TOWARDS MORE AND BETTER WELFARE THROUGH DIALOGIC ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT: THE "WE FIGURE IT OUT TOGETHER" PROJECT

Jacob Storch and Julie Nørgaard
Aarhus, Denmark

Movements from System Welfare to Relational Welfare

Municipalities and public institutions throughout Denmark are rethinking welfare in relation to citizens. Two competing narratives are seen in the current welfare debate. One is a narrative of worsening conditions and, ultimately, the potential dismantling of the welfare state. The other is a narrative about how we can work together to improve welfare by activating the existing resources found among citizens and in the relations of which they are part (Mandag Morgen 2015: 5).

The latter of these narratives can be understood within the framework of the term relational welfare. Looking at the development of welfare in Denmark and abroad, relational welfare is a term referring to the widespread co-creation agenda of today (NESTA, People Powered Health 2012). The term is already broadly used in the Danish public sector, referring to everything from initiating innovative new practices in collaboration with citizens, to just a slightly different term for cooperation. In Denmark Aarhus Municipality calls it "Rethinking welfare"; in Rødovre Municipality it is "Working together for Rødovre"; and in Billund they say "We figure it out together". The term relational welfare was coined by the internationally renowned British social entrepreneur, Hilary Cottam. To Cottam, relational welfare represents a change in the way we think about and practice welfare. By employing the term in this journal, we position ourselves in extension of Cottam's practice-oriented research, which identifies some necessary movements in our municipal practice if we are to ensure the continued development of our welfare: "The welfare state is based on an outdated, transactional model, and needs to be replaced with something that is shared, collective and relational" (Cottam 2011:144).

Relational welfare is the movement away from transaction thinking, towards a collaboration model in which welfare is not something we give to each other, but rather something we produce and create together on relational conditions.

Welfare is advanced through increased cooperation with citizens, increased focus on citizens' resources and increased focus on the relations of which citizens are part of. In alignment with Cottam, we point to relational welfare as the road to creating new welfare principles and practices based on human capabilities and relations, rather than on institutional reforms and streamlining (Cottam 2011:144). With this term, we also seek to assemble a wide range of examples that, when profiled and disseminated, can serve as change catalysts for movements towards more relational-based, co-creational welfare development.

Another example from England is a project utilizing citizen-centered collaborative practice in relation to a specific group of citizens on long-term sick leave. In addition to improved perceptions of quality in treatment and quality of life among citizens on long-term sick leave, the project also saved nearly 20% in costs for each citizen participating in the project. These results were simply a consequence of increasing citizens' ownership and motivation through the project. People on long-term sick leave represent 50% of all consultations by general practitioners, 65% of outpatient treatment, 70% of bed-

days in hospitals and 70% of health and social costs in England's National Health Service (NESTA, People Powered Health, 2012).

Given the Scope of these Expenses, the Potential Savings are Enormous.

Relational welfare must be seen as more than just the idealistic project that it also is.
An approach to quality and efficiency agendas in the public sector as interdependent and mutually beneficial elements of a larger whole holds the potential to unleash great benefits for society. Both improved quality and improved efficiency are potential results of good cooperation. A common thread in the examples collected is that a more collaborative, participatory and citizen-oriented practice is charting a course for our welfare. This practice is reducing system welfare, in which citizens expect and are entitled to a given municipal service managed and defined by the municipality, while increasing relational welfare, in which welfare is measured in terms of a good life as defined according to the individual's personal wishes.
This good life is often created where our relations are strongest: in the close and local communities. Relational welfare also shifts the tasks of municipalities, which must no longer deliver standardized services, but instead partake in a close cooperation to support the citizen's own resources, capabilities and network rather than serving as the relation to citizens, municipalities must offer citizens relations – for example, by allowing them to re-invite others into their lives, including associations, other citizens, local businesses and new networks.

The individual citizen must gain the capacity for self-reliance in the short or long term; herein lies great potential, in terms of quality and empowerment, for the citizen's continued well-being and improved welfare – as well as economic potential. In the following, you can read about how an entire municipality and municipal culture is moving in new directions, towards more participatory and collaborative relational welfare by "figuring it out together".

"The Joint and Unique Agreement regarding Citizens is what makes the Difference": What are the Citizen's Real Needs?

Janni Due Matthiasen is a social psychiatry supervisor in Billund Municipality.
A year-and-a-half ago, she was contacted by a nurse from the home nursing unit.
They were facing challenges in relation to a person who refused home care and threw home care staff out of his apartment. The person refused to take his medicine and he did not want any help with practical or personal care.

At the time, home care staff were visiting the apartment four times a day, in addition to one daily visit by the nurse. All of these visits ended with slammed doors and frustration for the citizen and the staff; all those who visited the apartment found it very difficult to engage the citizen in a conversation about the situation. Therefore, the nurse called Janni. They asked Janni to stop by the man's home while the nurse was on a visit. Janni was going to meet with the man to see if she could understand his wishes and needs. Janni succeeded in having a discussion with the man. It turned out that he had difficulty dealing with so many different people at once and he found the many visits to his apartment overwhelming.

Unique agreements regarding citizens: A collaboration between the social services, home care and home nursing units successfully identified the man's actual needs for help and care. He wanted to have one visit a day, with time and space for the staff to speak with and listen to him. In terms of practical help, he wanted assistance with shopping for groceries – and nothing more. Janni subsequently made daily visits to the man's home that also included grocery shopping. The home care unit cancelled all visits, after which the nursing and social services units were the only municipal staff to enter the apartment. As a result of the relation and closeness enabled by the cooperation and the new solution, the man was once again able to take his medicine and accept the help that he needed. Janni says:

> *The collective and unique agreement regarding the citizen is what made the difference. We established good contact and a good relationship by listening to the citizen's own needs. The ability to adapt to the citizen's unique wishes is what 'We figure it out together' is all about. In this case, we successfully planned and coordinated a good effort in accordance with the citizen's needs. The 'We figure it out together' project has increased our understanding of just how important these essential professional skills are.*

The "We Figure it out Together Project"

In 2013, Billund Municipality launched a pilot project called "Innovation Laboratory".
The municipal administrators were interested in the agendas also found in other municipalities and started by using the phrase "the citizen at the head of the table", reflecting a desire to move away from municipal distance from the citizen and towards citizen influence over their own lives and the solutions supported by the municipality. "The citizen at the head of the table" proved problematic, as many found it unfortunate that citizens could be given the wrong impression and false expectations of decisive influence over municipal rulings and decisions.

