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New tools for data collection and maintenance in the Swedish Business Register

Abstract

Over the last five years there has been an ongoing work at Statistics Sweden to reengineer and develop the Business Register (BR). The efforts have so far resulted in improvements in the production process. This abstract describes three achievements which are all based on technological developments.

First, Statistics Sweden developed a web based data collection tool ten years ago. The BR started to use a web based questionnaire in 2011. The delay was partly due to the functionality in the tool, which was not flexible enough to handle all data from the surveyed population. In the end, a combination of web survey and spread sheets was used. Moreover, the common system for checking data at Statistics Sweden turned out to be difficult to adjust to fit the needs of the BR. This forced the BR team to construct an application for checking data from the web survey. The transition to the web based survey and the introduction of the application for checking has almost eliminated the use of paper forms and thereby lowered the degree of manual work. Furthermore, the checking process for the survey has been streamlined.

Secondly, many applications at Statistics Sweden were programmed in Visual Basic 6 which is not supported anymore. This was also the case for the application used for maintaining the BR and to check data from administrative sources. The situation forced the BR team to plan for the construction of a whole new system that handles data (input), data storage, checking, verifying and output. As of now, a new application for checking administrative data from the Tax Authority has been implemented, which has made the checking process more efficient. Subsequently, administrative data from other sources will also be checked in this tool.

Thirdly, Statistics Sweden has participated in an effort initiated by the Swedish Government in order to simplify data collection from enterprises. The main objective is to lower response burden for enterprises and for governmental bodies to share basic, non-confidential enterprise information. There are a number of challenges for this to be fully realized, not the least regarding legal aspects. The work however resulted in a basic service being released in 2015 where the Companies Registrations Office, the Tax Authority and Statistics Sweden contribute with information on individual enterprises. Enterprises can e.g. log in and manage its basic information on a special website. Statistics Sweden in turn gets updates on enterprise variables such as postal address, activities (including NACE), number of employees, and newly created local units.