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Municipal facilities managers as strategists

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate practitioners' perceptions of strategic work in municipal facilities management: how public facilities management is changing, what is included in strategic public facilities management and who leads the strategic work.

Design/methodology/approach – A literature review begins with mainstream studies of strategy management, ultimately concentrating on municipal facilities management. Findings are based on a 2020/2021 questionnaire targeting 356 practitioners in municipal facilities management across Sweden (50% response rate). The statistical treatment includes factor analysis.

Findings – Most respondents indicated changed ways of managing facilities in the past five years; most reported that they were in an organization with an explicit goal of working more strategically. Respondents associated strategic facilities management with governance, facilities, sustainability, technology change and communication. Frequently, it was the management team of the facilities management department that led strategic work.

Research limitations/implications – Research into municipal facilities management is dominated by studies in Northern Europe, and more studies from other regions are needed. How strategies and work roles evolve in parallel appears to be a fruitful direction of further research.

Practical implications – Facilities managers need stronger competences and more resources to engage in strategic facilities management. Findings indicate a need to integrate sustainability aspects better into long-term strategic work.

Social implications – More strategic municipal facilities management is of obvious social value.

Originality/value – This is the first study of practitioner perceptions of work on strategic facilities management in municipalities.

Keywords Change processes, Strategic work, Facilities management, Facilities managers, Public organization, Municipality, Public buildings, Survey, Sweden

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Early on, it was recognized that facilities management is to be found at three interrelated levels in organizations: strategic, tactical and operational (Alexander, 1992). At the strategic level, facilities management should ensure that facilities meet clearly defined business objectives. Below the strategic level, facilities management has been understood to be involved with adapting and delivering services to the customers within defined policies,

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strategies and goals (Jensen, 2011). Looking at all three levels, a more recent Malaysian study has identified significant factors for strategic facilities management as managing change, benchmarking and strategic facilities planning, while the tactical level includes risk management, emergency preparedness, facilities technology, service-level agreements and supply management; examples from the operational level are primarily space planning and management (Kamaruzzaman *et al.*, 2018).

Facility management strategy is now defined as a "statement expressing the analysed needs of the demand organization, proposed facility management solution(s) and outline plan for implementation" in the ISO 41014:2020 *Facility management – Development of a facility management strategy* standard. One of the benefits of a strategy, as listed in the standard, is that it implies an "improved understanding of the demand organization's objectives, needs and constraints and an appropriate approach to FM and facility services."

Developing and delivering facilities management according to a set strategy appears to have been particularly difficult in the public sector, and there remains a need for continued efforts. Returning to the early 1990s, four major weaknesses of UK public sector property management, especially in local authorities, were pointed out already then by Gibson (1994): operational property management was reactive, the difference between the objectives of a landlord and those of a tenant were not understood, performance monitoring lacked and there was inadequate information because of incomplete or inaccessible property inventories. Since then, and with national differences, strategic thinking has made progress. Already in a study of facilities management in Swedish local authorities in 2000 (Lind and Lindqvist, 2005), it was found that almost 90% of municipalities of above-average size had introduced, mostly during the 1990s, a system of internal asset rents. About one in five of these municipalities had a special company responsible for managing their real estate. Furthermore, roughly half of these larger municipalities had their real estate unit organized as a profit center. Around 60% were using performance indicators and engaged in benchmarking. But views on strategy in the public sector differ globally, and to take just one example, representative or not: "inappropriate strategic leadership and responsibility for driving essential change" emerged as the least important of 22 challenges affecting FM practices in South Africa's public buildings; the highest ranked challenge was "availability of funds" (Mewomo *et al.*, 2022).

