



INTEGRATION AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

The Case of Info Bank

Degree Programme in Social Services
Bachelor of Social Services
Final Project
Autumn 2010

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Degree Programme in		Degree	
Social Services		Bachelor of Social Services	
Author/Authors			
Nanje, Jay			
Title			
Integration and Work-based Learning: The Case of Info Bank			
Type of Work	Date	Pages	
FINAL PROJECT	15.11. 2010	32 + 3 appendices	
<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>The purpose of this study was to explore the working methods of Info Bank User Panel members and their point of view. The working methods of the Panel members have social pedagogical elements such as work-based learning, empowerment, social participation and development at work place.</p> <p>This study is a qualitative research. Data were collected by conducting face to face interviews with the Panel members and by an online questionnaire sent to the Panel members. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one consisted of variables such as gender, age, educational level, ethnicity, religion and work experience. Part two focused on the research questions. A SWOT analysis of the working methods based on activity theory was used to explore the differences in the methods. Panel members' views on social inclusion in Finland was briefly discussed.</p> <p>The results showed that the working model can be applied by other organisations</p> <p>In conclusion, the working methods in Info Bank can be used by other organisations. In the future it may be useful to conduct a study on the job satisfaction of the Info Bank User Panel members.</p>			
Keywords			
inclusion, activity theory, working model, work-based learning, info bank			

Koulutusohjelma		Suuntautumisvaihtoehto	
Sosiaalialan koulutusohjelma		Sosionomi	
Tekijä/Tekijät			
Nanje, Jay			
Työn nimi			
Integraatio ja työhön perustuva oppiminen. Tutkimuksen kohteena Info pankki			
Työn laji		Aika	Sivumäärä
OPINNÄYTETYÖ		15.11.2010	32 + 3 liitteet
TIIVISTELMÄ			
<p>Tämän opinnäytteen tarkoituksena oli käsitellä Infopankin paneeli-jäsenten työtapoja ja mielipiteitä. Jäsenten työtavoissa oli sosiaalipedagogisia aineksia, kuten työperäistä oppimista, voimaantumista, sosiaalista osallistumista ja työpaikan kehittämistä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa käytettiin kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää. Tiedot kerättiin haastatteluiden ja kyselylomakkeiden kautta. Kyselylomake oli jaettu kahteen osioon. Ensimmäinen osa käsitteli variaabeleita kuten sukupuoli, ikä, koulutustaso, etnisyys, uskonto ja työkokemus. Toinen osio keskittyi tutkimuskysymyksiin. Vahvuus, heikkous, mahdollisuus, uhka-analyysi työmenetelmien perustuu toiminnan teoriaan käytettiin tutkia erilaisia menetelmiä. Paneelin jäsenten näkemyksiä sosiaalisen osallisuuden Suomessa oli lyhyesti käsitelty.</p> <p>Vastaukset osoittivat että Infopankin työtapaa voidaan soveltaa myös muihin organisaatioihin.</p> <p>Lyhyesti sanottuna Infopankin työtapoja voidaan käyttää myös muissa organisaatioissa (toisto). Tulevaisuudessa voisi olla hyvä tehdä tutkimus Infopankin paneeli-jäsenten työtyytyväisyydestä.</p>			
Avainsanat			
osallisuuden, toiminnan teoria, toimiva malli, työhön perustuva oppiminen, Infopankki			

Acknowledgement

I give my special thanks to Professor Jyrki Konkka for guiding and supporting me in finding the relevant materials to carry out this study.

My thanks also go to Terhi Salokannel-Stenberg and my study tutor Marja Kannelsuo for their support in diverse ways.

Sincerely,

Jay Nanje

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this final project an evaluative study on the working methods of Info Bank User Panel members has been conducted. The working methods of the Panel members have social pedagogical elements such as work-based learning, empowerment, social participation, and development at workplace. This study is a qualitative research. Data were collected by conducting face to face interviews with the Panel members and by an online questionnaire sent to the Panel members. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one consisted of variables such as gender, age, educational level, ethnicity, religion and work experience. Part two focused on the research questions. A SWOT analysis of the working methods based on Activity Theory and Formative Intervention (ATFI) was used to explore the differences in the methods. Panel members' views on social inclusion in Finland were briefly discussed. The assumption is that learning and work are simultaneously taking place.

With the growing increase in Information and Communication Techniques (ICT) and immigrants, new working techniques are required and so is development in workplaces as time goes on. How can one use learning to create innovation and open up more opportunities? Every workplace needs people with the ability to analyze the developmental needs of the organization and improve the quality and effectiveness of its operations both from the client / organization's view point and based on own judgment. With the increase in migration, cultural diversity is needed and people with different skills and different backgrounds have to be given recognition. Such is the case of the Panel members in Info Bank. In this study grounds for recommending the working method of the Panel members by other private and public institutions have been provided.

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Info Bank is a web service that began in 2003. The target groups for the service are immigrants already residing in Finland, immigrants planning to move to Finland and all the entities and institutions working with immigrants. Due to the rapid changes in society and working life, Info Bank is undergoing an overhaul in order to improve its

services. Fifteen out of the over a hundred applicants were recruited to make contributions in the development of the online service for the period of 2009 – 2013.

This topic is of importance to the student because it deals with work-based learning, social participation aimed at integration of immigrants into the host society, in this case Finland. The student also has a personal interest in the topic because of the unique working methods used by Info Bank User Panel which is inclusive, participatory and task oriented. It deals with immigrant participation in the working life.

A previous study was carried out in 2008 on Info Bank by Härkönen (2008). The goal of the study was to evaluate how the web services of the public sector support the immigrant's integration and employment in Finland as well as the public authorities working with immigrants. Härkönen basically used Info Bank to explain integration and employment and her assumption is that the provision of those services support integration. Her study is acknowledged because it deals more with integration through the provision of services in fifteen languages. Härkönen concluded that Info Bank alone cannot provide enough multilingual information in Finland.

Unlike the one in 2008, this study is an evaluation of the contribution made by all Panel User members working in Info Bank from social-pedagogical perspective (work-based learning). The study carried out in 2008 was an evaluation of more than one organization on integration policies. This study focuses on one organization hence it is a case study of how workers with various experiences contribute ideas and in so doing learn as they go along to achieve a common goal, based on Activity theory and Formative Intervention and social inclusion. All the workers recruited are multicultural with diverse professional experience. In such an environment the main elements of a social-pedagogical model for multi-professional collaboration are considered through multiculturalism (Hämäläinen 2003: 3, 1, 69-80).

