

Evidence-based design of services using randomised controlled trials (RCTs)

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DENMARK

Public interventions generally commit substantial resources and therefore the evaluation of the causal effects and costs of policy interventions is important. In this endeavour, the construction of a credible counterfactual situation is at the heart of the evaluation problem. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are typically considered to be the 'gold standard' for this construction since the randomised allocation mechanism into a treatment and a control group ensures that both groups are balanced with respect to both observable as well as unobservable characteristics. However, the implementation of RCTs and the interpretation of the results pose some problems and potential pitfalls which have to be considered thoroughly. The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR) has gained a considerable amount of experience with the implementation and analysis of RCTs. In doing so, STAR has developed a strong evidence-base which can be seen as the backbone of the Danish employment system by establishing a very deep knowledge on which activation measures work (and for whom).

Name of the PES	STAR – The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment
Scope of measure	Regular practice
When was the practice implemented?	Started in 2005, on-going
What was the driver for introducing the practice? Was it internal or external?	Internal as well as external drivers
Which organisation was involved in its implementation?	STAR, in cooperation with independent experts from academia
Which groups were targeted by the practice?	Different RCTs have different target groups
What were the practice's main objectives?	Strengthening the evidence-base for the design of services
What activities were carried out?	When implementing an RCT there are some practical issues that need to be considered; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The theory of change (target group, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, impact) ▶ Power calculations ▶ Randomisation ▶ Fidelity measures ▶ Implementation plan ▶ Evaluation plan (what kind of data to collect – quantitative and qualitative)
What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?	Funding for local experts/practitioners and researchers to design the program and implement the RCT, for a private consultancy firm to monitor the implementation/fidelity of treatment as well as for external evaluators.
What were the source(s) of funding?	National budget
What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?	8 RCTs have been completed and 3 are currently on-going.

What outcomes have been identified?

Collection of substantive evidence on the effectiveness and efficiency of different services for jobseekers. STAR is recognised as the main source of knowledge regarding what works and for whom within the Danish employment system.

What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

STAR has learned from the experiments that the design and implementation of the RCT is important and has written a 'cook book' to sum up its experiences:

- 1. Program:** Local experts/practitioners and researchers help STAR to design the program (hypothesis/theory of change/content/duration, volume/power-calculations etc.)
- 2. Randomisation:** STAR uses an IT-tool to randomise the target group into a treatment or control group
- 3. Fidelity:** STAR funds a private consultancy firm to monitor the implementation/fidelity of the treatment in the RCT and report back to the participating job centres and STAR
- 4. Evaluation:** STAR funds external evaluators (Did the measure/intervention work? Is it cost effective? Why and how did it work? For this qualitative and quantitative studies are necessary)
- 5. Dissemination:** STAR communicates the results by publication of a final report/conferences etc.



Contact details for further information

Name: LAMECH, Simon, Special Advisor

Email: sil@star.dk

Telephone: +45 72 21 77 72