



Success Factors

from Nordic educational
projects designed to
meet challenges in
society

Eight Success Factors

from Nordic educational projects
designed to meet challenges in society.

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This is an edited compilation of the research report "Analysis of Nordic educational projects designed to meet challenges in society. Defining the success factors ", developed by Jyri Manninen (University of Eastern Finland), Hróbjartur Árnason (University of Iceland), Anne Liveng (Roskilde University in Denmark) and Ingegerd Green (freelance consultant, Sweden) within the framework of the NVL's Competence Project 2009–2012.

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Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century brought some major changes which affected the economy and the labour market in almost all Nordic countries. Especially severe structural changes took place in Iceland, where there was a downswing in fishing, the US military base closed down in 2006 and, last but not least, the global financial crisis hit the country with disastrous consequences in September 2008. The unemployment rate soared while statistics showed that about a third of the work force had not completed upper secondary education.

Based on the above and with the knowledge that other Nordic countries had faced similar challenges, the Icelandic Coordinator within the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) initiated a project to examine successful Nordic educational projects. The aim of the project was not just to identify and highlight

a number of so-called “best practices” and to leave the matter there. A team of researchers was assigned to analyse some thirty successful projects from all the Nordic countries in order to establish what characterises projects that in their different ways are successful in meeting challenges, seizing opportunities and contributing to constructive change in society and working life.

This work resulted in a research report containing detailed descriptions of eight success factors which characterised the selected projects. With links to relevant research and theory and with specific examples from the various projects, the success factors can be recommended to everyone involved in the designing and planning of educational projects.

This booklet summarizes the eight success factors in a concise and clear manner. The intention is that reading the booklet will

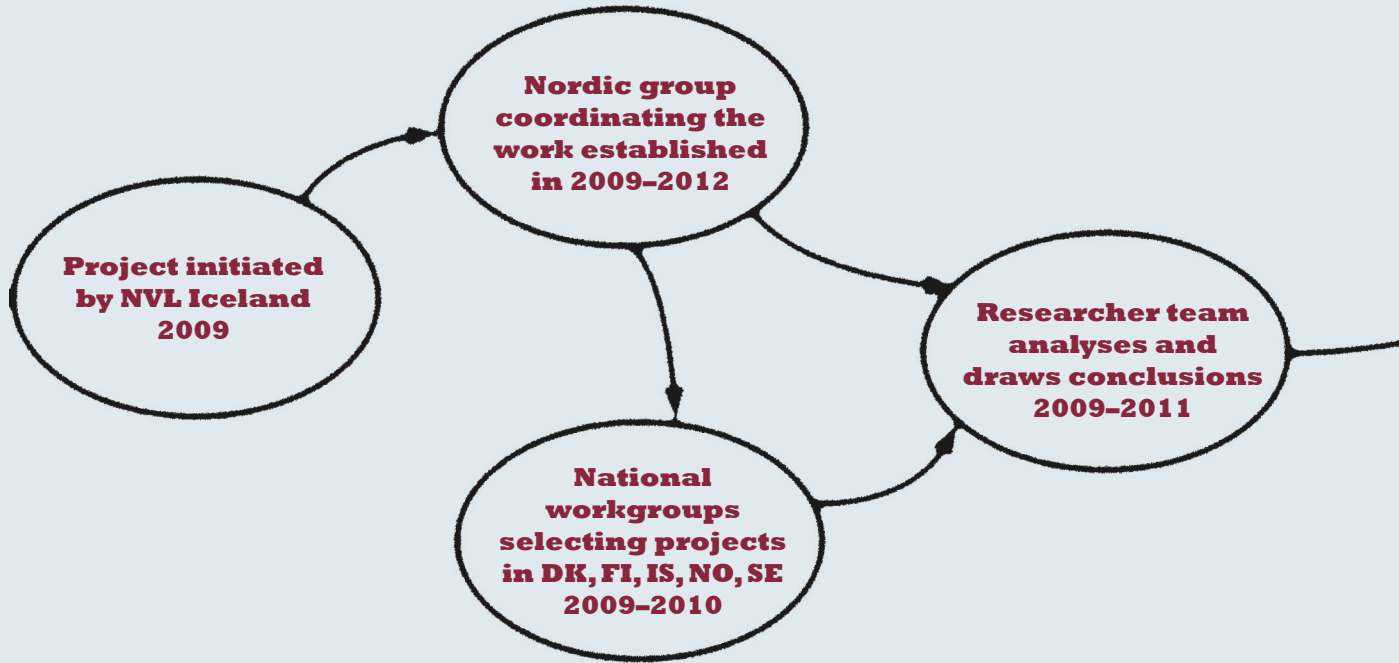
attract your attention to, or remind you of, what appears to be crucial to the success of an educational project and will inspire you to engage in the research report - “Analysis of Nordic educational projects designed to meet challenges in society. Defining the success factors“ (ISBN: 978-9979-72-141-3) which is available to download as a pdf on www.nordvux.net