According to Liu (2007) work-based learning, immigrants, empowerment, social participation, and social inclusion which are all elements of social-pedagogy, are used in this study. In spite of individual and personal differences, people from different cultural backgrounds can still work in one place hence work integration theories such as integration and acculturation are also prominently discussed.

Empowerment is the process by which individuals and groups gain power, access to resources and control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals. Empowerment resides in the person. (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Cauda, 1998: 91).

Integration according to Valtonen (1999) is defined broadly as participation in economic, political, and social life of the majority or mainstream society. Immigrant's integration implies the ability to participate fully in society. The access or openness of institutions to all members of society and flexible arrangements for admittance of the newest members are important criteria from the societal perspective (Valtonen 1999: 04). In many respects the high sense of exclusion among immigrants is perhaps their biggest problem. This is a threat to integration in both social and economic terms.

The function of the Info Bank online service is to provide information on Finnish society and public services and to support the customer work and professional expertise of those working with immigrants or in immigrant affairs. The objective for the funding period 2009-2013 is the development of Info Bank into a nationally recognised service, high in quality both technically and in terms of content, combined with a doubling of the number of visitors to the site. Over the autumn of 2009 the number of visitors per month was around 50,000.

Info Bank gathers all the information an immigrant will need for moving to Finland, available in one place in a form that can easily be assimilated. In this way Info Bank supports the integration of immigrants and prepares them for becoming active and participatory members of Finnish society. The objective of the reforms is to provide better service for those coming to Finland for different reasons, in a way that corresponds to their various information needs. Where possible, information is in the immigrants' mother tongue. At present the Info Bank service is provided in fifteen languages (Finnish, Swedish, English, Estonian, French, Russian, Somali, Serbo-Croatian, Turkish, Spanish, Albanian, Arabic, Persian, Chinese and Kurdish). As the immigrant situation is in constant flux the online service has been designed to accommodate additional languages should the need arise. Sound files or videos in many languages can also be introduced at a later date, extending the user base to include, for example, those lacking skills in reading or writing. This development, however, will demand additional resources.

The long-term objective is for Info Bank to involve all the major municipalities and regions in Finland with immigrant inhabitants, ensuring immigrant service users equal status regardless of where they live. Flexibility is built into the service in such a way as to enable new municipalities to link as members with the minimum of inconvenience.

The need for the changes in Info Bank

Info Bank was established in 2003. Since then the service has expanded from a single municipality and six languages to a service covering nine municipalities in fifteen languages. The constant population change has led to increase in demand for services. By the end of 2008 there had been no increase in resources whatsoever and development of the service had stalled. The following failings, among others, were observed in the online service: Information provided by the online service was too general in nature, neglecting the different information needs of the various immigrant target groups; page structure was confusing and hindered the search for information so much that recognition of the different service levels (national and local) was problematic; a clear demarcation between the service and other online services was insufficiently defined; the visual profile had aged and failed to communicate the service's identity; there was disparity in terms of quality and content among the different language texts due to a lack of coordination in the translation process; there existed deficiencies in the online service search function, among others.

The online service reform will mean a thorough overhaul of Info Bank as well as tendering for a new provider to structure the online service and supply the publishing service and system maintenance. In line with this, a clear and straightforward website where different target groups (for example, foreign students, asylum seekers, employees working in immigrant and multicultural affairs, work-based immigration) will be able to find precisely the information about their own particular circumstances, with minimum inconvenience and in their own language or in a language that they can understand, is needed. Also, an online service structure that eases the new user comfortably into the new service environment, allowing for the variation in cultural starting points is needed. The Director of immigration affairs in the city of Helsinki confirms this in a press release.

Immigration and immigrants are key to the dynamism of the Helsinki Region. Population growth and the functionality of services across a broad spectrum are dependent on immigrant input. This is why the Helsinki Region invests so much in supporting the integration of immigrants. Our flagship, with regard to electronic services, is Info Bank. (Forsander 2009)

Info Bank must function in way that provides a single source offering straightforward information in a range of languages. The idea behind the reform is not to surrender this premise but rather to deepen and refine it. The new service will offer more detailed information, part of which will be tailored to various target groups and target group roles. The content production will be implemented cost-effectively, exploiting the applicable sections of current content with appropriate restructuring and complementing with fresh content. This being the case, the need for an improved Info Bank online service also raises the need for a task force and therefore the recruitment of workforce team known as Info Bank User Panel members who will improve the accessibility of information, for example, through a regrouping of themes, search engine optimisation, a more functional search facility and information based on life circumstances in order to achieve a service that is flexible, reacts to changes but yet remains in the present.

In spite of the need for reform it is worth noting that Info Bank online service at the moment contains a wealth of excellent features that deserve to be retained. The service content is arranged thematically, and not, for example, according to the structures of official organisations. The language versions are identical in content and switching between languages succeeds at any point in the service. Also, searching within the online service is rapid as the web pages are light in structure and load quickly. Most importantly there are several ways to obtain information from the service (search, alphabetical index, navigation).

2.1 Working life connection

The final project is carried out with the informed consent of Info Bank which is under Helsinki city cultural office hence the city of Helsinki is making proper use of the Info Bank User Panel working method, suggesting that other public and private institutions can as well follow suit. Given that in the mission statement of Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, going global or becoming international is one of the

objectives, this could be a possible working model for the staff to meet the challenging workload due to the increase in foreign students within the institution. The working method could as well be used in the Ministry of the Interior, the Police, Reception centres, the Finnish Immigration Service, the Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorates, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, municipal authorities, the embassies, consulates and Finnish missions abroad.

3. AIM OF STUDY

The aim of this final project is to explore the working methods of Info Bank User Panel members and their point of view. The working methods of the Panel members have social-pedagogical elements such as work-based learning, empowerment, social participation and development at work place.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Activity Theory and Formative Intervention

The theoretical framework for this study is based on two theories. The first is Activity Theory and Formative Intervention (ATFI). ATFI provides interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological tools for studying the rapid and profound changes in the world of work, organizations, and technology. This is rooted in the legacy of Vygotsky (1981: 163) and Leont'ev (1981:208) and has been developed and applied to learning and development in educational and work practices in Finland and other countries. It is structured around three key content areas;

- a) History and the future of activity theory
- b) Work-related learning
- c) Methodology and practice of developmental work research interventions.

