



Sustainable employment of nurses at MUMC+

Final Report



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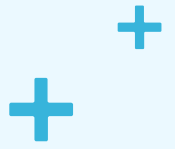


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1. A description of the problem



Before diving into the challenges of sustainable employability (SE), we first like to start with its definition. Although many definitions have been conned before, one of the most comprehensive one is that of van der Klink et al. 2016. They describe sustainable employability as follows:

“The ability of workers to achieve tangible opportunities in the form of a set of capabilities. It also includes the presence of necessary conditions that allow employees to make a valuable contribution through their work, now and in the future, while safeguarding their health and welfare. This requires, on the one hand, a work context that facilitates this for them and on the other, the attitude and motivation to exploit these opportunities. “ (van der Klink et al., 2016).

Adding to this definition, Gürbüz et al. 2023 argue that employee’s can experience a high degree of SE by carrying out three actions relating to the definition, which are: considering certain work goals (element of importance), having a suitable working condition to accomplish set goals (element of enabling) and finally realizing set up work goals (element of ability). These three actions can also be used as a tool to assess SE (Gürbüz et al. 2023).

Global context SE

The international labour organisation (ILO) is an organisation with a general goal of promoting social justice and internationally recognized humans and labour rights. Within that mission, it aims at protecting workers against sickness, disease and injury that can arise out of employment. Additionally they recognize that health is more than just the absence of sickness, leading to the inclusion of the importance of worker’s well-being (WWB).

According to their vision, WWB is defined as a condition that includes all aspects of working life, from quality and safety of the physical environment to how workers feel about their working environment, the climate at work and work organisation. The aim of WWB is to complement occupational safety and health (OSH) measures and make sure workers are safe, healthy, satisfied and engaged at work (ILO, n.d).

WWB is further recognized as a key factor in determining an organisation’s long-term effectiveness. To work on long term effectiveness and general long term goals, the organisation pursuits goal 8 of the 17 sustainable development goals coined by the united nations (UN): “Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all”.

Given ILO’s international influence, their inclusion of well-being as part of occupational safety and health framework, can catalyse organisations in adapting to develop global health promotion policies. This is needed as organisations are becoming more aware that many workplace problems derive from lack of commitment to the needs of their workers.



Challenges that nurses face in healthcare

In the Netherlands different job sectors struggle with sustainable employment. According to the Dutch government's social and cultural planning agency, the healthcare sector encounters challenges in sustainable employability due to relatively many employees working temporarily and on-call (0-hours contract) (van Echtelt & de Voogd, 2017). It is estimated that 70,8% of people who work in the healthcare sector work part-time (Varkevisse et al. 2023).

Within the healthcare system, nurses particularly form a group of interest for us. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) estimates the need of 13 million nurses to fill in the global gap of these professionals' in the future. Looking closer within Europe, the nursing profession is also reported as one with the highest shortages. The Asociaciones Nacionales de Enfermeras (ANE) expresses a concern and demands attention to this issue caused by heavy workload and stress suffered by their workers in many countries. Within the Netherlands, the Dutch Ministry of Health has been conducting studies for years on how large the shortage of nurses will be between 2022 -2030. Their estimates of shortages of nurses is visualized in table 1 (EMTG, 2022).

Table 1: Studies of the Dutch Ministry of Health: shortage of nurses between 2022 -2030

Nurses' specific numbers 2022	Nurses' specific numbers 2030
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of MBO level nurses: 9,300 – 11,700 • Lack of HBO level nurses: 6,000 – 7,200 (including midwives) • Lack in general hospitals and other medical specialties: 6,400 – 8,600 • Lack in university hospitals: 2,200 – 3,100 • Lack of home care: 8,500 – 12,200 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of MBO level nurses: 17,700 – 14,500 • Lack of HBO level nurses: 8,300 – 7,000 (including midwives) • Lack of general hospitals and other medical specialties: 16,900 – 14,100 • Lack in university hospitals: 2,200 – 3,100 • Lack of home care: 19,400 – 15,600

When it comes to decision making powers, which can relate to one of the important pillars of SE, a study at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) found that nurses rated their decision making powers, when it comes to active policie creations in there department as inadequate with a score of 5 out of 10. This was found in a research involving 2653 nurses in the Netherlands. Although nurses are the largest group of health professionals, occupying a crucial role in healthcare, they experience a lack of input in policy-making, both on a micro scale (patient policy) and on a meso scale (hospital policy). This lack of input became clearly evident during COVID (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, n.d.). All these findings indicated a clear need of SE within the healthcare sector.

