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To cite this Article / Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

Jinia, N. & Sairanen, L. (2023) Sharing stories motivated to face the challenges of job market integration. TAMKjournal, 9.11.2023.

URL: <https://sites.tuni.fi/tamk-pub/tamkjournal/sharing-stories-motivated-to-face-the-challenges-of-job-market-integration-nasrin-jahan-jinia-and-laura-sairanen/>

Sharing stories motivated to face the challenges of job market integration | Nasrin Jahan Jinia and Laura Sairanen

9.11.2023



TAMKjournal | When you graduate from a university, you might feel like left alone for a while. It can also feel like you are the only person in the world struggling and it helps to hear experiences from other people in the situation and get support. Job Club provides the opportunity to build a network with other members of the club and professionals. Peer support emerges through networking among the members which is one of the great successes of the Job Clubs.

Introduction

Quickly to Work project gives support at the stage of the transitional period of moving from being a student to a being a job seeker (Oleander-Turja 2022). The Job Club is a meeting group that helps to outline the next steps towards a job. Participants get to accumulate contacts and grow networks. Participants also meet others in the same situation during the meetings. The aim of the Job Clubs is to support university graduates in the transitional period to working life and give tools and information about job seeking and working life skills.

This article aims to describe the experiences of the Job Club events organized in cooperation with TAMK, Tampere University and the City of Tampere employment services as a part of the Quickly to Work project for international experts. Data and information have been collected from the Job Club events and discussions with the participants through open-ended

questionnaires. In addition, data has also been collected from the feedback of the participants and the project website.

Job Club supporting immigrants' access to the labor market

The Job Club concept is a valuable resource for job seekers, offering a supportive community and a range of resources to help them in their job search efforts (Hui & Wan 2011). It plays a significant role in assisting job seekers to navigate the challenges of the job market. The Job Club helps to find a job as quickly and effectively as possible using the best methods. It also provides a sense of community and emotional support during unemployment or difficult times.

Job Clubs may offer a range of activities and services, including networking events, job search workshops, resume reviews, mock interviews, and access to job listings. Job Club members may meet in person or online and may participate in a variety of activities designed to help them improve their job search skills and connect with potential employers (Barron, Black & Loewenstein 1989).

The Job Club concept can offer solutions for those who need the support, specially for international talents.

Job Club members benefit from group learning, increased accountability, networking opportunities, emotional support, helping other members, and enhanced understanding of the context of their experiences (Kondo 2009). It is a group that supports and helps members to find employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. The Club provides members with the opportunity to build a professional network with other members of the club and professionals. Thus, peer support emerges through networking among the members which is one of the great successes of the job clubs.

Peer support involved people with lived experience of a particular challenge, such as mental illness or addiction, providing support and guidance to others who are going through a similar experience. It can be beneficial in many ways such as reducing feelings of isolation, providing a sense of belonging, and promoting self-esteem, self-determination and self-empowerment (SAMHSA 2021). In relation to Job Clubs, peer support is a powerful approach to creating a friendly, cooperative and supportive environment for job seekers and it can help members to stay motivated, focused, and optimistic in their job search efforts.

Constructing and piloting the Job Club events for university graduates of Pirkanmaa region

In spring 2023, the Quickly to Work project organized several Job Club events for an international group that are fresh graduates and those in the process of graduating from Tampere University and TAMK and job seekers in the Pirkanmaa region. There were altogether four workshops. Initially, 39 participants were registered for this event, but finally, 9 participants joined and completed the workshop. The language of instruction was English. Job Clubs consisted of thematic lectures, elevator pitch practices, mock interviews,

networking development, visiting places, sharing ideas, and expert visits with the lead of the facilitators.

We used the registration form to get information about the participants' wishes and expectations regarding the content of the Job Club. Our goal was to create events that participants can actively influence. Taking customer orientation into account was an important part of the process, as we wanted to create an entity that would benefit the participants' needs as well as meet their wishes.