Similar work from Cole (1998:31, 137-151), Blackler (2010:863-884) and Engeström (1987:78) represent approaches closely related to Activity Theory. Furthermore, Chappell (2005) states that an organization's learning environment can be clustered around four areas such as work environment, work process environment, social interaction environment and managerial environment. In her recent work, Sannino et al (2009) focuses on the connection between discourse and activity and on the interventionist nature of cultural-historical activity theory, all related to learning and development in work practices with contributions from Engeström, a contemporary social theorist. It appears that Info Bank's activities have their roots in ATFI because there is work-related learning and development at work place in the working environment.

In the environments listed above, activity takes place and the student is more interested in the activity than the environment because all the four can be summarised into Finnish working environment. In Info Bank the Panel members are not necessarily interested in sitting in one place, same building. Rather they carry out various tasks at their convenience at various locations bearing in mind the deadline for the given tasks. The elements below (Figure 1) explain more on the working method of Panel Users.

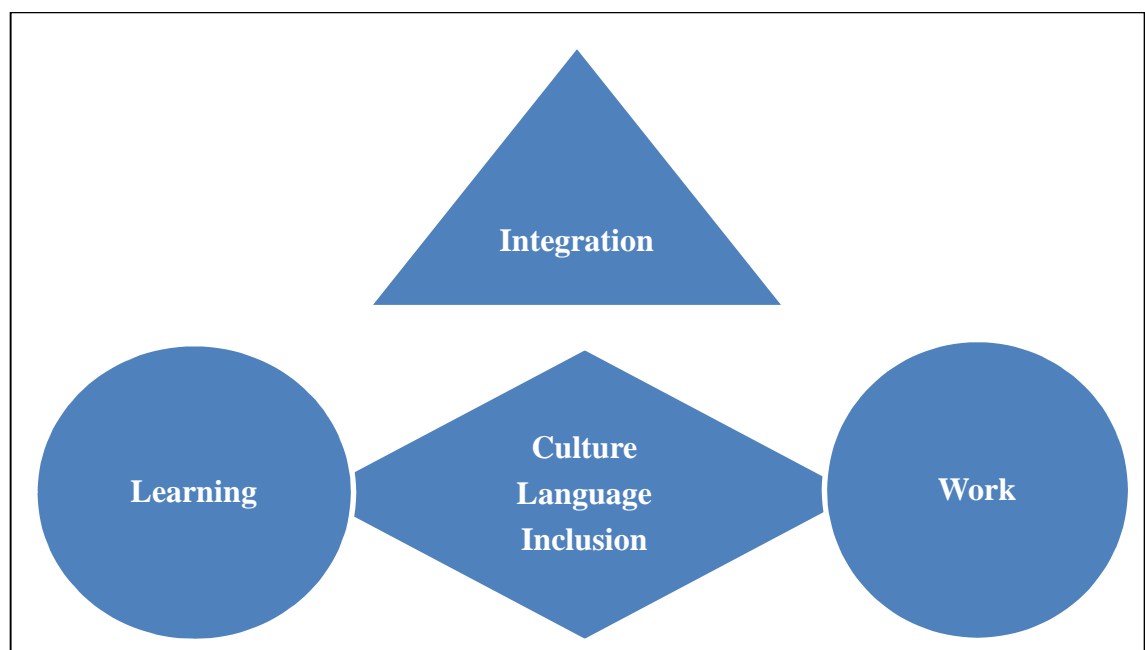


Figure 1 (based on Activity Theory and Formative Intervention)

Learning: from the data collected people from different backgrounds with different opinions come together, work together in an open, free idea sharing , relaxed and friendly environment ideal for learning as they go along hence a work-based learning is taking place and ATFI states that when people are working together learning is taking place. Tasks are assigned, usually by electronic mail to panel members from the editorial team of Info Bank. The tasks are in various forms. Sometimes it could be to attend a press conference or seminar. Other times it could be reading through a document after which comments and feedback are made online using Google documents. This way panel members who might not have been familiar with this way of working learn how to use, edit online documents while working hence work-based learning. In cases where the task is to attend a press conference, panel members learn presentation techniques from the Finnish perspective.

Integration: during press conferences which will be counted as one of the tasks there is unique opportunity to meet other personnel and organizations present who exchange ideas and share vital information with Info Bank panel members. For instance information on where and how to take Finnish and Swedish language courses, both vital for integration, was got after attending a seminar in Helsinki. Having a good command of both official languages definitely eases integration into the Finnish labour market. Sometimes information on job vacancies is got in an informal way.

Culture: fifteen panel members from all walks of life with different backgrounds are working together with a common goal in mind. Some, if not most of the panelists had little or no prior knowledge about each other's culture. The team is an example of cultural diversity in practice. In the Panel, the members have an opportunity to enhance their cultural diversity skills by learning about each other's culture and at the same time learning about both the Finnish organizational and working cultures. Diversity in this sense is valuable in that it creates more options for each individual (Kymlicka 1995:121)

Language: the official working languages for correspondence in the Info Bank panel are Finnish and English. However panel members are free to use any of the other thirteen languages provided a brief translation into Finnish and/or English is added to it. The multilingual nature of info bank makes it possible to provide information for immigrants in their own mother tongue where feasible, or in another language they can

understand. The majority of the information provided by Finnish online services is covered comprehensively only in Finnish and Swedish. English versions are often available, but mostly in a more condensed form. The diversity of the Panel members is to ensure that all essential information is provided with equal coverage in all the languages offered. The language versions run parallel to each other so that the user may switch to another language at any point. The parallel nature of the language versions enable straightforward comparison of text and, for example, the creation of links thereby serving immigrant customers who do not speak any of the service languages as their mother tongue but have some knowledge of other languages. If customers fail to understand the matter in one particular language version, they may then switch to another.

Inclusion: from the data is clearly seen that all the major immigrant groups are represented. The Panel members are involved in a work that directly concerns their livelihood. Rather than allowing someone else to decide for them, they have been given the chance to decide on the issues that affect them.

Work: The Panel members organize their tasks according to their own schedule creating room for flexibility. They work both offline and online. While online the Panellists are in contact with each other by email. The work involves building on the current work methods, which according to respondents have attracted the interest of other organisations. The work involves four hours of work on the User Panel in an online chat environment, a User Panel meeting, a working session, a workshop, or any combination of the above. The appropriate working method is chosen on a case-by-case basis. The scope of each assignment is agreed beforehand and announced about two weeks before the deadline. The Panel members review and comment on the content of the current online service, including filling in a content form or similar reporting tool and assessing the usability of the Info Bank. The scope of the content to be reviewed and commented is agreed on a case-by-case basis. Other work types can also separately be agreed upon. The Panel members participate in different ways and with varying degrees of intensity, but efforts are made in the course of the work to ensure that a similar input is required from all the members. The above elements are jointly summed up as one model within Info Bank.