2. Examine the specific need to address & solve this challenge

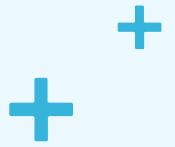


Additionally to the need of SE practices, research shows more challenges for employees in low-skilled jobs (MBO-4). Given that the majority of the Dutch working population (59%) is employed in low skilled jobs and the number is expected to grow, addressing these challenges is relevant (Hazelzet, 2023). Four difficulties of pursuing the promotion of SE have been identified in Hazelzet's recent study: (1) the human resource (HR) department of companies finds it difficult to reach specific groups of employees, (2) employers state a lack in knowledge and tools to implement SE, (3) the benefits of SE are seen in the long run and some organizations prefer a "quick fix" and (4) limited evidence of SE measuring tools makes it challenging for researchers to showcase the effectiveness of SE practices. When it comes to implementing SE, a balance between the individual, the organization and the public needs to be found (Hazelzet, 2023). For our research topic, these findings in particular are important given the large number of nurses with an MBO level of training as illustrated in the previous section.

To incorporate local organizations, we wanted to involve healthcare centers within Maastricht. Organizations we considered were the hospital Maastricht University Medical Centre + (MUMC+), Envida and the Sint Annadal hospital. Preferably we wanted to work together with an organization that might have already been working on the topic under the assumption that they would be open to exchange information. We came across a webpage on MUMC+ website discussing their growing attention towards SE of resident doctors. This gave us the impression that they are indeed eager to work around this topic. However, we could not find any further public information on their initiative and more importantly there was no mention of nursing staff. This grew our interest to the point of us deciding to contact them for this project.

In a 2022 year report of MUMC+, there was a mention of scarcity in the number of applicants for type v7 nurses. Main reasons for employees leaving the job were a high work pressure, lack of opportunities for horizontal career development (getting expertise in your own range) and flexibility in scheduling work and private life. The hospital did mention the introduction of an online module called "mijnloopbaan" for employees in which they can work on the development of their career.

3. Research question & sub question



To formulate a fitting research question, we made use of the PICO acronym to guide us. The initial subsections we identified were as following:

P(opulation): Nurses at MUMC+. We chose to include all level of work experience.

I(ntervention): Sustainable human resource management through the Excellent Care Program (ECP).

C (ontrol): Hospitals that do not implement ECP for nurses.

O(utcome): The retention of nurses in MUMC +.

Using PICO resulted in the formulation of the research question, which is: How can the implementation of the Excellent Care Program enhance MUMC+ nursing retention? With that, we also intended on answering the sub research question ‘What are challenges in implementing a SHRM practice within the MUMC+?’. After further investigation of our research topic, we encountered issues in obtaining the needed information to answer our research question. This led us to changing our initial research approach and a new research question: “How can awareness about sustainable human resource management be improved within MUMC+?”

4. Examination of the relevant case studie(s) & literature or previous research



Within organizations, HR departments have developed HRM policies that align with their vision on SE. These policies are supported by corresponding HRM practices and encompass three identified strategies (Genari & Macke, 2022). These strategies include the following:

- Attraction and retention: Focusing on attracting new employees and retaining current staff through career opportunities and diversity initiatives.
- Maintenance of employees: Prioritizing the mental and physical well-being of employees.
- Development of professional skills: Investing in employee education, training, and knowledge development. These strategies have been shown to increase organizational commitment, a key factor linked to retention (Genari & Macke, 2022). For the occupation of nursing specifically, factors like increased autonomy, accountability, rewards, and recognition play crucial roles in determining their intention to stay (Lartey et al., 2014).

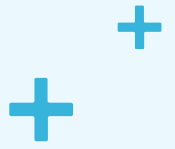
Equally important as program content is the implementation of the said program. The effectiveness of an intervention depends on several factors outlined by Buchan (2004):

- Best practice: Implement HRM practices proven by empirical research that improve desired outcomes.
- Contingency: Effectiveness of HRM practises can not be isolated, A fit between organizational strategy, HRM practices, and the environment in which the organisation is settled is crucial.
- Bundling: Recognize that no single HRM practice is the sole solution; combining practices creates an additive effect.

In a systematic review investigating interventions to enhance the retention of experienced nurses in Canada, over half of the interventions (58%) demonstrated improvements in nurse retention. The review categorized interventions into five broad areas: (1) nursing practice models, (2) teamwork approach, (3) leadership practice, (4) organizational, and (5) individual strategies (Rondeau & Wagar, 2016). Various factors influencing nurse retention were identified, including flexible scheduling, financial incentives, health benefits, mentorship opportunities, organizational focus on retention, management practices, recognition, work environment, and retirement plans (Rondeau & Wagar, 2016).

Additional research highlighted that professional practice models emphasizing nurses' autonomy, increased accountability, and shared governance resulted in either sustained or increased retention. Programs with similar features, such as heightened autonomy, reward and recognition systems, reported positive outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, higher morale, cost savings, and greater acceptance of change. Nurse leaders could advocate for organizational initiatives like improved staffing levels and enhanced care quality to support the retention of experienced nurses in healthcare settings (Rondeau & Wagar, 2016).

5. Reasoning for your proposed approach



In an attempt to answer our research question, we decided to take a two sided approach. Firstly, we want to involve the HR department that is tasked with the recruitment of nurses at MUmC+ as well as their management. We chose to emphasize this aspect due to the critique existing that HRM contributes minimally to organizations, coupled with the growing body of research over the last two decades seeking to demonstrate that HRM practices play a pivotal role in enhancing organizational performance (Rondeau & Wagar, 2016). By approaching the HR department, we involve a meso level layer of the hospital as HR could serve as the connecting network of nurses on different units.

Secondly, we want to involve the nurses on the different units as well, by providing them with information through posters. With these posters, we want to raise awareness about the importance of sustainable employability. The posters will contain information about SHRM and a link to a platform where (anonymous) ideas for sustainable employability interventions/practices or complaints can be shared. The goal is to incentivise nurses to approach their HR, leading to a conversation about interventions they feel would create a win-win situation for the parties involved. While doing so, the flyer will also state the interest HR has in tackling this topic. By approaching nurses, we introduce a micro level layer of the hospital that includes nurses individually and creates a bottom up approach.

As for the final product itself, we decided to make posters as we feel that these are a good way to convey a information in a compact way, fitting to the limited time nursing staff already has. Other posters involving other staff or patients could also have the same impact.

6. Overview of your approaches (solutions) framework



To present our findings of our research and answer our research questions, we will provide a theoretical framework which we will use as a base for our final proposed solution. As mentioned previously, the main problems within the MUMC+ regarding their shortage in v7 nurses include high work pressure, lack of opportunities for horizontal career development and flexibility in scheduling work and private life (MUMC+, 2022). To explore the underlying causes for these nurse shortages, we contacted the Dutch Union for Nurses (V&VN). They have a specialized department that investigates the challenges in sustainable employment of nurses in various Dutch care institutions. We conducted an interview, and V&VN's perspective provided the following insights into the issue of low nurse retention:

- Nurses lack recognition as professionals, and insufficient emphasis is given to their perspectives.
- Nurses experience low control in their jobs and communication with nurses in decision making is lacking, they do not get consulted.
- The nursing staff does not get treated individually, but rather from a one-size-fits-all approach.

These circumstances make that plans subsequently fail, as they do not align with the issues and urgencies at the workplace. "The V&VN has created a model themselves that addressed these issues and proposed some possible solution to them. The program that they created was called the 'Excellent Care Program' (V&VN, n.d.), and even though this program is no longer in use, we believe elements of this model can still be helpful in the case of improving nurse retention at MUMC+. The Excellent Care program was based on the

the American Magnet model, this model provides a framework for quality improvement as well as a systematic method for involving employees in the decision-making and improvement process (Abuzied et al., 2022). By creating a supportive workplace the satisfaction and organisational commitment is improved in these hospitals, which is beneficial for nurse retention. The Magnet mode is made up of five core components: transformational leadership,

structural empowerment; exemplary professional practice; new knowledge, innovations, improvements and; empirical outcomes. These components are supported by 14 forces that respond to changing nursing and healthcare environments. These forces include:

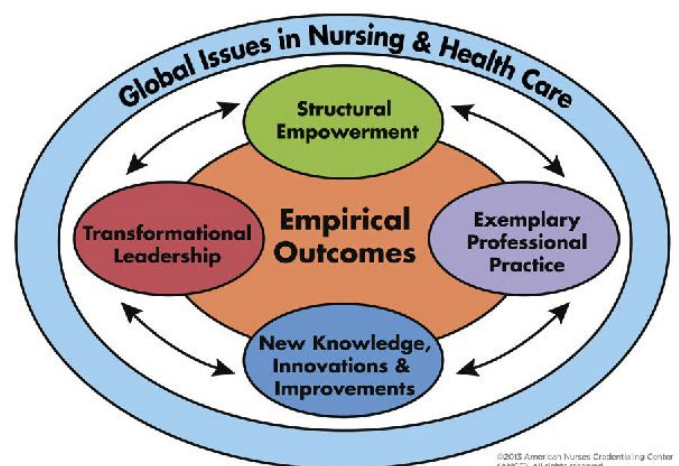


Figure 1: The Magnet® Model



- Quality of leadership,
- Organizational structure,
- Management style,
- Personnel policies and programs,
- Professional models of care,
- Quality of care,
- Quality improvement,
- Consultation and resources,
- Autonomy,
- Community and the hospital,
- Nurse as teacher,
- Image of nursing,
- Interdisciplinary relationships,
- Professional development

The Magnet model begins with identifying the issue or scenario that requires improvement. Then, it determines the elements that contribute to the problem and their frequency. The bottom-up approach to HR management promotes engaged and empowered employees, thus promoting sustainable employability (de Kok et al., 2023). Since in the MUMC the biggest challenges lie within professional development and structure of leadership, we believe the hospital can benefit from a sustainable HR management policy that is based on the Magnet model and the Excellent Care program. In addition to this, the approaches included in these programs fulfill the requirements of ensuring effectiveness of HRM practices because of the following reasons:

- The 'Best Practice' requirement. The Magnet model has been tested for 40 years and has been proven to effectively improve nurse retention (Abuzied et al., 2022).
- The 'Contingency' requirement. To ensure that the fit between the SHRM practise, organisational strategy and environment is optimized, the models leave the actual implementation of changes in the hospitals policy to the HR department and nurses of the hospital itself. This may prevent rejection of the new policy because the nurses were consulted in the process and there is no outsider party forcing changes onto the organisation (de Kok et al., 2023).
- The 'Bundling' requirement. Since the Magnet model is multi-faceted, it makes use of different HRM practices in each of its different core components.. The various elements of sustainable employability get covered this way, creating an additive effect of each of the different practices.



To add to this, the three strategies for Sustainable Human Resource Management practices are reflected in the Magnet model as well. They can be identified as follows:

1. Attraction and retention

Hospitals attract more nurses when they provide career opportunities and challenging work environments. The emphasis on autonomy, shared decision making and the focus on structured leadership can attract both first-time as experienced nurses. While first-time nurses will mostly be drawn to the highly structured organization and the quality of leadership, experienced nurses will be drawn to the opportunities that will be given to improve on their leadership qualities.

2. Maintenance of healthy and motivated professionals

To ensure that the physical, social and mental wellbeing of employed nurses will be maintained, implementing components of the Magnet model such as personnel policies and programmes, consultation and the availability of resources will be key.

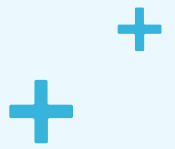
3. Development of professionals skills

The majority of the Magnet model's components is focussed on aiding nurses in their career development in various ways. Improvement of interdisciplinary relationships, development of empirical research and effective professional development tools are all forces that stimulate the broadening of nurses' skill sets.

