

JOBLINGE

10 Years
Theses

*An invitation
to dialogue*



JOBLINGE

Jahre. Widerstände. Mutig. Weiterdenken.

10 Years - 10 Theses

Dear readers,

Ten years of JOBLINGE are a reason to be proud and grateful. We are proud of the over 8,000 Joblings who have successfully completed their paths, and grateful for the overwhelming commitment of our partners from the private and public sectors and society who made it all possible. And we tip our hats to over 200 JOBLINGE employees without whom these achievements would have been unthinkable.

Together with you, we would like to use our ten-year anniversary to spur new momentum for integration, so even more young people can benefit from it in the future. We have learned that it takes courage to spur momentum: With a pedagogical approach that strengthens self-responsibility rather than dependency; recruiting based on decisions made in person, not on paper; and support rooted not in standards but in impact. Under the motto “Widerstände. Mutig. Weiterdenken“ (Courageously thinking against resistance) we have summarized our experience, insights, and convictions for you here. You may agree with some of what you read here, while other content may provoke you to challenge it ... and this is exactly the point. We would like to invite you to rethink the topic of integration in dialogue with us. We look forward to this dialogue – and to our continued shared commitment to addressing one of society’s greatest challenges and opportunities: Integration.

Warmly,
Ulrike Garanin and Kadim Tas, Directors, JOBLINGE umbrella organization

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Thesis 01

Position and program

Venture, not lecture

How do you reach young people considered to be tired of school and socially disadvantaged? And how do you awaken in them the skills relevant for employment? Not by sending them back to school, but by learning by doing. At places of learning that prepare them for everyday training. With practical tasks and emotional experiences that draw them out of their shells and broaden their outlook.

Thesis 01

Our participants often don't have the social skills they need to deal with training on a daily basis. They need to learn not only these skills, but also how to apply them. That's why we make sure they get practical experience that's new and challenging for them. The focus is on the emotional components of learning, for which we use innovative formats: Project based learning and with new media like our own math app. This helps our participants to overcome blockades and awakens their interest and motivation.

"Why do we still think the same methods used at school can help young people succeed for whom school is synonymous with personal failure?"

Our aim is to prepare them for professions and what they require. So we go through real-life situations with them from day one. We see ourselves as an entrepreneurial initiative and want to show these young people what a professional environment looks like – within the protected space of JOBLINGE. We address them as adults, not children, and there is a dress code, including for them. We send them to companies early, which is the best place to learn and get motivated. For a successful learning experience, not just "what," but "how," is key.

Thesis 02

Position and program

Challenges, not caretaking

Why does work with disadvantaged youths always have to be reduced to the lowest common denominator? If we expect them to overcome the ultimate hurdle – successfully starting an apprenticeship – we have to teach them to take hurdles. We have to take them seriously and insist that they do, too. Let them grow into meeting real-life demands. Help doesn't mean taking responsibility for them, but enabling them to take it for themselves.

Thesis 02

Easy assignments don't help young people learn to handle the job market on their own. They are not realistic preparation for daily work. To help them take the seemingly insurmountable hurdle of "getting an education," we challenge our participants to tackle ever higher hurdles from the very first day – and we believe they can do it. The overarching goal is to prepare for the demands of regular work, a little more every day.

"What will you pay me for doing JOBLINGE?"

Many of our participants haven't learned the principle of quid pro quo in their environments. They're more familiar with the role of passive recipients of aid treated as though they're no good for anything, which is, of course, ultimately a violation of their dignity. We take the opposite tack: We want our participants to become self-reliant, active members of society. They need to learn to overcome their fears, work to succeed, take feedback and criticism – in brief, to take responsibility for themselves.

Thesis 03

Position and program

Ballet, not boxing

Why is the focus usually on meeting youths where they are—with foosball, boxing, and a youth club atmosphere — instead of preparing them for where they need to go? How can we approach work integration from the intended goal instead of from the starting point? Our cultural program draws participants out of their comfort zones, enabling them to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Thesis 03

We're not a youth club. Our participants don't spend time hanging around a foosball table, and our instructors don't wear tennis shoes. Our kids have to work getting integrated into the job market in a setting that is not only foreign to them but a little scary for them. That takes a lot out of them. Here, our kids take part in a modern dance performance on one of the city's stages, write their own play, or give talks on art in a museum.