4.2 Social inclusion theory

The second theory used in this study is Social inclusion theory (Omidvar and Richmond 2003) which promotes the validation of diversity as well as recognition of the commonality of lived experiences as seen in Info Bank Panel members. Social inclusion involves the basic notions of belonging, acceptance, and recognition. For immigrants and refugees, social inclusion would be represented by the realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in their new country. In a simple but useful sense, therefore, social inclusion for immigrants and refugees can be seen as the dismantling of barriers that lead to exclusion in all these domains (Omidvar and Richmond 2003:1). Hence inclusion is not just about eliminating boundaries or barriers, but about closing physical, social, and cultural distances that arbitrarily separate people. Employers sometimes consider newcomer job seekers a high risk factor due to the degree of unfamiliarity with their education background, work experience and cultural fit (Ployhart, Schneider and Schmitt 2006) By hiring fifteen Panel members who represent fifteen different cultures and languages to improve the services provided by Info Bank it is safe to claim that the Helsinki City Culture office is in line with Omidvar and Richmond's social inclusion theory which consists of two dimensions. The first is to confer recognition and respect to individuals and groups, and not pathologize different cultures and equate them with perceived deficits. The second dimension is human development, which involves nurturing the talents, skills, capacities and choices of individuals to live a valuable life and contribute their full worth in employment.

In his explanation on citizenship theory, Kymlicka (2002:311), explains that in so far as we all have a self-interested reason to care about the stability of democratic institutions, we also have a self-interested reason to care about the overall level of virtue in society. He further explains that, liberals offer two-level response to the question of virtue and justice. At one level they emphasize that citizens are assumed to have a sense of justice, and this shared commitment to principles of justice provides a sense of solidarity that unites people with different conceptions of the good. At another level, liberal nationalists argue that social unity based on principles of justice is too thin, and must be further stabilized and strengthened by the development of a shared sense of nationhood, based on a common language, history, and public institutions...According to Kymlicka liberals are hesitant to adopt this second nation-building level, and prefer to rely solely on people's sense of justice as a motive for accepting the demands of active and

responsible citizenship. He argues that the existence of this sort of nation-building is implicitly assumed by virtually all theorists of deliberative democracy and civic virtue.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research questions

- a) What lessons are to be learned by selecting workers with diverse cultural and professional competences to improve services at work place? Questions 5, 6, 7 of the questionnaire have addressed this part.

- b) What do the workers think about the influence of their work method in an institution? Questions 4 and 8 have addressed this research question.

This study uses qualitative research method approach in evaluating the working methods used by Info Bank Panel Users. To accomplish data collection, the student has examined the activities of Info Bank to understand how it works, conducted face to face interviews and online survey with Panel User members. By tradition, the principal aim of the qualitative approach has been to comprehend and examine the social world from the perspective of the people that are studied. Qualitative research method often results in a relatively open and unstructured research strategy. Respondents have been chosen bearing in mind equal proportion of women and men, representing different ages and socioeconomic status and educational background. Prior to outset of data collection, the student formulated a list of questions. The questionnaire was first pre-tested, with a group of students and two Panel User members, to examine its relevancy for the respondents. The necessary changes were made and the questionnaire was prepared in its final form.

5.2 Data collection

The qualitative approach in this study has used respondents that are purposively selected for the study. With the help of a questionnaire (see appendix 1) the student has conducted interviews with the members of the User Panel and the editorial team. Additional information that was not otherwise asked in the questionnaire has been

included in the data. For the purposes of this study it is important to balance gender of respondents, so that one can get the views across the sexes. Therefore this has been taken into consideration in the questionnaire. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 71-76) says: "The sampling goal in qualitative research is one of attaining 'completeness' i.e. I set about to choose people who are knowledgeable about the subject and talk with them' until what is heard 'provides an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme or process' (Valtonen 1999: 7).

A researcher's plans may change depending on the situations on the ground and the empirical research material is often collected with variety of methods. The student is aware of the possibility for some limitations during data collection. Although the main method to collect information for this study was initially face to face interview, an alternative method, online survey, was added because it became feasible to use the combination of both methods to achieve the desired result because all the members could not be met due to their work schedules.

Being an immigrant the student is particularly interested in this study because referring to Omidvar and Richmond (2003) on social Inclusion, working in the Panel is the realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in the new country. As earlier mentioned, the student is a member of the Info Bank User Panel and hence a participatory researcher. This automatically calls for concern with regards to ethical dilemma. Notwithstanding, on the one hand there is an opportunity to have a direct, clear and precise information from an insider's perspective which would otherwise be different from an outsider's view. On the other hand, an outsider is in a better position to see things different from the insider. Being aware of this, the student has made all attempts to be as objective as possible in this study. Before answering questionnaires the aim and beneficiaries of the study have been clearly stated to all respondents.

Furthermore being bounded by the guiding principles of confidentiality which the Panel members undertake not to discuss other members' private matters outside the User Panel as clearly stated after the recruitment process, the privacy of participants has been respected. However, each member is entitled to discuss matters discussed at the User Panel, in general terms, with their family members and friends, for instance, seeking their opinions to the discussions of the User Panel, as long as this does not violate

anyone's privacy. On the grounds that the members are allowed to use information gained through the work of the User Panel for instance in their own work, as long as this does not violate anyone's privacy, the student has conducted the said study. All the materials provided by the respondents will be destroyed after the study.

In assessing the success of data collection attempts have been made in this study to present as clearly as possible the research process, the information received from different sources as well as the discussions and studies that had guided the student's thinking and interpretations. Respondents were not expected to indicate their names or addresses and this creates a sense of anonymity, known to be associated with people reporting their true feelings about an issue. These desires for transparency are aimed at dealing with the issue of reliability (Silverman, 2000:175).

