported by shared basic values in both co-operatives, gets visible mostly on the operating and logistic level, it can reach this very high point thanks to a global

strategy including complete integration of organization, management, and finance, which allows them to share problems and face with them together.

**Development goals**

Verlata intends to continue with its internal and external integration process of the two co-operatives, always with the employment opportunities for disabled people as its goal.

Verlata wishes to devote more attention to those sectors of Verlata Lavoro that have to face with a rather complex market situation and to diversify its production activities in new areas.

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