Strategic facilities management in the public sector should be viewed as a special case of public strategic management. Despite progress in research on public strategic management, Bryson *et al.* (2010) note that typologies often have viewed strategy as an entity rather as a practice, and that when the political aspects have been addressed, the extent and effectiveness of methods for handling stakeholders remain unclear. Moreover, there is a need for more clarity in dealing with conflicting goals and missions in public organizations; it is also unclear what the appropriate organizational level of application and analysis is. Finally, strategic planners have many different roles that need a fuller explication. How local government integrates sustainability into strategic planning processes is of particular interest. Zeemering (2018) emphasizes the role of stakeholder engagement in sustainability strategy development while also underlining a need for developing performance metrics. Having surveyed Finnish municipalities, Kettunen *et al.* (2020) found that more than two out of five municipalities responded that they carried out much or very much strategy-related work to achieve broad sustainability. They also mapped who participated in local development strategy formulation, finding that strategic planning was "mostly conducted at the top administrative levels of municipalities, with mayors, municipal executive boards and councils, and responsible officials being seen as the main actors."

Contextual factors increase the need for strategic approaches. For facilities management in general and since the 1990s, the two long-term challenges of digitalization and

sustainability have become much stronger (Bröchner *et al.*, 2019). Facilities management can and should contribute to realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Opoku and Lee, 2022). The digital toolbox is expanding (Lee *et al.*, 2021). Although the educational level among facilities managers and their accumulated experiences should have increased over the years, the issue of competence development in an emergent profession remains important (Galamba and Nielsen, 2016, 2019).

While there are many prior studies of the specifics of strategic facilities management, there has been no attempt to analyze practitioner perceptions of strategy. It is known from other contexts that perceptions are important particularly when pursuing strategic changes (Collier *et al.*, 2004; Thomas and Ambrosini, 2015). Against this background, and based on survey data from Swedish municipalities, and with an overall purpose to support strategic change in public sector facilities management, this study concerns practitioners' perceptions of strategies and strategic work. Three main questions have guided the investigation:

Q1. How are facilities management practices changing?

Q2. What aspects are associated with strategic facilities management in municipalities?

Q3. Who leads the strategic work?

Literature review

In mainstream research into strategic management, the field can be said to deal with "the major intended and emergent initiatives taken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving utilization of resources, to enhance the performance of firms in their external environment" (Nag *et al.*, 2007). The unit of analysis is typically the firm, and the primary outcome of interest is performance, although there is a lack of consensus on performance indicators among studies of facilities management (Amos *et al.*, 2019). An organization's strategy can be perceived in at least three ways: as communications by key influencers, as their intentions and as realized by organizational members (Steensen, 2014).

Narrowing the focus to public strategic management, Bryson *et al.* (2010) adopt an expansive definition:

> The appropriate and reasonable integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organization (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of its mission, meeting of mandates, continuous learning, and sustained creation of public value.

Such a broad definition allows for multiple interpretations in practice, and it is a very mixed picture painted by Poister *et al.* (2010) when going across numerous case studies of strategy research related to the public sector. Results from strategic management research in the public sector are difficult to generalize, and disconcertingly, they were unable to find any study that had tested whether strategic planning leads to improved performance. Moreover, strategic change in the public sector is the subject of many studies, but there is a lack of detail on change processes and outcomes, and theories used to study change are largely disconnected (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014).

FM strategies

The broadest overview of earlier studies with a relevance for facilities management strategies is an analysis of 702 articles devoted to asset management with a focus on strategic aspects (Gavrikova *et al.*, 2020). To some extent, asset management and facilities management are overlapping concepts, given that asset management includes decisions

concerning investment allocation, infrastructure expansion, modernization and replacement as well as issues of outsourcing, leasing and co-production. Five clusters of publications were found:

(1) operational level decision-making;
(2) asset life cycle management;
(3) strategic asset management, with a clear focus on strategy, efficiency and enterprise level decision-making;
(4) organizational aspects of asset management; and
(5) asset information management.

Sustainability aspects of strategic facilities management have been investigated by several authors, but as Nielsen *et al.* (2016) found in their review of literature, there had been limited research published between 2007 and 2012 that had taken an integrated strategic approach. A questionnaire survey in the UK with responses from 251 facilities managers indicated that time constraints, lack of knowledge and lack of senior management commitment were the main barriers for the implementation of consistent and comprehensive sustainable FM policy and practice (Elmualim *et al.*, 2010). Concentrating on housing and studying implications for sustainable facilities management, Nielsen *et al.* (2012) characterized the strategic facility management organization as a loosely coupled organization and as a network of decision makers, with various roles and relations. The influences and practices of facilities managers that impact on their ability to be advocates for energy efficiency were explored by Curtis *et al.* (2017) for the case of retrofits in commercial office buildings. Here it was seen that complex building ownership arrangements, poor communication skills, isolation from key decision-making processes, a lack of credible business cases and information, split incentives and the prospect of business disruptions can all impact on the ability of facilities managers to drive organizational change.