The idea of "We figure it out together" arose during one of the pilot project's first meetings. The basis for the project group's reflections came from an article published in the Danish newspaper Politiken, which described the fantastic results achieved at St. Hans Hospital by converting involuntary commitment wards to open wards and eliminating the use of forced physical restraint; the hospital also improved job satisfaction and patient satisfaction through cooperation with the patients.

The feedback of the hospital's staff and patients strongly reflected the visions held by the municipal administrators, and thus also provided the basis for renaming the project.
The key objective of the pilot project was to test how the organization – Billund Municipality – would respond to a co-creation agenda. The process did not aim to deliver any specific input, but rather to develop a well-founded agenda, create learning and provide insight into what co-creation means in Billund Municipality.

The pilot project took the form of a two-day workshop, in which 125 managers and employees worked together to design a series of prototypes of potential collaborative practices within their respective professional fields – and then to test these prototypes in practice. The two-day workshop was followed by two one-day workshops, held two months apart, to assess and develop the prototypes for the collection of new experiences through testing in practice.

The project generated extensive experiences relating to employees' and managers' understanding of collaborative practice, as well as to what happened when the prototypes were put into practice. The project participants also gained important experience regarding the general maturity of the organization in terms of its ability to undertake a major organizational project.

The experiences gained through the project were then chronicled in a report with a recommendation for use at the political level as to how a project could be designed, including the reasons and a budget framework for such a project. The report was considered at the political level and approved in the autumn of 2014, after which a tender process was launched. In January 2015, joint action won the contract and thus the task of realizing the intention of the project in practice.

Literature on dialogic organization development (Bushe & Storch, 2015) emphasizes the importance of the changes' generative images. A generative image is the motivating image of the future that encapsulates a development process's intention of changing practice.

"We figure it out together" is both a sympathetic intent regarding cooperation – we work together to develop the solutions – and a commentary on current practices. As creating solutions in collaboration with citizens and other stakeholders represents a deviation from normal municipal practice, the image is a critical commentary pointing to the need to develop and change our current practices. An ongoing dialogue and process therefore aimed to translate this intention to local contexts at schools, preschools, elderly care centers, the technical and environmental department, employment department, etc. Municipal Director Ole Bladt-Hansen (2015:12) described this during the project's early phase as follows:

> *I think that we need to give the municipality back to the citizens.*
> *I want to get to a place where we call "citizens" "fellow citizens".*
> *This means that they must be a part of finding new solutions and taking responsibility –*
> *when it comes to helping their neighbor, when it comes to parents and educators working*
> *together to ensure a good life for our youngest citizens, and when it comes to developing*
> *new areas of the city. The citizens are the experts on their own lives – not us.*

This represents an acknowledgement that the municipality must move towards a new practice that may appear to make sense, but which challenges the overall management model and the narrative upheld by the municipality – and so many other municipalities – for many years. Ole Bladt-Hansen (ibid) describes this change as follows:

> *For far too long, we've viewed welfare as a business in which the municipality is the*
> *manufacturer and supplier of services for a group of customers – the citizens.*
> *I think it makes more sense to look at it as a business in which all those who are capable*
> *and willing have a voice.*

We must remember that the very essence of the municipality's reason for being is based on local participatory processes and an active democracy.
The ambitious three-year development project was launched with the vision of giving the municipality back to the citizens, increasing participation and activity in the local democracy.

By involving the entire municipality as a participant at the same time, the project involved a high degree of complexity that we had to address. Therefore, the starting point for us as consultants was to consider the question: How do we design a process that gives the organization a sense of coherence and an overview of the project's many components, while maintaining an openness that ensures the ongoing incorporation of incoming learning – and ensures that choices and activities driving the project forward utilize this learning?

Our starting point was an ambition to develop an exemplary process where our work as consultants reflected the inherent intentions of the title "We figure it out Together". Rather than taking control, we sought to work in ways that ensured local ownership through meaningful conversations and processes.

The approach chosen was a competence development-based action learning process for employees and managers. Selected employees were offered a consultant training course to build professional skills enabling them to perform increasingly complex action learning activities in cooperation with their managers and colleagues. Meanwhile, managers received training in navigating the processes and thereby supporting the conversations that would give rise to the development of new practices. The inspiration for this approach is detailed (among other sources) in the book Dialogic Organization Development (Bushe, G. & Marshak, R.J. eds. 2015). In the following, we examine dialogic organization development in further detail.

Parental Involvement is About Taking Shared Responsibility

Berit Holm Petersen works as an educator at Regnbuen, a preschool institution in Billund Municipality. In collaboration with Stenderup School, the preschool significantly increased the involvement of parents, who are now invited to participate as important and key partners. Berit says:

> *In the past, we weren't very aware of what 'our parents' thought a good day at preschool entailed. We didn't ask the parents about their wishes and values in relation to their children's time in preschool.*

Therefore, the preschool's staff invited the school's and preschool's parents to participate in dialogue and conversations about their hopes and dreams for their children's lives in the institutions. They issued an invitation to a public meeting that was visible to everyone in the town, but which particularly sought the participation of citizens with ties to the preschool and school. The meeting began with a presentation of "We figure it out together" for all those in attendance. The rest of the evening's event was then based on parents' input regarding the values and activities they found to be of great importance for positive experiences in preschool – and their proposals regarding new initiatives for which parents would be responsible. All of the school's and preschool's staff attended the public meeting. Berit says:

> *They were extremely active and engaged, and they debated issues and were very specific. I think this was largely because their wishes were in focus that evening. They were invited into a space where they were the basis for the process.*

New role as coordinator. Berit is now the coordinator of the selected new activities, helping the parent groups get off to a good start. One of the groups is currently arranging playdate groups among the children; Berit helped the parents compose these groups, after which it is the parents' responsibility to coordinate the actual playdates. According to Berit this reflects one of the key points of the collaboration: "The parents know what their tasks are – they're responsible for contacting the other parents and planning the playdates with them" and the essential balance is "helping the parents get off to a good start, while also setting the projects free, giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility so that they want to continue taking new initiatives." In addition to more parent-organized activities, the evening event also created new relations and greater familiarity between the parents. Berit continues: "We no longer just talk about the kids, but about what each of us can contribute. The parents are able to get more out of each other."

