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making
it work

The Swedish Case Study Report

About Our Project

Our partners, and the purpose of our work together

It was envisaged, during the application phase of Recruit and Retain – Making it Work, that our transnational project should run in parallel with a regionally funded implementation project involving a large number of inland municipalities within the county of Västerbotten. The large-scale regional implementation project failed to attract interest among the funding programmes and the Swedish ambitions had to be scaled down. A smaller local implementation project, funded by Storuman Municipality, as a side project to our Recruit and Retain – Making it Work, was designed and implemented.

The Swedish case study description took partly these changes into account and ambitions were set to a realistic level. The Swedish business case was implemented in close collaboration with Storuman Municipality, and partly funded by Storuman Municipality.

The focus of the implementation work remained as outlined in the business case description, activities have been implemented with the priority to:

- Provide opportunities for possible recruits to get acquainted with the rural regions improves the likelihood of a person deciding to work there.
- Provide opportunities to stay for a longer time period in at a rural based employer, prior contacts leads to longer length of stay once people move there.
- Strengthen the networks and alumni activities, since new recruits often comes from the same university or on the recommendation of people who have recently been in the rural area or employer.

It should be underlined that Sweden had to devote a substantial part of their resources for implementation activities, since the large-scale regional implementation project failed. The intended Swedish focus of developing a sophisticated structured evaluation system, supported by indicators, with the aim to provide evidence of the impact of the activities implemented became a second priority.

Focus was forced to be on implementing activities, that we have identified as appropriate from pilots carried out during the first project of Recruit and Retain . The first project Recruit and Retain, identified through their Strategic Management Group, several activities that was beneficial across sectors and our business case has implemented specially designed versions of some of these activities.

Our project activities and timelines

Rural Stream Medical Education Students to rural areas, transforming Medical School curriculum to increase the number of clinical practice days at rural primary care units.

Two students in each course are invited during this pilot/early implementation stage to make a clinical placement, a few times, during a semester at the cottage hospital in Storuman and at Lycksele hospital. “- They get an insight into how common diseases and health problems can be expressed in sparsely populated areas, where, in comparison with larger cities, there is often a larger proportion of elderly patients, but also a larger element of emergency medicine,” says Patrik Wennberg at the Department of Public Health and Clinical medicine at Umeå University.

The students may also choose to complete their final thesis/final degree project in Storuman. The intention, in the long run, is to strengthen the provision of front line health care providers to rural areas. The pilot is monitored by an ongoing evaluation team comprised by a multidisciplinary research group at the university. “- The Medical Education Program Board sees the pilot trial as a test bed for the new extended medical education, which is most likely to be introduced in the coming years”, says Patrik Wennberg.

“By this pilot, medical students are given the opportunity to gain a better insight into and a positive image of the exciting and different task that is the reality when working in a rural area. The ambition is that more students, eventually, wants to specialize in general medicine and work in primary care” says Ewa Klingefors, acting primary care director at Region Västerbotten.

From a Framework perspective, this is an activity with strong evidence in literature, which is expected to lead a positive impact when it comes to recruiting professionals and gets them to stay at rural positions. This is important for recruiters so they can secure that they offer contract to the right people. This is also important for the job applicants to make themselves familiar with the environment before applying for a job in a rural location, so they feel more informed about the positions and the local community when they apply.

The ambition is that this activity/set up will lead to a structural change of the education system. It potentially concerns also other academic educations of other professions, which provide services in remote and rural locations. Centre for Rural Medicine has initiated a dialogue with Storuman Municipality to see if a similar rural stream can be created for students being educated to teachers. It should also be mentioned that the Swedish team is aiming to set up the summer camps for doctors and nurses, based on the model for summer camps that Northern Ontario School of Medicine is successfully making use of. This become another way of providing a stream of possible new recruits to rural regions.

In addition, Centre for Rural Medicine is slowly developing a portfolio of place based training opportunities for front line healthcare providers in rural areas, for instance “Resident Physicians in Hemavan”. This is a training course which is funded by the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social

Affairs. Participants are trained to address the specific conditions that is a reality for physicians in rural regions, including challenges related to distance and limited resources. Another course is “Acute medicine care in extreme remoteness” build around the specific challenging conditions which exist in Storuman Municipality, such as the mountain areas with its extreme remoteness and specific weather conditions. We have also from the first Recruit and Retain collaboration transferred a training related to Ultrasound for General Practitioners in Remote and Rural Regions. This is a training, initially developed in Scotland, which helps building a more comprehensive portfolio of training opportunities to secure competence maintenance and training for rural practice.

Connections to the “Framework for remote rural workforce stability”: Training Future Professionals

All criteria for success are viewed as necessary to take into account in order to successfully implement the Rural Stream of Medical Education Students.

