

CASE STUDY

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A Visit to the

Learning Shop –

Providing Access to

Lifelong Guidance

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Abstract

This case study is designed as training material for guidance practitioners. It describes a situation from the daily life of guidance practitioners and shows how a guidance practitioner from the Learning Shop in Neukölln is dealing with the information handling skills of their client. It poses questions for discussion that every guidance practitioner can think about and answer for himself or herself. Furthermore some more background information about the guidance system in Berlin is given.

Keywords: professionalizing career guidance practitioners, competence, lifelong guidance, information handling skills, Learning Shop Neukölln, case study, training and teaching material

The Story

Thomas, a forty-year-old unemployed accountant, enters the Learning Shop in Berlin-Neukölln. It is Monday, 11 a.m. and the Learning Shop is full of people who are getting counseled. The Learning Shop Neukölln is in a 50 square meter room with big windows. There are four tables where career guidance can take place and two computers for researching work. Thomas is asked to be seated and wait for a moment while all the guidance practitioners are talking to clients. After fifteen minutes, Thomas can speak to Martina, a young guidance practitioner.

Thomas tells Martina that he had already received some educational guidance support in his hometown a few months ago. He has now moved to Berlin. He tells Martina,

that he had asked for vocational training in the field of SAP¹. The guidance practitioner had printed out some courses for him. Thomas did not feel that he was sufficiently well informed and therefore he decided to go to the Learning Shop.

Martina starts the guidance counselling session by telling Thomas that she is happy that he has come into the Learning Shop. She then asks him why he wants to do the vocational training in SAP. Thomas explains his background. They find out together that SAP is really the training Thomas might find most useful to get back into the labour market.

¹ SAP AG is a German software corporation that produces enterprise software to manage business operations and customer relations. The company's best-known software products are its enterprise resource planning application and its enterprise data warehouse product. SAP is one of the largest software companies in the world.

Thomas now wants to know which training provider offers the course he needs. Martina opens different databases² and looks for SAP courses. While doing this she explains every step to Thomas. He is quite astonished. The last time he asked about courses he just got printouts and some information about the vocational training providers. Martina explains that she finds it quite important to explain to clients what she is doing as this might help clients to look for further training courses themselves. In this session Thomas “learns” that he can use the databases mentioned above in different ways: Either he enters a word that might bring him a wide range of results and trainings courses or he specifies the query. The first approach might make it harder to find the right training course. On the other hand one might find a training course that might also be interesting. The second approach brings up fewer results and the chances are higher that one will quickly find the course they are looking for (if a course is available).

After printing out the information about the training course, Martina takes a look in a folder that lays open in the Learning Shop. Providers of vocational training send their advertisements and course information to the Learning Shop and so the most up-to-date information. Martina and Thomas find another course that might be interesting for Thomas. Martina now goes through the flyers that she has given Thomas and explains some of the information provided in her own words. She asks Thomas about his opinion regarding some specific aspects of the course to see if he has picked out the important points. She then summarizes what she and Thomas have found out so far and asks Thomas if he is of the same opinion about the results.

Thomas has now got information about four different courses that meet his expectations concerning the content and dates of the course. He now gives Martina a questioning look and asks her to tell him which training provider to choose, because she knows all the training providers in the region and can therefore tell him which ones are the best.

Martina explains to Thomas that this is not the counselling approach of the Learning Shop. They want that their clients to decide for themselves. She asks Thomas what is important for him when choosing a training provider and what he would need to have a good learning atmosphere. Thomas thinks for a while and then answers, that he really would like to learn SAP running on the latest version and would like to have a course where the other people are on a similar knowledge level. Martina then asks him how he thinks he could find out about these two things. Thomas decides that he will look on the homepage of the training provider and also go to the training provider beforehand and ask if he might see the classrooms and speak to people attending the course. Even though he knows that the people on the course will have different expectations, he is interested to find out what they think about the course. Martina also gives Thomas a brochure that gives hints on how to decide which training provider to choose. This brochure contains questions that clients can ask themselves concerning the goals of the vocational training, how to get an overview of different courses and how to assess the quality of courses and training providers. Martina points out to Thomas that quality does not just mean that the training provider has got a certified quality management system but that the quality of a course is also something every client has to define for himself or herself.