Municipal FM strategies

Research into facilities management strategies in the public sector is clearly dominated by the local level of government, which reflects the relative importance of municipal asset holdings. Based on a World Bank study, Kaganova and Nayyar-Stone (2000) reviewed the status of municipal real property asset management internationally. Noting that in nearly all countries, municipalities own or control much real estate, including public buildings, schools, hospitals and housing, local government seldom think of their holdings as a portfolio whose composition might be modified to serve public purposes better. The typical municipality would not review routinely whether the current use of individual properties was appropriate.

There are several studies that consider specific strategical aspects of municipal facilities management: portfolio thinking, property divestment, outsourcing of services, organizational structures, political influences, condition assessments, investment versus maintenance, health and building performance versus service performance, as in the following.

Portfolio thinking appears to depend on stages of economic development: a survey of 18 case studies of municipal property asset management in the UK and Russia found a tendency in the UK to apply a long-term view of portfolio management (Phelps, 2011). Nevertheless, it was felt that this strategic perspective was poorly developed. A few critical change factors were described as organizational will, strategic focus, commercial ethos and portfolio intelligence.

An assessment of property divestment processes in Italian municipalities (Vermiglio, 2011) has highlighted the absence of, first, a real estate management strategy that supports the organizational enhancements during the time; second, quantitative and qualitative information about the real size of the whole portfolio and the nature of property owned by local governments; and third, a performance measurement system providing advice for the decision-making process and useful data for strategic benchmarking with other public administrations.

Another organizational issue of strategic importance is outsourcing of municipal facilities services. Haugen and Klungseth (2017) found no hard and fast rules concerning what services should be kept in-house and what should be contracted out. The choice is not necessarily between outsourcing and in-house production; it is rather about strategic sourcing and management of the needed services, they conclude. In the UK, local government facilities management was earlier found to be viewed as an internal function with little impact on meeting the needs of those who consume authority services (Clark and Rees, 2000). Integrated facilities management existed in 29% of local authorities in 1999. Within Norway, and up to the mid-1990s, almost all municipalities had a decentralized structure for their facilities management (Hopland, 2014). Then a swift centralization followed, and in 2010, roughly 85% had a centralized structure. Large municipalities with weak political leadership had been more ready to centralize.

Again in Norway, local political fragmentation, measured as the number of parties and their seat share in the local council, has been found to be associated with poor building conditions, both for schools and for buildings in general (Borge and Hopland, 2017). This can be explained if politically fragmented municipalities are less able to take a long-term view, and as a consequence, maintenance would be given low priority in budgetary decisions. A further Norwegian survey showed that public facility managers are concerned about weak fiscal conditions and lack of political priority of facility management, and at the same time that local governments reporting public buildings in good condition generally have fewer and less serious concerns (Hopland and Kvamsdal, 2018). Managers in municipalities with a centralized facility management structure were less concerned that the organizational structure of the facility management is suboptimal. A prior study of maintenance and building conditions in 31 Norwegian municipalities (Valen and Olsson, 2012) had found that proper governance and political prioritization of maintenance and facilities management had a positive correlation with good building condition.

As to condition assessments, a study of large public schools in Texas found that, although the majority of them considered maintenance planning to be an important part of the overall organizational plan, most still lacked adequate information about their facility's condition (Lavy and Bilbo, 2009). One school out of five conducted a building condition assessment and was able to gather more detailed information, being able to further use this for activities such as long-term planning, benchmarking components and preventive maintenance.