Alumni register to capture people who are interested to move back. The title of the Swedish business case was “Come Back To Storuman”, and most activities has centered around this wordplay and vision.

When thinking about activities related to the elements of activity group planning, a starting point is to know whom to contact. For Storuman it is a priority to inform about the development that is occurring locally, even for people that has moved out of the municipality. A register of all people moving out of Storuman Municipality has therefore been developed, the register contains approximately 2.800 people of which 1.440 is between the age of 25-55. The register is used to send newsletters to inform earlier people living in the municipality what is happening. The register is also used when arranging activities for different target groups of priority, such as the yearly university student information event that has been held in conjunction with the local festivity “Storumandagarna”.

Connections to the “Framework for remote rural workforce stability”: Emphasize Information Sharing

The main criterion for success necessary to succeed with the task of creating an Alumni register is Adequate Investment. However a register is only a tool to initiate activities with. For expected activities all five criteria for success are foreseen as necessary to take into account.

Web tool UinNorth.se to provide overview of rural life style opportunities. The web tool UinNorth.se was developed during the first Recruit and Retain project, to support recruitment to rural areas in the north of Sweden.

The purpose of the web-tool was to share information about rural living, including lifestyle, leisure and work. The initial site contained information about two municipalities. We have learned that transparent and accessible, accurate information builds trust with possible recruits. Providing an overview of rural life is of priority to invest resource in the correct possible recruits, recruits that can see themselves in the environment where the positions are based. Further it was seen that the web-tool needed to demonstrate a wider geographical scope of opportunities, also from neighboring municipalities. Therefore, this updated web-tool has now been developed and supplemented with information, image and film material about rural living in eight municipalities. The website offers a 360 degrees perspective on rural living in the different municipalities.

Connections to the “Framework for remote rural workforce stability”: Emphasize Information Sharing, indirectly Community Engagement and Supporting Spouses and Families.

All criteria for success are viewed as necessary to take into account in order to successfully implement the Web tool Uinnorth.se.

Relocation Coordination Officer, to facilitate community engagement and improve impact.

Storuman municipality has seen the need and opportunity to further strengthen the community engagement, for instance by engaging the entire community to provide good, meaningful and varied spare time and recreational activity programme and for possible recruits. The unique angle taken when investing a relocation officer is to focus on coordination, by approaching existing organisations and addressing the opportunities from their point of view. Tina Kerro, relocation coordinator at Storuman Municipality explains “- an organization shall be made aware of what happens if they add a new members to their organization, what can they achieve by that”. This creates opportunities for organizations to widen their scope of activities, but it could also mean that their current activities can be sustained. Further Tina view that Storuman Municipality is well positioned, with all the pieces in the puzzle available; “- by playing them out together it is expected that a stronger impact can be achieved”. Tina’s strategy is to capture the stories and to share them with operation managers across different organizations. As Tina explains “- Operation managers need to know about what can be offered, they need to be able to explain what is out there, know the sunshine stories and share them to create inspiration for their own staff (to become spokes persons of what is available) as well as being able to attract possible recruits”. The long-term ambition is to create inspiration so that a strategic recruitment and retention approach can emerge, across organisations and companies in Storuman Municipality.

An example of what coordination can lead to is when the Swedish team applied the concept of couple recruitment. When recruiting a new CEO to one of the municipal owned companies it was discovered that his wife was a teacher. The municipal relocation services coordinated the contacts between the school management and the teacher. Both persons are today employed and have moved with their entire family to Storuman Municipality. This example can be claimed partly to be a coincidence, but coordination certainly helps to coincidence to occur more often.

Connections to the “Framework for remote rural workforce stability”: Community Engagement and Supporting Spouses and Families.

All criteria for success are viewed as necessary to take into account in order to successfully implement a Relocation Coordination Officer.

Combined positions, to widen the career opportunities and improve the recruitment potential.

The number of vacant positions for nurses has increased for some years; it has been difficult to change this development even if different measures have been taken. During the last year, comparison have been made of number of applicants to traditional nursing positions at the cottage hospital in Storuman and combined research-nurse positions partly based at Centre for Rural Medicine and at cottage hospital in Storuman. We can see a greater interest for combined research-nurse positions, which is also attracting applicants not currently based in Storuman. This is a system at early stages of development, which needs to be further tested and systematically evaluated.

Connections to the “Framework for remote rural workforce stability”: Training Future Professionals, using research and development centre attraction to create combined positions to fill vacant rural service positions. Relevant Professional Development, combined positions help creating career development.

All criteria for success are viewed as necessary to take into account in order to successful implement a system of combined positions.