5.3 Data Analysis

In this study various variables which include gender, age, educational level, ethnicity / nationality, religious background and work experience have all guided the data collection. Both male and female Panel User members participated in the study. Two males and five females have completed the online survey that was sent to all Panel User members. Three females have partially completed the survey. Face to face interview was conducted with two males and one female. The ages ranged from twenty-five to fifty-four years while the educational level ranged from Masters to Doctorate. Two of the respondents indicated their level of education as 'Other' which in this study could be either below Masters Degree or above Doctorate suggesting that Info Bank has room for those who do not have either Masters or Doctorate degrees. The same seem to apply for religious background where besides Christianity, Hindu / Buddhist and Muslim, four of the respondents indicated their religion to be 'Other'. This, in the student's opinion suggests that irrespective of religious affiliation, qualified persons are given the opportunity to participate in the User's Panel. It is worth noting that in this study, a face to face interview was conducted in Finnish language with the only participant who expresses herself better in Finnish language. This means the questionnaire had to be translated from English to Finnish (see appendix). Two male Panel members were also interviewed face to face in English language. Their work experiences ranged from sales manager, economic diplomat, pharmacist, project coordinator, landscape architect, and

language interpreter to a graphic designer with thirteen years experience. It is fair to say that the Panel members are highly skilled professionals.

The variables in part one of the questionnaire are

1. Gender: The gender proportion is balance.
2. Age: age range from twenty-five to fifty.
3. Educational level: Educational level of the respondents range from Bachelor Master and PhD.
4. Ethnicity, The ethnic background range from Asian, European and one African.
5. Religion: Among the respondents where Christians, Muslims, one Buddhist and other respondents said 'other'. The options provided were Christian, Islam, Hindu/Buddhist and Other. Respondents who ticked Other are neither Christians, Muslims nor Hindu/Buddhist.
6. Work experience.

One of the respondents has worked as an official in the Finnish Embassy abroad under the Ministry of Interior and has worked for the Ministry of Labour, and as a teacher and a translator. Another has worked as a pharmacists and a consultant in the pharmaceutical industry. One has experience as a project coordinator. Another worked as an architect, interpreter, and administrator assistant in an embassy. Another worked as international business. Another is a researcher, sales manager, and working towards a PhD at the University of Helsinki. One of the respondents is a kindergarten teacher with a nursing background. This part one section of the data collected is evidence that this can be a working model to be applied by any Finnish institution, employer, private, or public indicating that the working method used by Info Bank has no restrictions or limitations.

In analyzing part two of the questionnaire, a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis has been used in this study because it reinforces the theory for the study which is Activity Theory and Formative Intervention (ATFI). The SWOT analysis is an extremely useful tool for understanding and decision-making for all sorts of situations in business and organizations. The SWOT analysis headings provide a good framework for reviewing strategy, position and direction of a company or business proposition, or any other idea. SWOT analysis came from the research conducted at

Stanford Research Institute from 1960-1970. The background to SWOT stemmed from the need to find out why corporate planning failed. The research was funded by the fortune 500 companies to find out what could be done about this failure. The Research Team were Marion Doshier, Dr Otis Benepe, Albert Humphrey, Robert Stewart, and Birger Lie. Albert Humphrey was a leading expert in the field of corporate strategic planning and strategy realisation. He said: "Most executives realize that the best way to build a 'pre-action plan' is to use the people who will do the work to plan the work. But they commonly find that such an approach is hampered by poor group human behaviour." Info Bank online service is to provide information for target groups. Members of the various groups have been recruited to improve the service.

According to the respondents, the purpose of Info Bank is to help immigrants to find their place in Finland by providing information to them about living in the Finnish society and culture. The service also informs potential immigrants, freshly arrived immigrants, and Finns who work with immigrants (bureaucrats, relocation service advisers). A face to face interview with three Panel members revealed that Panel members bring first hand immigrant feedback of how well info bank service works in practice through testing various prototypes and through bringing feedback from their personal contact network among the immigrant community. The role each member plays in the Panel was discussed. One of the respondent shares experiences about working as an interpreter, working with immigrants and Finnish organizations, and the integration process with other Panel members. Another respondent who represents English and French speakers, as well as migrant workforce, brings significant expertise on immigration policies and best practices from various countries.

*I represent native English and French speakers and north Americans in general. In short work-based migrants in general (migrant labour). As far as the linguistic, geographic and immigration cases are concerned, I provide expert knowledge about immigration legislation and best practices from various countries. **Respondent 6***

From the responses above, all the members do understand the purpose of Info Bank and the role in the Panel.

What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the working methods in the User Panel?

Strengths

From the data collected Panel members are employed from different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, age group, sexes, and work experience. Specific tasks are assigned to employees and a specific date as to when the given tasks must be completed is clearly stated. In other words the working method is task-oriented. This means that different members have different workloads and duties, because they have different areas of expertise and interest.

Panel members are encouraged to work according to their pace suggesting that it is possible to agree on working procedures and work rhythms jointly among the entire group so that everyone can commit to them. The data also suggests that the Panel members understand their role in the team. The working environment is work-based learning with personal and organisational goals to be achieved. User's Panel members represent a wide variety of immigrant backgrounds: spouse, Ingrian return migrant, refugee, family member of an asylum seeker, university researcher, student, migrant worker, a foreigner considering a relocation to Finland, plus a Finn returning to the country after several years abroad, all making up a fifteen-faced cultural and linguistic diversity task force. Such a variety of group representation is liberal and democratic. It is also a plausible extension of existing democratic traditions, and according to Kymlicka, there may be some circumstances where it is the most appropriate way to ensure an adequate voice for minority interests and perspectives. Since it is vital that minorities have a fair hearing in the political process, proposals for group representation themselves deserve a fair hearing (Kymlicka 1995:151).

we are a team, discussion of every project and idea is our strength... we represent many nationalities, so, we probably what is better for our nation and is needed and what should be changed based on cultural differences... we are all immigrants, clarifying something for us in infopannki web site, we make it better for other immigrants who is the same situation or from the same country **Respondent 1**

Just as there is a variety of backgrounds, likewise is there a variety of responses from the same question. In response to the strength of Panel members, one respondent had this to say.

big issue :-) **Respondent 4**

Weaknesses

The Info Bank User Panel's working method has its pluses and minuses. The job satisfaction is not known and therefore could be taken up as a future study. There is no specific working space, that is, no office to work. It is possible that some of the Panel members might not have the required qualification. The working method is internet driven. Human contact is lost in this new system of working. There is limited face to face contact.

