

## **Becoming an attractive employer for future employees: Some experiences from Statistics Norway**

Invited paper submitted by Statistics Norway<sup>1</sup>

*In the current labour market there are good opportunities for recruiting skilled professionals and technical workers. However, to attract 'the right' people is a critical challenge for Statistics Norway as the communication channels used by the company should be more adapted to the needs of the 'digital society'. This paper aims to discuss how Statistics Norway is branding itself, how the company is perceived in the eyes of the students and what are the most attractive communication channels that enable to reach prospective employees with the skills and behaviours that are necessary for organisation to succeed. Particularly, experiences from building the new website of Statistics Norway will be emphasized as well as other channels such as career fairs and company presentations on campuses will be overviewed, which believed are necessary tools in strengthening employer brand.*

### **1. Introduction**

For the moment there is relatively good supply of potential candidates with relevant competences for recruiting. However, to be visible and to attract 'the right' people is a critical challenge Statistics Norway is facing. In relatively near future this challenge might be even more important as there might be stronger competition for candidates with relevant competences and background. In addition, due to age structure of the present work force, Statistics Norway will have to recruit and train more staff due to retirement of a significant number of knowledgeable and experienced employees. Currently, around 40 per cent of the employees in Statistics Norway are more than 50 years old, whereas situation in the Kongsvinger office is even more critical and has around 54 per cent employees in this age group. In 10-15 years time there will be a noticeable number of employees who will retire. Many of those employees were working in Statistics Norway for almost all their lives and are competent in running various operations in different areas. The challenge is not only finding competent people to fill the needed positions, but also attracting the right candidates who are willing to stay with the organisation for some time. At present, the turnover of employees in Statistics Norway accounts around 6.5% (2009), however higher among the newly recruited (with less than five years length of service). This affects the stability of competences and production capacity in some areas<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper drafted by Rita Braziunaite (trainee Statistics Norway September 2009 – April 2010) and finalised with contributions from several colleagues; Heidi Torstensen, Jan Byfuglien.

<sup>2</sup> *Reengineering the statistical production process and the changing needs for human resources – some experiences from Norway*. UN Forum on Human resources management and training. 3 - 5 Sept. 2008

Statistics Norway is continuously investing in student research, profiling, employer branding, and definition of the competences that are needed in the organisation. All these initiatives contribute to make the organisation a more attractive employer and in creating interest in the field of statistics as well as ensuring recruitment including mathematicians, statisticians, economists, engineers and others.

Statistics Norway is aware of the changing surroundings and the challenges and opportunities employing a new generation. 'The digital society' is a unique group of people who were born after 1980 and who is emerging in the workforce rapidly. They have grown up with technology like no any other generation, particularly communication technology and the Internet. They constitute the majority of Statistics Norway's new employees and in the near future they will be a major part of the entire organisation. There is a challenge finding effective communication channels to reach them, to recruit them and to integrate them in the current working environment.

This paper aims to discuss the necessary tools to recruit future staff with relevant competences and different ways to become an attractive employer. It will also discuss how the company is currently perceived in the eyes of the students and what are the most attractive communication channels that enable to reach prospective employees with the skills and behaviours that are necessary for the organisation to succeed.

## **2. The strategy for becoming an attractive employer**

In 2007 Statistics Norway decided upon a strategy for human resources as a sub strategy of the overall strategy document "Strategy 2007". One of the main headlines of this strategy highlighted the importance of becoming an attractive employer. Statistics Norway believes that it is essential to meet growing competition for qualified personnel by projecting the organisation as an attractive employer.

This strategy is being implemented through various actions in the annual work programmes, and is a background for our work. Statistics Norway's Activity Plan for 2009 emphasized that skilled staff with an ability to adapt to change is a prerequisite for realising the plans that have been adopted. Targeted and systematic efforts are therefore being made to develop the right skill-set among employees to meet the requirements from a changing environment with new user requirements. Statistics Norway meets the competition for labour by promoting the organisation as an attractive place to work in relevant specialist domains at universities and colleges. A presence at universities and other higher education institutions makes Statistics Norway more visible to future employees.

