



# Steg för Steg

Arbete, studier och sysselsättning för personer  
med schizofreni och liknande psykoser



# Step by Step

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**Project report**

## **Table of contents**

<b>1. Introduction to Step by Step</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Background and social impact	2
1.2 Step by Step in practice	2
<b>2. Effectiveness and current challenges</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. The solutions</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 New activities	5
3.1.1 Gardening	5
3.1.2 Journalism	6
3.2 Raising awareness of schizophrenia	6
3.2 Working against social isolation through platform	7
<b>4 Conclusion</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>8</b>

## **1. Introduction to Step by Step**

### **1.1 Background and social impact**

Step by Step (sw: Steg för Steg), founded 1998, is a business run by the association IFS/CS (sw: Intresseföreningen för schizofreni och liknande psykoser i centrala Stockholm) in central Stockholm. The mission of Step by Step is to create and develop daily occupation and work opportunities for people with schizophrenia and similar psychoses who are disadvantaged in the regular labor market. The activities focus on work and studies, and aim to be complementary to the present municipal activities.

Step by Step has been able to expand their offerings continuously, resulting in immense growth due to successfully aligning their mission (Ormiston & Seymour, 2011). The operation started on a small scale with a knitting group and studies in computer skills on an individual basis but have since then grown tremendously. Today, the activities occupy more than sixty participants each week. Participants can take part in their study circles or work within their various branches as accountant, office administration, or cafe assistant. Moreover, the organization also manages various initiatives including podcasts, suicide prevention programmes, and provides lectures about schizophrenia to external parties.

Step by Step is currently focused on three variables in their business. Financial performance (from Ekonomibyrån), attendance and satisfaction in terms of people joining the activities and the rating the activities receives, and lastly awareness which is related to people reached by their external communication. Their main focus is on the activities, their core strategy. Based on the case, the objective is to grow all three variables further. Hence, besides introducing new activities in their current area as they are facing a growing demand, Step by Step is exploring the possibility of a vertical expansion through community building. Considering the risk of growing too much in the same vertical and possibly cannibalizing the current municipal activities, it is important to grow with care and find ways to leverage their current business. To achieve long-term profitability and impact, Step by Step needs to identify and pursue new verticals beyond their current offerings as it is crucial for creating a sustainable business (Shaw & Carter, 2007). It is therefore a natural step for Step by Step to seek opportunities beyond their core strategy, to iterate their mission and strategy to increase the impact of their ultimate objective (Ormiston & Seymour, 2011). This paper will thus review the current challenges and introduce solutions that can facilitate their new growth journey.

### **1.2 Step by Step in practice**

In this part, we aim to delve into the social entrepreneurial journey of Step by Step by drawing upon key concepts from social bricolage (Di Domenico et al, 2010) and effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001) to show how they have played a crucial role in shaping Step by Step's strategic decision-making and actions, ultimately contributing to its remarkable progress.

First, Step by Step initially started with small-scale studying groups and then reasonably developed and expanded. This demonstrates that the organization utilized existing resources in the early stage, developing and expanding its influence through simple activities. Second,

during the development of Step by Step, the organization did not overly focus on future market predictions (i.e., the traditional causation approach). Instead, they focused on meeting the needs of their participants (using “idea box” to collect ideas and recommendations from employees and participants) to provide corresponding services and opportunities. Third, Step by Step cooperates with IFS/CS, jointly undertaking entrepreneurial risks. Additionally, Step by Step also receives funding from sales of study seats to the municipalities in their region and income from clients of Ekonomibyån. The study seats and activities are dependent on the ratings received from participants as they are directly impacted by Step by Step’s future fundraising efforts. Our analysis indicates that Step by Step has consistently received high ratings, which has enabled them to establish a virtuous cycle. This positive feedback not only demonstrates Step by Step's exceptional ability to create social value but also helps them secure and allocate more resources. Furthermore, Ekonomibyån is one of their businesses generating revenue to the organization which facilitates a financially sustainable operation. This could be seen as a version of ‘refusal to enact’ (Baker & Nelson, 2005), running a legally distinct for-profit accounting firm to generate additional revenue and provide work opportunities for their participants. Finally, as a social enterprise, Step by Step can flexibly adjust its strategies according to changes in the market and social demands. For example, recently, they added podcasts, suicide prevention programs, and lectures on schizophrenia for external organizations to raise awareness of schizophrenia and similar psychoses.