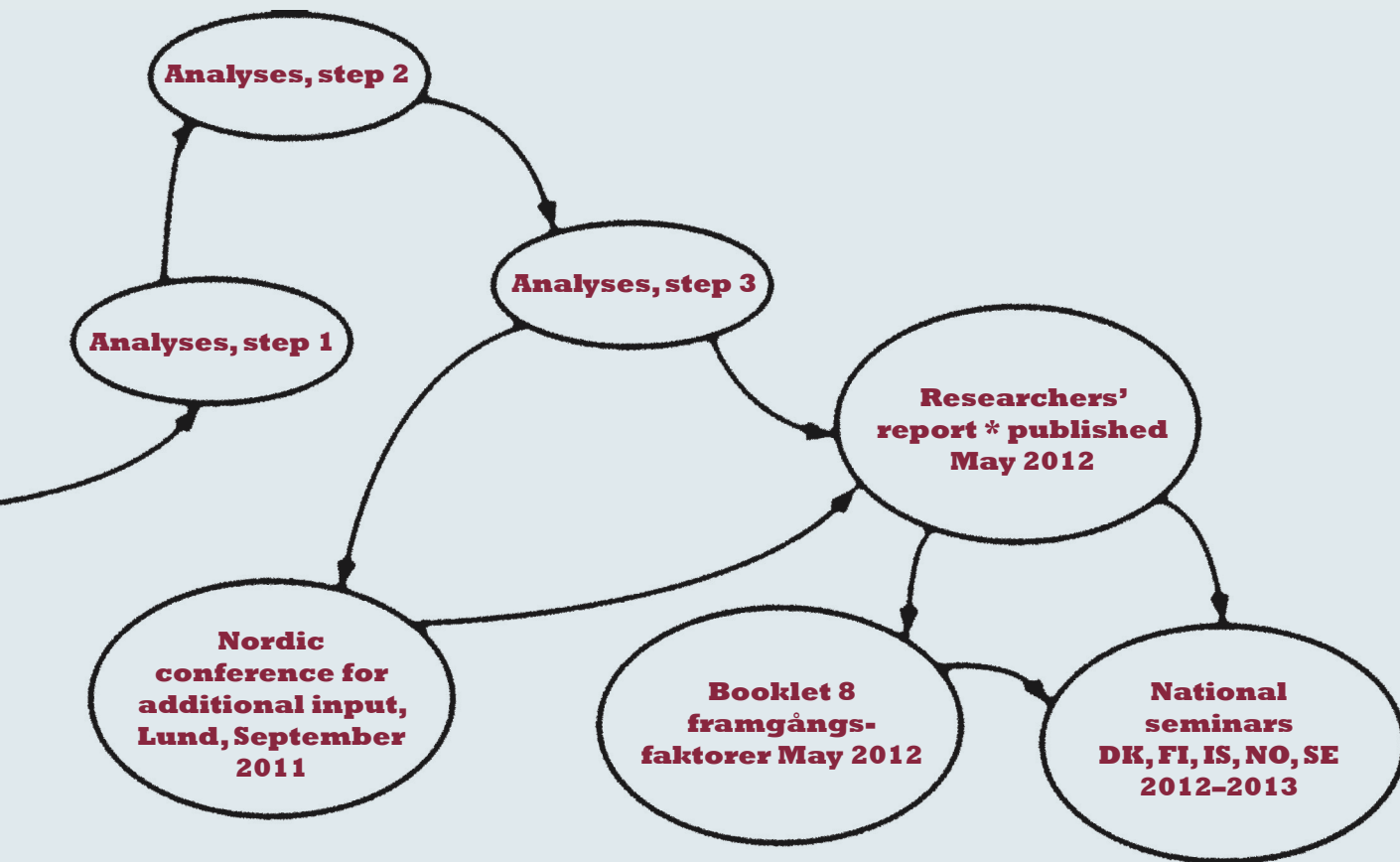
Wishing you an enjoyable read,
Ingibjörg Elsa Guðmundsdóttir