*...at the same time workers do not see each other very often
and is more difficult to work as a team. there is risk of not using the panel enough
...not tapping into its potential fully.* **Respondent 1**

Some Panel members think that it is not always possible for the whole team to attend meetings and conferences because they are more often than not planned in the mornings, and therefore those working in the morning are likely not to attend. This confirms the reason the student changed plans for collecting data from Panel members due to their work schedule. Because of the flexibility in the deadline of task submission it possible that some tasks are not always completed in time. According to Respondent 1 too much dependence upon the production team's willingness to delegate responsibilities, the absence of other languages in Info Bank service, are some of the weaknesses. S/He is of the opinion that some members are only experts in their own field.

*Not all the members have theoretical and practical experience in immigration
legislation or a good knowledge of what is available as service for immigrants.*

Respondent 1

Opportunities

The data suggests that Info Bank is open to all immigrants and the Panel members agree that almost all the immigrant communities in Finland are in one way or the other represented. The Panel members also have opportunities to learn from the conferences and seminars they regularly attend. Considering that some organisations have indicated interest in the working model used by the Panel in Info Bank and would like to use the same in their respective work places, there is an opportunity to develop and to expand the method even further. One of the respondents is of the opinion that the representation of various immigrant backgrounds is an opportunity for personal growth.

diversity of backgrounds is represented, practically every corner of the planet. Major languages present in Finland. Best coverage of geography, language and migration case. openly share, discuss what each one can bring, better able to contribute, learn from each other and improve everyone's knowledge of integration as a whole and the result will overcome the threat that misunderstanding brings. This can easily overcome weaknesses and threats **Respondent 1**

Threats

There is a risk that the working method used in the Panel may exclude native Finnish workers whose language is only Finnish and therefore counter integration rather than to promote it. However the threat itself could be an opportunity in the sense that Finns who learn Swedish, English, Russian, Somali, French, Turkish, Arabic, Thai, Chinese, and Estonian will have an opportunity to work in the Panel and a way forward to integration could be found. While a respondent is of the opinion that too many opinions in the Panel might lead to some sort of mix up and eventually leading to team break up

There is also a threat of the group tearing itself apart. insufficient production team resources hamper the development of Infopankki against competing services and severely limit opportunities to use the User Panel's expertise and know-how.

Respondent 1

Another respondent categorically stated the opposite

threats: I can not see them! **Respondent 2**

In an attempt to know how different the working methods in the Info Bank User Panel are from other organisations that Panel members have previously worked with, the student was made to understand that there exist a lot of differences. Two of the respondents admired the systematic way of doing the tasks.

*Systematic way of team working. Clear instruction and information sharing. Quick response in Google Docs and emails. **Respondent 8***

According to Respondent 2, many organisations do not take the user friendly approach (as is the case with Info Bank Panel) into account. Another Panel member considers the method more egalitarian, impartial and open for participation and according to him/her the very existence of the user panel makes it different and therefore an exception.

*...In most typical Finnish organizations things are more decided upfront. People get invited to meetings to bring feedback. the outcome which is already known. There is no continuity in most organizations. Info Bank's feedback gathered in one meeting are used as starting point for new ideas. There is huge amount of interaction among panel members unlike in other organizations were there is no possibility for open interaction and real participation. **Respondent 6***

S/He went on to absolutely recommending the working method to other organisations on the grounds that, according to him/her, customer oriented development model produces useful result than the normal market study oriented approaches found in many workplaces are pointlessly stiff and closed-minded. However two of the respondents think that in as much as the model is useful for organisations that are genuinely interested in the needs of their service users, it might not necessarily be applicable to others.

*not in my field, but I think could be useful in other fields. **Respondent 1**
some yes, some no: not suitable for all **Respondent 4***

The student collected data on the respondents' view vis-à-vis social inclusion and participation in Finland. Information gathered shows that there is need to provide similar resources and opportunities for immigrants that the natives have in order to find

a place in the society. Furthermore there ought to be more opportunities to participate and to influence one's own livelihood and so more effort is required. Most of the respondents are of the opinion that active participation in social activities is important as this eases immigrant integration into the society.

*the social network are very important to help immigrants integrate better to finnish society, to get a job etc. **Respondent 3***

Another respondent highlighted that the Info Bank User panel is not used only for content but also for delivery of content, and that it is one thing to have information yet another thing to present it in a way that people will understand and find what they are looking for. Therefore there is much room for improvement. To another respondent social participation and inclusion do not seem to be a problem.

*I try to give my best and I think it's good for me. **Respondent 5***

In some other case a respondent said Finland is a country based on homogeneity. And since immigration is a recent issue the society is only gradually accepting the notion of cultural and ethnic differences hence the tendency of most people to be protective of their little sand box. In some cases acceptance is difficult for Finns. According to him/her the democratic process is not very clear. The media could be a useful tool in clarifying the process.

*Sometimes policy makers think it is costly to include the target group in say, during government changes in immigration law therefore memoranda from the target group are not adhered to. Finding a mutual ground has always been difficult because immigration is a recent issue. In some cases disagreement is considered complaining rather than expression of dissatisfaction. However the social media plays a good role to bridge the gap of exclusiveness. **Respondent 6***

As far as the rights of citizens are concerned one wonders if certain groups in the society have been excluded from full participation because of their socio-cultural identity (difference) or because of their socio-economic status (Kymlicka 1995:180).

As for the recruitment process respondents went through the usual procedure in Finland. The production team interviewed applicants from as wide a group of immigrants as possible, to cover the widest base of nationalities, justification for residence (refugee, migrant labour, spouse of EU/Finnish national), languages and professional background as possible. The vacancies were published online. Applications were submitted. Shortlisted candidates were invited for interview. One of the respondents was interviewed by three representatives of the City of Helsinki Cultural Office while another was interviewed over the phone.

6. WHY INFO BANK WORKING METHOD IS RECOMENDED?

A number of public and private organisations and many Finnish speakers have given positive feedback on Info Bank especially on how useful the service has been to them. The working methods of Info Bank Panel User members are unique and can be used by other organizations in the following ways:

1. Employ members from different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, age group, sexes, work experience.
2. Assign tasks to the employees and be specific as to when the task must be completed. In other words be task-oriented.
3. Make sure each employee understands the role in the team.
4. The model in Info Bank is a work-based learning environment with personal and organizational goals to be achieved, as seen from the data collected.

According to Kymlicka (2002:285) the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its basic institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens, for instance, their sense of identity, and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands, and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment... He went on to explain that citizenship is not just a certain legal status, defined by a set of rights and responsibilities. It is also

an identity, an expression of one's membership in a political community... (Kymlicka 2002:328).