After saying goodbye to Martina Thomas stays in the Learning Shop for a while and uses the computers provided. He just wants to check which other courses he can find using the database. Martina starts the next guidance counselling session but there is a service employee that can help clients when they have questions regarding the use of the database.

² Mainly two databases are used: Firstly the database by the public employment service in Germany called KURSNET is used (<http://kursnet-finden.arbeitsagentur.de/kurs/>). KURSNET is Germany's largest database on vocational education and training. For example, people who subsequently want to acquire a college degree can find information on KURSNET. They can look for an educational training course to customize their professional skills and/or expand or reorient themselves professionally. People can also search for the vocational integration or rehabilitation on KURSNET. KURSNET also contains information on 1.2 million training courses run by 18,000 VET providers. It is possible to search for vocational and educational training courses using keywords. KURSNET is neutral, independent and free of charge. The second database used in the Learning Shop is the "Weiterbildungsdatenbank Berlin" (<http://wdb-berlin.de>), training database. This training database provides comprehensive and unbiased information on professional training in Berlin. People can search for advice on various topics and can research training in VET using keywords. It creates transparency and provides an overview of training opportunities in the capital. Use of the training database is free of charge.

After the Counselling

When Thomas comes home that evening, he tells his wife that he has found out where and when he could do a course to learn how to use SAP. He tells her that he will go and visit the training providers and then go to the Job-Center to ask for funding. He thinks that the possibility of getting the course funded is higher if the case manager sees that his decision to do the training course is based on relevant information. Thomas tells his wife that he liked the guidance counselling in the Learning Shop a lot, as he had learned something new.

When Martina meets a colleague after work she tells her how happy she is with her work. Martina started to work in the Learning Shop just a few months ago. She really likes the shop concept – clients can just drop into the Learning Shop – but she also tells her friend that this is quite challenging work as you have to have the most up-to-date information at hand to provide to clients. Martina also explains that for her the most important thing is to ask her client questions, as she feels this is better than just telling him or her everything. She likes for them to work together to come up with ideas and plans.

During their conversation, her friend asks her where she gets all the information she needs for her work. After thinking for a while, Martina says that apart from the databases that are very useful, the most important source of information is her colleagues, not only from the Learning Shop but also from other guidance institutions. The structure existing in Berlin helps guidance practitioners to communicate with each other. There is a platform with all the contacts of publicly funded guidance providers in Berlin, that can be used by clients and there is an internal webpage where guidance practitioners can submit important definitions and news regarding vocational guidance. Furthermore, there are regular meetings of all guidance practitioners once or twice a year.

This has allowed them to get to know one another and over the last few years this has resulted in improved cooperation among guidance practitioners.

One important source is also the providers of vocational education who send their flyers to the Learning Shop. When looking through older flyers she and her colleagues call the providers on a regular basis to find out if there are some new courses. As a result of this close contact Martina is quite up-to-date regarding courses that are available.

Her friend also asks her, how she knows that her client really understands the information and how she makes sure that the clients “use the information in a right way”. Martina laughs at this question, as she cannot really be sure that her clients always fully understand all the information she provides them with. She tells her friend that in this situation she questions clients. She simply asks the client if they require any further information, and if they have understood everything. Furthermore she summarizes the information in her words and asks the clients if this is what they have been talking about. She says with a laugh, that she really would like to have a tool to measure how much of the information the client has really “understood” but no such tool has been developed yet. But she thinks this is partly down to experience, and it is probably easier for a more experienced guidance practitioner to tell how much of the information the client has grasped or understood than for a less experienced guidance practitioner. Her friend suggests to Martina that she might try and develop such a tool.

After talking to her friend for another while about books, Martina leaves the café and goes home. She passes the Learning Shop which is still open and waves goodbye to her colleagues who work the late shift.

Questions and Discussion Points

- › How do you enable access to information for your clients?
- › Discuss how to get the information in the first place.
- › Do the structures in your region support you in getting important information?
- › Do you have defined methods in your institution to assess how your clients deal with the information provided or do you do it intuitively? How?
- › How do you make sure in your guidance counselling session that your clients interpret the information they get?