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How we worked





* Jyri Manninen, Hróbjartur Árnason, Anne Liveng, Ingegerd Green (2012). Analysis of Nordic educational projects designed to meet challenges in society. Defining the success factors. Published by NVL, Nordic Network for Adult Learning. URL: <http://www.nordvux.net/page/812/kompetensutveckling.htm>

In search of success factors

Organisation of the work

The project work was organized in three groups - a Nordic group, national working groups and a researcher team. The Nordic group, with representatives from all the Nordic countries, had overall responsibility for coordinating the project and, initially, this group formulated the directives that directed and guided the work of the national groups and the research team. During the project the group met regularly in order to follow the progress and results and to ensure that the project was driven forward according to plan. The various members of the group were, in turn, responsible for keeping contact with their national group. In this way the whole development process was sustained. A presentation of the Nordic group is on page 50.

The national groups consisted of experienced and knowledgeable people with different

backgrounds and from different sectors of society. Under the leadership of the NVL's national coordinators the national teams were responsible for everything, from formulating criteria for the selection to identifying, discussing and choosing successful national education projects and programs. The Danish team launched a contest to gather projects. In Sweden, the national working group defined the criteria for success and selected a handful of projects on the basis of these. In Norway there was a national seminar to present suitable projects. The Finnish group identified eight different projects and in Iceland 20 projects were gathered and two experts assessed them.

There was a final, qualifying selection of 33 descriptions of training projects, or larger training programs. These were submitted to the Nordic group, who together with the research team defined the process by which

analysis would be conducted and conclusions would be drawn about what made the projects particularly successful.

The research group consisted of a researcher from Denmark, Finland and Iceland, as well as a practitioner from Sweden. With a large amount of data collected, a number of cross-cutting issues and with extensive experience and knowledge in the field, the group started their search for what had significantly contributed to the 33 Nordic training projects which were perceived as being particularly successful. They also screened for strengths which were identifiable as being specifically Nordic. The work was conducted alternately in working meetings and through individual work and continued for nearly two years. The research group is presented on page 49.

The first step of the analyses

After reading through all the material, it was decided to gather additional information directly

from project managers and others who had been involved in the projects, this time from a structured project description form with certain questions, whose answers would provide both in-depth and new information on the projects.

The second step of the analyses

It soon became evident that the selected projects were diverse in nature, with different purposes and scope. In order to facilitate the continued analytical work the projects were analysed and categorised by applying six different dimensions relating to how an educational program is designed to meet challenges and changes in society.

On the one hand the projects were grouped on the basis of what characterised the project implementation. Were they reactive, proactive or innovative and change-oriented? On the other hand they were grouped on the basis of what the projects ultimately aimed to achieve. Was the main objective to develop competitiveness

in relation to others in similar situations, or to develop new skills and create new jobs?

Many of the projects gathered turned out to contain elements that matched well with

several of these dimensions. But in most cases it was possible to determine in which category the project primarily belonged, and this greatly eased the continuous search for success factors.

	Reactive	Proactive	Innovative & change-oriented
Competition	Job search skills Career planning skills	New forms of employment and income	Encouragement of innovations, entrepreneurship
New skills	Training filling the current skill gaps	Training anticipating future trends	Change agents Chaos pilots
Creation of new jobs	Development programs to meet the current needs of the labour market	Development programs anticipating future trends	Innovative development programs

The third step of the analyses

After a second round of data collection and categorising the projects, the number of relevant projects could be reduced from 33 to 21 and from these 14 preliminary success factors could be identified. After further analysis and processing the research group redefined and modified the success factors until finally eight clearly defined success factors evident in the projects emerged. A list of all the projects can be found on page 47.

