

JOBLINGE Frankfurt: An Innovative Learning Space to Help Young People Succeed

A project supported by Steelcase Social Innovation and led by Change Corp Munich, an employee-led social impact group.

 Read 5 mins

At many not-for-profit organizations, well-designed and well-furnished environments are often deprioritized in favor of program investments. But at JOBLINGE in Frankfurt, Germany, leaders realized that upgrading their spaces could provide an important advantage for reaching their goals.

As a learning organization focused on helping better enable young people facing social disadvantages prepare for and succeed in the job market, JOBLINGE leaders believed their space felt “make-do,” second-rate and inferior. Instead of inspiring students, it made it too easy for them to feel disconnected and unimportant.

“We wanted our space to say, ‘We believe in you, and you should believe in yourselves’”

ZLATA BAYAR | project coordination

A collaboration between private, public and volunteer sectors, supporting trainees through vocational training and apprenticeships is the heartbeat of the JOBLINGE program. They wanted to stretch their impact by increasing the completion rate and helping participants develop the skills that could support them in their professional journeys.

However, they knew that their current space wasn’t fully supporting effective learning and mentoring experiences. Insufficient privacy, both visual and acoustic, meant frequent interruptions. Wayfinding was difficult with spaces spread out and separated. Hybrid activities were poorly supported. In addition to the space not feeling like a place of empowerment and belonging, another disadvantage was that it wasn’t helping them prepare for today’s more agile ways of working.

JOBLINGE leaders decided it was time to launch a new program in totally redone premises. The result is JOBLINGE basecamp, an innovative initiative in an innovative new environment.

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ENGAGING WITH STEELCASE

JOBLINGE engaged Steelcase to help them develop a space for their basecamp project that would engage and attract students and inspire them to succeed.

This project was supported by Steelcase Social Innovation and led by local Change Corp Munich leaders, Georgeta Macovei and Martin Hodulak. The Change Corp network consists of our employee-led social impact groups around the globe.

“It was a pretty big request, and not only space driven, which is why we collaborated with Martin Hodulak from Applied Research + Consulting (ARC),” recalls Georgeta Macovei, Steelcase Learning Consultant. “We wanted to uncover some of the existing patterns and cultures within the program to understand the current situation and the values that JOBLINGE wanted to evoke through the basecamp project in order to translate those in space. We understood early on that the culture and the objectives of the organization, and its members, are strategic for the design of a space.”

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To meet the goals of the project, the Steelcase team facilitated interviews, workshops and observations involving leaders, trainers, students and sponsoring partners. Based on all they learned, they then formulated five key objectives to guide the design:

Self Esteem

Increase self-esteem through building a community of positive relationships, empathy, mutual respect and encouragement as well as active listening and understanding of each other’s motivation. Provide for wellbeing on the emotional, cognitive and physical levels.

Professional Relevance

Learn and develop skills and capabilities for the current and future labor market, by being progressive and innovative with the big picture in mind.

Curiosity

Stay curious, embrace failure, and keep learning, to build purpose and make a positive difference in work and life.

Responsibility and Ownership

Promote commitment and being held accountable for one’s actions and decisions. Encourage being proactive and taking ownership. Provide clarity on goals, objectives, and the bigger picture.

Inclusion and Diversity

Foster equality and trust in a diverse community by visibility, transparency and encouragement to speak up. Gain and give back through taking on roles of learning and teaching as well.

TRANSFORMING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The first basecamp space was set up in Frankfurt in 2020 as a pilot concept to be tested, refined and potentially extended to JOBLINGE’s more than 30 locations throughout Germany.

Above all, it's a space designed to inspire learning and trigger curiosity. Designed around a zoning concept, it includes distinct areas for active learning, hands-on experimentation, meeting with mentors, and mingling with peers, staff and volunteers in a spacious café, as well as an adjacent event space and an outdoor gathering place. Access to all the spaces happens through a spacious and inviting central corridor, which includes touchdown workspaces, enclosed booths for calls and lockers to optimize utilization.

It's a fluid and flexible environment, fully equipped with Wi-Fi throughout. Mobile seating and whiteboards plus height-adjustable tables create progressive, user-centered learning spaces. "Many of our students have never learned to learn. And I think to have this change in mindset, you have to give them an emotional experience that broadens their outlook and occurs in a place where they like to go". "By working with Steelcase, they introduced us to their research and all they're doing in their own facilities and with other organizations. We learned so much.," says Christiane Schubert, JOBLINGE regional manager.

The new Basecamp space is also a place where JOBLINGE staff and volunteers are working and collaborating in new ways with designated spaces to focus as well as other spaces to meet.

"Steelcase helped us through the process," reports Bayar. "It was not just about furniture. They helped us in the process of taking ourselves on a journey toward a new way of working. As a result, we realized that lifelong learning isn't just for students. It's also for us. And it's a never-ending process — to always be open to asking how we can evolve more."

We at Steelcase believe that we can use our business as a force for good to make a lasting difference and shape a shared future for all. In order to truly move the needle on positive social impact, we believe that a strong commitment to cross-sector collaboration and a network-based approach centered in shared learning is key. By sharing insights from partnerships with organizations like JOBLINGE we aim to fulfill our promise of shaping a shared future for all.