This type of cooperation between parents also opens up new ways of integrating and including newcomers with other cultural backgrounds. Berit adds that strong relations between parents also has a visible effect among the children: "The parents take a shared responsibility for practice – both in terms of educational approach, but also towards each other as parents. Our responsibility as educators is to help the parents get off to a good start in this respect.
It leads to great benefits for the children."

Dialogic Organization Development

Canadian professor Gervase Bushe and his American colleague Bob Marshack (Bushe, G. & Marshak, R.J. eds. 2015) propose Dialogic Organization Development as a general term for change processes characterized by a participatory and cooperation-based process. The book presents a contrast with the diagnostic approaches to organization development, where analysis and data provide the starting point for change, based on the logic that we can fix what is not working. In the foreword to the book, Edgar Schein looks back to the original conversations and research that formed the basis for the field of Organization Development (OD).

Here, study and experiment provided the basis for organizational learning and development rather than analysis and implementation of known concepts. The term Dialogic OD marks a return to a set of original virtues on taking action in changing organizations – taking into account the past 30 years of research and developments in practice.

The unifying point is that a family of ideas comprises a field of basic positions, with an accompanying set of methods for practice. The basic positions are known as social constructivism, complexity theory and self-organization, discourse and dialogue theory, the theory of complex responsive processes of relationship formation, generativity and collaborative studies (ibid). Together, these positions seek to paint a picture of organizations as complex social communities bound by interactions, language and conversation.

In a Danish context, Appreciative Inquiry is known and widely used as a dialogic method and is one of the most thoroughly-described approaches to participatory development processes. But the method can also be found in more classical organization development textbooks. The method's phases (discovery, dream, design and destiny) can be presented as a diagnostic process in which the discovery phase

collects data that is then analyzed and forms the basis for future action. The dream phase can be seen as creative identification of problems, where the desired results of problem solving are articulated as a way of engaging the participants; the designed solution is ultimately implemented in the destiny phase.

The purpose of methods is their use in practice! Central to the aforementioned understanding of dialogic change is the confrontation of a classic dominant idea first articulated by Kurt Lewin (Bushe & Marshak 2015: 12) in 1947, which holds that interventions follow a three-stage process of "unfreeze, move, re-freeze". Underlying this assumption is the notion of organizations as stable, with change being temporary in nature. This perspective was suited to the industrialized organizations of that time, in a market where development was slow enough to allow for ongoing adaptation of organizations based on analysis. Today we know that organizations are dynamic, complex social phenomena, and that change is a constant ongoing activity. As the post-industrial age has come to dominate a global, digital world, the need for a new approach and understanding in relation to change is greatly needed.

Bushe og Marshak (2015) propose a comparison of diagnostic and dialogic change as follows:

Diagnostic OD		Dialogic OD
Positivism, objective reality	Ontology	Interpretation, social constructivism
Open systems	Organizations are	Dialogic networks
Behavior and results	Focus on	Discourse and generativity
Planned, episodic	Change is	Emergent, ongoing and iterative
Operate in the periphery, partner up with	Consultants	Are embedded in, part of
Hierarchical, start with the top and work down	Change processes	Heterarchic, start anywhere and work from there

This comparison can be seen as a continuum.

The organizations and change processes of the real world contain a mix of the two mindsets, and Billund Municipality's project is no exception. On one hand was a realization from the outset that the project involved a cultural shift from a classic municipal order-delivery model to a collaborative and participatory model. The chosen project duration of three years was therefore essential, as time was needed for things to develop.

On the other hand there was the need for planning, and thus a more episodic process approach – in part because the project was politically rooted, requiring an explanation of its mandate through process

descriptions. The complexity of this project, which involved every administrative department of the municipality, also required a structure and change narrative in order to establish a form of organizational security and anchor.

Change Agents

A competence development process is found at the core of the development project's success. The training of approximately 100 motivated managers and employees in consultative skills established an innovative and radical approach – rather than letting external consultants work directly within the organization, enough employees and managers were trained to ensure that all units, departments and institutions had at least one change agent among their permanent staff. The change agents acquired professional skills to facilitate the processes and conversations needed to establish the range of development activities required to realize the project's ambition. As many of these skills are also directly applicable in the dialogic relational contact with citizens, the process also contributed to ongoing competence development within the framework of new forms of practice.

What makes "We Figure it out Together" a Dialogic Change Project?

The project had a clear ambition from the outset to adopt an approach corresponding with the competences and skills that needed to be developed. The approach was articulated as a learning-based development process, with a focus on building internal competences through a change agent training course, monthly supervision and ongoing management guidance and training, thus ensuring that all processes in the organization are performed with the organization's own resources and engagement.

Invitation to Internal Learning Days

The Billund Municipality's extended an invitation to internal learning days. Two days annually, the change agents arrange and conduct a conference for their colleagues in which they share the best tips and tricks, experiences and methods for involvement of citizens and cross-organizational collaboration. The invitations are sent by the change agents to their colleagues.

These learning days ensure the spread of learning through the municipality by the practitioners themselves. These activities aim to ensure that all those involved get a first-hand experience of the difference it makes when they are given the opportunity to shape the course of events with their own ideas and capabilities. The core idea is that it is only possible to empower citizens to be co-creators of the initiatives if staff feel that their contributions and expertise are also part of the process. However, this does not preclude the use of more classical assessment and analysis in the project's conversations. What it means is that the project is based on a mindset where these more classical perspectives are combined with reflections by staff, such as: "How can we best explore the meaning of this in relation to the challenges at hand?" or "How can we link these perspectives with our other conversations and activities?"

Bushe and Marshak (2015: 19f) identify three dimensions of successful change projects with a dialogic approach. They identified these three dimensions by studying a number of Dialogic OD projects in which schools worked with the same Appreciative Inquiry-based process approach, but achieved significantly different results. The successful changes are marked by the following three criteria, which

we outline below as a framework for presenting the Billund project's three phases and the activities contained therein.