The relation between investment in facilities and their maintenance appears to be complicated. Norwegian survey data suggest substantial fluctuations in building conditions and a negative relationship between building conditions in 2004 and in 2016 (Hopland and Kvamsdal, 2019). Local governments with poor building conditions in 2004 had higher investment in the following years. There was no systematic relationship between building conditions in 2004 and maintenance expenditure in subsequent years. The authors conclude that if maintenance levels are too low, investment levels might be too high.

Building performance can be thought to influence service performance. Brackertz (2006) reported a case study of physical and service performance of community facilities in two

councils in Melbourne that used a software tool with key performance indicators. There was a statistically probable effect of the performance of the physical building on the quality of the service delivered from it, although it remained uncertain whether a change in building performance leads to a corresponding change in service provision.

Summing up, the nature of facilities management strategies in municipalities must be thought of as strategies that support overall management strategies to improve performance of the organization. However, to understand why or why not such a strategy is able to improve performance, it has been argued that researchers need to pay closer attention to how practitioners interpret, understand and work with strategy. If the secrets of strategy are easily available, why do many organizations fail? Searching for an answer to this question has led to the strategy-as-practice approach, "paying close attention to the work of strategising as ongoing, distributed activity in and across organisations" (Hughes *et al.*, 2021).

Municipal FM and practitioners' experiences of strategy work

In line with an overall strategy-as-practice agenda, in Denmark, Galamba and Nielsen (2016) have explored through action research the role of public facilities managers and examined how an empowerment process can help them develop collective competences for strategic facilities management. A workshop process was intended to facilitate collective reflections on the concept of sustainability and how the concept could be translated to the local organizational context and individual work. Another case study has concerned the development of a strategic facilities plan for one of the largest Swedish cities; key actors were seen to take complementary roles when promoting new collaborative processes (Gluch and Svensson, 2018). Recently, Svensson *et al.* (2022) interviewed facility managers in Swedish municipalities and made two case studies. Managers expressed a wish that their organizations would be more than a service unit, instead being made responsible for future directions with consequences for the whole municipality; they would claim a higher status, but it also emerged that the ability of facilities managers to work strategically was limited, and that the responsibility for strategic work was divided between so called strategists and the facility managers. New roles for facilities management also meant that user organizations in the municipality would have to adjust to new practices.

Method

Based on prior literature and earlier interviews with representatives of ten municipal facilities management departments, a workshop was held to get a broad view of public facilities management in Sweden and how work is changing currently. Participants included two representatives from project management firms, one private consultant, four representatives from public facilities management organizations, an experienced facilities management researcher and two representatives from a municipal housing owner; all selected because they either worked in municipal facilities management or in firms closely collaborating with municipalities. This workshop led to the identification of a long range of aspects that could be covered by a questionnaire, which could capture a wide range of views held by practitioners from various backgrounds, thus a topic-driven survey (Blair *et al.*, 2014) designed to investigate aspects of strategy and strategic change. This meant devising a questionnaire capturing perceptions of strategic work, not least aspects of long-term challenges, leadership and stakeholder influence.

Respondent perceptions were measured using four types of variables established in quantitative studies (Bell *et al.*, 2022): a Likert scale with a five-point range (1 = not at all and 5 = to a very high extent), a binary scale with yes/no, several response options and

descriptive information. The questionnaire was tested on three public facilities managers to identify and reduce possible misinterpretations. Their feedback was taken into consideration before finalizing the questionnaire.

The targeted respondents were individuals likely to be involved in facilities management, refurbishment and maintenance and assumed to be in a position where they would be familiar with practices in public facilities management. These respondents would have various occupational titles but can be categorized within six professional groups: managers (department heads), facilities managers, strategists, building engineers, planners and project managers. Respondents were identified in three steps. Web pages for all 290 Swedish municipalities were as a first step screened for information on their facilities management and contact persons. Second, identified contact persons were contacted by e-mail and informed about the study and also asked if there were others in their organization who could be appropriate respondents. The online questionnaire was sent in a first round in November 2020 to 322 respondents. Complying with GDPR, the European Union General Data Protection Regulation, respondents were asked to consent to the use of their personal data. Based on suggestions from the initial respondents, we were able to add 61 contacts who received the questionnaire in a second round in December 2020.