When we first met the group, we introduced the concept and again asked for their wishes for future events. Then we built the content according to the group's wishes and needs so that they were given the knowledge and tools for the next steps in their job-seeking journey.

The entity included several visitors from the local TE-office services and International House Tampere (including the visitor from International Tampere Skills Centre OSKE), who informed the participants about practices of how to seek a job in Finland and which kind of services there are available to highly educated job seekers in Pirkanmaa region.

The participants also wished for more information about volunteering, so we arranged for a visitor from the Finnish Red Cross to tell them about how to get involved. Visitors from Companies were wanted, so we arranged for a visitor from Triuvare company to tell the participants about the recruitment process and preparations for the job interviews as well.

In addition, we arranged a group visit to the Mukana intercultural meeting venue so the participants would get knowledge of the meeting venues in the Pirkanmaa region where they can join and meet other internationals and local people. This meeting venue is an intercultural place in Tampere city center which is open for everyone. The aim of Mukana is to strengthen social networks and support integration into Finnish society. They also offer workshops and different group activities like Finnish discussion groups, all free of charge. (Mukana 2023.) The members of a Job Club assist and cooperate with each other by joining small group events, sharing ideas and participating in the discussion.

Reflections from the events

As the experts of the Quickly to Work project, we organized the Job Club events and worked as a facilitator with the group. The events created an atmosphere that helped the target group to develop their networking, get information from the experts of different sectors such as the labor office, international own coaches, and visit meeting places that helped them to get information about the labor market in Finland.

We found that the participants were very spontaneous and enthusiastic. They were very keen to learn the practical issues of job markets. Their activities were very encouraging during the events. We found that the events were meaningful, especially for fresh graduates and job seekers.

One of our goals was to create an open atmosphere that helps to share experiences with others in the same situation. Many participants have a feeling of being completely alone. In that situation, peer support helped to create hope and make them feel that they are not alone. As facilitators, we inspired the group by sharing our own experiences and invited the visitors to

talk about their own stories and inspire them – this helped to normalize the struggles. We received feedback that this was particularly motivating from the participant’s point of view. All participants were highly motivated and recognized the importance of active participation in discussions and exercises.

Reflections from the participants

The events were a very effective platform for enriching participants’ knowledge of working-life issues. The participants achieved the targets of the events very well with the support of the facilitators. Feedback was collected after every meeting via a Forms survey and in the last meeting every participant wrote feedback on paper that we collected. We also send a follow-up form to all participants in August to ask about the impacts of participating and got answers from seven participants. One of them had received a job already. Some feedbacks from the participants are presented below:

“I like we have time to discuss questions in small groups, it was really good to meet new people and discuss our common problems related to job seeking.”

“Interview practice – It was a great idea, and I was able to understand my weakest points through this exercise.”

“The openness to share a lot of information was very educative about building your network, integration opportunities and personal development.”

“The two-way communication between the facilitators and participants helped to build confidence towards job seeking.”

“I was encouraged not to give up on applications towards searching for jobs.”

Overall, we received excellent feedback from the Job Clubs. The most desired development proposal was that there would be more time for meetings and more companies. All the participants wanted to continue with the events and were interested to know if the Job clubs will continue in the future.

By joining the events of Job Club, university graduates feel that they are not alone and receive support immediately after their graduation and their transitional period of life.

The necessity for this kind of event series is real. The Job Club concept can offer solutions for those who need this support. By joining the events of Job Club, university graduates feel that they are not alone and receive support immediately after their graduation and their transitional period of life. It would be a great solution to reduce the unemployment situation if TAMK, Tampere university and City of Tampere could organize Job Club events permanently.

More information about Quickly to work – A co-operation model for supporting the unemployed people with higher education at Pirkanmaa project:

<https://www.tuni.fi/en/research/quickly-work-co-operation-model-supporting-unemployed-people-higher-education-pirkanmaa>

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