In conclusion, by effectively utilizing resources, engaging stakeholders, practicing flexibility, and leveraging persuasion, Step by Step has successfully navigated the challenges of growth and development until today. It is however important to keep in mind that a continued growth journey imposes several challenges that need to be addressed in order to not lose sight of the overall objective of Step by Step, especially when considering going into new verticals and engaging even further in community building.

### **1.3 The Dark and Bright sides**

Step by Step embraces a philosophy emphasizing the importance of visibility and recognition for all individuals. This guiding principle aids in fulfilling its social mission, which is to shed light on schizophrenia's impacts at individual and societal levels. As a social enterprise, Step by Step works diligently to mitigate the effects of this illness on those diagnosed, striking a balance between its social mission and financial stability. Albeit the positive aspects of Step by Step, running a social enterprise has its complexity which have been highlighted by several researchers (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Dey & Steyaert, 2012; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010).

Step by Step is a focused enterprise catering to a niche: individuals with schizophrenia or similar psychoses. This narrow focus could possibly constrain the company's expansion potential, imparting both advantageous and disadvantageous effects on its operations. Its success in generating social impact stems from a profound understanding of, and attentive listening to the concerns of the involved parties. As they are targeted to a niche, it is important to widen their operation and not only offer activities as their growth ambitions might create a risk of having too many activities than needed for their niche group. Instead, the focus should shift to how to further lift the target group (which they have slowly started with) as current

activities are primarily focused on solving current needs. Although the current activities are very much needed and the core of Step by Step, they should consider expanding by seeking opportunities that can create a long-term impact for individuals with schizophrenia. When seeking new opportunities, it is therefore important to continuously keep the core values in mind, to make sure that new strategies are aligned with the objective.

Contrary to Friedman's assertion that a company's sole social responsibility is to generate profits (Friedman, 1970), Step by Step offers an alternative model, demonstrating that the strong desire to fulfill its social mission can offset any financial impact. While securing funds is indeed a primary objective, these resources are directly applied to mission fulfillment. Moreover, while Step by Step has made a considerable social impact through its commitment to balancing its social mission with financial stability, and its adaptability to its target audience's needs, there remains a risk of over-dependence on non-scalable or unsustainable solutions. It is therefore important to balance the financial impact with the social mission. Step by Step is currently offering a variety of activities but few are linked or dependent on each other. To foster cross-sectional involvement and cooperation between participants, activities could be connected to each other. Not only would it facilitate a stronger connection to the social mission when the activities are related to each other, but could also be beneficial financially. Hence, in a continued growth journey, it is important to find synergies in existing activities as it will leverage the business and help them become sustainable in the long-term.

However, a company's future may see challenges in terms of marketization. If municipal or institutional funding becomes unavailable, the organization may be compelled to explore novel self-financing solutions. This could have a potentially negative impact on the social aspect, which could lead to mission deviation and prioritizing financial objectives over social impact (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). However, the risk of this happening in Step by Step is significantly mitigated by the involvement of people directly affected by the disease or their relatives (such as the board and employees), thereby reinforcing the organization's commitment to its social mission. By finding synergies with current business whilst further educating external parties, it could be easier to stay committed to the mission as you are increasing the number of stakeholders you aim to satisfy.