What resources (funds and in-kind) were required for the project

In addition to Northern Periphery and Arctic funds, a partner budget 771 000 EUR which is including Lead Partner coordination and other responsibilities, the following additional investments have been identified:

- Local implementation project: 500 000 SEK investment by Storuman Municipality (downsized from the intended large scale regional implementation project).
- Work in Local Implementation Committee: Approximately 2 months of work by Swedish Public Employment Service
- Work with incoming services: A full time position over two years, still ongoing, at Storuman Municipality.
- Work with rural stream, medical school at Umea University: Estimated time at the University of Umeå is about 6 months of work. In addition, the work by that students that have taken part in clinical practice at cottage hospital in Storuman and Lycksele hospital as part of the rural stream concept. This is still at a piloting stage, work in progress with the ambition to be fully adopted when the Medical School at Umeå University will be revised in the near future.
- In addition, several different resources have been pooled to implement the activities, initially anticipated to form part of a large scale regional implementation project. Estimated 6 months of work.

Key Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The most important outcomes of our project

We view that our most important and measurable outcomes are:

- Going from project to process, Region Västerbotten has decided to invest 1 million Swedish kronor per year and assigning Centre for rural medicine to facilitate and coordinate recruitment processes in joint collaboration with inland municipalities in the county of Västerbotten.
- Number of clinical training days, for Medical Education Students, in remote and rural regions has increased from 18 days to 91 days.
- The website Uinnorth.se has had between 300-400 visitors per month and the majority of the visitors are from the age group of 18-34 years old. The most visited pages on the site are "job vacancies", "mountain hiking", "couples recruitment", "living in rural areas", "developmental opportunities" and "distance by car". In summary this tells us that the website succeeds in reaching a young audience who are interested in working and living in rural areas.

We also observed a number of unforeseen positive outcomes which has occurred, through our coordinated efforts, these outcomes include:

- The opportunity and interest in Storuman Municipality to take ownership of their development, and template on the Rural Stream for Medical Education Students for other professional services in Storuman which require university education.
- A strong monitoring and evaluation system, with an evaluation group, is set up and assigned to carefully study the effect of providing clinical training opportunities for Medical Education Students in remote and rural regions. Evaluation is ongoing and structured data is produced.
- Taking responsibility and strategically developing a set of unique place based training opportunities for frontline healthcare providers has resulted in:
 - Increased attention to and status of skills required for remote healthcare
 - Increased interest among professionals to work with remote and rural primary care
 - Participants are looking into opportunities for exchange, short-term contracts or vacant positions at Storuman cottage hospital.
- That couple requirement can happen through community engagement and coordination, a decisive factor for the professionals recruited.
- Having a research and development centre in a small municipality can become a factor helping municipal service providers and businesses recruiting expert staff, by providing opportunities for combined positions.
- The webtool, www.uinnorth.se that, in addition to providing users with sophisticated packaged information, attracts people to take the step to submit unsolicited applications. 7 persons submitted their unsolicited applications through www.uinnorth.se during the period of March 2018-September 2018.

Lessons Learned

The following two lessons can be drawn from the experiences of implementing the Swedish Business Case.

1. Work with what you know you have!

The early large-scale ambitions with a parallel regional implementation project covering multiple municipalities failed, although the hopes were high to succeed to present a successful bid to the funding programmes. This slowed down the entire implementation work in Sweden, and energy had to be devoted to pull other resources together to get implementation going.

This caused the Swedish partnership to devote their project resources to invest in creating the strategic collaboration partnerships between Region Västerbotten and Umeå University, for Rural Stream of Medical Education Students without the support and back up of a Municipal Directors from several inland municipalities in Västerbotten.

However, by applying the rural model, which is based on trust and collaboration, through support and attention by several operation managers from multiple organisations a traction and momentum for the process was achieved.

We can conclude that a process for remote rural recruitment and retention can be started by coordinating existing activities, to secure possible synergies and increase activities impact.

2. Need patience and endurance - difficult to apply monitoring on already existing systems

The strong project ambitions to collect structured data, by setting up a baseline for each business case condensed into a baseline data report was agreed as one of the corner stones of Recruit and Retain – Making it work. This is also outlined as one of the essential elements of the “Framework for remote rural workforce stability”, which is the main conclusions from 7 years of recruitment and retention collaboration in remote and rural regions.

The work to design the structured evaluation, under the supervision of the Evaluation Working Group, was running smoothly during the early stages of the project. This includes the design and selection of indicators, appropriate for the different regional/local business cases, as well as setting up the monitoring system. However, it turned out that data feed from external resources are difficult to secure.

Our recommendation is to apply structured data collection only for processes that your own organisation is responsible for. However, structured data collection from external sources can work if data collection is well embedded in the system, preferably by an automatic feed, from start when new processes are set up. Note above given example on monitoring system for the Rural Stream of Medical Education Students.





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