Thus, the questionnaire was sent to a total 383 contacts, and as 27 e-mails bounced, primarily because of sick leave, parental leave and job change, the final sample was reduced to 356. Two reminders were sent out in December 2020 and January 2021. Responses came from individuals working in facilities management in 123 Swedish municipalities. The median municipal population was 60,000. Responses were obtained from 207 individuals, 19 of which had only answered a few questions and were removed from the data set, leaving us with a final population of 178 respondents and a response rate of 50.0%. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Survey results

Respondent background

Of the respondents, 60% were men and 40% women. A majority, 52%, were between 45 and 60 years, 36.5% between 30 and 44, 6% over 60 and 5% under 30 years of age; 0.5% preferred not to tell. Regarding education, 57% held a university degree, frequently in engineering or business administration. Most of the remaining 43% had an engineering background (secondary school level) or vocational education focusing on real estate or facilities management.

Tasks

Table 1 displays tasks the respondents see as included in their work with public facilities management, relying on Likert scale responses. Many are involved in collaborative work and leading teams; they participate in both strategic and operative decision-making, as well as in diffusing information and making cost estimates, but they are also engaged in activities with a longer time horizon, such as business development.

Changed ways of managing

Many respondents (84%) stated that they had changed their ways of managing the public building stock in the past five years. Only 6% stated that they had not, while 10% replied that they did not know. Changes include introducing new work roles, increased collaboration with stakeholders, working more digitally and with a more systematic inventorying of the building stock (Table 2).

Task	Mean	SD
Cooperate with external stakeholders	4.04	1.08
Make strategic decisions	4.02	1.09
Communicate information	4.02	1.08
Make operative decisions	3.94	1.12
Engage in business development	3.91	1.07
Estimate costs	3.86	1.00
Lead teams	3.79	1.34
Develop new work methods	3.70	1.07
Decide on new business directions	3.53	1.20
Implement new concepts/models in practice	3.45	1.20
Create teams	3.45	1.34
Manage property inventory	3.39	1.41
Develop new concepts/models	3.38	1.13
Manage projects	3.33	1.20
Teach in internal training	2.42	1.01
Teach in external training/education	2.05	1.04
Perform caretaker duties	1.29	0.77

Source: Authors own creation

Table 1.
What tasks do you perform in your professional role?

Change	% of all respondents
New professional roles added	65.7
More cooperation with client/user	53.4
More systematic inventory of built assets	44.9
More digitalization	42.1
Staff transfers to new organizational units	41.6
New systems and tools, e.g. IT systems	39.3
Organizational mergers	28.7
More portfolio management	28.1
New system of internal leases	20.2
Introduced a new space supply process	11.2

Source: Authors own creation

Table 2.
Changed ways of managing in the past five years

Almost two-thirds of the respondents perceived that the role of facilities managers has changed over the past five years. Some of the main changes raised were that the facilities manager, in comparison to earlier, works more with finances (mean 3.92, standard deviation 1.07), more long term (mean 3.91, standard deviation 0.94) and more strategically (mean 3.62, standard deviation 0.97). The facilities manager also works more on an overall level (mean 3.87, standard deviation 0.94) and with a larger number of facilities (mean 3.41, standard deviation 1.38). Furthermore, the facilities manager has a more coordinating role (mean 3.67, standard deviation 1.11) and a different educational background compared to previous years (mean 3.35, standard deviation 1.24).

The concept of strategic facilities management

A clear majority of the respondents (77%) indicate that they are familiar with the concept of strategic (public) facilities management, but only 36% state that they are

working in accordance with the concept. Those who reported that they were familiar with the concept were asked about what aspects they relate to the concept. The aspects that on average (on the five-point Likert scale) were ranked highest were instrumental aspects such as increased focus on planning, cost efficiency, measuring, mapping, assessments and property inventories (Table 3). But, there are also softer management issues such as changed approach, communication, increased coordination, information and change processes. We also find politics and funding high on the list together with major contemporary challenges such as energy efficiency and digitalization.