Nordic balancing conference

Before the final task of compiling a report with the findings was completed, the Nordic group, together with the research group, arranged a conference in Lund, Sweden. Representatives from the education sector, research society and social partners from all the Nordic countries participated with critical and constructive reflections on findings presented in the preliminary report. After the conference, the

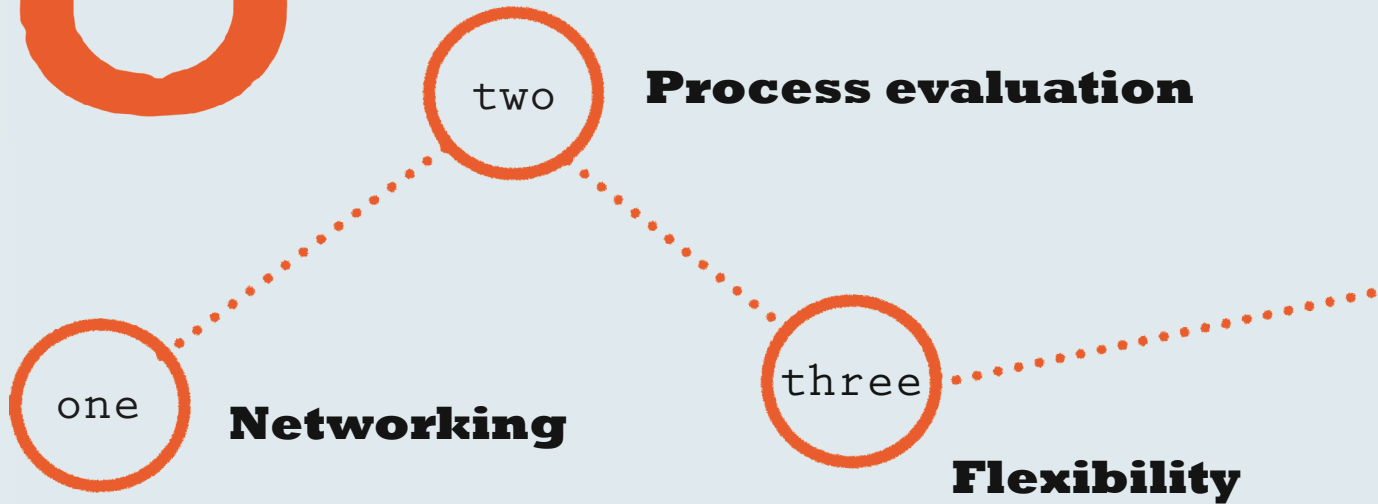
research group was finally able to compile its report — which is now available for download on NVL's website, www.nordvux.net.

The Process continues

To disseminate knowledge on the eight success factors so that they can have a significant value for those who develop, drive or finance educational projects of various types, the Nordic group decided to conduct national workshops, spread over a period of one year. At each of these seminars a member of the research group takes part, in the hope of providing a basis for an on-going exchange of experience in what characterises those educational projects which succeed in responding to challenges, seizing opportunities and contributing to positive development in society and working life.

8

Success Factors



**New role for
institutions**

five

six

**Getting new
groups involved**

seven

**Community as
pedagogical
strategy**

four

**Focus on
needs**

eight

**Sustainable new
structures and
practices**

success factor [one]



Networking

To plan and implement a project by **networking** with different actors and stakeholders provides many benefits. Conscious networking can make the project more innovative, financing easier to resolve and create a sense of belonging that motivates the participating organisations to do their best.

→ [networking]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ Clearly, untraditional networking between different types of educational providers, other organizations and governmental agencies has many advantages.

→ This type of networking not only makes the programs more innovative, but is often also a prerequisite for a successful outcome.

→ Networking leads to more ideas and makes it easier to put them into practice. It also makes it easier to find funding.

→ Cooperation with new and unexpected partners helps to break up traditional roles of the organisations and makes it possible to reach new target groups and motivate them towards learning.

→ Networking also creates a sense of involvement among the participants in a project. It motivates individuals from the participating organisations to be involved.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

→ **The Nordic values of inclusion, community and a strong social capital as key ingredients create an excellent climate for networking.**

success factor [two]

Process evaluation



Process evaluation as a form of follow-up and development of project processes and results creates opportunities for continuous improvements while the project is in progress. When the evaluator returns analysis, findings and knowledge to the project organization and target group, this enhances learning and the experiences of the project are utilised in a way that creates added value.

→ [process evaluation]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ A constructive dialogue between the project and the evaluator during the whole project increases the ability to remedy flaws in a way that directly creates value in a project.

→ The evaluator will be a valuable advisor and supporter of the project activities and not a controller at the end of the work.

→ By starting the evaluation process in the planning phase, the quality of the needs analysis is improved, as is the formulation of goals.