The Background

More information on the Learning Shop concept as well as the structure in Berlin can be found below.

The Learning Shop

The aim of the Learning Shops³ is to boost interest in education by providing expert advice and showing customers ways in which they can organise and arrange further education and training. The Learning Shop is designed as a shop and offers a broad range of personal and virtual advice on all aspects of training and further education.

The working principle of the Learning Shops is to provide counselling that is:

- › independent of funding bodies
- › anonymous
- › free of charge
- › open to target groups
- › available during normal business hours

They provide advice in person, over the telephone and on-line (e-mail and chat).

People who use services offered by the Learning Shop include:

- › jobseekers
- › the employed
- › migrants
- › trainees
- › school pupils and students
- › pensioners
- › employees in small and medium enterprises

The employees at the Learning Shop act as independent agents between those seeking education and providers of education. The services can be adapted to suit the customers' needs. They range from offering quick information on available courses, to an intensive, comprehensive consultation involving a competency analysis and/or career planning.

The focus of the counsellors is always the identification of the appropriate educational path for the individual customer. Customers can also make use of the Learning Shop facilities to research educational opportunities and questions online, either independently or with support. Additionally, free individual job-application workshops are offered.

Alongside these personal consultations the Learning Shops also offer short counselling sessions on the phone or via email as well as advice on given topics through online chat. At the Learning Shops themselves there are computers available to visitors to support them in their personal research and written job applications. A wide range of courses in, for example, job seeking, application training and vocational targets accompany the core business of counselling.

The Learning Shop in Neukölln is financed by the Senate Department for Labour, Integration and Women's Affairs, the European Social Fund and the JobCenter Neukölln. The Learning Shops have been developed within the framework of the "Learning Regions – Providing Support for Networks" programme of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. gsub-Projektgesellschaft mbH acts as a funding organisation for the Learning Shop in Neukölln.

³ There are three Learning Shops in Berlin: The Learning Shop Neukölln, the Learning Shop Am Ostkreuz and the Learning Shop Pankow.

The Berlin Vocational Guidance Webpage

(www.bildungsberatung-berlin.de)

Due to the increasing demand for good counselling, an optimisation of the existing offer and networks of the heterogeneous counselling landscape in Berlin was needed. In cooperation with the Senate Administration Labour, Integration and Women's Affairs, the *kes-grouping*⁴ established an information and counselling platform as well as an integrated working platform (extranet) for guidance practitioners in 2005.

The homepage collects and draws together information about the complex and changing counselling landscape in Berlin with the goal to increase the accessible information for clients. At the same time the platform offers a very useful tool for educational counsellors to stay updated. Contents of the homepage include an overview of educational counselling centres, documentation centre, online counselling tools and information for different target groups such as apprentices, students, job seekers, etc.

Berlin's education counselling landscape has an established online-based system for documenting counselling. This is run from an independent location – the coordination and evaluation centre for publicly financed further education counselling centres in Berlin (KES). All counselling at the Learning Shops is documented according to numerous criteria – without the inclusion of personal details such as name or address. Through the use of an ID number it is possible to draw on data for follow-up consultations and update them.

The system therefore serves two purposes: it acts as support during the counselling process, serving as a reference file, and it is an optimal documentation system for detailed and comprehensive analysis of the consultation data. The data sets allow for the long-term observation of counselling relations with the population of Berlin. By highlighting characteristics such as ethnic background, gender, age and marital status, specific problems can be solved. In this way the Learning Shops have an evaluation instrument that provides the optimal guide to the courses available. Thorough analysis of the counselling data provides information regarding the success of the counselling guidance counselling provided by the Learning Shops.

For further information please visit:

http://www.lnbb.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/LernNetz/Dokumente/Booklet_LNBB_2010_englisch_web.pdf
and
www.bildungsberatung-berlin.de

⁴ The origin and the name of grouping is based on the title of the pilot-project "(K) Co-ordination and (E) evaluation (S) centre of the publicly funded (further) education counselling of the Land Berlin" which started in 2005. Since 2007 kes develops and operationalises strategic projects. The work of kes focuses on three major topics: coordination – evaluation – structuring.

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.