

"I grew several meters!"



Karolina Samuelsson, newly appointed Director & Head of Internal Services and Support at Region Gotland, is an avid ambassador for the Executive MBA program at the Stockholm School of Economics. She has worked in leading positions in Stockholm, Västerås and Örebro and currently resides Gotland.

It might be the road less travelled but it certainly seems to contain a world of exciting challenges. Karolina Samuelsson was HR manager within TeliaSonera Sweden when her interest in public affairs and politics persuaded her to move to the public sector. She took a job in the municipality of Västerås where she became head of HR. During that time, she felt the need to power up her skill set and put together an analysis that would clear the path for taking an Executive MBA at SSE. Karolina also made sure that her superiors understood the value of the program and the benefits for the organization.

“That's the best way to do it. Make sure that the value of the projects is apparent and the fact that enabling one individual to participate in the program can boost an entire organization if done properly. Myself, I put together a booklet covering my entire MBA experience that I've freely distributed to anyone that's expressed interest, and I even ran a workshop titled "One-day MBA " to try and share what I learned with my colleagues. “

A large but secret world

Swedish municipalities employ roughly 800 000 people and represents 25 % of total employment in Sweden. Each local municipality provides a large part of the welfare-state services, and their autonomy and authority to levy taxes are enshrined in the Swedish constitution. In her most recent position as HR director in the municipality of Örebro, Karolina worked in an organization about the same size as TeliaSonera Sweden. And that's just *one* municipality.

“I think that companies and municipalities would benefit tremendously from learning more about each other. There are a lot of business opportunities but if you don't know how a municipality works, you won't discover them. And municipalities interact with private companies all the time, so they need to know how firms work and think. “

What's the most common misconception about working in a municipality instead of a large private company?

“Many ambitious people tend to think that operations are slow and kind of boring. Or they think that it's difficult to drive change in a sector weighed down by administration and bureaucracy. The fact of the matter is that a municipality is a very complex organization that needs to cater to a wide range of different needs. It's a service conglomerate with a large turnover and a large municipality has all the workings of a large corporation. Anything you need in terms of processes, models, and support is already there as is the need for transformation and development. Today's municipal sector is a very fast-changing and rich in opportunities for people who want to make a difference.”

But salaries are lower and career opportunities limited, right?

“Swedish municipalities understand that they need to pay for the right competence, and career paths are not that different from those in the private sector. You can go from heading up one area to several areas and then become the "CEO" of an entire municipality. You answer to a politically appointed board, and their role is equivalent to the board in a large company. You'll feel right at home and at the same time be part of delivering and improving services that are vitally important to society and to citizens.”

What is the greatest challenge that Swedish municipalities face going forward?

“Our challenge is to provide the services that people need and expect in the most efficient way possible and to do this within the existing fiscal framework. This will require a whole new way of working through governance and management in order to answer questions such as, which services should private contractors provide? What is the optimal way to deliver welfare to people without losing heart or losing track of costs?”

Do you really need an MBA in a municipality?

“The private and public worlds are merging and having the best possible tools for governance, control, marketing and management is maybe even more important in a conglomerate like a municipality. I encourage people all the time to take the time and make the effort because it changes things. I grew several meters during my MBA and got to know people, businesses and other countries in a way that I would never have been able to do otherwise. If you want to be a driving force in developing welfare services in Sweden, an MBA is a great boost because it gives you the right tools.”

In what way has the MBA changed you?

“I learned that everything has to work together: management development, financial governance, marketing and change management. Both structures and culture come into play. I use my MBA every day and feel right at home in discussions where I previously only had a superficial knowledge. Now, I have

informed opinions and ideas, and I feel that I'm just beginning to use what I learned. It's invigorating and a lot of fun!