→ A well-planned, systematically and professionally conducted process evaluation costs slightly more than a traditional evaluation, but it awards greater and different value to the projects.

→ As long as the basic principles of the process evaluation are followed in its implementation, it will lead to a good outcome regardless of whether there is access to a nominated adviser from the academy or not.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

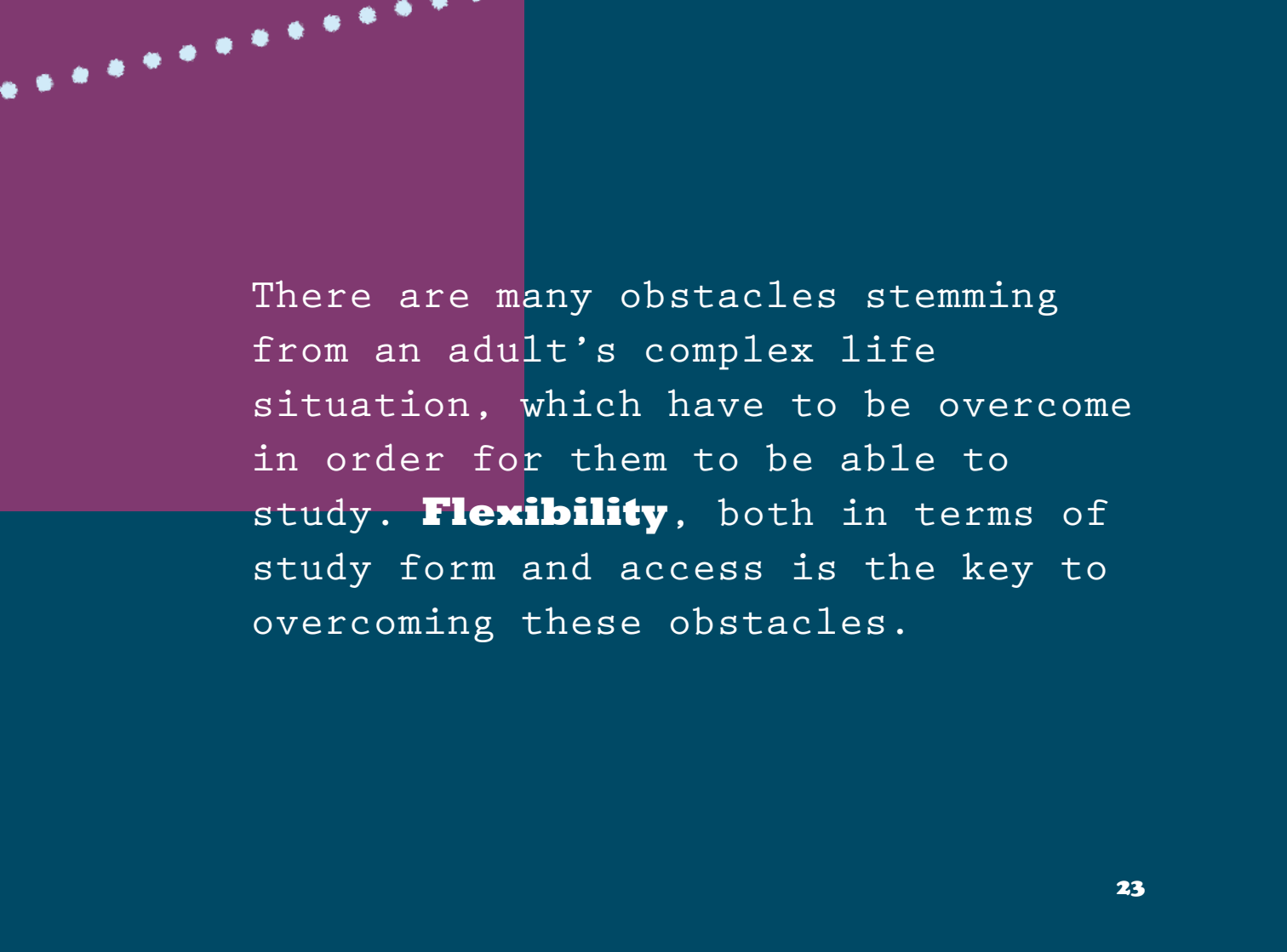
→ **Process evaluation is based on the ability to engage in constructive dialogue and to be able to take on board constructive proposals for change and improvement. These are abilities that have been developed and strengthened in the strong tradition of openness, cooperation and consensus that has long characterised working life as well as society in the Nordic countries.**

success factor [three]



three

Flexibility



There are many obstacles stemming from an adult's complex life situation, which have to be overcome in order for them to be able to study. **Flexibility**, both in terms of study form and access is the key to overcoming these obstacles.

→ [flexibility]

three


This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ Individual tailor-made learning content is found to be the best guarantee of success.

→ Flexibility in content and execution makes it easier to overcome some of the obstacles an adult learner faces caused by a complex life situation. It may involve lack of time and money or family commitments,

but also lack of motivation, interest or perceived needs.

→ Educational programs with flexible forms of learning, both in terms of what should be learned, at what pace, where the education takes place and how it is carried out, create sustainable results.



→ For individuals with little formal education, learning that takes place outside the traditional classroom was found to be easier to grasp. Learning based on flexibility from several different perspectives has proven to be easier to move out of the classroom and into an authentic workplace environment.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

→ **There is a long and strong tradition of development of adult learning in the Nordic countries based on individual needs and background. A widespread and easy access to IT has also created opportunities for highly flexible learning in the Nordic countries.**

success factor [four]



Focus on needs

A fundamental and perhaps obvious precondition for a successful educational project is that it should meet actual **needs**. Needs, which can be recognised both by individuals and in society at large, have to be carefully defined before the content is shaped. This may seem obvious but has often proved to be a neglected success factor.

[focus on needs]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ An inventory of needs carried out from several different perspectives provides better conditions for meeting the expectations of several target groups on project results.

→ When all stakeholders in a training project are cooperating in analysing the needs identified, the picture of the demand becomes concrete and is perceived as real by all involved.

→ In successful programs for developing labour market training the need of the target group is identified and analysed by the representatives of the target group - trade unions, employers, organisations, relevant ministries and other governmental agencies in co-operation with educational providers.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

→ When the target group and the educational provider have come to consensus on what an educational effort can lead to and this meets the needs for competence development of the individual, it creates a strong motivation to complete the training.


→ **Because the Nordic countries have a high level of education, it is easier for both individuals and organizations to identify their learning needs. Research shows that the more education a person has completed the easier it is to recognise new training needs.**

→ **The Nordic educational providers are not hierarchically structured but rather based on democratic principles with a culture where both teachers and educational providers recognise the individual's needs.**

success factor [five]

New role for institutions





In contexts where institutions that are part of an educational project are challenged to take on a **new role**, or turn towards new target groups, this can spur the development of opportunities for a variety of positive changes in the organization.

[new roles for institutions]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ When the participating institutions adopt new or different roles, they have developed a sound critical view on their practices and this has a positive effect on the project's results.

→ By granting institutions new and unaccustomed roles in a project, both institutions as organisations and individual

employees become inspired to innovate both in terms of attitudes and practices.

→ With changing tasks and roles the institution as a whole and its employees are given the opportunity to develop new skills and gain innovative knowledge.

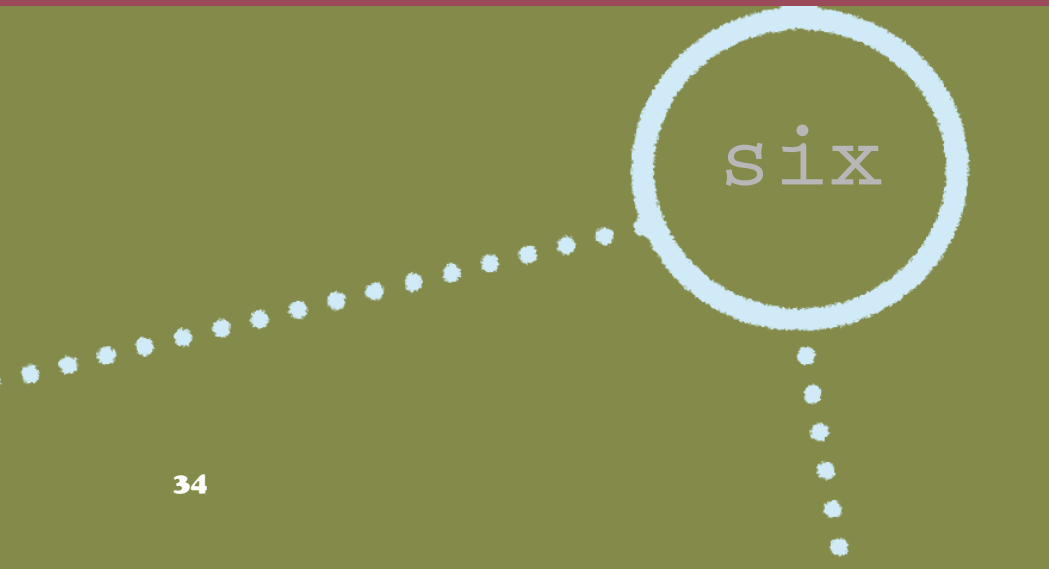
→ When participants and project staff are forced to think again, and not just carry on in old, familiar ways, tasks and assignments are worked through in a more effective way, with more power and stronger motivation.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