Emergent Change
During the change process, a number of breaks with habits and preferred ways of seeing the world occur. Like complex systems, social systems are also able to self-organize around new views and meanings when they are brought out of balance, disrupted or challenged.

This leads to the formation of new ideas, actions and views during that cannot be predicted or determined in advance. This could include situations in which the participants would have previously passed by without noticing the possibilities; but now, as a result of the project and the new ideas, they stop and take action in new ways. These new actions can represent a discontinuity in the process; and, through the power of example, they chart a course with the power to shape the organization and perspectives of other participants.

Change in one or more core narratives

 Part of the project involves changing our central narratives about who we are as an organization and how we work. These narratives can arise in a multitude of ways. They may arise through examples that grow and form a school of new practices, through leaders who articulate a strong narrative, or through other means.

The point is that within a dialogic OD mindset, words and language have a very special importance. We establish and attribute meaning to our world through the language we use to describe it. This includes our words, metaphors, documents and everyday conversations. We cannot escape from language, so to speak, as the meaning we attribute to our world is created through the use of a language; and it is through language that we assess this world and potentially decide to adopt and incorporate new language that helps us find new and more helpful ways of expressing what matters. All language is embedded in narratives – discourses – that form relationships and frameworks of meaning. A shift in narrative thereby heralds a new way of using language.

The creation of a generative image

A process that allows the emergence of a new reality is linked to the idea that generativity plays a crucial role in the organizational movements. As the meaning of our actions is something we ascribe to our practice, rather than something that exists independently of our descriptions of practice, language plays a critical role in determining the reality we perceive and find meaningful in our daily lives.

Bushe argues (Bushe & Storch, 2015:101ff) that the generative image, both figuratively and literally, is the most significant element in the documentation of long-term effects of change projects. A generative image is characterized by two qualities: It allows for new ways of seeing old problems. The image – the metaphor, the idea – allows employees and managers to see opportunities for action and decisions that they could not previously see. It is an appealing image, characterized by the participants' desire to act on the basis on the new ideas generated by the image. The challenge of generative images is that we

cannot predict which images will be generative, nor the way in which they will be received. Therefore, it is important that the introduction of new images is incorporated into dialogic studies, giving participants the opportunity to explore the meaning of a given image in relation to their own practice.

We see the "We figure it out Together" project as such a generative image. On one hand, it charts a course towards collaboration as the way to create solutions; and on the other, it leaves many questions and issues requiring exploration. The Danish journal Mandag Morgen played a role in actualizing and supporting the generativity of the statement "We figure it out Together". In the first year of the project, the municipality invited Mandag Morgen to produce a magazine featuring good stories about how the desired practice had already arrived in the municipality. The resulting publication, "Municipality means Community", states the vision as follows:

The vision of "We figure it out Together" is to create a new way of working for all employees and managers in Billund Municipality. [...] In addition to being a down-to-Earth title reflective of the Jutlandic mentality, it also expresses the essence of the project's objectives and content. In short, "We figure it out together" is about how all of the municipality's employees must find better solutions together with those for whom the solutions are intended, be they citizens, relatives, volunteer associations or representatives of the local business community. The objective of "We figure it out Together" is to create a municipality that offers citizens good opportunities to participate in the development and decisions – both for themselves and for the area in which they live. This leads to better and more effective solutions, which employees and managers in Billund Municipality will be testing, sharing and debating during the project period (Mandag Morgen 2015:8). "We figure it out Together" combines something new and something in need of changing, but does not specify what and how it is to be changed. Instead, it invites employees and managers into a process where they contribute to developing answers about what it means to them.

"We figure it out Together" is Visible in the Corridors of Grindsted City Hall: External Inspiration

Throughout the training of change agents, the management development process and the internal and external conferences, good cases, new practices and existing experiences with participatory and cross-organizational welfare work from other municipalities have all had a voice in "We figure it out Together". Among others, Vejle Municipality, Holbæk Municipality and Hjørring Municipality have shared innovative approaches to practice and important experiences, providing inspiration for managers and employees in Billund Municipality.

The Three Phases of the Project

The project was organized as a narrative with three phases so that we could invite employees and managers in Billund to partake in a larger narrative, while also creating a sense of forward progress and movement in the project. The three phases were largely articulated as sequential, but in practice they overlapped and were more integrated. We called the phases mobilization, consolidation and benefits realization. The aim was to create a legitimizing framework for the things we would encounter during the project, thus providing structure and flexibility when necessitated by challenges. Each of the phases were visualized on a running basis in a series of maps providing overviews how the individual elements

were linked and the tasks of various stakeholders (change agents, managers, municipal administrators). The applicable visualizations were prepared and reviewed by the managers and selected employees, respectively, combined with an offer of training in the skills of particular importance for the coming period.

Mobilization Phase

The primary point of the first phase was to create movement throughout the organization, to mobilize organizational conversation and focus towards the idea of a municipality as an organization that creates solutions together with its citizens rather than for its citizens. By allowing the entire organization at all levels to open up for new conversations examining the rules on cooperation with citizens, challenging and often replacing these rules with new ideas and practices. Rather than offering a single, all-encompassing narrative breaking with old narratives, many small new narratives were mobilized, adding layer by layer along the way, in the form of new explorations and conversations. These conversations contributed to forming a generative image of the direction in which practice is moving.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry explains how the generative image awakens the participants' motivation: "If you want to build a ship, you don't bring people together to create timber or produce tools. You don't delegate tasks to them or distribute the work – instead, you must arouse their longing for experiences on the open seas."

The process revolved around involving and motivating employees in Billund Municipality to take part in charting a course and direction for the journey. Likewise, the change agent training course for employees focused on learning to involve citizens in a way that they see a greater purpose in their case because they are part of charting the course.

The module invites employees to engage and participate in developing the methods, images and conversations that will move them towards increased involvement of citizens and cross-organizational cooperation. Some conversations between employees in Billund led to dead ends and had to be cut off, some grew, and new conversations emerged; all of this contributed to the creation of an ever-growing sense in the organization of being on the way to something new, of being in movement.

