

The Time of Merging: Do's and Don'ts

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Technopolis Group

- One of Europe's foremost private consultancy companies in the area of Research & Higher Education Policy
- Over 130 consultants in eight countries
- Various kinds of evaluations, studies, analyses at regional, national and international levels
- We work for research councils, research foundations, governments, international and regional R&D organisations, HEIs, European Commission



Why merge?

- The international aspect of research and education is becoming more prominent
- The increased use of rankings strengthen the competition between universities
- Research funding is distributed according to quality criteria which increases the competition among the applicants
- There is a need to make strategic decisions for all higher education institutions

- A reaction to external conditions and pressure
- Purpose: to stand stronger as an institution

Different kinds of mergers

- Small HEIs merge with larger universities
- Two (or more) equally strong HEIs merge
- Involuntary mergers as a result from state intervention – “Shotgun marriage”
- Merger because of similar profiles
- Merger because of different profiles

TWO SUCCESSFUL CASES IN SWEDEN

1. Friendly take-over: Small college merges with big university

- Gotland University College (GUC)
- Take-over by Uppsala University (UU) on 1 July 2013



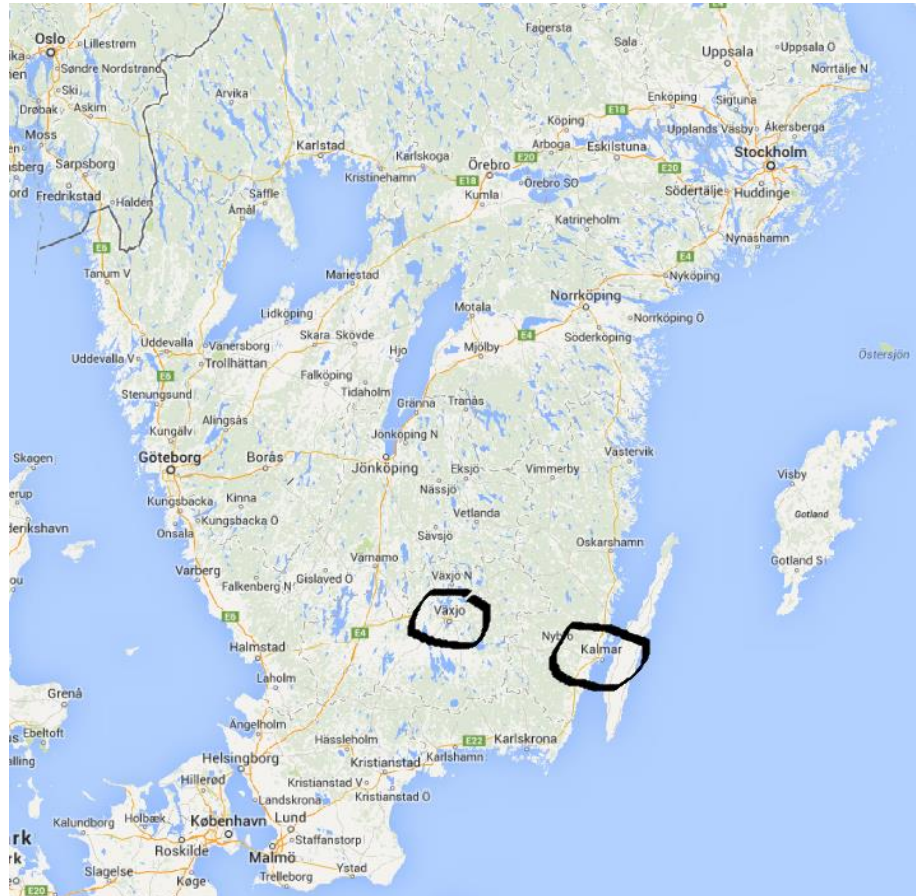
Gotland/Uppsala

- GUC was Sweden's smallest and youngest college
- Liberal Education, distance education, increasingly stressed economy, critical after governmental change of funding legislation of students: funding for non-utilised places withdrawn
- GUC vulnerable from the start – seeking cooperation partners including UU but also others
- UU: old (1477) comprehensive university
- Window of opportunity: merger funds available

Gotland/Uppsala

- Scepticism and enthusiasm at UU
- Uppsala old rector/new rector
- GUC closed down, full integration of GUC into UU
- What's in it for UU? Campus Visby on Gotland in a wider perspective
- Unique location at Visby, innovative teaching methods, Baltic Sea presence, new academic competence, 'Almedal Week', a political festival
- Indirect political steering – carrots rather than sticks
- GUC: much to gain
- UU: little to lose

2. Merger between two parts of equal size



Reasons for the merger

University College Kalmar and Växjö University – Linnaeus University, 2010

- A closer cooperation between Växjö, Kalmar and Blekinge – Akademi Sydost...
- ... was stopped by legal barriers; the only solution was a merger
- External pressure on both institutions – of different kind
- Changes in our neighbour countries
- Changed approach to national and international research policy. From 50 % goal of a student cohort to Universities of Excellence

Why was the merger successful?