→ **The Nordic countries are relatively small and capacity does not allow the establishment of new institutions when the need arises. Instead it will be natural for the existing organisations to re-evaluate and change their roles and take on new positions.**

success actor [six]

Getting new groups involved



To succeed with the involvement of **target groups** that normally do not participate in learning activities is important not only for the individuals themselves but it also develops an educational provider's ability to develop achievements for society at large.

[involvera nya målgrupper]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ By combining offers and opportunities on the multi-faceted Nordic educational scene, new and even unfamiliar audiences in education are reached.

→ For training organisations, working with new audiences often means developing new approaches and new learning, which strengthens and improves the quality of their activities.

→ By turning to new audiences, training providers can expand their activities, create new jobs in their organization and in turn strengthen its position.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

→ When lower educated and new target groups whose competences need developing are given the opportunity to participate in relevant training, it strengthens the individuals' confidence and their position on the labour market is improved.

→ **The relatively egalitarian and economically equal Nordic societal model sets the stage for an education system that caters to all citizens regardless of prior qualifications.**

→ **There is a tradition in the North for a variety of educational offers, with several entrances and a blend of formal education, folk high schools and evening classes conducted by various interested organisations.**

→ **In addition, the Nordic welfare model implies that the inhabitants like to engage in adult education both to strengthen their personal development and as a career opportunity, which has become a tradition for adult learning in many groups.**

success factor [seven]

seven

Community as pedagogi- cal strategy

A sense of **community** and belonging creates a good basis for learning. We simply learn better in an environment where we feel safe and are part of a community with others.

[community as pedagogical strategy]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ The sense of belonging to a group, and in collaboration with others, gaining influence over the learning process appears to create a desire to learn more.

→ When participants in an education perceive themselves as owners of the learning process and its various elements, it strengthens group cohesion as well as engagement in an activity.

→ When a group with strong solidarity comes into contact with new and perhaps unexpected groups the participants are challenged to learn from the interaction with people they are not usually expected to work with.

→ All training measures are limited in time, but the contact and exchange of experiences between the participants in

a training group which is deliberately community-based last longer. This may even result in the learning process initiated by the learning activities continuing after the training is finished.

→ When the participants feel that they are safe and belong to a group, focus and concentration on individual learning is sharpened.

NORDIC STRENGTHS

→ **Inclusion is a key concept in the Nordic welfare model and an important element in building a social community. Both educators and training providers aim to create a democratic and safe educational environment – both as a deliberate strategy, and as a result of this Nordic tradition.**

success factor [eight]



Sustainable new structures and practices

Projects that challenge organizations and participants to develop sustainable **new structures and approaches** to ensure that the project's results and ideas can live on even after the project has ended, are more successful than others in creating real change and sustainable effects.

→ [sustainable new structures and practices]

This is what we found in the successful projects:

→ In projects designed to bring about a more permanent change in an organization, it is of importance to identify already at the planning stage what is necessary to ensure that the project ideas and results will live on after the project has ended.

→ Allowing the project to result in new methods,

new curricula or in the establishment of a new quality standard, increases the chances of longer-term change.

→ Sustainable structures, practices and changes are created mainly in projects where there are conscious and systematic reflections on how and why individuals act in various project activities

and can quickly change their behaviour depending on the results of the analysis.

→ With new structures and practices it is possible to generate sustainable results without the need for more or extended funding for operations.



→ **Nordic institutions are often governed by a comprehensive set of written rules and procedures. This enables the rapid introduction of new structures and practices with great impact on an organization's activities.**

Special types of success factor

Most of the recommendations given to those who design, plan and implement different types of projects deal with how to build a healthy project structure and how to organize and lead to achieve objectives efficiently.