In the mobilization phase, participants began to do something new and thereby create new forms of practice. New approaches were tested, giving rise to new forms of practice. The emergence that occurs in the mobilization phase can be illustrated with a baking metaphor. When you bake bread, you mix yeast, flour and water, and from these individual ingredients something new arises: the bread. In Billund, we combined new ingredients, giving rise to new realizations and practices as mobilizing activities.

Consolidation Phase

The next phase marked the beginning of the consolidation process, transforming the activities into new recipes for the desired practice. The numerous activities were rounded up and described by change agents on a digital bulletin board designed for the project. The system collected all activities in a forum that was accessible to everyone in the organization. In addition to providing an overview, the system allowed participants to comment and engage in dialogue with each other. The following is an example of an overview from the system:

In addition to the participants' own project descriptions, the best breakthroughs and examples were collected throughout the project and disseminated in publications. The first example of this was a magazine produced by Mandag Morgen. In addition to covering the managerial vision of change, the publication focused strongly on identifying unique examples of employees who performed tasks emblematic of the aim of "We figure it out Together".[i] Cases centered around the change agents' activities were also published internally on a running basis throughout the project.

"If we move as Employees, then Citizens will too!"

As part of Billund Municipality's Family Intervention Unit, Helle Buch Christiansen works as a family therapist at the institution Familiehuset (The Family House). Together with 16 colleagues and 8 other change agents from the Family and Prevention Unit, the entire department is now working with a special focus on giving life to a more participatory and collaborative practice in relation to the families with whom they work. Helle says that the municipal staff in particular – i.e. herself and her colleagues – must move to enable this practice, in which the professionals do not simply deliver standardized welfare services, but rather focus on contributing to the self-reliance of the individual citizen.

The change begins with us. Helle Buch Christiansen has just stepped out of a steering committee meeting for "We figure it out Together" at Grindsted City Hall. The meeting provided a status update on the municipality's major development project for a group of administrators, managers, project managers and change agents. We seize the opportunity to talk with Helle about what she sees as the most important prerequisites for successfully changing welfare practice in the municipality:

> *We as employees of Billund Municipality have to focus on implementing a new mindset regarding welfare. If we don't, then we will still just be giving citizens services within a certain framework. Far too many are clinging to the established methods and ideas about how we usually do things. There is so much else we can do – we just have to break down some of the barriers – throughout our organization, internally and externally.*

To Helle, the realization of a desired change rests on creating a more comprehensive approach to citizens – an approach that gives citizens ownership of their own lives. In their daily work, the Family Intervention Unit>>has excellent experiences with the use of treatment plans written and developed in collaboration with the citizen: "In the collaboration relating to treatment plans, we identify the resources a citizen has in his or her own network, so they don't feel alone in the professional network and can involve relevant people from their own network." Helle suggests that this requires a willingness among the professionals to make cultural and identity-related changes – and that this applies for all employees in the municipality. She adds that particular attention must be given to the

role of employees in the movement from being a provider of services to being a coordinator that contributes expert knowledge and experience:

> *As an employee, you must work on pulling back so that you have more of a role as coordinator, giving ownership back to the individual citizen. This is what we must remember: the responsibility for development is that of the citizen, and it is our task as professionals – together with the network and volunteers as resources – to coordinate these efforts, drawing on our professional methods, knowledge and experience.*

Cross-disciplinary connections are important The Family Intervention Unit has focused on establishing a strong cross-disciplinary cooperation relating to citizens, particularly in the close relations with colleagues; in this respect, it was particularly beneficial for Helle and a few of the other change agents to visit other organizations to exchange knowledge and experiences. For example, Helle visited Stenderup School and Preschool with another change agent, where she served as the facilitator of a citizens' meeting on parental cooperation and volunteers. Helle continues:

> *Suddenly we understood that we can use each other much more across the organization, for example by consulting with each other on the change agent role and thus using it more actively. We could have spent days talking about and discussing the various initiatives at the meeting, but the methods allow for quick implementation of initiatives for the benefit of the school and preschool. As change agents, we communicated and shared our knowledge in a place where it made sense and was in demand.*

The success of using each other as change agents was repeated during the Family Intervention Unit's theme day; acting in the role of change agent, Helle invited a change agent from the Educational Psychological Counseling Unit to facilitate the event. As Helle suggests, it is easy to say that we should cooperate, but it's really difficult to do it in practice: "We have to prioritize it, take responsibility for its development and help ourselves with small measures – and we have to remind ourselves and each other that we are in this together and we have to help each other realize the changes, which also begin with ourselves*."*

The consolidation phase was a continuation of the mobilization phase, where the focus was on collecting the process into a set of specific, prioritized initiatives that were first developed locally in the units and later coordinated throughout the organization. Citizens were also involved in the strategy work at the unit level to provide critical input on how citizens perceive the strategy images. These strategy images represented the practical strategy in the organization and were followed up by a practice in which managers and change agents met monthly to discuss the next month's activities and to compile learning, thereby ensuring progress and ongoing consideration of how to maintain the tempo while addressing potential barriers along the way.

The ongoing coordination and discussions kept the organization's "feet to the fire", ensuring that they continued to work with the plans in real-time by keeping the distance from decision to action short, and by holding follow-up meetings quickly. The responsibility for action was also made visible, contributing to ensuring that action was actually taken. The following overview illustrates the strategy process for the management system:

Example of Strategy Paper with Initiatives, rooted Centrally in the Technical and Environmental Administration

All of the strategies were written in a simple and uniform format for the entire organization, providing a template for follow-up. The format was designed as a statement of the strategic direction of a given area, followed by four strategic initiatives that comprised the prioritized initiative aiming to realize the vision. The four strategic initiatives were then divided into the expected benefits they would create in the organization, as well as which actions should be prioritized to ensure the ability to create results. At the end of the second year of the project, a report showed that the change agents were involved in nearly 200 active projects.

The point of this strategy is to ensure a volume of small movements, which accumulate into major movements over time, and to ensure that the individual projects cross-pollinate each other and thereby grow. Thus, it does not matter much that a few (and sometimes many) projects are stopped or never launched, as new projects quickly take over and more or less explicitly build on learning from all the projects – both those that work and those that did not.

As our focus was on the quality and value of the conversations, all of the units also had to account for how they would ensure ongoing dialogue with the entire organization (up-down and across) to enable an internal perception of unity in relation to the strategy. The templates used for this purpose can be found in the back of this magazine. In addition to the ongoing local conversations, general follow-ups on the process and overall progress were also conducted.