Despite these potential pitfalls, Step by Step exemplifies how social entrepreneurship can effectuate positive change and foster social justice by prioritizing the needs and viewpoints of those affected, and maintaining a balance between social and financial goals. However, to ensure fidelity to its original mission, it is crucial for Step by Step to scrutinize the political and economic landscapes within which it functions, and stay alert to potential mission drift.

## **2. Effectiveness and current challenges**

Step by Step has identified a very clear social problem, namely people with psychological illness should have the same right to a meaningful job as any other person. The organization is, according to us, rather successful in its way of targeting this problem. They do reach out and succeed in attracting people to join their organization. They do also have lectures and similar to spread awareness of the problem. On an individual level we would say that they are very successful. Every person that takes a step into their organization seems to enjoy a very

nice offer of services and a nice environment. Several researchers have expressed difficulties to find relevant measures to use when evaluating impact and success (Dacin et al, 2010; Austin et al, 2006; Ormiston & Seymour, 2011). Although the benefits on an individual level are hard to measure, one can say that for someone that Step by Step creates a meaning for, the value is beyond boundaries. When speaking to people in their organization you get the perception that almost all people there are satisfied and that they are very successful in helping the individual. However on a large scale their efficiency can be questioned as their spots are limited and mainly solve a short-term problem. To create a substantial societal impact they need to scale their work. Not only by adding new activities, but also by broadening their scope such as raising awareness externally and fighting social isolation within the target group. We see that the work they are doing is very successful, but to create a larger impact they need to scale their business and help even more people, both short-term and long-term.

The challenges Step by Step recognise themselves are well aligned with those we have identified. First, they want to expand their offer through new activities. Second, they want to lift their target group and make “ordinary” people understand that “you are not your illness” and that they miss out on a lot of competencies. Last, they want to create a communication platform for people with psychiatric illnesses. Also this has the chance if done with scalability in mind, to have a large impact on society in general and be of use for a broad audience.

### **3. The solutions**

#### **3.1 New activities**

Step by Step is on a mission to expand their activity offerings and raise awareness about schizophrenia. To help them achieve their goals, we have identified two activities that we believe are the perfect addition to their current offerings.

##### **3.1.1 Gardening**

There is increasing evidence that there are significant health benefits with gardening (Soga et al, 2017), our first suggestion of a suitable activity for Step by Step is therefore gardening. Gardening combines low intensity physical activity with social interaction whilst being exposed to nature and sunlight. Whilst sunlight lowers blood pressure and increases Vitamin D (Sowah et al, 2017), participants are able to use their mind and creativity in a stress-free, low intensity activity. As gardening involves several steps such as planting the seeds, watering the plants, and harvesting; participants are able to be part of an ongoing process and see their work come to life, either as beautiful plants or as vegetables to eat. An advantage with gardening is the scalability and flexibility of the activity as it can be conducted in both small and large scales depending on space and popularity. Moreover, the activity can be conducted indoors in pots or pods, or outdoors if the weather allows for it either in boxes in the courtyard or in window boxes. One potential way to initiate this activity is to collaborate with the social entrepreneur *Boodla*. Moreover, to embark on circularity and ways to cooperate within the organization, we suggest that the home-grown vegetables and herbs can be used in the daily operation, such as the Step by Step Café. By doing so, we see potential for

participants of Step by Step to cooperate together whilst facilitating for a financially sustainable way for Step by Step to run their organization.

### 3.1.2 Journalism

Step by Step has been very successful in developing Ekonomibyån. However, there is a demand for more advanced activities for less sick participants. A suggestion for Step by Step is to start a journalist section within the organization. The activity/job can be performed by people with an interest in journalism or with people with relevant background. Further, such a sector requires photographers as well as IT-managers. Journalism can be conducted at a flexible pace and without much pressure from stakeholders, which is why it should be a good fit for Step by Step. Initially, it is suggested that the articles are posted on the website of Step by Step, but can in a later stage also be sold to media houses. The articles could initially cover topics related to schizophrenia or the operation of Step by Step. Moreover, the hope is that some participants involved in these activities will take a step outside of the organization and become employed by the private sector. The chances for this are perceived as reasonable concerning the type of job and the open minded approach of the media branch. Another important aspect for why specifically journalism is a good fit for Step by Step will be explained below and connects to the second question Step by Step wished to be helped with.