In addition, the Strategy for Human Resources 2007 emphasizes that Statistics Norway shall focus on recruiting and retaining well-qualified staff. Statistics Norway must offer competitive salaries, particularly compared to other public bodies. Opportunities for professional development shall be emphasised. In addition, flexible working hours and the opportunities for international contacts and to work abroad will be actively promoted in the marketing.

Moreover, continuously enhancing satisfaction of current employees and encouraging them to share their positive experience with potential candidates would contribute strengthening employer brand and increasing the attractiveness of the organisation.

SSBs HR strategy underlines the importance of management, and emphasizes what to expect from the leaders.

A leader in Statistics Norway:

- Implements the strategy
- Stimulates innovation and improvement
- Takes responsibility for the whole
- Develops expertise
- Treats employees as a whole

A management program has been developed, deeply rooted in the organizations strategy and written principles for management. During the last two years four major themes have been lectured, and each leader has carried out a 360 degree evaluation. It's more likely that qualified leaders are able to improve conditions for their employees, by stimulating innovation and developing expertise. Satisfied employees are good ambassadors on behalf of the organization.

### **3. The importance of employer branding**

Being an attractive employer requires a good strategy with targeted interventions and systematic work. Employer branding is a tool to position the organization as an attractive employer to selected audiences. Employer branding is a long-term work based on a deliberate plan. The common branding practice shows that brands cannot be built over night, they are built over time. The purpose of employer branding is to build a strong, attractive, true and consistent picture of the employer that will succeed in attracting and retaining key talent.

Statistics Norway is continuously working on improving the organization's brand as an employer. For two years Statistic Norway has engaged external consultants for advising and implementing a method for employer branding. At the same time Statistics Norway has continued its work on improving the image as a producer and as employer for existing staff.

The consultants suggested five steps to be followed to ensure efficient employer branding:

- Step 1: Research
- Step 2: Employer Value Proposition
- Step 3: Communication Plan
- Step 4: Communication Material
- Step 5: Action

#### **3.1 Research**

The first step refers to the research that an organization should perform to acquire knowledge of the current position of the employer brand. Both external and internal researches are vital for creating a sufficient starting point of the employer branding strategy. Statistics Norway is regularly conducting both internal and external research which helps to create an understanding of internal and external target groups, to find out their perception of the organization and their needs. All this contributes to creating a useful base for decision making in later stages of the employer branding process.

### 3.1.1 External research

In 2008 Statistics Norway participated in a survey concerning students' career preferences, their employer preferences, the rankings of other employers, and the preferable communication. The survey made visible potential applicants who are attracted to Statistics Norway and how Statistics Norway is perceived amongst them.

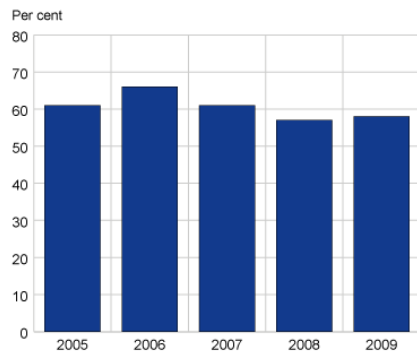
The results of the Universum Student Survey (2008) shows that Statistics Norway scores highly on the employer reputation and image (4.14 on the 5-point scale) while the most attractive employers in Norway also obtain similar results or even lower results on this dimension (for example Statoil, Norges Bank and the Ministry of Finance score 4.29, 4.24 and 3.93 respectively on the 5-point scale). The employer reputation and image is one of the four main drivers which are critical for employer attractiveness. The results also show that Statistics Norway scores lower on the remuneration and advancement opportunities. This employer attractiveness driver includes dimensions such as prospects for high future earnings, competitive benefits etc. The top findings of the main drivers of employer attractiveness for Statistics Norway are presented in the figure below.