“Modern dance – and then in front of an audience, too – that was really tough. But I gave it my best and am proud of myself for doing it. I got applause for the first time in my life.”

This helps them not only do to solidify various social skills relevant for a job, they also get to know an environment that would otherwise never have been open to them. They visit locations of “high culture” like museums, opera houses, and theaters, and see more of them than some regular subscribers. The confidence they acquire from broadening their horizons like this is also starting capital for their entry into the job market.

Thesis 04

Cross-sector involvement

Cooperation, not charity

How can cross-sector support be effectively and sustainably organized? With non-profit initiatives that understand themselves not as recipients of aid, but as partners and providers of win-win solutions. This requires an understanding of the needs of all involved and the development of solutions using their combined competencies – together.

Thesis 04

Integration can succeed only when the public and social sectors, business, and civil society work together. But when this happens, worlds collide, with highly divergent constraints and maxims for action: Partners from social fields focus on “help” and guidance; the public sector both wants and needs to ensure that funds are used according to the rules; and employers want their hiring criteria to be fulfilled. Though all of them stand firm behind the goal of getting young people trained, the expectations of the collaborative effort are often so disparate that it doesn't work.

“The transition from school to work sometimes seems like an exercise in passing the buck: Schools demand more help from parents, businesses demand that schools turn out young people with better qualifications, the government demands more investment in education from businesses, and parents demand more support from the government. And no one wins.”

For tri-sector cooperation, especially, clearly defined roles, carefully managed interfaces, and proactive communication are decisive. Our goal is to ensure that the different worlds neither battle one another nor pass the responsibility to the others, but work together successfully as partners. This requires an understanding of the different needs – and the courage to forge new paths together.

Thesis 05

Cross-sector involvement

Target-oriented, not boundless

How can we mobilize more volunteer engagement and be attractive for people whose professional support could be a major success factor but whose available time is limited? With a clearly defined structure, beginning and end, role understanding and objective, backed up with professional preparation and support, volunteering is more results-oriented and satisfying for everyone.

Thesis 05

This is how we do volunteering: In the context of job integration, qualified volunteers become role models with a clear assignment, role, and boundaries and a defined timeline from the beginning to the end of their involvement. This kind of volunteer work is not only more goal-oriented for the benefit of the program, it is also more satisfying for volunteer mentors.

*“Oh, aren't you some kind of mentoring program?
That won't work anyway. You'll give up after awhile.”*

Our professional preparation and support for volunteers have proven to be long-term success factors. A clear structure must also include honesty and expectation management from us: Yes, your mentee will turn up late and probably even stand you up. If he didn't, he probably wouldn't be a Jobling. And this is exactly why mentors' contributions are so important. They are often the first ones to concern themselves with these kids without a “government mandate.” And almost every time, this turns out to be an experience described as rewarding not only by the young people, but by their mentors too.

Thesis 06

Cross-sector involvement

Proving, not applying

How can we prepare our target group for the job market? And how can we recognize and develop their talents? Not by filtering them through a process they are bound to fail, but by getting to know them personally and allowing them to prove themselves in practice before they have to do so on paper. When we dare to turn the process around, 70 percent succeed. When we don't, 100 percent fail to make the cut.

Thesis 06

Our target group doesn't meet the formal criteria of employers. Their situation cements their extremely poor entry chances, but doesn't allow any judgment to be made about their potential. That's why we "turn recruiting upside down." We don't select young people based on their grades. Instead, we allow them to prove themselves. In formats like our STEM worlds, young people get to know professions that often correspond exactly to their abilities. And instructors quickly recognize whether someone is interested and has a knack for something.

*"Before this workshop, I was sure I was wasting my time.
Now I'm optimistic that I've just met two prospective apprentices."*

In a concrete occupational environment, recruiting criteria can be much more specifically applied for a selected profession, even without formal qualifications. At our partner companies, our young people have the chance to introduce themselves personally, leave an informal impression, show commitment, convince others, and thus earn their apprenticeships. Especially for the integration of young refugees, partners need to embark on new paths and break away from traditional application processes.

Thesis 07

Management and financing

Innovation, not administration

How can dynamic developments like digitalization be translated into innovative solutions for disadvantaged youths? Where do new ideas and partnerships come from? Only from working closely with the young people, employers, and partners involved. Locally and hands-on. Not one of our innovations was the objective or result of a public call for bids with a predefined concept.

