

CASE STUDY

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High Quality Guidance?

Balancing Your Work

and the Need to Update

Your Own Skills

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Abstract

This case study is training material for guidance practitioners, mentors and social workers. It describes the daily life of a guidance practitioner and shows how challenging it is to find time to update one's own skills and knowledge. The story gives some background information about Employment Services Unit in the City of Tampere and an overview of youth unemployment in Tampere.

Keywords: guidance practitioners, employment services, youth unemployment, Finland, updating one's own professional skills and knowledge, training and teaching materials, Learning Shop Neukölln, case study, training and teaching material

Introduction

It is March 5th and Liisa, a guidance practitioner, has an ordinary busy day: meetings with 2 clients, negotiation with a potential employer who could offer a traineeship for one unemployed young person, an update meeting with team colleagues, a lot of paper work etc. Suddenly she receives an e-mail: there is a 2 day course on from March 15th-16th and she has been offered a place due to a cancellation. Liisa applied for the course in January, but due to the popularity of the course, she was not accepted. Liisa is more than happy – she feels that she has just won a lottery!

However, those two days are fully scheduled in her calendar – one appointment with civil servant, meetings with 4 clients¹, a meeting with a potential employer² etc. Furthermore, March 16th is the deadline for applications to educational institutions. This is usually the busiest time of the year for Liisa, because majority of her clients are obliged to make an application during this application period. Now she has a problem to solve: could she possibly reorganise her appointments during the course days?

¹ Usually one hour is reserved for each client meeting.

² The potential employer is interested in hiring a young unemployed person. Liisa will meet this employer to market the employment benefits available for this particular case (related to Youth Guarantee in Finland).

The Background

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN TAMPERE, FINLAND

Finnish young people are living in a situation of contradiction: the welfare is bigger than ever, but unemployment is very high. 10% of people in Finland are unemployed, but among young people this figure rises to 20%. This means that a lot of young people must look for help from their parents or from the society. There is a threat that new class of poor people will be created.

As a result, the Finnish government has set a new law: the Youth Guarantee. The youth guarantee requires that each person under 25 years and each recent graduate under 30 years of age be offered work, a traineeship, or a study, workshop or labour market rehabilitation place, within three months of becoming unemployed. The guarantee was launched at the beginning of 2013³. The new law causes a lot of pressure for guidance practitioners dealing with young unemployed people all over the country.

According to several studies, Tampere is the most popular place to live in Finland⁴. Tampere has been the leading industrial city of Finland since the beginning of 19th century (textile industry, paper industry and engineering industry). Today, Tampere is a center of know-how intensive entrepreneurial activities; educational and cultural city; leading city in industry and a center of information society.

The number of inhabitants in Tampere is 215 000. The unemployment rate is 13 per cent and that means that over 14 500 people are looking for a job. The number of young unemployed people (less than 25 years) is over 2 000⁵. However, not everyone is seeking the services offered by the Employment Services Unit.

THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES UNIT, CITY OF TAMPERE

The Employment Services Unit was founded as a 4 year pilot in 2009. As the work done in the unit has been effective, the city council of Tampere has just decided to make it a permanent unit of the city.

The unit has almost 50 employees and the number of clients has been 3 500 a year. The goal of the services is to move unemployed people towards the open job market or vocational education.

The services available at the unit are:

- › **Rehabilitative Work Experience** that is based on an activation plan (cooperation with the client, a municipal social worker and an advisor from the employment office). Work activities are organised in various departments of the city as well as in various associations or foundations.
- › **Services for Young People**
- › **Vocational Training for Immigrants** (counseling services and traineeship placements for immigrants)
- › **Development and Supportive Services**
- › **Tampere City Region Labour Force Service Centre (LAFOS)**, where services are run together by three different public agencies (i.e. the Employment and Economic Development Office, local municipalities and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland). The LAFOS offer services for those whose access to employment is difficult. The service model is based on multi-professional teamwork between employment officers, social workers, health care professionals and other partners.

³ http://www.tem.fi/files/34273/Youth_guarantee.pdf

⁴ <http://www.taloustutkimus.fi/ajankohtaista/?x1541726=2486678>

⁵ Pirkanmaan työllisyyskatsaus, elokuu 2012. Tampereen työ- ja elinkeinotoimiston tiedote 25.9.2012.

Liisa the Guidance Practitioner

Liisa is 30 years old and has been working for about 5 years. The last 2 years, she has worked as a guidance practitioner at the Employment Services Unit in the city of Tampere. She has a working contract for 4 years that will end in December 2013.