**Figure 1. Employer Attractiveness – Statistics Norway. Universum Student Survey 2008**



Statistics Norway is aware that there is a need for improvements in the remuneration and advancement opportunities. As previously mentioned under the Strategy for Human Resources 2007 Statistics Norway is planning to offer competitive salaries, opportunities for career development, and benefits such as international work challenges and further career development. Statistics Norway is working on the implementation of the strategy and hopefully these possibilities offered to our employees will contribute to strengthen attractiveness of Statistics Norway as an employer in the eyes of current and future employees.

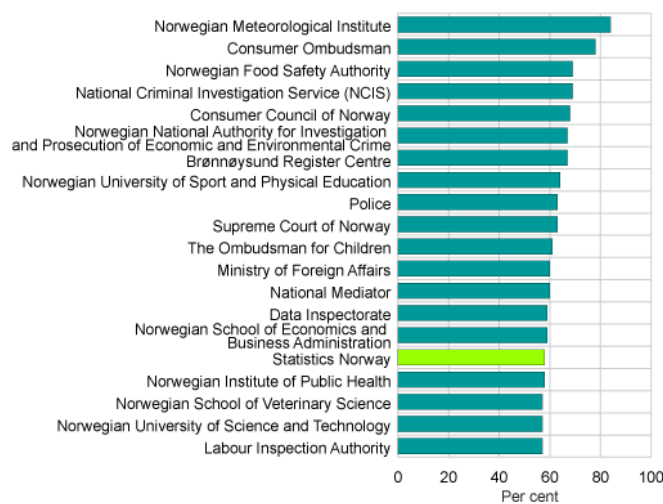
The share with a «very good» or «fairly good» total impression of Statistics Norway. Per cent



Source: Synovate 2009.

Another external survey in 2009 shows that a total of 58 per cent of the population report a good overall impression of Statistics Norway. This is very much the same result as for preceding years.

The share with a "very good" or "fairly good" total impression of various government agencies. 2009. Per cent



Statistics Norway is number sixteen in the rankings for overall impression in 2009. Ahead of Statistics Norway are, among others, the Norwegian Meteorological Institute, Consumer Ombudsman, National Criminal Investigation Service, Norwegian Food Safety Authority and Consumer Council of Norway. Only 3 per cent say they have a “slightly or very poor” impression of Statistics Norway and 39 per cent of the respondents have no opinion on Statistics Norway. With regard to information and transparency, Statistics Norway holds eighth place.

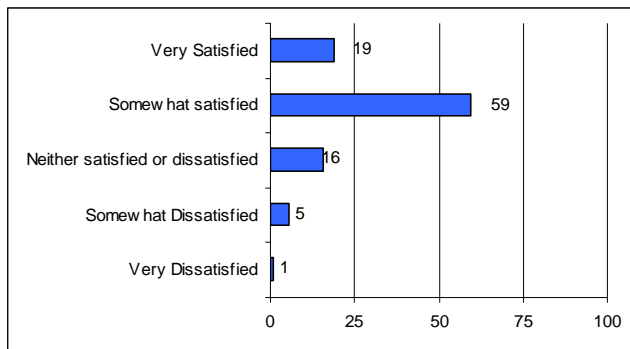
### 3.1.2 Internal research

In addition to the external professional survey Statistics Norway has an internal employee job satisfaction survey. The purpose of this survey is to provide an indication of the employee's perception of the work environment in the organization. The employee job satisfaction survey

provides the basis for implementing measures to improve the working environment in Statistics Norway.

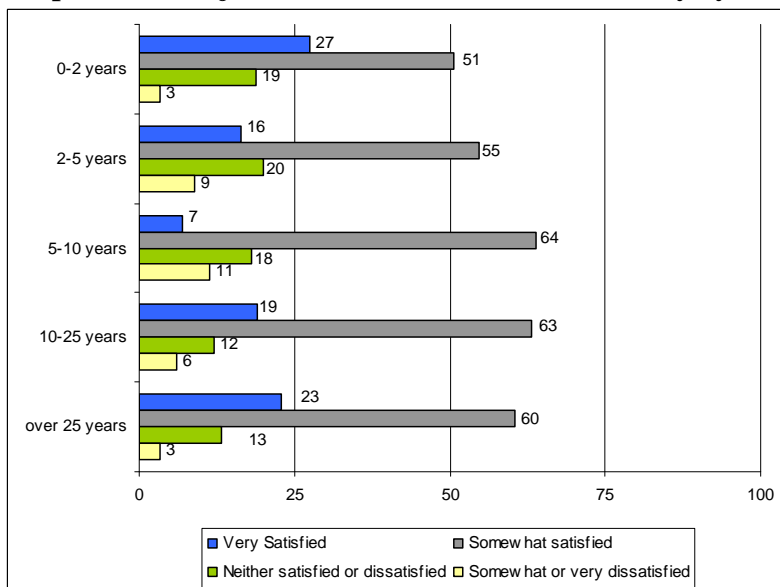
The results of the job satisfaction survey 2010 shows that overall employee satisfaction is 78 per cent (this includes both very satisfied and somewhat satisfied employees). There is a slight improvement when comparing with the previous years, where overall satisfaction in 2007 was 76 per cent.

**Graph 1 Overall job satisfaction at Statistics Norway 2010**



When looking at the results by seniority (number of years worked at Statistics Norway), it is interesting to note that the highest number of very satisfied employees lay among the newly started employees, who mostly belong to the age group of people under 35 years. Overall satisfaction is highest among those that are staying with organization the longest, above 10 years (82 – 83 per cent), and the less satisfied are employees who are working in the organization between 2 – 10 years (71 per cent). The results about the overall job satisfaction in Statistics Norway by seniority are presented in the graph 2.

**Graph 2 Overall job satisfactions at Statistics Norway by seniority 2010**



The deeper analyses of the survey show that employees are satisfied because they are working in an academic environment (84 per cent) as well as they feel that the work tasks are useful.

Statistics Norway is also facing some challenges as there are a quite significant number of people (37 per cent) who plan to seek other work outside Statistics Norway. This is one of the major retention challenges which refer to a desire of better wages, career development and new challenges. As mentioned previously, Statistics Norway is employing new strategies for human resources and working on meeting these challenges.

Statistics Norway is planning to conduct a job satisfaction survey every two years. The survey is a barometer and is intended to give an idea of what main challenges Statistics Norway is facing in terms of employee satisfaction.

### **3.2 Employee value proposition**

Following the strategy suggested by the consultants the second step to be taken when working with employer branding is employee value proposition. The objective of this stage is to define a set of values, associations and offerings that characterize the company as an employer. The set must support the business strategy of the company and fit into the employer brand.

Statistics Norway Personnel Policy 2001 decided on values, goals and principles. This document sets out goals and direction for further development and practice of human resource policy measures. Personnel policy defined values that are fundamental for Statistics Norway to function as a knowledge organization, and to be perceived as an attractive workplace.

Statistics Norway believes that employees should take responsibility for their own and the organization's development, and that they should contribute in creating a good working environment. Statistics Norway demonstrates trust in people by giving them individual responsibility, support and freedom in their work. Employee competences and commitment are considered as most important resource in Statistics Norway. It is therefore essential that all employees are given development opportunities. Both academic and social skills are valued at Statistics Norway.

Statistics Norway expects that employees updates themselves about Statistics Norway operations, engage themselves in the work and participate actively in the restructuring process, so that Statistics Norway is well prepared to meet new demands and challenges from the environment.

The goal of the personnel policy 2001 is that all employees are familiar and deliver on Statistics Norway values:

- Reliability
- Equality
- Cooperation
- Openness
- Loyalty

Statistics Norway decided on values nearly a decade ago. However, it should be better communicated to both external and internal audiences, as not all current and prospect employees can easily recall them. Statistics Norway believes that in order to become an attractive employer one of the critical steps is to clearly communicate about who we are, what values are important in the organization and what opportunities we offer to our employees.