Relying on factor analysis, five principal components were identified: governance, facilities, sustainability, technology change and communication. Just considering the averages for each aspect, it is clear that the facilities component is the one that includes the

	Component						
Component aspect	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1 Governance							
Handling conflicts of interest	0.748					3.94	1.06
Decision processes	0.738			*0.401*		4.18	0.98
Politics	0.685					4.28	0.92
New site conditions	0.680					3.98	1.10
Population forecast uncertainty	0.561					3.77	1.05
Change processes	0.559					4.16	0.91
Colocation	0.527					4.13	0.93
Finance	0.510					4.23	0.98
Municipal coordination	0.479					4.34	0.78
2 Facilities							
Mapping the stock of facilities		0.787				4.57	0.71
Cost efficiency		0.750				4.66	0.58
Long-term planning		0.686				4.79	0.50
Building status assessments		0.680		*0.502*		4.42	0.78
Inventorying		0.566				4.29	0.90
Change to portfolio approach		0.535				4.31	0.89
Building life cycle		0.484				4.47	0.82
Adopting private sector practices	*0.455*	0.472				4.30	0.88
3 Sustainability							
Environmental sustainability			0.826			3.99	0.98
Social sustainability			0.756			3.76	1.04
Energy efficiency			0.654			4.34	0.80
Measurement and monitoring		*0.432*	0.575			4.11	0.88
Digitalization			0.559	*0.395*		4.02	0.90
4 Technology change							
Reorganization				0.654		3.33	1.22
Building technology				0.588		3.64	1.11
Innovation	*0.466*			0.548		3.70	0.97
5 Communication							
Communication					0.766	4.13	0.95
Information					0.646	4.02	0.91

Notes: $N = 128$; principal component analysis; varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization
Source: Authors own creation

Table 3.
What aspects do you relate to the concept of strategic facilities management? Rotated component matrix

highest-ranking aspects, led by long-term planning, which could have been expected. What is more striking is that sustainability aspects are found in a separate component with little in common with the two components of governance and facilities. Long-term planning thus appears to be thought of as only weakly related to sustainability. Looking at average scores, it emerges that cost efficiency (appearing in the facilities component) is ranked higher than any particular aspect of sustainability. It is notable that digitalization is primarily assigned to the sustainability component; nevertheless, it is also strongly related to the technology change component. This slightly surprising link between digitalization and sustainability can be due to respondents who associate monitoring of energy use with digital support technologies. Another example of an aspect that bridges two components is innovation, found to be associated with both technology change and governance.

Strategic work and involved actors

Of all respondents, 76% stated that their organization had an explicit goal of working more strategically and long term than it does today. Among those in an organization with the explicit goal, almost half (49%) claimed that they lack sufficient resources to work long term and strategically, whereas only 15% said that they have resources. As many as 36% also stated that they did not know whether resources were available. In particular, 81% stated that they lacked sufficient staff to carry out strategic work. This is followed by the lack of organizational structures supporting the strategic work (55%), lack of financial resources (48%), lack of appropriate IT systems (44%) and lack of political decisions (40%).

Table 4, which reports answers to a Likert scale question, shows that the management team of the FM department together with strategists (staff with a specific function of performing strategic work) and municipal top management are seen as the three groups who dominate strategic work.

Furthermore, respondents state that during the past five years, departmental FM management teams have gained more influence over the operations carried out. Also, strategists are stated to have gained increased influence. This implies reinforced roles for the groups the respondents see as more involved in the strategic work (Table 4). Also, municipal politicians have become more influential.

Discussion

Returning to the three questions formulated initially, the results first show that municipal facilities management undergoes continuous change; Swedish municipalities are in a

Actor	Mean	SD
FM department management team	4.12	1.24
Strategists	3.79	1.43
Municipal top management	3.66	1.41
Municipal politicians (councilors)	3.10	1.33
Planners	3.09	1.43
Facilities managers	3.08	1.39
Financial officers	2.75	1.28
Clients/users of facilities	2.68	1.23
Project managers	2.65	1.34

Source: Authors own creation

Table 4. Who leads the strategic work with facilities in your municipality?

process of adopting a more long-term and strategic approach to facilities management, much as outlined in the two case studies reported by Svensson *et al.* (2022). A caveat is that taking an end-state view on strategy work instead of seeing it as a continuous process may create frustration among staff, and therefore, departmental managers and others who lead the development of strategies need to express clearly how they see the change processes they initiate, avoiding a fixation on the ultimate product.