## **3.2 Raising awareness of schizophrenia**

The second question Step by Step wants to have suggestions on is, “How can we lift our target group?”. Their aim is that people in general get a broader awareness of what schizophrenia and other psychosis means and that people are not their diagnosis. The first suggestion is to take advantage of the proposition of starting a journalism section. This operation can be used to spread awareness and information regarding schizophrenia and other psychoses at the same time it offers clients a new activity as already explained. As Wendt writes in his biography, the best way of spreading information and awareness is by creating it yourself and then serving it to the media. People are lazy and journalists are not an exception. Therefore by continuously offering them material with newsvalue the articles and agenda will come through, eventually.

The suggestion includes the already existing plans of creating a podcast, but it should not be limited to it. The podcast should be one part of the journalism strategy. However, if the podcast is to be listened to and noticed among general people, it has to contain some kind of outer attraction. Therefore, a suggestion is to invite guests to the podcast. Potential guests are television doctors, athletes and similar. It is believed that some of them will host the podcast to help Step by Step spread awareness. When producing articles or similar activities, it could be beneficial to connect to the podcast and by that help the different platforms grow together.

Even if this mainly should be viewed as a way to lift the target group a potential future revenue stream is spotted. When the journalist becomes more senior and the recognition of their work is more well known, there might be a possibility to start selling the work produced. This is of course the ideal outcome and not something that should be expected or accounted

for. However, the media industry embraces and values inclusion and diversity much why it should be a reachable target for such offerings.

Lastly, Step by Step should continue to visit institutions, workplaces and similar to inform about their operations. Connections and networks are vital in any business. The more people you meet, the more possibilities arise in the future. A potential outcome of the journalism strategy could be that more people reach out to Step by Step. Trying to meet as many of these interested people/organizations as possible should be a goal for Step by Step if they want to continue their growth and impact.

### **3.2 Working against social isolation through platform**

To work against social isolation, we are introducing "StepTogether", a revolutionary application designed specifically to serve as a beacon of hope for individuals living with schizophrenia. This innovative platform is crafted to foster a supportive community, deliver mental health education, and provide accessible resources, easing the journey through the complexities of schizophrenia.

StepTogether offers a secure space for peer-to-peer interaction, enabling users to share their experiences and reduce the isolation often associated with mental health disorders. The chat interface is user-friendly, promoting empathetic and understanding dialogue within the community. Furthermore, the platform bridges the gap between patients and professionals, offering real-time online sessions with psychiatrists and psychologists specialized in schizophrenia. This feature guarantees that expert help is always within reach, be it for immediate intervention or routine mental health check-ups.

StepTogether features a dedicated section for news and articles, providing the latest research, breakthroughs, and inspiring stories related to schizophrenia. The app will also offer a Podcast section (including Step by Step Podcast) for users to engage in enlightening discussions and interviews, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the condition. The company believes in transparency and approachability, hence the app will provide an overview of the mission, vision, and team. Users can also find information about the nearest Social Services, and details about various events hosted to promote mental health awareness and a sense of belonging. Finally, the app can also incorporate mindfulness exercises, meditation guides, and a symptom tracker, enabling users to monitor their mental health and manage stress effectively. StepTogether is not just an app; it's an empowering journey, a support system, and a lifeline for individuals with schizophrenia with the goal to fight social isolation.

### **4 Conclusion**

To summarize, this paper has proposed several solutions for the continued growth journey of Step by Step. The solutions have focused on new activities such as gardening and journalism that leverage their current business and different strategies to lift their target group to raise awareness with the aim to achieve a long-term impact of their business.



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