Benefits Realization Phase

The third phase, benefits realization, focuses on developing an organizational and management practice to make the benefits arising from new forms of cooperation visible. The first step in this process was updating the municipality's strategic initiatives to ensure a specific focus on the benefits and, not least, work processes supporting the realization of these benefits.

A strategic step in the process was a conference day, which brought together the elected user boards and councils of all municipal institutions, politicians and municipal administrators. The conference resulted in a set of specific recommendations on how these councils and boards could be more proactively involved in the development and performance of the municipal core task. In many ways, this was the first cultural step towards a more open and transparent result-oriented practice, whose focal point is a learning culture in which professional solutions are discussed and documented, ensuring learning from things that work and development in areas lacking visible results. These activities took place within the framework of cooperation with citizens, providing ongoing disruption of the traditional service thinking, pushing towards an increasingly unique collaborative approach to interaction with citizens.

Conference: The Billund Municipality of Tomorrow

The "Billund Municipality of Tomorrow" conference is an annual event in which the project reaches out to all corners of the municipality. The one-day conference ensures that the project establishes contact with all of the municipality's volunteers, various business networks and companies, etc. These various interest groups gather to discuss, develop and dream up ideas about the direction Billund Municipality should take. The event provides an opportunity for these leading figures to meet and make their voices heard through participation in the project's development. This makes possible the launch of new projects, discussions and activities in new communities and constellations.

The 2016 conference had around 200 participants, underpinning the increased collaboration between the municipality and the region's various boards and user councils.
The conferences thereby contributed to realizing "We figure it out together" through citizen involvement and democratizing, transparent approaches that have invited local figures to engage in dialogue and share their experiences to promote innovation. Alongside the positive developments during the first two years of the project, a number of challenges have also arisen, leading to a rethinking of the project's third phase based on the learning and barriers encountered along the way by the municipality.

The barriers are unique yet general, in the sense that we have seen similar challenges unfold in connection with other municipal transformations. In the following, we will examine two of the most significant challenges: the role of management in the creation of a new culture and welfare practice, and interdisciplinary cooperation to address complex citizen-oriented challenges.

It Benefits both of us and Citizens if we Continue 'Disrupting each Other

Michelle Carina Christensen is an occupational therapist on the Assistive Technology, Vehicle and Housing Team, under Billund Municipality's Elderly Services Division – and she is also a change agent. Together with four other change agents, she is responsible for heading an internal consultant training course in Billund Municipality for new change agents as part of the "We figure it out together" program. The course is offered to municipal colleagues and managers who want to raise awareness of co-creation with citizens and employees throughout the municipality.

From change agent to change agent. Over the past three years, about 100 employees and managers from Billund Municipality have completed the change agent training course. The course has equipped them with tools for increasing citizen involvement in the development and execution of welfare tasks. In a new internal training course, Michelle and four other change agents ensure that this knowledge is transferred to colleagues in the municipality.

The new internal consultant training course is arranged by change agents to ensure the sustainable development of "We figure it out together" through the training of new change agents. Michelle says: "The training course contributes to ensuring that we as an organization remain curious about how we can develop ourselves and create more success stories together with citizens." The internal consultant training course gives participants the opportunity to learn more about what contributes value for citizens, while also gaining greater insight into what creates value in the daily performance of tasks. Michelle adds: "If we put ourselves in the shoes of the people at the other side of the table and look at it

from their perspective, it increases our reflection on how we can work with a fuller understanding of the citizen's life situation. This is the journey we are taking with 'We figure it out together'."

Productive Disruptions

The internal training course also increases awareness of existing resources in the network of colleagues. Employees are pulled out of everyday routines and environments and given the opportunity to meet colleagues from throughout the municipality. Michelle says that the course also contributes to building relationships between employees – providing greater awareness of which professionals should and can be involved in specific tasks relating to citizens. In Michelle's words: "The knowledge of our colleagues' competencies is critical to the success of the overall solution with citizens. A well-functioning cooperation is an important foundation when focusing on the citizen's development and opportunities. Therefore, it benefits both citizens and us if we continue 'disrupting' each other".

The course focuses on tapping into the citizen's own resources – and those of colleagues. "When we as professionals are able to do this, combined with an awareness of our role as an authority, we can achieve a great deal," says Michelle, who finds it important to maintain the right balance in this regard, including in her daily work with citizens seeking various assistive technologies. Quoting Michelle:

> *We must ask about citizen's wishes and dreams – because they do not always seek what they actually dream of. We must initiate conversations that bring us closer to understanding their true goals and desires. 'We figure it out Together' opens the door to methods of exploring the individual as a complete person. We become even more aware of how 'the good life' is an important aspect of even the smallest conversations and dialogues with citizens.*

Challenges and Barriers to Relational Welfare

In connection with the redesign of the "We figure it out together" project, the management of Billund Municipality has identified five focus areas for addressing the challenges and barriers arising in connection with the project. On the initiative of the municipal administrators, the management has planned the future activities under the project on the basis of these five initiatives and special strategic areas of focus. The five focus areas are: 1) Matching the needs and goals of the various professions, 2) Linking with the strategic goals, 3) Integrating the general management, 4) Becoming a mindset rather than a project, and 5) Practices that span the organization.

We will not elaborate on all five focus areas here, but we have chosen the two areas we see as general challenges that frequently arise in other development projects: 1) the pressures on managers regarding the balance between operational tasks and development efforts, and
2) interdisciplinary collaboration in the organization. The five focus areas as such are not new focus areas for the project.

Many of the ideas and initiatives were part of the project from the start, dating back to the proposal presented to Billund Municipality at the start of the project. It became evident during the project, however, that there was insufficient focus on these five focus areas, which are brought more to the

forefront with the redesign. As external consultants, we would have liked to see Billund Municipality's management acknowledge that these efforts require special attention at an earlier stage of the process. But this confirms an important point about dialogic change processes: acknowledgment cannot be rushed. Acknowledgements occur when they occur, and we cannot plan or rush change processes, which first and foremost must be lived out by the central participants.

