

Mapping Tool

Methods:

As a part of the Healthy Regions project, employees of the Region of Southern Denmark have worked as external consultants in parts of municipal strategy processes. In the Municipality of Langeland the mapping tool was presented to employees on the strategic planning level in order to discuss the competencies of the municipality for working with health and health promotion. Due to a structural reforms in Denmark less than two years before, the municipality was an amalgamation of three smaller municipalities, and the municipality was assigned new tasks within health. Therefore addressing competencies for solving these tasks was an obvious action to further develop the municipal organisational capacity.

However, one potential disadvantage with focusing on the tool was that the municipal capacity for health work is dependent on more determinants than competencies, e.g. political priorities and financial resources for the health task, priority within the management across sectors for working with health, etc.

In agreement with the municipality, a full mapping according to the tool was not carried out, as this was expected to add no further value compared to a less detailed discussion. Therefore, a discussion on health competencies was held in a process meeting. The reflections below are presented to give a balanced view on potentials and challenges with the tool.

Targets/Stakeholders:

The target group was employees on a strategic planning level (health consultants).

Results:

Potentials

The health competencies mapping tool has a potential for raising municipal awareness of relevant factors contributing to citizen's health. Thus, the tool is based on the Dahlgren & Whitehead-model¹, which illustrates determinants of health within individual life style factors, within the social environment, and within living and working conditions. From this perspective it is obvious that health work should not be performed solely in a municipal health department but as a cross-sectoral responsibility between more municipal sectors. In accordance with this, the municipality of Langeland has based its health strategy on this model by clarifying the responsibility of the municipality, the citizens and the local communities respectively within these determinants.

The tool also illustrates relevant competencies that should be mastered by the staff working with health. Thus the mapping tool can be used as a guide to discussing necessary competencies when recruiting staff and implementing in-service training for the staff.

Challenges

The major challenge of the tool is the detail level. Thus the tool suggests mapping 6 sets of public health competencies for 9 different health determinants, which creates a corpus of 54 different values related to health competencies. This amount of data is confusing. In addition, the reliability of the tool and the relevance of the detailed data can be questioned. First, the mapping exercise will be very dependent on a rather arbitrary judgement of the subject doing the mapping.

¹

Originally described in Dahlgren G, Whitehead M (1992). *Policies and strategies to promote equity in health*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe

Secondly, one could state that the competencies listed are not essentially different from one health determinant to another – e.g. the communication competencies needed are comparable irrespective of the health determinant considered. In other words the very detailed distinction in the tool seems to be overkill as some competencies are more general in nature.

Thirdly, some of the health determinants are not very relevant to developed European countries. As an example of this, water and sanitation standards in Denmark are high, which makes sanitation an irrelevant subject for public health workers in Denmark despite the coherence between sanitation and health as such.

Guidelines to the use of the tool:

The mapping tool – or the basic perspective of the tool – is useful for facilitating dialogue on competencies within public health work and can be used at specific dialogue or process meetings concerning this issue.

In addition, the Dahlgren & Whitehead model of health gives a relevant framework for discussing municipal responsibility and possibilities within public health at dialogue or process meetings, or the model can be used in strategic health planning work.