

Moving from introduction towards integration of new employees – objectives and methods

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The professional integration of new employees is very important for several reasons and has several dimensions. This paper intends to describe different factors related to the integration of new employees. Experiences from Statistics Norway recent reform of an introductory course program will be discussed; both the intentions and the layout of the program and an evaluation of the program and how it could be improved. Statistics Norway has about 1000 employees in two locations, and employs between 50 and 100 people annually.

1. Introduction

An employee's first few months in an organisation are important in several ways. To be effective the newly recruited needs an understanding of (among other things) the products and services of the organisation, and the objectives to be reached both as individual, section and organisation. New colleagues have to be acquainted, and the organisational culture familiarized. This is no easy task at hand. Also, it is in these first few months that the groundwork for both the organization's and the employee's satisfaction is laid, and ultimately the choice of continued employment.

Statistics Norway employs between 50 and 100 people annually. Currently the situation is that all new employments are put on hold, but we believe this situation to be temporary. Regardless the number of new employees, it is important to give them the support they need, to integrate new them, orient their job and enable them to quickly adapt to new environment.

Statistics Norway has in previous years spent considerable time and resources on an introductory training course. It has been run at least twice a year for many years, covering altogether 8 days of which 3 days were allocated to statistical methods. Although the course received a pretty good evaluation, a further inquiry (group interviews) showed that very little of the topics presented were remembered afterwards, and that little of what was taught was used in their daily work. The new employees stated in interviews that they wanted to know more about SSB at a strategic level, what the overall goals were and how they could be targeted and met. They also wanted practical information on Human Resource issues, and IT systems and tools. Other topics sought after were individual career development, and possibilities for working abroad. Considering the length of the course and resources spent on it, it was decided a revision was needed.

After lengthy discussions, the new course was designed with our main strategy as a template. The strategy sets the direction for Statistics Norway's development in the years ahead. It is built around a few brief primary strategies: *Statistics portray society, Research of high quality, Satisfied users and motivated respondents, Cooperation to improve statistics and Quality in every process*. By using these same topics as a way of organizing the course, we have a pedagogical framework for organizing the course as well as ensuring that our strategy

and main goals are made clear. But this also means that the schedule is relatively tight, and some topics from previous programme are no longer relevant. The new programme was executed for the first time in autumn 2009.

When designing an introduction course it is necessary to consider who these new employees are, which skills, behaviours, and attitudes are needed to perform their roles effectively. What specific competencies are needed? What training do they already have? The programme is intended for all the new employees within the first several months of their employment. Newly recruited have diverse backgrounds, and their job specific tasks will be numerous. We believe that the more practical statistical skills employees need to perform their job are individual and best taught in the work setting, by colleagues. Thus, it was decided that the topics presented in the course would be of a more general character. For example, the extensive training on statistical methods and standards was taken out of the course.

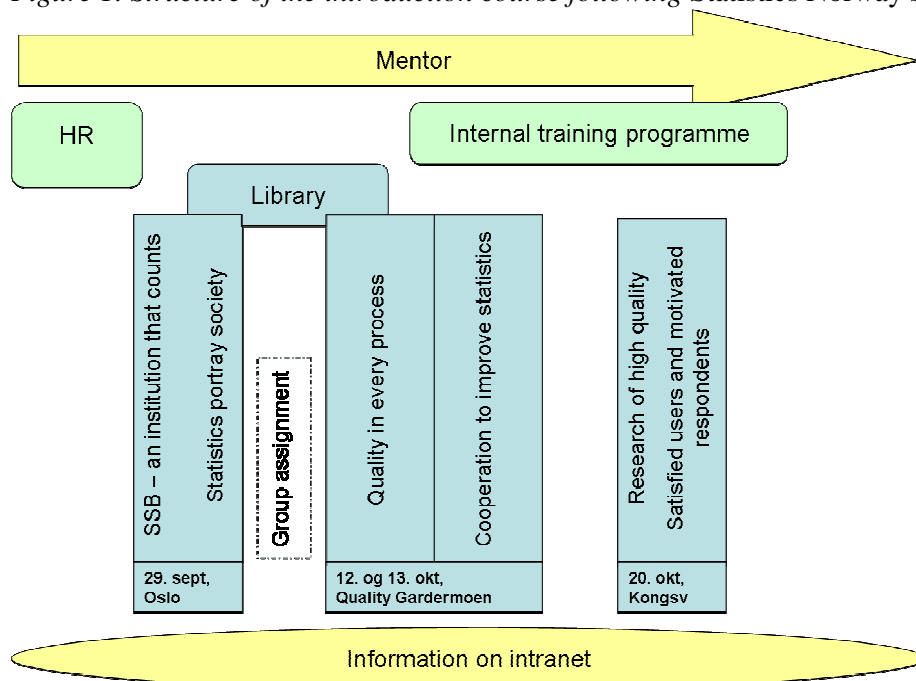
The aim of the program is stated as:

- Contribute to creating a positive start for new employees
- Create a better understanding of Statistics Norway as an institution and Statistics Norway's responsibility for society
- Give an overall understanding of statistical activities, and what describes good statistics.
- Contribute to creating professional and social contacts across departments

2. Structure and content of the course

The content of the introductory course is derived from the Statistics Norway *Strategy 2007* and is formed to provide an overview of the organization as a whole. The structure and content is presented below.

Figure 1. Structure of the introduction course following Statistics Norway Strategy 2007



Day 1

The topics presented during the first day refer to the statements from Statistics Norway *Strategy 2007* “Statistics Norway – an institution that counts” and “Statistics portray society”.

- Statistics Norway’s strategy;
- Statistics Norway’s social mission, history and culture;
- Statistics Norway’s safety procedures;
- The totality and the individual elements of the statistical production.

Day 2

The topics presented during the second day refer to the statement from Statistics Norway *Strategy 2007* “Quality in every process”.

- Quality work in Statistics Norway;
- The importance of good questionnaire in quality work;
- What is metadata and its importance of Statistics Norway;
- Why do we need statistical methods in Statistics Norway;
- Quality work - presentation and dissemination.

Day 3

The topics presented during the third day refer to the statement from Statistics Norway *Strategy 2007* “Cooperation to improve statistics”.

- Statistics Norway 's national contacts and partners;
- Relations with suppliers of administrative data;
- International cooperation;
- International collaboration – some practical experience;
- How we work and cooperate within Statistics Norway.

Day 4

The topics presented during the fourth day refer to the statements from Statistics Norway *Strategy 2007* “Research of high quality” and “Satisfied users and motivated respondents”.

- Statistics Norway’s establishment in Kongsvinger;
- Dissemination of statistics and analysis;
- Data collection;
- Data collection and dissemination of the consumer price index;
- Statistics Norway’s research activities.

The programme consists of different presentations by internal presenters as well as practical cases and group works. Consumer price index (CPI) was used as an example throughout the program, to make some of the more theoretical topics more accessible to the participants, as well as understanding CPI. There was a course leader present at all lectures, who introduced speakers, summed up discussions and tied topics together. We want to point to the significance of this course leader, who is central in the planning and implementation of the course. This function is responsible for the professional totality of the course. Although the presenters are responsible for their individual topics, it is the course leader who makes sure that the course in total succeeds and that all topics contribute to the aim of the program and complements each other, instead of overlap. The ownership of the course lies with this function – not with the statistical experts.

The course is organized in both offices of Statistics Norway (Oslo and Kongsvinger) to enable employees to get familiar with both work locations and different departments. Two of the days are spent outside the office, which gives a possibility to new members to get to know each other better in the outside of the office environment. The programme is followed by the evaluation scheme which provides guidelines for further improvements of the course.

3. Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation of the introduction course has been made¹. The main conclusion is that the course was perceived as informative, it gave general knowledge and feeling of belonging to Statistics Norway as well as it created overall positive impressions. Participants were very positive to being able to meet top leaders in the course and get to know other employees. In addition, the course was well structured and thoughtful providing opportunity for new employees to visit both of the offices. The course increased the participants feeling of belonging to the company and provided general knowledge about Statistics Norway. In addition, participants thought that Statistics Norway would benefit by providing the course since new employees would gain higher motivation and dedication to their work after they complete the course.

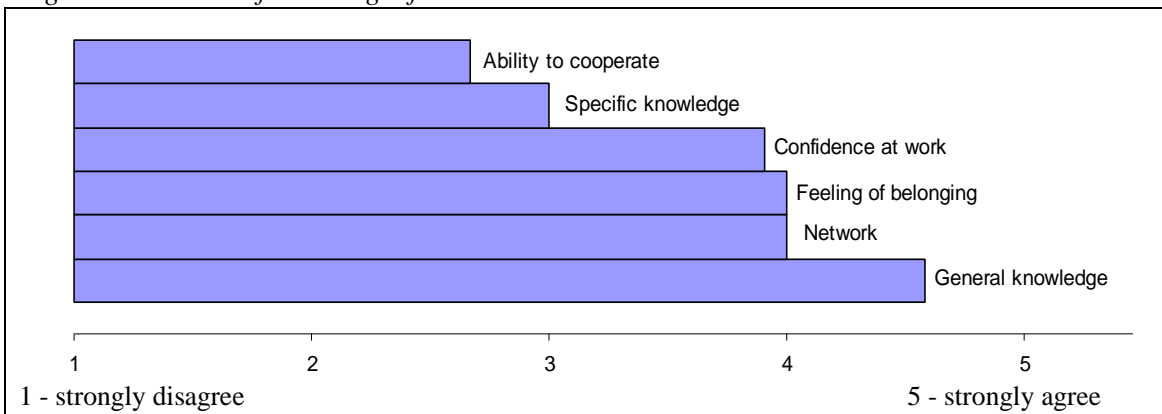
When looking at the detailed purpose of the course, as described above, we can see that the goal was mostly met.

Aim	Result
Contribute to creating a positive start for new employees.	Met. “The course gave positive impressions”.
Create a better understanding of Statistics Norway as an institution and Statistics Norway’s responsibility for society.	Met. “The course was informative and provided general knowledge about the company”.
Give an overall understanding of statistical activities, and what describes good statistics.	Partly met. “Gave an overall understanding. The course could provide more specific knowledge”.
Contribute to creating professional and social contacts across departments.	Met. “This is a great opportunity to meet leaders and get to know other employees”.

¹ Evaluation drafted by Rita Braziunaite (trainee Statistics Norway September 2009 – April 2010).

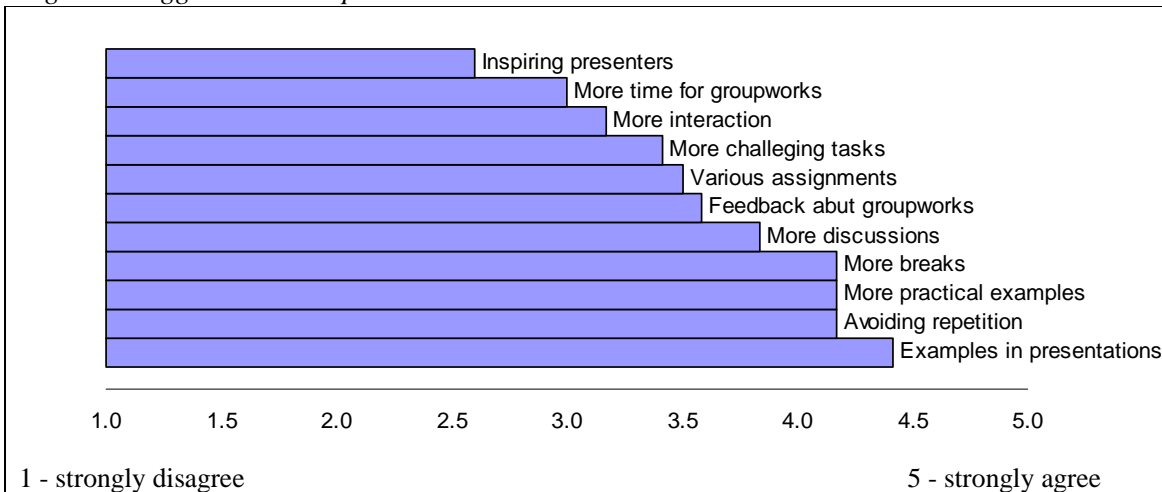
The evaluation uncovered several areas for improvement, as seen in the figures below. These evaluations were made on the 5-point scale (1-strongly disagree while 5-strongly agree).

Figure 2 What benefits did I get from the course?



Participants claimed that they gained general knowledge about the company, more specifically this means that they learned about the organization’s structure and strategies used at Statistics Norway. They also stated that they got contacts with people from different departments and got a feeling of belonging to Statistics Norway. However, they believe that they did not gain enough specific knowledge that is relevant to their job. Also, they do not think that this course taught them how to cooperate with other employees.

Figure 3 Suggestions to improve the course



Some of these suggestions are easier to resolve than others, for example more time for group works. Others, as will be shown in the next section, call for a discussion of a more principal character.

4. Thoughts for future planning

When planning a course like this, there are many considerations to take; many parties are involved. Our experience is that management and other employees are passionate about this

programme and have strong opinions. Many topics are considered important, yet a selection has to be made. There is also a political element, as all the different departments should be represented in the programme. To make the appropriate adjustments for the next course, some matters will have to be discussed. In the following we highlight some of these.