Complexity theorist Ralph Stacey describes this phenomenon as follows: "Organizations change in an evolutionary way and the patterns of that evolution emerge in the many, many local interactions of all involved, in the many interplays of intention." (Bushe and Marshak, 2015: 157).

It is important that we as consultants help the participants, in this case Billund Municipality, talk their way to their own acknowledgments and into the useful perspectives:
"The client's rejection of the proposed process can be understood as an expression of difficulty in relating to the proposal from within the idea itself.
But when they have the opportunity to talk their way into an idea of how a process can be executed, they begin to manifest a process that equips them with orientation grammar in terms of how they will progress in their organization." (Storch, 2012: 82).

The consultant must provide support and allow the time needed by participants to achieve this on their own. Then the central participants can take the initiative to carry out the required redesigns of the project when they – much like Billund Municipality in this case – find it meaningful and are prepared to do so.

There is a reason that the literature on organization development often refers to the fact that the vast majority of change projects do not realize the expected benefits that motivated the change to begin with. Making large-scale cultural changes is a complex matter involving a multitude of agendas simultaneously at play. Typically, the organization must remain in operation at the same time that it is to undergo change. You have to dare to break with habits and embrace risk, while also meeting or cutting the budget. You have to invest time and resources in new activities, but without having more hours to do so. There are also some very practical matters; managers and employees must do things that they may personally oppose or do not fully understand, which is not optimally conducive to creating change. In short, it's easy to see what can make it so difficult.

"We figure it out together" also encountered challenges that we would like to share to illustrate how a dialogic approach to change processes is also a matter of having the courage and ability to reassess whether conversations during the planned process take us where we want to go. In Billund Municipality, the last six months of the project involved renegotiations to address two challenges in particular: Managerial support of change and a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration. In the following, we will explore these two issues as challenges that are not unique to this specific project, but rather commonly occurring barriers in other projects.

The model below from Mandag Morgen's welfare panel in the September 2016 publication "Towards more welfare" confirms that the lack of interdisciplinary coordinated cooperation and the lack of managerial support represent some of the most central barriers to the development of better welfare: (Mandag Morgen 2016)

Returning our focus to Billund Municipality, a clear picture of the managerial support emerges. This picture tells a story that the areas where the local management has embraced the new agenda are also the areas where employees make the greatest changes and where employees deliver the best results within the new framework.

Hornstrup (Hornstrup & Johannesen 2013) suggest that managerial insistence is critical to creating change. This does not mean that managers must change everything in their own practice. But it means that managers must be attentive to the importance of their engagement and insistence that employees work with the applicable change agenda, and they must contribute and help with eliminating obstacles to the project's success faced by their employees.

In connection with a status assessment, in which we asked about the change agents' perception of their colleagues' standing in relation to the project and the degree to which they experienced managerial support, a clear pattern emerged and was most evident in the large welfare areas with many employees. The study showed a strong correlation between the perceived managerial support and the other employees' engagement and participation. The study also showed two things worth mentioning.

First, the managers generally assessed their own engagement in the change efforts higher than employees did. The message to managers seems to be that they must demonstrate much greater humility regarding their own managerial practice and increase their awareness of what employees find important to ensure that employees feel involved and responsible in the change process. We recognize this picture from the many supervision and follow-up conversations we have had throughout the process with change agents; on one hand, we have had managers who express that they are doing everything they should in relation to the change efforts, but their employees indicate in our conversations that they do not share this view. Our message in these instances has been that both parties should spend more time focusing on the quality of their cooperation than on the quantity of their activities. It does not make sense to hold meetings if they are not perceived as productive, meaningful or conducive to development.

Second, the last point of focus is the significant difference between those who are part of the project and those who are not. It is as if people are either part of the project or they cut themselves off at some point along the way. There is not much in between. Therefore, the divide grows between the departments that succeed and thrive in the application of new practices, and those that never get off the ground. Another clear pattern is the lack of interdisciplinary coordination of tasks.

In recent years, Danish municipalities have generally intensified their focus on so-called "expensive citizens". The Danish National Board of Social Services published findings that DKK 45 billion (approx. $6.5 billion) is spent annually on social services, but that documentation only exists for activities corresponding to 10% of the total funds spent.
A recent report on a study by the Local Government Denmark (the association of Danish municipalities) of the most expensive and most vulnerable families' impact on municipal finances showed that that the 1% most expensive citizens account for 22% of the total individually-attributable expenses, while the most expensive 10% of citizens account for 72% of individually-attributable expenses. The study also found that these citizens receive extensive benefits. This indicates a potential

in ensuring a coordinated, comprehensive approach to casework relating to these citizens (Local Government Denmark, August 2016).

Management is about Leading the Way: When Somebody leads the ways, wd can create the Cultures that truly Benefit Users of the Institutions

Søndre School is an example. I the past three years it has changed the perception of, and the way in which the school is run. The changes are not revolutionary in nature, but rather small, everyday changes incorporating new stakeholders into the work with and relating to students. As a manager and change agent, Dorthe Bønning Møller is one of those who has been a part of the development from the outset of the project. From the beginning stages and preliminary design of "We figure it out Together", the school played an active role in making the project a living organizational practice involving both students and parents as key partners.
The school now works with a more participatory approach. For example:

Students as mediators. If you were to visit Søndre School during recess, you may encounter some of the school's new mediators, who are students themselves and help to resolve the challenges and conflicts that arise during recess. The corps consists of sixth graders who submitted written applications to attend a two-day training headed by two of the school's teachers with special training in mediation.

School principal Dorthe Bønning Møller talks about how this program involved the students themselves in defining what constitutes good relationships at the school:

> *With this program, students themselves are mediators who help resolve conflicts between other students during recess. This increases students' well-being during recess and, most importantly, the program strengthens all students' understanding of how we should act and interact, as well as the responsibility we have for each other.*

According to Dorthe, because Søndre School was involved in the innovation lab that set out the framework of the "We figure it out Together" project they thought they were good at involvement, but realized they had no idea how important it is to involve students and parents in the school. In response the three school principals took the lead in the project as change agents, convinced that managerial support and pioneering leaders were required to mobilize an entire school to move in the same direction.