As to the second initial question, the results also show that public facilities managers are aware of a long range of aspects associated with strategic facilities management. Our factor analysis shows how various factors are closely integrated and other factors not. This illustrates the complexity of strategic work in this field and reveals integration challenges faced by those who initiate and lead strategy development. The relation between sustainability issues and other strategic aspects of facilities management emerges as particularly important, although our empirical analysis reveals that much remains to be done. The need for local government to achieve horizontal coordination of sustainability management is in line with Zeemering's (2018) reasoning, and our results appear to confirm that "the elements of strategic thinking are often consistent with an increased local engagement with sustainable development" (Kettunen *et al.*, 2020). However, to achieve such a consistency, managers need to develop adequate management processes that can handle increased coordination on local levels.

Considering the third question, that of leadership roles for strategic work, it should first be noted that many responding practitioners feel that they have insufficient resources for strategic work, primarily in terms of digital tools and staff. This is worrying, as the facilities manager has been understood in the literature as a crucial actor for introducing strategic management of facilities (Curtis *et al.*, 2017; Hopland and Kvamsdal, 2019; Galamba and Nielsen, 2019). While our study indicates that the influence of facilities managers on strategic decision has grown over the past years, we also see a new specialist role that has entered public facilities management, that of the strategist. This role is in addition to previous roles. At the same time, facilities managers who are anchored in operative issues need adding new competences, such as in financial and business development.

As both internal and external coordination are raised as important aspects of strategic facilities management, a question of organizational boundaries and the relevance of the "one organization" view can be raised (Kuipers *et al.*, 2014). With strategists as carriers of ideas, the question is whether internal strategic work in public facilities management may result in suboptimization, neglecting a broader picture of consequences for the municipal administration as a whole (Svensson *et al.*, 2022). For municipal facilities management, it is therefore important to understand that a reliance on specialized strategists can make for a different change process and a different outcome. As we have seen from our data, it is also clear that the role of facilities managers is undergoing change, and they are expected to act both on the operative and the strategical level, which means a degree of competition with dedicated FM strategists, although a number of respondents seem to be unaware of these broadened responsibilities. Seen from above, this raises the question whether those who perform strategic work possess sufficient knowledge of the operative practices they intend to change; it is particularly difficult to coordinate tasks in public organizations such as those responsible for facilities management (Gluch and Svensson, 2018; Svensson *et al.*, 2022) if lacking access to detailed knowledge of grassroot realities.

Conclusion

The ambition of this investigation has been to increase focus on how municipal facilities management undergoes change in the direction of greater emphasis on strategy, as reflected

in views held by practitioners. This has resulted in transformative change in terms of focus, need of resources and competences and new and/or changed organizational roles and practices. The study gives an overview of strategic work in public facilities management by capturing contemporary challenges addressed, content as well as involved actors in this work. The research provides a deeper insight into how the facility managers role is perceived to be changing. It also details how stakeholder influence has changed due to an increased focus on strategic municipal facilities management.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the general issue of how strategies and work roles, notably that of strategists, evolve in parallel appears to be a fruitful direction of further research with significance for facilities management. More on the empirical side, it is obvious that research into municipal facilities management is dominated by studies carried out in Northern Europe, and more studies from other regions are needed.

Practical implications of this investigation include that facilities managers need stronger competences and more resources to engage in strategic facilities management. Facilities, user needs and current management processes should be mapped, relying on a common IT system. This especially includes developing management processes that can handle horizontal coordination on local levels. This also implies that processes of strategy implementation should be considered in parallel with strategy development, a principle that encourages staff participation, channels energy and supports broader commitment. Findings indicate a need to integrate sustainability aspects better into long-term strategic work, which is a serious challenge for an industry that is frequently subject to requirements for change.

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