### **3.3 Communication plan**

A communication plan is the third step to be followed when working with employer branding as suggested by the consultants. The employer value proposition needs to be communicated in a planned way in order to affect the candidates we are looking for at Statistics Norway. The Student Universum Survey 2008 found out how the students prefer to gather information about their potential future employers and how the students who are attracted to Statistics Norway have gathered information about the organization. The results from the survey about the communication channels are presented below:

Top 5 - Preferred communication channels in Norway:

- Company Presentations on Campus
- Company Websites
- Career Fairs
- Acquaintances employed by the company
- Career Websites/Internet Job Boards

Top 5 - How the students attracted to Statistics Norway have learned about us:

- Articles in newspapers and magazines
- Career Fairs
- Company Websites
- Advertisement in print media
- Don't know

Statistics Norway is using a variety of channels to reach the prospective candidates. The organization is actively participating in different career events such as company presentations on campus, career fairs at the universities and other events related to recruitment. Once a year Statistics Norway is visiting different Universities such as Oslo University, NTNU in Trondheim, Bergen University, Norwegian University of Life Sciences in Ås, NHH in Bergen and Karlstad University in Sweden.

Statistics Norway is actively providing presentations for various primary, secondary and high schools to make pupils familiar with the organization from their early age. Through collaboration with schools, we may help giving teachers and students an insight into the value statistics is creating, strengthen students' educational development and provide advices and guidance on their education choices.



### 3.4 Communication material

Communications material is the fourth step to be developed when working with employer branding, as suggested. In this section we will present what communication material we are planning to use in our new career website.

In addition to the company presentations on campus and career fairs, company websites are considered to be as one of the most preferred communication channels among students. Corporate career websites is no longer a competitive advantage, but instead the primary source searching information about the work. Nowadays, Internet penetration is very high (88 per cent in 2007 in Norway). This has changed the way employers focus their communication towards potential employees. Statistics Norway is currently taking initiative to become better on promoting the organization online. At present, Statistics Norway is building a new career website and if this turns to be successful it will deliver the message to prospective audiences about the different opportunities in Statistics Norway, trainings and developments, the possible career paths, the values of the organization and other important information that is useful to know for prospective candidates.



### 3.5 Action

Following the strategy suggested, the last steps to be taken when working with employer branding, is action, evaluation and adjustments. These steps brings together all the previous steps and helps to evaluate and adjust all activities continuously. Employer branding needs specific measures in order to be successful.

The development of our brand will be evaluated by following measures:

- Attractiveness among specific target groups
- Number of applications with right profile received per position
- Percentage of satisfied employees
- Employee turnover
- The image of the organization as a producer of statistics

Statistics Norway, looking at these measures, should set the targets on a realistic level and attach a time scale to each of them

#### **4. Conclusions**

To conclude, there are many actions that Statistics Norway is taking to become an attractive employer. According to annual surveys, a very popular source of information for graduates and professionals is 'acquaintances employed by the company'. Satisfied and proud employees communicates positive experiences to external contacts, and the awareness and attractiveness towards Statistics Norway will be noticeable.

Statistics Norway has a high profile in media as the source for official statistics in Norway. Delivering statistical information relevant for actual political issues gives the organization a lot of "free publicity".

One aspect to take into consideration, compared to other NSIs, is that Statistics Norway also include a relatively large research department providing substantive research in the fields of economic and social statistics. For some students this department is especially attractive. At the same time many students get knowledge about Statistics Norway by using statistical information in their studies. This give a broad audience wide knowledge of the organization and its products. Statistics Norway benefits from this publicity as an employer. Thus for future recruitment it is important to maintain the image as a producer of high quality products and at the same time continue to improve the information channels concerning our products and our organization.