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## **When Sustainable Development is Core Business** Changing FM Focus in a Local Danish Authority

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*Published in:*  
FM-Gespräche 2010

*Publication date:*  
2010

[Link back to DTU Orbit](#)

*Citation (APA):*  
Galamba, K. R., & Nielsen, S. B. (2010). When Sustainable Development is Core Business: Changing FM Focus in a Local Danish Authority. In FM-Gespräche 2010: Industrial Facility Management

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# When Sustainable Development is Core Business: Changing FM Focus in a Local Danish Authority

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Keywords: Local Authorities, Organisational Change Processes, Action Research, Sustainable Development

## ABSTRACT

How local authorities act to support sustainable development is increasingly on the agenda of politicians as well as their administrations. This paper outlines approaches towards developing facilities management supporting sustainable development from the point of a local authority. Appreciative Inquiry as initiator for a change process in the in-house FM organisation is used in an action research process in order to strengthen transparency and strategic thinking within the FM organisation.

## FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The local authority is responsible for developing local society in a sustainable direction. This is effectuated partly through the planning act and local legislation that gives direction to the physical expression of the city, and through the delivery of social services to the citizens of the local area.

There is, however, not a generally accepted definition of sustainability, though the definition from the Brundtland Commission in 1987 is often used: “Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The discussion in this paper is based on this definition, and on the assumption that sustainable development is core business for the local authorities.

The facility manager has a key role in creating the physical frame for the services delivered, and for developing the architectural expression of the buildings owned by the local authority. Both are very important tasks in the support and development of the local society. However, the definition of sustainable facilities management (FM) is even more unclear and immature. The discussions on sustainable FM seem to have a bias towards technical and systemic solutions to contribution of the buildings towards isolated environmental problems. Key words in the discussion are among others: Implementation of management tools (Sunihl, 2006), eco-renovation (A. Sobotka, D.P. Wyatt, 1998) and sustainable construction (Häkkinen and Nuutinen, 2007), energy performance (Sawyer,

Wilde and Turpin Brooks, 2008) as well as indoor air quality and energy efficiency. Facilities management is, however, also discussed in relation to a sustainable development on a societal level. (Alexander 2006) is arguing that community based facilities management can enhance opportunities for social inclusion in the society, while (Nielsen et. al. 2009) point to the housings areas as central in sustainable development due to both resource consumption and as transition agent towards sustainable lifestyles.

This paper will open the discussion on the role of facilities management in the local authorities, in developing a sustainable society on local and global level, at present and for future generations. The discussion is based on findings from the initial phase of an action research project conducted in an ongoing Ph.D. project. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is explored as a method for developing facilities management through the empowerment of employees in the in-house FM organisation.

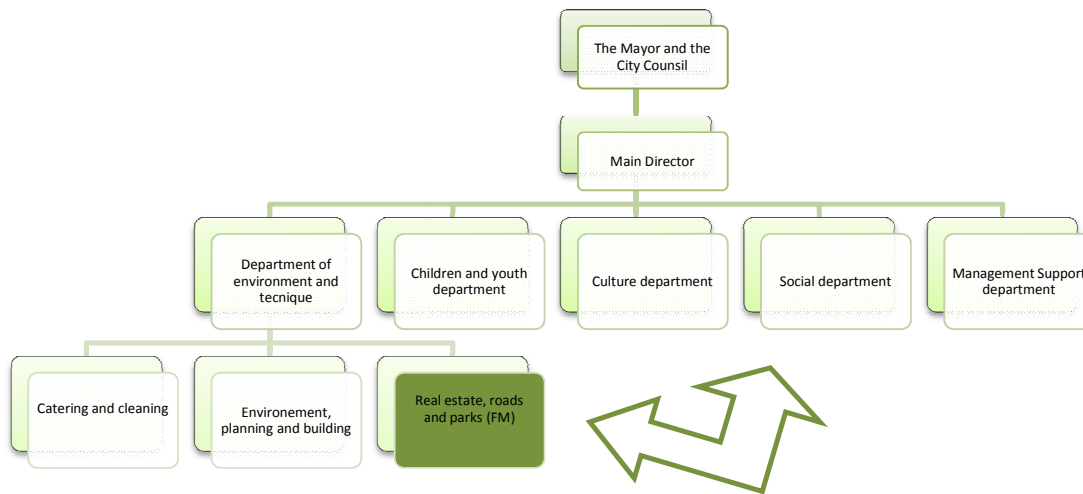
### **DEPARTMENT “REAL ESTATE, ROADS AND PARKS” (FM)**

In February 2009 the department Real Estate, Roads and Parks (FM department) in the local authority of Albertslund and the first author of this article initiated a joint action research process based on the systemic method Appreciative Inquiry. The main goal was to start a change process towards a more holistic FM supporting a sustainable development on a societal level.