Leadership is about leading the way. According to Dorthe, "We had to show that it was important – that it was something we believed in and that it could make a difference. And it has really made a big difference." Dorthe continues,

> *That does not mean that we no longer have any doubts about whether it was the right decision to send three administrators and not three teachers to the training course. If we had done the latter, we might have been challenged more in terms of what we as administrators don't see from our position.*

The curiosity and wonder about their own managerial choices illustrated in Dorthe's honest reflection is actually the most important tool for successful involvement. Thus, they continue to think about to get people to participate more in the way we run our school.

We ask the questions: Realizing the importance of being curious, they ask: What will it take for you as parents to come to the school? and, How would you like to be involved?

Co-creation and management of co-creation is about leading the way and having the courage to step out into an unknown landscape where many more people have the right to define the practices that should be followed. Dorthe elaborates on how this ability and new perspective on the school's tasks has manifested itself in recent years:

> *We are now more aware that the responsibility for running the school is, of course, ours, but that it must also be offered to others. We are now aware that involvement gives students and parents something important – something of great value. The process has given us an opportunity to consider why it is important to offer this responsibility to others, and how being reflective over our own practice opens the door to new possibilities.*

Being aware of how the school can involve new stakeholders all the way up through the system is not about major initiatives and big banners, but rather about small everyday measures.

At Søndre School "We figure it out together" is no longer just a project, but has become a living organizational practice at as a result of the small everyday changes happening there.

Dorthe suggests it is not just about taking new initiatives, but also about considering which initiatives should be carried out, explaining what she considers particularly important to keep in mind to ensure continued success in creating new cultures and changes that can make a positive difference for the users of institutions. In Dorthe's words,

> *Reflexivity has been present throughout the process. We considered establishing a study group where parents could be involved, but after further consideration we chose not to launch the initiative for a number of reasons. Other projects were launched with great success – including in the network surrounding the school, where our after-school center and youth club are now much more involved in parental cooperation and are seeing increasing enrolment. And there are many small and good stories we can share, because we have had the ability to reflect over the initiatives during the process and have become more aware of where and why involvement is important to co-creating the cultures that truly benefit the users of the institutions.*

This development was not lost on Billund Municipality, which is therefore working diligently to create the connections between departments that are needed to solve these complex challenges. Managers and change agents have been organized into groups dedicated to specific target groups and issues, and tasked with developing and testing new practices. The assessment at the project's halfway point showed the trend we find in many municipalities, whereby a lack of cooperation across departments represents the biggest obstacle to solving these challenges and establishing successful cooperation with citizens.

The groups are working based on the same dialogic tools used throughout the project: developing ideas, testing them in practice and then collecting experiences and further developing ideas through ongoing iterations. A key tool in this work is relational coordination (Gittell, 2016), which identifies the connection and ensures that the quality of these connections is incorporated into the initiatives. In our study, employees particularly pointed to the silo structure and financial micromanagement in their daily work as significant barriers to collaborating with citizens in the development of unique solutions.

In other studies, we have conducted, we identified an interesting pattern that appears in all of the municipalities. The daily cooperation is generally seen as well-functioning, and there is high social capital in the departments – an expression of good cooperation and trust in each other in the framework of the task to be performed. But when we examine the quality of cooperation across areas and departments, we find a different picture. Whereas internal cooperation is good, the figures between departments are poor.

Seen from the perspective of citizens, the important thing to consider is the interdisciplinary performance of tasks (or lack thereof) they perceive, while the social capital is a reflection of an internal perspective focusing on how we feel about each other. Thus, the citizens pay the price for the poor cooperation. In other words, the organizational complexity is shifted onto the citizens.

Considering the previous figures from Local Government Denmark, which found that 10% of citizens account for 72% of individually-attributable costs, a significant portion of the municipal budget is tied up in social services, while the organization's greatest weakness (interdisciplinary cooperation) is the single most important factor for successfully tackling complex challenges in collaboration with citizens. The municipalities that succeed in taking up this challenge and creating strong collaborative interdisciplinary environments in cooperation with citizens are also the municipalities that find the money needed to provide welfare for the benefit of the other 90% of citizens. The dialogic approach offers a means of addressing these issues – issues that also demand special attention in the project in Billund.

Thinking and acting dialogically is also about repeatedly rethinking one's own formats and structures in the process. Billund Municipality built new sails for the project based on points of focus and challenges they considered essential and relevant: managerial commitment and an inability to radically collaborate across sectors. Billund Municipality showed the courage and drive to address these challenges with new structures for the next six months of the project. The dialogic set-up requires flexibility and constant reflexive consideration of whether our actions are making sufficient contributions to the goals we want to achieve.

Judgment is a key virtue and competence in dialogic practice and more relational-oriented welfare development. In every meeting with citizens, the individual practitioners engage in a more open and unpredictable dialogue regarding the citizen's unique wishes for his/her own life; and at a structural level, the organization must adapt with greater flexibility to support the highest quality performance of tasks, rather than performance adapted to the organization's structures. The willingness to embark on the journey towards more dialogic development and collaboration creates the proper conditions for the co-creation of more relational welfare and new relational management.

sis

the right activities and movements take place in their lives. Citizens must encounter a system where the professionals have renounced the unassailable right to define the service.

Similarly, the dialogic manager must be prepared to renounce the right to define the organization's movements and invite the employee to engage in conversations that make management something that is jointly defined by employees and managers (Storch, 2012).

Zooming out and looking at the bigger picture in terms of the development of our welfare, many municipalities are clearly well on the way towards thinking and practicing welfare on a more participatory and relational basis.

More and more positive, practice-oriented narratives on sustainable welfare are helping to prove that the practice we seek has already arrived in many parts of Denmark. The increased cooperation that brings many new participants into the process, creating new networks and connections, is crucial to an integrated approach to quality and efficiency as mutually beneficial factors in the public sector. As a result, we are able to realize great potential in society, unleashing significant economic and human value. Relational welfare shows that good cooperation can result in improvements to both quality and efficiency. We hope that this story has helped inspire you to embark on the journey towards more and better welfare.

Author Note:

Julie Nørgaard
Consultant and Editor, *Joint Action*.
External lecturer, VIA University College, Aarhus, Denmark

Jacob Storch
Founder, Joint Action
Jacob founder and main organizer of the international conference, Relational Welfare.

i Endnotes: