

NVA Positions Consulting Firm as Thought Leader

Preera's journey with Sweden's National Values Assessment

December 2013

Industry: Consulting

Country: Sweden

THE SITUATION

Preera is not your ordinary management consultancy firm. They help organisations face the challenges of our times in unique ways. This work is driven by a desire to make a real difference.

Preera was founded in 1998 and consists of 45 management consultants in Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden.

In 2008, Preera partner, Martin Sande heard about the National Values Assessment (NVA) conducted in Iceland. He had seen the benefits of the Cultural Values Assessments with clients and was inspired to learn more about the Swedish national climate. The NVA was aligned with Preera's vision to prepare clients for current and future conditions. They had a conviction that conscious decision makers needed to be supported by a deeper understanding of values.

THE PROCESS

2009: Preera invested \$10,000 USD in the NVA. It was an experiment in many ways because they didn't know what to do with the results. They wrestled with questions about how society could benefit from the NVA and how they would share it. They joined with three partners, but Preera invested the bulk of the expense and effort. They published a paper, and couple of articles were covered in the media. However, Preera realised that to make a greater impact, they would need to partner with people and organisations that were more invested and engaged.

2010: Volvo IT and Fortos joined into a coalition with Preera in the second year with a commitment to offer the NVA for the benefit of society. Preera and Volvo IT each invested \$12,000 USD. Half of the budget was used for the assessment and half for marketing and events. They hired a professional PR media firm to launch the results. They created a unique name and brand, separate from Preera, called Sverigestudien ("The study of Sweden").

Also in 2010, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) approached Preera to conduct a parallel study on six Swedish municipalities in the same format as the NVA. SALAR was a past client of Preera's, and they funded this project. This study gave another set of data to reference when comparing with the national picture.

With solid data from the NVA and the municipalities, along with the guidance of the media firm, they received a high level of media coverage. They honed in on a few key messages, including one that struck a chord with the national audience – “the average Swedish workplace longs for a rich inner life, which is stable, and that doesn’t have any customers.” This message of complacency got buzz. After this launch, they had more proposals for lectures and speaking engagements at large conferences. As a result, they were making money and building Preera’s brand. Over thirty blog articles were written about the NVA in 2010. This NVA also generated significant business for Preera doing organisational transformation work.

The information was shared freely and getting more coverage, but the team questioned if they were really achieving their aims to make a difference. They started to put real efforts toward sharing the information with politicians.

2011: The team aimed even higher. They created the website www.sverigestudien.se in order to truly make all of the data and information open source. They collaborated with national politicians, including inviting a couple to speak at the launch of their results. The team was clear with the politicians. They were asked to use the data to promote long-term societal issues and not use it to promote their particular parties. The 2011 NVA led to \$100,000 worth of business to Preera and over 30 speaking engagements.

2012-13: The national awareness of the NVA has grown and is quite widespread. After doing the NVA for five years with a randomised panel, the results have been fairly consistent, which in itself has established more legitimacy.

The five question NVA has also contributed to the growth of Preera’s consulting work. The five questions relate to workplace in addition to the nation. The questions are based on (1) personal values, (2) perception of the national culture, (3) desired national culture, (4) perception of their workplace cultures, (5) desired cultures for their workplaces. This data enabled business leaders to learn trends and to recognise their influence in society.

With SALAR, Preera developed a seven question survey, asking two additional questions: (6) perception of the community culture and (7) the desired community culture. This has added depth and understanding of the societal attitudes. For example, at the municipal level, people want more citizen participation and democratic process. The results show the urge of people to co-create a better society. They want to be engaged but not always in the ways currently offered to them by the government, so it’s an opportunity to redesign collaborative projects for the future.

On the national level, the lack of customer focus and rising cultural entropy continue to be warning signs and important messages for Sweden's leaders and future.

Skandia has also come into the work group as another solid partner committed to the values of society. They have energised both the team and the process as such. Skandia, being a big company, has also enabled a widening of circles and opportunities of Sverigestudien. This has given others in Preera the opportunity to grow and establish themselves as thought leaders.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Martin Sande, Preera Partner, reflects:

"How can we inspire others to take the leap and do this work?"

For us, it has become less romantic. We know that this is stuff we need to share. **We do this and give it back to society as a mirror, to see ourselves.** We know this. We need to get in contact with our values to change the world. At the same time, we are more business-wise than we were when we started. We gained media attention and now have the muscles of a great communications team.

Our assumption initially was that this would be a costly project. We needed real money to pay Barrett Values Centre for the data. It actually proved to be quite cheap. Based on the initial investment of \$10,000, we have gained that ten-fold in business. We've also **built the brand of Preera as a conscious company that wants to do good for society, while not being ashamed to make money.** It is the conscious capitalism model.

It's critical that you **find the right partners who want to be part of long-term societal development.** For us, it was perfect to partner with an insurance company, a logistics company, and a media company with strong ties to news and TV.

Be consistent and convey only a few messages. At the beginning, we tried to tell too much and told too many stories at once. In recent years, we have had different messages for different target groups. For business leaders it was 'hey guys, wake up! There are going to be issues if we aren't focused on customers and the level of national entropy is rising. Leaders, we need you to lead'. It will take you a couple of years to recognise patterns and to develop the right messages.

So, if you are interested to do this, **be prepared to commit to at least three consecutive years.** The first year blows over quickly, not many will care. To gain momentum, you need to put three years into collecting data and building credibility. "