The workers in the Info Bank Panel who are not yet citizens and many others are involved in working life activities, making meaningful contribution to and at the same time enjoying the virtues of society. By employing Panel members with diverse identities the city of Helsinki is by so doing applying Kymlicka's theory of citizenship. Kymlicka further explains that excluded groups are no longer willing to be silenced or marginalized, or to be defined as 'deviant' simply because they differ in race, culture, gender, ability or sexual orientation from the so-called 'normal' citizen. They demand a more inclusive conception of citizenship which recognizes (rather than stigmatizes) their identities, and which accommodates (rather than excludes) their differences.

Another reason for adapting such a working model is that highly skilled immigrants who have had their training in Finland will then be tapped which is essential for nation building (Kymlicka 2002:343). In that sense Finland will not be squandering foreign talent since money spent on training immigrants will not be wasted, thereby addressing the issue of fear of challenges by most employers who wonder about the language to be used in meetings and what methods to be used by employers to work with clients and fellow employees. Unfortunately such fears have been used as justification for not tapping into highly skilled foreigners' expertise which in turn forces the immigrant to leave the country due to limited career opportunity. This can be seen in the assertion by Kymlicka that minorities are forced to emigrate en masse, particularly if they have a prosperous and friendly state nearby that will take them in...(e.g with the mass emigration of Ethnic Germans from Kazakstan to Germany, or of Jews from Russia to Israel). This seems to be a similar trend in Finland nowadays.

Forsander (2009) opined that the functionality of services is significant in supporting immigrant integration and in the building of a new life. The faster immigrants master their new circumstances the greater the benefit for the whole society. The objective of the working method in Info Bank is to offer clear, reliable, understandable and updated information on Finland and the services of Finnish society to immigrants, persons planning to move to Finland and persons involved in immigration services, thereby helping immigrants in their everyday lives and facilitating their integration as active members of Finnish society.

The information on the Info Bank website covers such topics as housing, education, Finnish language teaching, permits and employment. The panel members work toward a common goal of offering understandable, clear and updated information on Finnish society and its services for immigrants, persons planning to emigrate to Finland and persons involved in immigration services. The implementation of the online service is the responsibility of the Info Bank editorial Staff at the Helsinki Cultural Centre. Openness and transparency are key values in the work of the Info Bank editors. The User Panel members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with both Info Bank material and those produced by its interest groups, as their time and interests allow. Most of the reporting on the Info Bank is submitted in Finnish. For reasons of cost, translations are not always provided.

The online service reform will be accomplished with the aid of a user-based plan. The fifteen-strong User Panel with a variety of immigrant backgrounds has been recruited in support of the reform process. Panel participation is focused on the planning of service content, as well as assisting with assessment of service usability. The Google Analytics tool for monitoring website traffic is also being used to gather information on user habits and content needs. Furthermore, the views of key partners will be sought during the reform period in connection with the development needs of the online service. The work is coordinated by the Info Bank editors. The Advisor of Info Bank Panel is mainly responsible for coordinating the work of the User Panel. However other editorial staff are also involved in the coordination of User Panel from time to time.

The Panel members telecommute from elsewhere in Finland or, in exceptional cases, from abroad. The members carry out most of their work at home on their own computer (commenting on texts, participating in discussions in social media). Members communicate using social Web tools such as “google.docs”, “google.groups”, “google.calendar” and Gmail, and possibly other tools too. The user identities (Ids) and passwords were given to the Panel members when the contracts are signed. Members may work independently during working hours, in the evenings and at weekends. User Panel meetings are held four times a year at times convenient for the members, usually on a weekday between 14.00 and 18.00.

Panel members' tasks

The Panel was recruited during the summer of 2009. Hundreds of applications were submitted in response to recruitment advertisements published in a wide variety of languages. The service has three key target groups, chosen after careful consideration: immigrants living in Finland, the immigration authorities and foreigners planning to emigrate to Finland. The Info Bank caters for immigrants everywhere in Finland, but particularly in the Info Bank member cities. The Info Bank is based on networking, cooperation and information exchange among the authorities, the third sector, immigrants and other partners. Membership of the User Panel requires active participation, attendance, good cooperation and completion of assignments. The User Panel operates on principles of transparency, honesty, mutual respect and confidentiality. The Panel intends to clarify the immigration process from a user's perspective and to create best practices and guidelines to streamline the process of immigrating. The panel members assess the existing info bank web service, its content, usability, visual appearance, language, and other key elements. A panel member may also participate in providing information about and increasing awareness of the service, in a manner mutually agreed in advance.

The activities of the User's Panel are chiefly composed of reading and commenting on text, discussion in the social media, workshops activities, and interviews. Further tasks involve ideation of new content for the updated service and assisting with assessment of web service usability and other aspects relating to development of the new service. Activity goals are approved in detail at a joint meeting of user's panel members held for the purpose of achieving commitment to common work practices. To sum it up the key tasks of the User Panel is to collect and write up tacit knowledge. The User Panel has proven itself to be an indispensable tool in Info Bank's renewal process and it will remain a key element of our user-oriented strategy, emphasizes the Project Manager of Info Bank.

The structure, technical design, content and graphic appearance of the Info Bank online service will be reformed with a view to the quality criteria for public online services. The regional multicultural information service www.selma-net.fi will be merged into the Info Bank online service and used to pilot a nationwide service for the immigration authorities as part of the Info Bank. The coverage of the service will be improved by

taking all willing new municipalities on board. Cooperation with member municipalities will be improved in both content production and communications.

An example of the Panel members' task

The social services department of the city of Helsinki sought the expertise of Info Bank User's Panel. The Child day-care service required comments about their web contents so that they could make some changes and get the text translated into Somali language. Two Panel members were assigned for the task. The deadline for submitting the task to the Child day-care service office as instructed by the social service department was March 31 2010. The purpose of this task was to write down all the needed content for a Somali language translation of the Social service Department Day-care server page. The task was not to translate the page. Rather the assigned Panel members were expected to read through the page and think from an immigrant's perspective the needs of information for the new immigrant, and write down all the necessary content topics. For example to name all the topics that one would need information on. The structure and technical details of the page were ignored. The important issue was what information should be translated in the specific language and does the Finnish language version have sufficient information for the target group of immigrants and service users, the groups for whom the languages are translated? The Panel members did the task and the feedback was positive.

Funding

The Info Bank service is funded by the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry of Finance, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, and the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen, Turku, Tampere, Kuopio, Rovaniemi and Kajaani. Additional funding under a five-year cooperation agreement signed by the above actors at the beginning of 2009 has enabled Info Bank, suffering from outdated information and a lack of resources, to undergo a thorough overhaul technically, structurally and visually and in terms of content.