Thesis 07

The further a group is from the job market, the more decisive a customized approach is. Rigid calls for bids with predefined content won't get us anywhere. Instead, successful integration in the highly dynamic job market calls for tailor-made solutions: Offers that don't just fulfill the minimum requirements, but are made to do the most for young people. This requires innovative partnerships, along with the willingness to question the program again and again and to develop it in an impact-oriented way.

“Why do you first come up with a concept and then try to get public financing – and not the other way around, like everybody else?”

In order to successfully address issues like digitalization, the job market 4.0, and demographic change, we need agile and demand-oriented solutions that go beyond the straitjacket of conventional funding logic. We need to be a motor for innovation, to think and shape trends and their consequences for the target group at high speed, rather than responding after the fact. And to do it in intensive dialogue with young people and companies.

Thesis 08

Management and financing

Impact-, not input financing

Why do public sector management and financing still include incentives to keep the unemployed “in the system” longer rather than finding them a lasting occupation? The focus of quality management and cost indicators isn’t long-term integration, but providing training slots. Measuring impact rather than input would free up significantly more resources and innovation for society’s real goal – sustainable work integration.

Thesis 08

Social impact – measured by integration and retention rate – should be the basis for financing. Instead, content or formal requirements usually are. But these can make it even more difficult to achieve the social objective. The central factor for funding measures is still the monthly cost per participant, not the cost of that person’s long-term integration. This amounts to financial incentives in opposition to the social goal. The longer a person is kept in the system, the more funding continues to flow.

“What financial incentive is there for us to get our customers out of the system?”

Theoretically, not-for-profit organizations should be just as free as for-profit companies to achieve their social objectives in an entrepreneurial way. If they were, young people would no longer repeatedly go round a carousel of measures that are likely to end in long-term unemployment; they would be placed rather than babysat; and socially weaker candidates wouldn’t be turned down in favor of stronger ones. There would be more transparency, incentives for innovation and cooperation, providers selected by quality, and competition in line with social objectives. And not, as is has been up to now, pure cost competition.

Thesis 09

Management and financing

Transparency, not transcendence

Why is the transitional system so opaque – despite the measurability of placements for young people and how long they last? And why is it still acceptable to use sayings like “people first, numbers second” to push the question of impact into the background? A common standard for measuring the effectiveness of programs is both necessary and possible. And it is the prerequisite for learning from one another based on facts.

Thesis 09

It's easy to measure whether work integration is successful. But there's hardly a sector as opaque as vocational preparation and integration. This market, worth billions, lacks the basis for fact-based sharing of best practices and impact-oriented financing. What's needed is a common standard – a consistent data basis with generally valid placement and sustainability rates.

“For me, the rates have very limited meaning – every educational institution also has its own rate definition of rates.”

Especially when the goal is to enable people to exercise the fundamental right to work and shape their own lives independently, it should be in the common interest to make the measurable success factors for achieving this goal transparent. That is, to say whether, how, when, with what approach, and under which conditions the goal of work integration can be achieved for which target group. Instead, it's sometimes claimed that looking at numbers is dehumanizing.

Thesis 10

Management and financing

Vision: social business, not educational provider

Is the concept of social business, where recipients of aid become contributors, really superfluous in a state with a social safety net? Particularly where the state has yet to find satisfactory solutions, the concept of social business may have them. Such as in innovative entrepreneurial approaches to the achievement of social goals, including and especially that of work integration. At the same time, social business could also provide an urgently needed sustainable financing model for non-profit initiatives, where the state still has the ultimate responsibility – which it could then better fulfill.

Thesis 10

In Germany, the Nobel-Prize-winning idea that recipients of aid should pay back part of their support as soon as the assistance has been successful has been met with resistance or declared unnecessary. But in the context of work integration, in particular, it would be important to awaken a responsible attitude among those affected and to establish the principle of give and take.

“Interesting concept, but in a country with a good social safety net, we don’t need it.”

Social business pursues social objectives with an entrepreneurial approach and without consideration of profit. This requires goal orientation, measurability, transparency, innovative strength, the willingness to take risks, and synergetic cooperation. In the vocational preparation and education sector, these values don’t correspond to reality. It would hardly be possible to convey to participants the idea of cost sharing – even if only symbolic – as long as the system offers them financial incentives to remain in their programs. We need to rethink the entire system.

We look forward to a lively exchange with you at diskurs@joblinge.de and are personally available at more than 30 locations in nine regions across Germany.



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