

Mingletation

by team DataNomads

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1. Defining the problem

Employers in Kupittaa have voiced their concerns about the quality of applications received from students, citing a lack of effort in many instances. It appears that, in Kupittaa, the supply of job seekers may be surpassing the current demand, although additional sources are needed to verify this trend.

Furthermore, in today's job market, building a professional network is important for successful applications and career development. Unfortunately, many students lack access to suitable opportunities for network building. In 2022, a striking 46% of job seekers discovered job openings through friends, highlighting the importance of referrals in the job search process. An even more impressive 54% of hires originated from referrals according to a research by Maria Webb (Techopedia, 2022).

Also Students from Turku told us that you need to know somebody to get a job. This underscores the challenges faced by both job seekers and employers in identifying the right talent. In Kupittaa this is especially a problem, since people from the higher

education institutions of Turku are not in touch with the region around Kupittaa. Additionally we want to encourage the Fins, who are rather less outgoing according to locals we have talked to, to get in touch with the employers of Kupittaa science park.

In this landscape our mission is clear: to create a project in Kupittaa Science Park that not only addresses these issues but also increases the probability that labor market participation of students and young graduates is enhanced, improves the well being of citizens, foster innovation and boosts tax income for the city of Turku.

2. Concept to tackle the problem

Concept of the Mingletation format: Mingling and Presentation.

So what shall happen in the group meetings of the students with one or more representatives of a company or a startup? There are six pillars of our Mingletation format.

Pillar 1: Challenges. Our principle idea is that the company attends the Mingletation event after having prepared a small task, problem or discussion topic related to their business field or current (challenging) market situation out there. This task is supposed to become discussed by the students within groups. In doing these challenges, students can see what the problems of the companies are about and if they find that interesting, i.e. want to deal with that in future. Because the students might have no knowledge about the topic, the company should give a short keynote not longer than 30 minutes to introduce the students to the topic.

Pillar 2: Open Space Technology. The companies and the students in the groups start interacting with each other in a natural way because they have a challenge to work on. Representatives from the company can see how the students work together, how they can deal with the problem, how they behave in discussions and how innovative and creative they are. These are some important soft skills which are important in today's labor market.

Open Space Technology is more informal and “relaxed” than an assessment center or a job interview, for example. So, it allows both sides to get to know each other and whether they feel comfortable with the vis-a-vis. The overall goal should be that the company and the students who "matched" get connected in order to make the next step into employment.

Pillar 3: Randomness. It is supposed to be an absolute coincidence in which group you are put into as a student attending the Mingletation event. This should prevent deciding for groups along "habitudes", such as, e.g.: "This company I know/like/find exciting, so I go there."

Pillar 4: Exclusive event. There will be a limited number of seats at Mingletation events. Regarding the possible number of attendants, you can set the limit depending on available seats in the venue. Optimally the company can send two or more representatives.

Pillar 5: Locality and different accentuations. Each location is accompanied by different surroundings of the practicalities on site. Regarding those accentuations, we thought of Mingletation aligning with the companies being present and the venue of the event. Here, two possible accentuations which match with the Kupittaa district of Turku city:

- DataCity -> Focus on virtual reality, i.e. the sensory organ of the eye (e.g. use VR glasses and discover the companies in the virtual world by chance while walking)
- BioCity -> Focus on food, i.e. the sensory organ of taste (e.g. blind tasting = the best tasting product is the random company match).

Pillar 6: After-Care. To facilitate sustainable network building by the students, they should receive the contact information of the company representatives after the event. For example, there could be an after-Mingletation email sent out by the City of Turku. Then, students that are really interested in the company where they had worked on the challenge could hold contact. Besides, they already have a good starting point for working there once they graduate.

⇒ This concept of Mingletation is the main point of differentiation comparing our format to a normal job fair event. This applies for not only Turku, but also other regions and city districts. If Mingletation works successfully, i.e. company and students make first contact with each other in a more intimate way, then there is an sustainable exchange between the participants that results in stronger connections.

⇒ The company can already get a good glance of the skills of the students. Other hand, the students gain a better insight into the real problems of the company in the current market situation. This is a more practical exchange in human resources, or at the starting point of a job career. It offers a big chance for both sides, the students and the employers. And it is actively including the City of Turku as an intermediate since they do the invitations for the Mingletation events.

3. Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology is a discussion approach that benefits from a healthy lack of any formal agenda. We stated in our concept for the Mingletation that our main innovation aspect is that we use Open Space technology to bring the students and the company in valuable exchange. We want to show why it is reasonable that Open Space Technology is indeed helpful to achieve this goal:

For example in the USA H.H. Owen and Company were able to make really good results with Open Space technology. They made the observation that at an international conference in the 80s they organized the whole event but in the end the coffee breaks were the most useful part of the conference because in this break the people could develop their ideas openly and combine their skills in a synergy. So H. Owen came up with the idea to try open space technology for a project where a highway should be extended. He brought 225 people together, people from the government as well as Native Americans, they created different groups and they were able to create an agenda in less than half an hour and produced 150 pages of concept in less than two days.

Of course our use of open space technology is totally different than these examples but in the end it shows that open space technology allows people to work together, get to know each other and be creative and innovative. That is what we want to

achieve in small groups. Due to the lack of a fixed agenda participants are able to change the group if the topic discussed in their group is not interesting to them. They could also have talks outside of the groups. We also don't use any documentation of the progress of the discussions because the main purpose of our event is the connection of the participants and helping students to build their own networks. Because of the ability to create their own agenda the people will participate more and even new topics can show up because of suggestions of the participants like Philip Howard mentioned in 2012. Another advantage is the flexibility to leave the event whenever you want or if you are very excited about the topic to stay longer and continue discussing. This enhances the attractiveness of the event to the students.

4. Marketing and feasibility

Marketing is completely outsourced to the student associations. The city of Turku only fills the role of inviting the companies and the students via the student associations. Companies and students in a common field should be happy to attend, not only to get in touch with people, but also because we asked a member of one of these student associations and he answered that he had high confidence that both he and many of his fellow members would be very interested in participating in such an event marketed by their student association.

The incentive for companies to attend this event would be that they could meet future talent. This incentive will be particularly strong in the case the company is interested in expanding or looking for new talent. The City of Turku could also compensate the company for their time spent in participating in the event and they could also provide food or other complimentary refreshments.

The Mingletation event is feasible because the City of Turku already possesses space(s) in Kupittaa and it is easy to arrange. Additionally it is very affordable and a timeless solution, because it can be repeated frequently and depending on demand and success rate.

Additional extras like CV checks, where people from the company or third party persons can have a look at the CVs of students and give advice on how to improve them, or professionally made headshot photos, for the CVs or LinkedIn of the students, are just some examples of additional ways to market the Mingletation events and decorate it to the liking of the invited parties.

5. Conclusion and prospects

Mingletation is supposed to be the networking event currently missing in Turku. It is a realistic approach to connect students in Turku with the employers of the Kupittaa region. It is simple and inexpensive to invite them and convince them of the value of a Mingletation event. We have learned through interviews with various students of the Turku universities that networking and connections is one of, if not the, most important things when it comes to seeking employment.

So a relevant question is how to make Mingletation applicable.

The first step must be to make a list of suitable companies here in Kupittaa and also a list of suitable student associations that are relevant in the field. An example could be if the companies are technology related you could invite student associations in that field (eg. Datateknologerna rf, Infå rf, Digit ry, Asterisk ry).

The second step is to pitch the event to the companies on the list. Mingletation should be beneficial to all the companies. According to the European Commission, the number of vacancies is increasing in southwest Finland, which come with demand for talent.

Networking is very important, especially in Finland a good recommendation or contact might outweigh a good application. Small group discussions enable a natural way of talking to each other.

6. Our process description

On the first day of the project our working process already started during the workshop since we all were full of ideas. We began with everyone in the group presenting his idea with plenty of comments from the teammates. After that was finished we started our discussion about what we could include in our final project for which we want to develop a concept. In this step of the process we took mentoring from Antti Nuutinen, a startup expert of the university of Turku and from Matias Halmeenmäki. This was really helpful because they gave us hints on how to think more concretely into the direction of the Kupittaa Science Park. At this point we finally found our topic that we want to develop a concept of an intimate meeting event between companies and students. With this idea we were walking around the offices in SparkUp to ask the entrepreneurs there if they like our concept and what they think would alleviate employment of students in the science park. With more concrete ideas we were then able to start to bring our ideas to paper. For that we divided the tasks into writing about, what exactly our problem is, the organizing of the events, the concrete concepts of the meeting and we wanted to do some research on Open Space Technology to have a scientific basis for our concept.

On the second day we went to the community breakfast of Boost Turku Entrepreneurship Society to receive fresh input and discussed our ideas with other students there. After that we returned to SparkUp and finalized our concept by merging the individual parts of the team members. At the same time we also created a presentation.

In all stages of our development we were discussing a lot because there were different views on almost every aspect of the concept among the team members.

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