She works in the project where clients are young unemployed people (less than 30 years old). Her main duties are helping clients to find jobs, traineeships (finding new employers, maintaining relationships with long term employers), and potential professions as well as helping them to apply for schools or appropriate educational courses. She also advises them on how to apply for a job (job applications, CV) and how to apply for subsistence. Sometimes she organises group mentoring days (6 hours) with different themes (e.g. skills in job searching, practical training, self-knowledge, interaction skills and educational questions).

Liisa's daily networking includes communication with educational institutions, employers (private and public sector) and public agencies related to employment and social services. In addition to the duties described above,

she also has to do paper work such as writing reports, writing contracts with employers, maintaining statistics and marketing the services provided by the unit (e.g. fairs).

Liisa's job has two features that make her work challenging. Firstly, Liisa is not a civil servant because her work is organised as a project and funded mainly by the European Union. As a result, she is the last one whose calendar is considered when appointments are made with public agencies such as social workers. Secondly, Liisa finds it difficult to plan for long term continuity and consistency of youth employment, because the funding is granted only until the end of the project. Her future within the unit is uncertain, because nobody knows if there will be services for young unemployed people in the future.

As a person, Liisa is extremely kind, committed to her work and her clients, conscientious and empathic. She is also ambitious and is very interested in developing her professional skills. As she has been working in the field for 5 years already, she longs for professional refreshing! The training course would give her new methods to improve her work. This works as a great motivator for Liisa!

Liisa's Clients

As mentioned above, Liisa works with unemployed people under 30 years of age. The majority of the clients are 16-25 years old (80%) and they have been unemployed for 6 – 12 months on average. Usually the clients have low levels of education, they have quit their vocational education and they have no direction for their lives. Often, these young people do not get any support from their relatives either – they might be the second unemployed generation in their family.

In addition to low levels of education, some clients have also been addicted to alcohol or drugs. However, when they will come to meet Liisa, those problems should already have been dealt with – otherwise they will be sent to meet a social worker. Sometimes, a client has been found to be intoxicated at the workplace and these cases require immediate action.

Every issue has two sides: a good one and a bad one. Usually young people try to avoid meetings with public agencies. As Liisa is not a civil servant, it makes it easier for young people to come to meet her. Once they meet, clients' expectations are very high: they require immediate services: a job or traineeship etc. Although they have to wait some time for "real action" (e.g. beginning of traineeship, group mentoring days), the feedback from the clients has been very positive. Some of them have had a feeling that "for the first time in my life, someone really cares about me!" This feedback is a "drug" for Liisa.

The Training Course

The training course is about Thomas Personal Profile Analysis (PPA). PPA has its original impetus from the writings of Marston (1928, 1931) who postulated a theory of human behavior as a function of two bipolar dimensions, one external and the other internal. These two dimensions provided a matrix from which the individual's typical pattern of interaction could be described through four characteristics: Dominance, Inducement, Submission and Compliance (DISC). Marston's theory assumed that most people are capable of showing all four of these patterns at different times⁶.

The analysis gives a good indication of who people are: what motivates them, what are their core strengths and limitations, and their potential.

The two day course that Liisa could participate in will teach the participants all elements of the PPA system. It explains the background and theory of the system and

the terminology used. It equips participants with practical skills such as how to read a PPA profile, how to give feedback to candidates, how you can modify your behaviour to manage your team, how and when to use the assessments, the reports available and how your organisation can benefit from using them. Each delegate receives a pre and post course tutorial for which a Thomas consultant will visit their office. The consultant will go into more detail on how to use PPA and answer any specific questions that they may have. The consultant will also work with them on a regular basis to help and support them to use PPA for all aspects of the employee lifecycle.

The fee of the course is 3 000 euro and at the end of the course, Liisa will get a certification. Liisa's employer will cover all the costs. As a result, Liisa's motivation to participate in the course is very high. Furthermore, she feels that it will be a highlight of her career so far!

The Situation

Liisa is overloaded by work because the economic recession has considerably increased unemployment in Finland and thus, the number of Liisa's clients has also increased. As Liisa's calendar is fully booked for the days that course will take place, she faces the fact that the next available times for rescheduled clients will be in April 9th. From the client's point of view, this is unacceptable: one month in young people's lives is a long time.

Liisa is well aware of all the pressure that participation in the course will bring about. It would be easy to just let it go and continue normal working. However, she is also aware that this is the last chance for her to participate in the PPA course paid by employer. The next course will be too late for her - her working contract will have ended before the next available course.

It is not all about money – she really needs a new motivator for her work, because she has not been able to update her skills and knowledge for a long time. Also, if she has a certificate in PPA, the possibility of having her contract renewed or finding a new job increases considerably.

⁶ www.thomasinternational.net

THE GUIDE

PROJECT

GUIDE was realized by MetropolisNet and its network. This network is made up of organisations working in metropolitan areas to promote social inclusion, employment and urban development.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission and the Senate Department for Labour, Integration and Women's Issues in Berlin. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.