In the Netherlands there are some hospitals that actively incorporate different aspects of sustainable employability of their nurses into their HR management. The Catharina Hospital for example already implements SHRM practices in their Catharina Vitaal program (Catharina Vitaal, n.d.). The MUMC+ could draw inspiration from their HRM policy for their nursing staff because of the following reasons:

- The Catharina Hospital is transparent about their policy regarding sustainable employability. . As a non-employee the scheduled events, programmes and employee discounts, e.g. gym memberships are visible as well. This transparency on the services that they provide may aid the attraction of new nurses.
- The Catharina Vitaal platform promotes a variety of different programmes, hereby making use of the bundling effect of multiple HRM practices. Themes of their workshops include improving a healthy lifestyle, financial advice, team building and working on career development. The wide selection of different programs allows for an individual approach to career development. Employees can choose on what aspect of their career they want to work on, thus shifting away from the 'one-size-fits-all' approach that is often seen in HRM policies.
- The HRM department plans introduction bootcamps for new nurses, so the first steps in working on the improvement of the workplace are already taken for them.

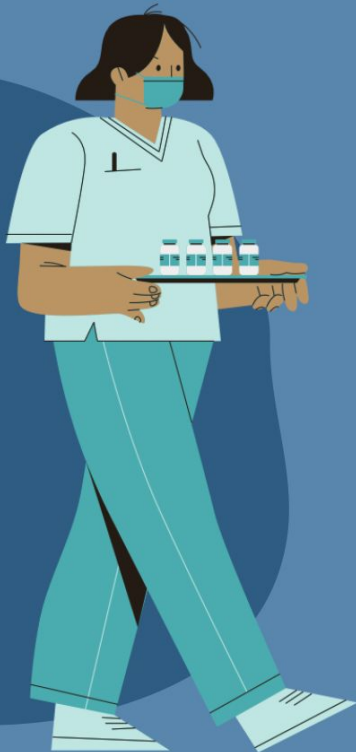
7. An analysis & recommendation or solution based on your findings



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feedback reach HR,
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workplace for all.

4

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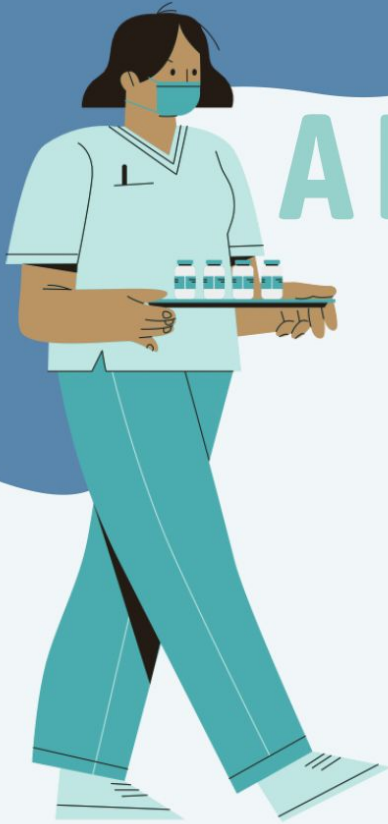
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8. An overview of challenges (including the feasibility of your recommendation) & directions for the future



The biggest challenge we encountered throughout our project was the limited time frame we had to conduct our research. With this in mind at the start of the course, we contacted different organizations that we wanted to investigate within the first week of the course as their interest would determine our research question. We reached out to several healthcare organisations within Maastricht. We contacted ones we had personal ties to, as well as organisations that could potentially be interested in sharing their information. Organisations contacted included Envida, MUMC+, Sint Annadal Kliniek. The latter did not have any relevant contact details so our initial research was narrowed down to include Envida or MUMC+.

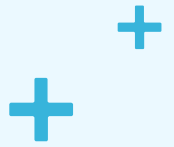
While contacting organisations, additional challenges were identified. It was not a straightforward road to find the specific people who could help us with our research as some contact information was no longer accessible or we were redirected a couple of times and needed to wait for further response.

We anticipated that Envida might not have enough time to get back to us given that they indicated not to know about any SE practices when we called them. On the other hand, the enthusiastic phone call with the HR department of MUMC+ we had, in which an employee stated their interest in sitting together to discuss certain challenges, we narrowed down our research question to looking at interventions for MUMC+ specifically. This resulted in us formulation our research question: How can the implementation of the Excellent Care Program enhance nursing retention at MUMC+?. A sub question we wanted to include was ‘‘What are challenges in implementing a SHRM practice within the MUMC+’’.

Upon further communication with the HR department of MUMC+, we were informed that a meeting to inquire about their specific challenges faced was unfortunately not doable after all as they would need more time with their team to gather the necessary information. In the final stages of the course we also got a reply from Envida, but had to inform them that a collaboration with them would also not be feasible considering the time restrictions. We also contacted the Excellent care program but they informed us that the program was no longer active. Nonetheless, were successful in getting some information through a questionnaire/interview through emails.

These challenges forced us to be resourceful by looking for secondary sources on the issue regarding MUMC+ such as: contacting our networks even further to include practices we know of, looking into news items, questioning employees at MUMC+ and looking into the internal MUMC+ magazine with updates.

8. An overview of challenges (including the feasibility of your recommendation) & directions for the future



Finally, the encountered difficulties led to a shift in focus from the initial research questions. This shift also impacted the assessment of recommendation we initially had planned for this project (see figure 2 below). Despite these challenges, we were able to come up with a feasible outline that re-represents directions for future collaboration with MUMC+. This is reflected in our final research question which is: ‘‘How can awareness about sustainable human resource management (SHRM) be improved within MUMC+?’’

Exploring future recommendations, the significance of sustainable employability for nurses remains central to our conviction. To enhance future implementations, a comprehensive approach tailored specifically for MUMC+ is warranted. Firstly, we propose conducting an extensive meeting to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges MUMC+ faces in implementing sustainable employability. This gathering would serve as a platform for stakeholders to share insights, fostering a clearer overview of the unique hurdles within the hospital's context. Moreover, we advocate for forging collaborations with other hospitals in the Netherlands (or all over Europe) that have successfully implemented diverse programs to boost sustainable employability. Drawing on the experiences and best practices of these institutions can provide valuable insights and inform tailored strategies for MUMC+. By combining a meticulous internal assessment with external collaboration, MUMC+ can cultivate a robust framework for sustainable employability, ensuring that future endeavors are strategically aligned with the hospital's distinctive needs and challenges.

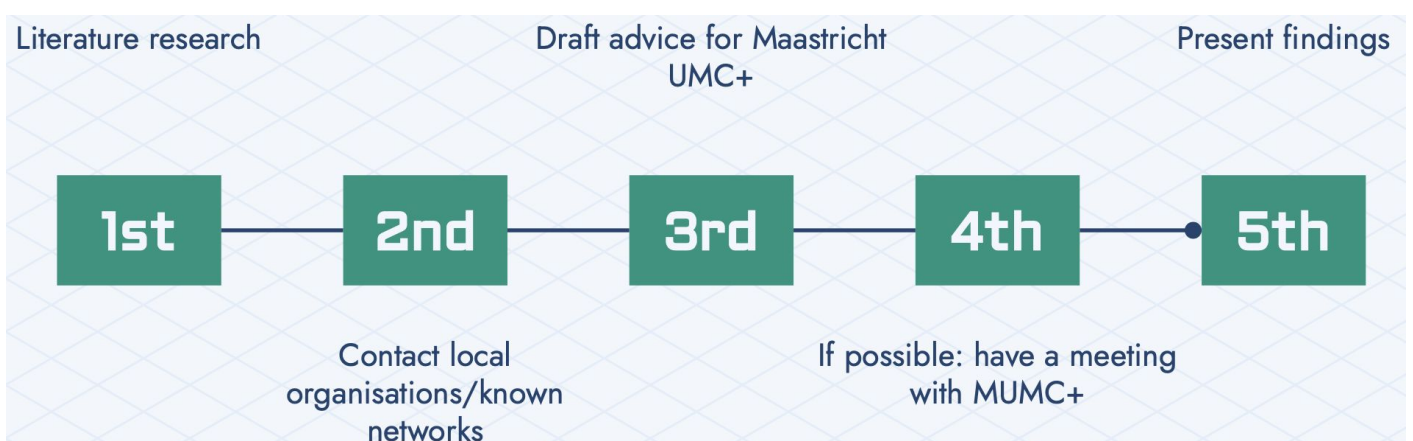


Figure 2: Plan of action of initial idea

9. Resources



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