These perspectives on what makes a project successful were set aside in the competence project 2009–2012. To complement the more

traditional recommendations on how a project is successful in reaching its objectives, the research team chose to focus on the contextual elements that seem to be essential for success.

The results of this are the eight success factors, some of which, hopefully, can be perceived as new and therefore of particular interest.

The projects

To make it easier to identify and analyse success factors in the different projects, a model to categorize the submitted projects and programmes in five groups according to scope and focus was applied. To ease access to more detailed information on the projects in the research report they are listed here:

Large- scale national programmes

Noste

(Finland, Ministry of Education)

Education and Training Service Centre

(Iceland, Education and Training Service Centre)

Guidance and counselling in the workplace (on the labour market),

(Iceland, Education and Training Service Centre)

Regional development programs

New Waves

(Finland, ESEDU)

First reaction, Suðurnes

(Iceland, Suðurnes Life Long Learning Centre)

New Path

(Iceland, Life-Long Learning Centre of Eastern Iceland)

A Stronger Community

(Iceland, Farskólinn – Life-Long Learning Centre in North-western Iceland)

Network Initiatives

Toive

(Finland, Luovi Vocational College)

Kunstgreb

(Denmark, Danish Artists' Association)

Kollegial Vejledning

(Denmark, Region Sjælland)

Branch Initiatives

Finnish Entrepreneurs' Apprenticeship Project

(Finland, The Federation of Finnish
Entrepreneurs)

CNC Teknik²⁰¹⁰

(Sweden, Skärteknikcentrum Sverige AB)

Design in Metal

(Iceland, IDAN Vocational and Training
Centre, Printing and Graphic Area)

Value of Work

(Iceland, Education and Training Service
Centre)

Vincent

(Sweden, The Gothenburg folk high school)

krAft

(Sweden, Jönköping International Business
School)

Local Innovative Practices

Perlos

(Finland, City of Joensuu)

FLOW

(Denmark, Adult Education Centre Odense
and FORA 1748)

Prisma

(Iceland, The Iceland Academy of the Arts and
Bifröst University)

The Researcher group

Jyri Manninen is professor of adult education at the University of Eastern Finland. His main research interests are learning environments, participation in adult education, wider benefits of learning, developmental evaluation and lifelong learning policies.



Hróbjartur Árnason is a university lecturer at the University of Iceland where he heads a master's program on adult learning. His main research interests are adult learning and the use of ICT in adult learning.



Anne Liveng is a university lecturer at the University of Roskilde in Denmark, where she works with interdisciplinary research on healthcare education and healthcare.



Ingegerd Green is a freelance consultant and CEO for the branch organisation Skärteknikcentrum Sverige. She has extensive experience of competence development in the labour market and has participated in a number of NVLs competence networks.



The Nordic group

Ingibjörg Elsa Guðmundsdóttir

is the director of The Education and Training Service Centre in Iceland since its start in 2003 and has worked in adult education since 1985. Among other things, she has been teaching adults, participated in Nordic and European projects, served on the various boards and committees and participated in numerous working groups in the area.



Sigrún Kristín Magnúsdóttir

is specialist at The Education and Training Service Centre and has long-term experience of adult education. She is the Icelandic coordinator in the Nordic Network for Adult Learning, NVL, and was responsible for NVL's Competence project 2009–2012.



Peter Müller has been head of development at VCU North Jutland (education for adults and young) since 2004. Prior to that, he was Director of the VUC East Himmerland and Adviser to the Danish Ministry of education.

Peter has been involved in adult education since 1976, partly as a teacher, but above all as a coordinator of national and international projects, mainly focusing on the relationship between education and industry.



Ingegerd Green (see previous page).

During the first ten years of the 21st century, Europe was hit by two severe economic downturns which to varying degrees affected the national economy and the labour market in all Nordic countries. Against this background, the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) initiated a project to examine the characteristics of Nordic educational projects that successfully developed individuals' and organisations' ability to face the challenges following extensive changes in society and working life. Here we present an edited compilation of the success factors identified and described by the Nordic research group that has been active in the NVL's Competence Project 2009-2012. The script can hopefully serve as an inspiration for all those who in various ways are involved in planning, operating or financing educational projects.

Further reading in the research report:

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