- Joint experience of falling behind at a national level
- Openness and anchoring within the organisation, allowing extensive and time-consuming processes
- A large number of internal working groups; dialogue with trade and industry, politicians and media
- Trust between key actors important when problems occurred
- A new brand
- The positive attitude in the region – a part of a larger process
- Will and driving force from key actors
- ”A project of quality, not a project of rationalisation”

Staff support

- Crucial for the success of the merger with a well anchored strategy, including agreed goals and rationales, which have been followed even when there was strong resistance from various stakeholders
- The support of the merger from staff and students will vary over time
- The support may increase after a couple of years when positive results start to appear and routines become more familiar



OTHER EXAMPLES IN BRIEF

The painful merger at Sichuan University, China

- 1994: Merger between Chengdu University of Science and Technology and the 'old' Sichuan University
- All critical factors favoured a merger (complementary disciplinary profiles, equal size, vast pre-merger cooperation and partnership, campuses located on each side of the same street, political reforms
- Still the process became long and painful. What went wrong?
- Both institutions were allowed to continue almost like before
- No integration came about. Merger was not in any way anchored among staff and students, they were faced with the decision after it was made
- There was an agreement that both institutions should be equally represented in all decision-making bodies
- And the name...

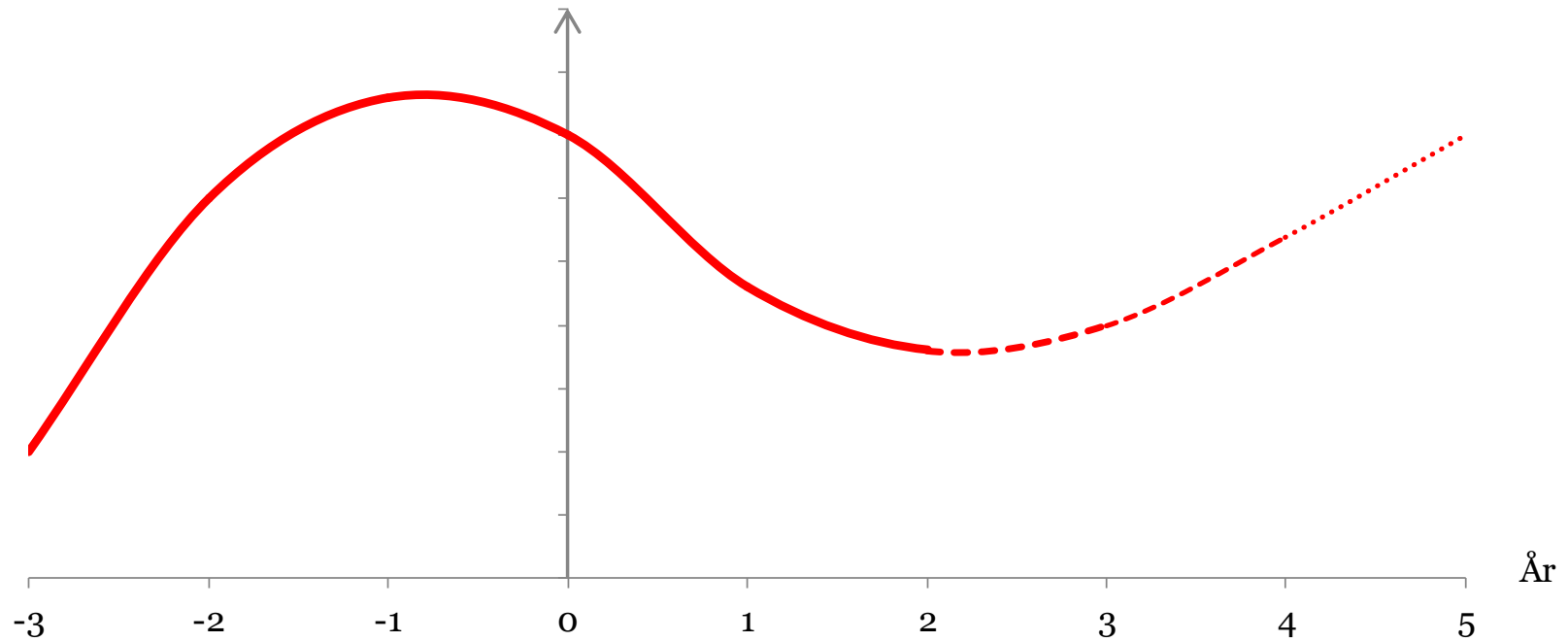
Denmark: Characteristics of the preparation process

- The overall merger process is often viewed as a single, coherent reform
- Initiated by the Danish government
- Very rapid process ~10 months during 2006
- Often multipartner mergers
- Low staff involvement
- Limited initial enthusiasm, or even strong resistance
- Unclear long term goals

Key conclusions... merger for quality

- Preparing a merger requires time; differences should be brought to the surface and be discussed, throughout the organisation. This is valid for many years after the date of the merger
- Important with regional support from counties, health authorities, municipalities and the business sector
- The importance of functional communication on every level and in any direction can hardly be over-estimated
- Do not wait too long to appoint new responsible individuals for various tasks and areas
- Important with clarity and transparency in the decision-making
- The more shortcuts that are taken regarding the points above, the longer the post-merger healing process

Staff support for a merger; a typical example



WORKSHOP IN GROUPS

Discuss these questions in four groups:

- In which way would research and education be strengthened and improved through mergers in Lithuania? Which are the motives/drivers?
- What would be the barriers towards mergers in Lithuania and what threats are there towards the quality of research and education, if mergers would occur?
- Group 1 & 2
- Group 3 & 4

Thank you!

Northern light over the newly merged university in Trondheim, NTNU, now Norway's largest university.