According to the manager of the department, the motivation for entering the action research process was based on the belief that it could help her create a transparent and viable organisation, integrating facilities management and the responsibility for a sustainable development on a societal level. At present the organisation faces an urgent need to prioritise tasks due to a required building modernisation and at the same time limited resources. The action research process is believed to support the development of competences and shared knowledge in the department, and thereby qualifying the prioritizations (Kremmer 2009).

Being a merger of two former departments the FM department is relatively new, and the manager found its internal organisation too vulnerable to enter a critique and a problem orientated approach. This was supported by the researchers’ point of view by a curiosity towards the systemic theory and the potential of initiating change by focusing on what works, leading to the choice of AI as the initial approach.

The diagramme below shows the principal organisation of the local authority of Albertslund. The FM department has been highlighted, as this is where the action research process takes place.



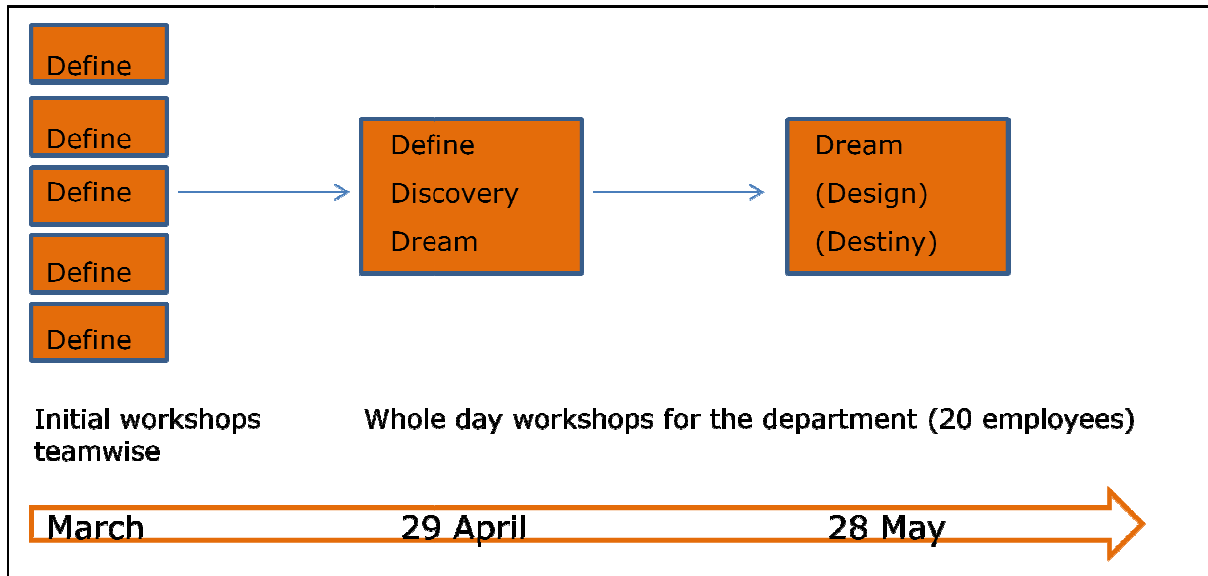
Figur 1: The principal organisation of the local authority of Albertslund. The arrow indicates the role of the department in supporting the core function of the other departments through development and maintenance of the facilities.

The FM department is responsible for the development and maintenance of two kinds of facilities – the public buildings and the areas in between like roads and parks. As the core function of the local authorities is to support and promote a sustainable development on a societal level, it has been decided to focus on the development and maintenance of the facilities in a broad sense.

The users of the facilities are both the employees working professionally with for example child care and the citizens using the services provided by or within the facilities. This demands some very dynamic methods for user involvement in the process of finding out how FM most efficiently supports the core function of a facility, and thereby indirectly how FM can support a sustainable development on a societal level.

## **EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES TO STRATEGIC THINKING**

It was decided to go through the phases of AI (Reason 2006) within a period of four month. In order to define the main topic – sustainable facilities management - that was to be elaborated upon during the process, this process was initiated with workshops on team basis. . This was followed by two whole day workshops for the department, where the employees were creating future scenarios initiated by an exploration of “the best of what is”. The manager participated only in parts of the workshops in order to create an arena for the initial process, where the employees could speak freely and without a managerial superior solution. The manager was, however, invited to all important presentations during the process.



Figur 2: Principal process design spring 2009, showing the phases in Appreciative Inquiry: Define: Topic choice. Discovery: Appreciation “the best of what is”. Dream: Envisioning “what could be”. Design: “Co-constructing “what should be”. Destiny: Sustaining “what will be”.

The overall theme of the workshops was the role of facilities management contributing to a sustainable development on a societal level. The workshops had the aim to provide a common understanding of the current practice within the department, and to facilitate the creation of scenarios for the future facilities management.

Scenarios were created under four headings: ”Everyday environmental work” , ”A Holistic FM-Data System”, ”Dialogue and Communication in the Organisation” and ”A strategy for sustainable facilities management”. The design and destiny phases were meant to provide a frame for describing the first steps to take in the change process. It did, however, turn out to be impossible to make action plans, as all tasks in the department are somehow depending on cooperation with other parts of the organisation.

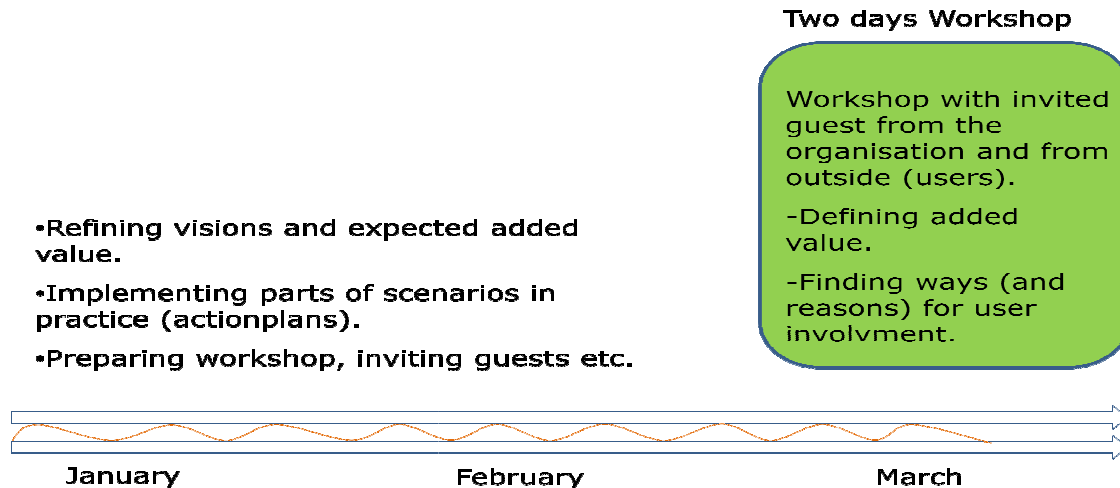
Using Appreciative Inquiry showed the weakness that the future scenarios developed were limited by the borders of the system (= FM-organisation). As the system in this case consisted of only a part of the whole organisation, some of the ideas and suggestions turned out to be directly contradictory to initiatives and strategies in other departments. In relation to the overall research question more important was that ”sustainability on a societal level” was almost impossible to catch through the process, as the employees worked very much on the organisational level.

The strength of the approach was, however, that the employees experienced a high level of energy and sense making during the process. They worked together across team borders with issues that they chose themselves and therefore found meaningful. Working on a system level spurred the employees to address the working conditions in the department, which turned out to be crucial for the possibility of changing the department into a holistic FM function.

After the initial phase of the change process the challenges are at least twofold. How can the future scenarios developed by the employees become reality? And how can the action research process lead to an inclusion of the question of sustainability on a societal level in the process?

So far the answer is a focus on “value” or “added value” created through FM. If the four future scenarios can be merged and elevated into terms of value, we expect it will be far more accessible to the rest of the organisation to discuss strategies without going too much into a tactical mode.

The next phase in the development process is therefore to invite the users of the facilities from strategic, tactical and operational level to a joint workshop. They will be asked what added value the created FM future scenarios could contribute with in their daily work. On this basis methods for user involvement and new cooperational forms can be explored, addressing sustainability as an overall value at the same time. The principal process design for this is presented below.



Figur 3: The principal process design for spring 2010. Elevating the scenarios to a value level and inviting users to qualify the scenarios and ways of implementation.

In our work we have explored the meanings of “sustainable FM” and “FM supporting a sustainable development on a societal level” trying to distinguish the two. The first we see as a primary tool orientated approach trying to incorporate sustainability into the practice by different systems and tools. The second points more to the role of facilities management as supporting the corebusiness in influencing on the development of the society in a sustainable direction by a more holistic approach. This conceptualization will continue through the Ph.D.

## CONCLUSION

So far findings indicate that there is a great potential in a bottom up approach to change processes in the local authority administration, even in a department working mainly on the tactic and operational level where everything should have been done yesterday. At the same time it has proven difficult to address the sustainability issues on a societal level within a systemic approach. This will be the subject in further discussion later in the Ph.D. research process.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to the employees from the local authority of Albertslund for their engagement and encouraging engagement and Realdania for the funding of the Ph.D. through the Centre for Facilities Management – Realdania Research (CFM). See [www.cfm.dtu.dk](http://www.cfm.dtu.dk).

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