The aim of the five-year online service reform is to improve the service so that its objectives can be reached better. The online service was last overhauled in 2005. Due to

meagre resources, it had not been possible to develop the online service as needed at the time. Now that significant additional funding has been received for a five year period, the online service reform is possible and ongoing with the input of all Panel members. A user-oriented service development will continue beyond 2013. The membership of the User Panel will probably change before that, because not all members are able to participate for the entire five-year period. However, members can remain on the User Panel for the full five years if they so desire.

Other information gathered revealed that Info Bank publishes the multilingual communications of other actors and informs about its own activities in a range of languages. However, for resource-related reasons, Info Bank is not a news desk, nor is its primary task to produce multilingual topical items for instance, moderating discussion forums or replying to multilingual feedback; therefore it is not an interactive online service. Development of the service is user-based and the user perspective is incorporated wherever means allow. Channels for gathering feedback include user surveys, the work of the User Panel, and user statistics.

At present, Info Bank is restricted to producing information principally concerning public administration and its associated services. The future field of tasks may be expanded to cover the private sector provided that the necessary resources are made available. The service nevertheless already provides links to private sector online services in cases where no corresponding public sector service is available.

In addition to its own internal links, Info Bank contains a wealth of document links to multilingual texts, such as publications, produced by other organisations. The starting point is that Info Bank language versions contain links to all the other language versions offered. This gives users the greatest likelihood of finding a language version that they can understand, even where the material is unavailable in their own language as, regrettably, is often the case.

The needs of the various municipalities in producing multilingual online services, and the resources available to them, vary greatly, as do the significant language groups of their immigrant populations. Some municipalities need to produce information in an extremely broad range of languages, while others require only a few. Discounting the Helsinki Region, municipalities do not have the opportunity of arranging translation of

the web pages into all the service's languages. It has therefore been agreed that the municipalities are not obligated to do so. An obligation nevertheless remains to translate information into at least five of the service languages.

Info Bank serves a number of special groups and in certain cases it is not worthwhile to provide information in all languages when the matter is the sole concern of a particular section of the user community. In this case the information section is produced only in Finnish and in the languages of those directly concerned. The remigration of Ingrian Finns, for example, concerns only Russian and Estonian speakers, and information with regard to refugee status may be provided solely in the languages used by those speaking, or with knowledge of, these languages. Where the composition of the language versions varies, the user is clearly informed and offered the opportunity of accessing another language version.

In a Publication launch for the Helsinki region section of the info bank online service that took place in the International Cultural Centre Caisa, Forsander (2009) noted that Info Bank is the global showcase for the Helsinki Region. In her address she stated that although Info Bank is a nationwide service it also functions effectively at the local level, in individual cities, and in the Helsinki Region. It fosters the acclimatization of immigrants, while also promoting the work of the authorities and the third sector in support of immigrant integration. Electronic services, and the entire virtual world, free us from the restrictions of place. Among the more appealing aspects of Info Bank is that it manages to be both local and global at the same time. Of visits made to the Info Bank website, as many as 46 per cent are made abroad.

The majority of website visits outside Finland occur in countries that are significant in terms of immigrant volume, such as Russia and Estonia. For immigrants from these countries, Info Bank may act as a 'pre-integrator' before they even set foot in Finland. Research shows that a significant number of immigrants in the Helsinki Region working in specialist positions acknowledge having searched for preliminary information on Finnish society via the internet. In this way Info Bank helps us, at the global level, to reach precisely those people to whom we wish to communicate the opportunities that await them in the Helsinki Region (Forsander 2009).

7. CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion on the respondents data based on the theoretical framework for this study suggests that the Info Bank User Panel's work-based learning and social pedagogical working method is recommended for other institutions. The respondents who work in the panel have confirmed this. The theory for this study, Activity Theory and Formative Intervention shows that the Panel members' activity is a work-related learning method. With the help of contributions from other studies such as multicultural citizenship and representative democracy by Kymlicka the student has demonstrated how the expertise of minorities in the Info Bank Panel can be tapped to make valuable contribution in the host society.

However from the responses there seem to be lack of sufficient information available for immigrants. Information should be put in web sites and Info Bank brochures placed in areas where immigrants always go, places such as airport, seaport, train stations, bus terminals where people would quickly have access to the kind of services provided by Info Bank. The welcome package in Kela (Social Insurance Institution of Finland) could as well have Info Bank brochures. Collaborative work with reception centers, associations such as Caisa Cultural Centre and other forums will lead to early access of information about Info Bank.

8. DISCUSSION

The service which is primarily online seems to be more beneficial for people who have basic knowledge in computer. The working method used by the Panel members involves online interaction. As the data suggests the method might not suit every work environment. For the computer illiterate, they will have to depend on other sources for information. However the method could be considered positive because one is able to work with the method available, that is, the internet.

Info Bank is not a replacement for the immigrant services or communications of its partner organisations; on the contrary, the obligation of such organisations to provide immigrant services and communicate them continues unchanged. Info Bank does not provide services directly, nor does it provide multilingual counselling or translation

services. As with other online services, Info Bank merely provides a finite amount of information addressed only to those able to access online services, which means that the above organisations must continue to provide walk-in services. In line with the above there should be a way of responding to the customers' needs. This impacts the way clients make use of the services. If a question is asked by a client but it remains in cyber space the client may not recommend it to others. Perhaps the Info Bank service might someday develop into the one where feedback from service users and clients would be in the form of email or face to face contact by fixing appointment with service users. During this meeting there will be interpretations for clients.

In analyzing the data, the following questions came to the student's mind: is there a correlation between age and use of online service, between work experience and the recommendations provided, between level of education and use of online service? Those respondents who have a certain level of education are more inclined to giving a certain recommendation because they have frequent access to the internet. For instance, a tired construction worker might not have time to look for information in the internet after a tired day. Hence the kind of work influences the recommendation of Info Bank's User Panel's working method. Is there a relationship between gender and recommendation given? The student also wondered if family status could influence the kind of information being searched for.

Based on the data collected information was not gotten on employee satisfaction and therefore a future study could be looking into how satisfied are Info Bank User Panels in their work place? Considering that some highly trained immigrants leave the country after their studies another possible future study could be to find out the number of immigrants trained in Finland who leave Finland after graduation in search of employment abroad due to limited career opportunity in Finland.

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