



Co-Browsing and Recruitment Meetings Online

Study Visit to the Swedish PES (Arbetsförmedlingen)

24 September 2014

Follow-up to the Peer Review: Blended Service
Delivery for Jobseekers, Amsterdam, The
Netherlands, 5-6 June 2014



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1 Introduction

The Peer Review on “Blended service delivery for jobseekers” in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on 5-6 June 2014 highlighted the importance of innovative developments in the digitalisation of service delivery for jobseekers. Following this meeting, several public employment services (PES) expressed an interest in a study visit to the Swedish PES (Arbetsförmedlingen) to gain further knowledge and practical insight into two original projects currently being piloted on the PES website, namely a co-browsing tool and online recruitment meetings with employers. PES representatives from Belgium VDAB¹, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal attended the event.

¹ Every region in Belgium has a PES; The VDAB is the PES of Flanders.

2 Implementation logic for the Swedish PES

Both projects fit into a broader implementation logic of creating a virtual PES online, offering a range of 'self-serving tools' and 'personalised online support'.

There is a high demand from clients for Internet accessibility of Arbetsförmedlingen's services. At present, the Arbetsförmedlingen website has over two million unique visitors per month (the mobile Job Vacancy App itself receives 350,000 unique visitors per month), making the Internet the most utilised channel when compared to local employment centres and call centres. Official figures corroborate the **growing expectation** among customers to access public services online; in 2013, 89% of Swedish households had access to an Internet connection and the use of mobile devices has been growing rapidly in recent years²³.

Blended service delivery is already available through the Arbetsförmedlingen website. 'Self-serving tools' include a vacancy bank (80% of online visits are related to vacancy information), an online activity report (which jobseekers are required to update on a monthly basis), a CV database, online registration of unemployment, vocational information and guides, labour market forecasting for different professions, social media, and further online activities (tutorials, films, webinars). Online recruitment meetings with employers are the latest addition to this range of **'self-serving tools'** – this project is still a pilot. Co-browsing is a latest developed in the provision of **'personalised online support'**, which offers web visitors tailored support and guidance by specialised and dedicated or employment officers. This project was already launched at testing scale in 2014

Both projects are part of a **broader development strategy**, which aims to provide increased accessibility to PES services. As such, both projects contribute to developing services which 'are delivered in a way that is relevant and adapted to the client's capacity and situation'⁴, with a view to increasing customer satisfaction and trust. A central objective is to create a **more effective and cost-efficient organisation** that can deliver relevant services through the right channels. Therefore, both co-browsing and online recruitment meetings contribute to the delivery of the Arbetsförmedlingen's Development Strategy in 2010 that seeks to provide a greater offer of web-based services, the NEXT-Program that aims to build a new PES website, and the Digital Agenda 2013 that aims to provide more individualised support, improve and rationalise the service offer and "be where the customer is, when the customer wants us, [the Arbetsförmedlingen] needs to be there".

² "The Swedes and the Internet 2013", The Swedish Internet Infrastructure Foundation.

³ For instance, a 'Vacancy Bank' Application, launched in 2011, has 3 million visits per month (not unique users).

⁴ European Commission (2014), "Blended service delivery for jobseekers, Peer Review Host Country Paper, Brussels, Author: Arbetsförmedlingen, Sweden.

3 How co-browsing works in practice

The study visit provided a unique opportunity for participating PES to experience the new tool through 'live demos'. Below are some of the features of this tool.

The co-browsing tool provides real time one-to-one support online.

The co-browsing tool provides customers (employers *and* jobseekers) who are visiting the Arbetsförmedlingen website the opportunity to receive real-time, personalised hands-on support through a combination of assisted browsing, chat / text, audio and video facilities. The co-browsing tool **is manned by 21 part-time PES officers** located in seven contact centres located across the country (this figure corresponds to 10 full-time equivalents). Contact centres were first established in 2003 and now customers through a wide range of channels including telephone, email, chat, webinars and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram).

Co-browsing is presented as a clickable banner on selected PES webpages (these are defined strategically by the project group in dialogue with staff from the Market Area, and with recent statistical figures in mind).

Once the customer has clicked on the banner, his/her request will be queued in a centralised system, visible to all co-browsing 21 PES officers. An officer (based in a contact centre) will pick up the request and send a live chat message to the customer to offer assistance. At present, 98% of customers will experience a **waiting time of less than one minute** before their request is picked-up by a PES officer.

When the co-browsing tool is unavailable, **customers are referred to a different communication channel**. During weekends/holidays or when the queue becomes too long, the banner will still be displayed but a message will refer customers to the contact centre phone line (in opening hours).

A number of communication channels can be blended to support the customer.

When 'picking up' a new customer through the co-browsing system, the PES officer (1) sees which webpages the customer was visiting before he/she clicked on the assistance banner and (2) gains immediate remote access to their web-screen on the PES website (not the customer's computer). **Remote access** to the customer's screen position on the Arbetsförmedlingen website allows the PES officer to provide live support by highlighting information (in colour) on a webpage or filling-out certain fields (for instance of online activity report, which a customer is finding difficult to fill out).

Based on the customer's preference and need, the PES officer has different communication media at his/her disposal to provide the most effective support (live chat, phone, web-camera). **Media channels can be blended during the co-browsing session**, meaning that a customer may request to use chat/phone or phone/web-camera simultaneously. At present, live chat remains the most utilised means of communication within the co-browsing tool.

An interesting '**efficiency feature**' for the PES is that **the officer can handle multiple dialogues simultaneously**. Pre-prepared text, auto texts, links to FAQs, other pages on the Arbetsförmedlingen website and short informational videos - these are all *reference* tools the PES officer can use when serving a client online, which they can also share with the client directly. This allows PES officers to 'optimise' their interaction, for example by inviting one customer to watch a short information video while picking up another client from the queue. Importantly, PES officers who are dedicated to co-browsing must be highly knowledgeable about PES processes, rules and resources available to support customers in order to handle multiple enquiries.

Finally, at the end of a co-browsing exchange, the customer will be given the option of emailing the chat to his/her personal email address in order to keep a record of the information and refer to it later. Subsequently, the customer is invited to complete a short satisfaction survey on his/her experience with the co-browsing tool⁵. Today, results from these surveys show over **90% customer satisfaction** with the service provided. In fact, 92% of nearly 1,600 respondents said they “*would prefer this type of support/assistance again*”.

However, the co-browsing tool is aimed at **jobseekers who are job-ready and who have been unemployed for less than four months**. This means that customers who are not job ready or who have been unemployed for longer than four months will be referred to the local PES office for assistance. Discussions are underway to explore how more customers can be served digitally in the future, but today this is an important **profiling** component underpinning the use of and access to the co-browsing tool.

⁵ The PES officer will also be prompted to evaluate how the session went.

4 Delivering the co-browsing project: the journey and lessons along the way

Throughout 'live demos' and subsequent discussions, the Swedish PES highlighted the practical lessons and benefits which they experienced since the development and the launch of this tool. Indeed, the co-browsing service was launched on the Arbetsförmedlingen website in February 2014; the project's extension and expansion is planned for June-December 2014. Since the launch of the co-browsing tool, a number of lessons emerged around (1) accessibility, (2) flexible service delivery, (3) personalisation of online services, (4) cost-efficiency, and (5) PES organisational structure and staffing. These are outlined in turn below.

Co-browsing aims to provide targeted and easy access, while remaining discrete.

The co-browsing tool targets **web-visitors who are identified as being most in need of real-time assistance**. The clickable banner - triggering online assistance - appears automatically on selected pages (when a page loaded for the first time⁶), and it appears again when the customer is identified as encountering difficulties based on his/her browsing activity. Typical instances would be a page being loaded for the fifth time or three failed attempts at filling out a form. At present, 5-10% of customers who see this banner click on it. Via this tool, the PES has been helping around 4,000 customers per month (this number is growing).

An unanticipated effect of the co-browsing tool is that it **facilitates access to PES online services for non-native Swedish speakers**. Indeed, language needs of jobseekers from minority backgrounds are being catered for through a specific banner accessible on the Arbetsförmedlingen Arabic webpages, which directs customers to an Arabic-speaking PES officer. Non-native speakers appreciate receiving support in written form (live chat option), which they can subsequently come back to in their own time (by emailing the chat to their personal email address).

Access to the co-browsing tool is easy (a single click on the pop-banner will ensure live assistance within less than 1 minute) **and discrete** since the clickable banner remains visible for 1 second only when the page is loaded for the first time, then folds back. The objective is to provide a targeted offer of support while avoiding to disturb or interrupt a customer who does not need assistance.

The co-browsing tool makes flexible service delivery easier.

Flexible service delivery is a key benefit of the co-browsing tool. At present, this flexibility transpires in 2 ways: Firstly, in the wide range of communication media at the PES officer's disposal when interacting with a customer. Secondly, in the flexibility the PES retains when it comes to staffing co-browsing. Early findings show a peak in co-browsing activity around the 15th of each month, which is the date when jobseekers are required to fill out their monthly activity report. Subsequently, the PES has been able to regulate and adapt the number of co-browsing officers at customers' disposal in such periods of increased activity. .

In the future, flexibility in service provision will go further. The Arbetsförmedlingen is looking at **'skills-based routing' (SBR) to expand the co-browsing concept**. Skills-based routing is a customer-assignment strategy, which will assign incoming co-browsing customers to the most suitable PES officer. PES officers from different parts of the organisation have different skills and specialisations; accordingly, they will serve different queues of customers, depending on the questions asked.

⁶ The banner appears on 3 pages: "Activity Report" page (jobseekers are required to submit an activity report every 15th of each month), "My Profile" page (where jobseekers upload their CV) and the "Vacancy Bank" (where over 11,000 job vacancies are posted each month by employers).

Co-browsing is more efficient than other channels of communication.

Based on the number of customers a PES officer can handle per hour, supporting jobseekers through co-browsing is more efficient than email, face-to-face or telephone. This is mainly because the **officer can handle multiple cases** at once in the new system. At present, a PES officer can handle 12-15 dialogues per hour with the co-browsing tool, compared to 5-6 telephone calls per hour in the same call centre.

Cost-efficiency considerations have also led the PES to adjust the opening hours of their contact centres to adjust to weekly call patterns. Since the volume of incoming calls was low during working week evenings, the opening hours were reduced from 10pm to 8pm on weekdays and extended during weekends to start from 9am instead of 10am.

However, the co-browsing tool has implications for the PES' organisational structure and staffing strategy.

The co-browsing tool (and the centralised IT service it is built on) challenges previous assumptions that decentralisation improves public service provision, and that services are best delivered in local offices that understand the local labour market. The information technology supporting co-browsing opens up **new possibilities for personalised support provided remotely** to jobseekers across the entire country, so long as PES officers are provided with adequate support and knowledge about local and regional labour markets. Furthermore, online case-handling and skill routing could provide jobseekers in rural parts of Sweden with direct access to tailored support, which is unimaginable for them at a local level given the distance to their nearest PES office.

In that context, co-browsing also raises opportunities and challenges for a future PES staffing strategy. At present, the Arbetsförmedlingen has 320 local PES offices across the country and employs 13,000 staff (of which 8,000 are PES officers). The rapid expansion of demand for internet services and personalised online support underscores the **growing need for PES staff with strong IT literacy**. But it also raises the question of geographical location of PES staff and the channels through which services will be provided in the future. While local PES offices will continue to play a critical role in supporting harder-to-place job-seekers and long-term unemployed, the development of online support opens new avenues in the provision of remote services between IT-savvy PES officers and customers.

The IT technical component of delivering the co-browsing service are simple for the user.

Technical requirements on the client's side are minimal and simply require a browser that supports flash video, internet connection, and a video camera if the customer wants to use this type of communication channel during their co-browsing session. Therefore, co-browsing is a highly accessible service for customers, at no cost to them.

A Java Script (software) installed on the website digitally enables the co-browsing tool. The PES procured this tool by open tender. After procurement, the installation and configuration of the software was done **jointly between the PES IT and communications departments and the supplier**. This means that specifications for the co-browsing tool are highly tailored to the PES's requirements and environment.

PES representatives from other countries attending the event expressed an interest in the services package supplied by the IT provider used by the Swedish PES. It was also noted that growing competition for this type of services could serve to reduce costs in the future.

5 Project under development – recruitment meeting online with employers

Recruitment Meetings Online (RMO) is a pilot project - due to be launched in early 2015 – which functions like **'speed dating' for employers and jobseekers and which facilitates the matching process between them**. This initiative seeks to replicate the successful recruitment meeting which are organised in local PES offices in Sweden today. Recruitment meetings Online simply makes use of videoconferencing to mirror the concept of short interviews (3-4 minutes long) between both parties. At a fixed date/time, jobseekers will queue up online and the employer will dedicate a specified timeframe to interview shortlisted candidates. An alternative formula consists of jobseekers recording video answers to video questions posted by the employer online.

In practice, recruitment meetings are published in the **'Vacancy Bank'** on the Arbetsförmedlingen website and are advertised via **other social media channels** such as Facebook. A short, pre-recorded video by the employer may serve to 'present' the company and the vacancy. Jobseekers then sign into their personal account to book a place for a recruitment meeting. On the day of the meeting, jobseekers test their video equipment prior to entering the queue for the RMO, so as to reduce the risk of experiencing technical difficulties during the interview. Within their allocated timeslot, the employer then picks up the jobseeker from the queue when it is their turn, and the RMO takes place.

In order to prevent overbooking, employers typically place **a limit on the number of places** for each RMO, which can range between 20-100 candidates. Depending on the agreement with the employer, the PES can handpick (all or a certain percentage of) RMO candidates in advance. A PES officer may also be present during the meeting (for instance in cases when jobseekers can be recruited with a wage subsidy).

RMO offer a number of advantages over 'traditional' face-to-face interviews.

From an employer's perspective, the RMO can **improve the effectiveness and cost-efficiency** of the recruitment process. Above all, it offers the opportunity of a rapid first screening of candidates online (selected candidates will typically be proposed a longer 'standard' job interview by the employer if they are successful at RMO stage). Similarly, employers who experience chronic difficulties in finding local skilled labour (for instance in the mining industry) can use RMO to expand their pool of candidate to the national level. It is important to note here that Swedish jobseekers are often prepared to re-locate for work, which is linked to the nature of the Swedish labour market and the geographical distances which Swedish workers are used to having to adapt to.

The RMO can **support equal opportunities** by providing jobseekers, who may otherwise not have made the interview shortlist, a chance to meet a prospective employer. For example, jobseekers with a migrant background or with low qualifications (but with the necessary skillset) may often be overlooked by a recruiter. However, in handpicking candidates, the PES can ensure that a certain share of 'disadvantaged' or hard-to-place jobseekers is selected for the RMO.

Finally, from the perspective of the PES, RMO has the **potential to reduce costs and improve accessibility**. Certain local PES offices lack the facilities to organise recruitment meetings in their premises. Moreover, given geographical distances across the country and jobseekers' readiness to travel for interviews and work, the PES covers the travel costs of over 20,000 job-seekers each year. This cost (time and money) can be substantially reduced through the introduction of RMO in a country like Sweden.

6 Concluding remarks and next steps

6.1 Next steps for the Swedish PES

The expansion of co-browsing will provide greater personalisation of services, moving to online case-handling.

At present, co-browsing provides information and support to online visitors. As part of the pilot project's extension from October 2014 onwards, the PES will widen the service scope and integrate co-browsing with the PES's own identification system – **the objective is to move towards online case handling for customers who log into their personal accounts**. Once logged in, a co-browsing officer will have access to a customer's file online; this identification system will also pave the way towards more effective skill-routing and personalisation of support. An underlying ambition for this development is that the Arbetsförmedlingen is looking to establish a common, national e-identification system across all public services. This is already the case in Belgium and Estonia, as pointed out by participating PES, and the Swedish PES would look to share learnings in the near future

Understanding the customer's journey will help to establish a seamless cross-channel customer experience in the future.

The Arbetsförmedlingen is gradually accumulating knowledge of customers' use of the co-browsing tool through the short satisfaction survey proposed at the end the co-browsing session. A future ambition of the PES is to understand how the co-browsing tool fits into a customer's journey through different channels of communication with the PES. Tracking such a journey would serve to inform future policies, which would aim to provide a seamless, cross-channel customer experiences.

The use of data will help to inform future service delivery

Both customer preferences and evaluations of the cost-efficiency of different tools – such as the co-browsing tool and recruitment meetings online - will serve to shape the Arbetsförmedlingen's strategy of multi-channel service delivery in the future.

This information will feed into the design of the new Arbetsförmedlingen's website, which is underway as part of the NEXT-Program. Several features of this new website are currently being considered, including a new interface, automated matching, and the auto-review of vacancies posted by employers on the Vacancy Bank. Similarly, another objective remains the development of an e-identification system across public services or/and the integration with the e-identification system of banks and other private businesses in Finland (i.e. a multi-entry point system).

6.2 Contextual drivers and transferability for other PES

PES representatives stressed the value of these early findings and their relative ease of transferability as part of their own national strategies to develop online service. It was also highlighted that the Arbetsförmedlingen had the unique opportunity to test such new tools at a time when many national PES across the European Union were facing important budgetary cuts. Since its launch in February 2014, the co-browsing tool has led to an increase in the number of client contacts with the PES but has not led to a corresponding decrease in the number of contacts made through other channels. At present, the Arbetsförmedlingen is almost uniquely placed to pilot innovative tools with a view to determining the most effective mix of blended service delivery.

As a follow-up of this study visit, PES representatives expressed interest in pursuing discussions and exchanges remotely and convening 'digitally' at part of webinars, where attendants could react in real time through live chat.

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