General vs. job specific knowledge

As mentioned above, the introductory course has been shortened from eight to four days, and topics are of a more general character. The introductory training is a basic course and it is the same to all employees. However, we see that it can be a challenge that the topics are perceived as *too* general, so they lose their relevance for the individual participants. To give everyone specific job knowledge is difficult, as there are many different jobs within the organisation. Our plan is to complement this course with more specialized and advanced courses that are formed according to specific competences and needs of the employees. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the difficulties of targeting each individual in such a diverse group new employees are. If the information is perceived as not relevant for the job, it is easily forgotten, and this is of course a problem.

Many brief vs. a few thorough topics

There is a lot of new information for the participants to take in, and the timeframe is short. So how does one go about to prevent ‘information overload’? We tried to keep the presentations short, and not too thorough. Evaluations showed that this was perhaps not the optimal solution. Although participants did not think that course was too repetitive, which means that participants found every topic bringing them new information, they asked for more examples in the presentations, more practical tasks, more discussions, and more feedback on group works. (Various were evaluated between 3,5 and 4,5 which indicates that they agree that employing more practicality in the course would improve its quality). It seems the participants felt that a short presentation on a topic is not enough. The challenge with a more practical approach is that these things take more time, which means some topics must be cut. As many topics are seen as equally important, it is difficult to see which ones can be taken out.

Inspiring presenters

Related to this is the lack of inspiring presenters. Participants did not think that all lectures were very motivating, and some were too theoretical. Although most of the presenters are experts within their field, and clearly passionate about their subject, not all succeeded in engaging their audiences. The communication was often one way, and PowerPoint with a lot of text was the preferred medium. Presenters were given a summary of the evaluation. We gave clear instructions to the presenters on the main purpose of the topic, and encouraged interactivity. One can speculate on whether the timeframe was too tight, and that the presenters felt they had too much to say in too little time, and therefore focused more on presenting the material than interacting with the group. Bearing in mind that the presenters are first and foremost statisticians, perhaps we need to coach and train them extensively beforehand.

Statistical vs. non-statistical competence

Statistics Norway is currently working on a framework for competence². The framework distinguishes between three main types of competences: ”**basic competences**”, “**core competences**” and “**job specific competences**”. Basic skills and competences in Statistics

² For more information on this see the paper submitted by Jan Byfuglien and Beate Johnsen. **Why and how to improve competence descriptions and evaluations in a statistical institute? Some experiences from Statistics Norway.**

Norway are defined as those competences required of all employees in the organisation, regardless of role or business unit. Core competences are linked to the primary task of statistics production. Job-specific or specialist competences are applied to specific roles, job groups and functions, especially within the field of methodological, ICT or administrative support, but might also be the case for specific tasks within the statistical production process. Although some of these are clearly present in today's programme, it seems natural to integrate this into the programme in a more systematic way.

It is interesting also to note that the formal academic training is not the most prominent feature in this framework. This does not mean that academic background is unimportant, rather it is a prerequisite. Thus the important issue is in what area our training can complement the formal education of our staff. We believe there to be less stability in future, regarding staff, technology and internal production processes. We see a future organisation with many cross-cutting projects and tasks and moving in the direction of process orientation. This organisation will require staff with strong abilities in team work and project/process management combined with innovative and analytical capacities, in addition to the more statistical subjects. Perhaps this is the area where focus should lie?

5. Towards an integration program

For the new employees, this is a period when much is to be learned. Not just professional tasks and responsibilities, but also culture and codes, relationships to colleagues, where to find information, routines, identification of key players, organisational structures and so on. These are topics that can not be taught in the classroom. Newcomers learn through active participation in a social practice, and as a result of interaction between newcomers and established members. Nevertheless, new employees need structure and support to find their way. Therefore, to complement the more traditional introductory program, other supporting processes will be looked at in parallel. We want to move from an introductory programme to an integration programme.

We are currently also working on the following measures:

- The role of the mentor, more assistance and clearer definition of responsibility
- Review information given by HR department at arrival and after some months
- Assess (and possibly add) courses offered at our internal training to this target group, make some mandatory for some groups
- Update and supplement information at our intranet
- Individual career planning offered after 12 months on the job
- E-learning on certain topics. This means training can be offered at a more targeted time, e.g. 2 weeks after employment begun.

We hope that together with our improved introductory course this way of organizing will give the new employees the knowledge and support-system they need to fulfil their potential.