



# **The Model Municipality Experiments**

*- A presentation*

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## 1. History

For several years the Norwegian Union of Municipal Employees (NKF) has been working seriously on improving the municipal sector through initiatives for and participation in various projects. Worth mentioning in this regard are the campaign projects *Sammen om en bedre kommune (Together for a Better Municipality)* and *Nye Roller (New Roles)*, the project *Offentlige servicekontorer (Public Sector Service Offices)*, the project *Næringsvennlige kommuner (Business-friendly Municipalities)* – and now *Modellkommuneforsøkene (The Model Municipality Experiments)*. Although as a labour organisation our first priority, of course, is seeing to our members' interests, we have a clear duty also to see to social policy interests, where considerations of service as well as the quality and availability of services play a prominent role. It is our desire always to take a critical view of the organisation of the municipal sector, to venture new ideas within the framework of municipal administration and improve the dialogue with users. For we believe that what functions well for users is also positive for the employees, even if privatisation advocates would like to portray it otherwise.

As a labour organisation, NKF has made a broad commitment to the debate on governance, control and the evolution of the public sector and has wide-ranging expertise on the competitive tendering situation in the municipalities. Although the privatisation debate has, fortunately, become more nuanced, we are still worried about the lack of a critical attitude toward the matter, despite the fact that Norwegian municipalities too can now point to a good many negative experiences and wildly varying results. In particular we would have liked to have alternatives to competitive tendering as a tool for development and renewal.

### *NKF's experiences with traditional reorganisations*

Our experience with traditional reorganisation projects is that they are short-lived, expensive and bureaucratic. They engender insecurity due to a lack of being rooted in the employees, and the process elements fail to appear – as do any real changes.

Because employee representatives spend time at meetings, they are unable to motivate the members to accept changes and make recommendations for creative solutions.

## 2. Basic idea

### *Responsibility and participation in developing one's own workplace*

We in NKF know that municipal employees represent a vast reservoir of knowledge and skill. We also know that there is a genuine willingness to do a good job. Our members' problem – the problem of all employees – is that they often do not get to do as good a job as they really want to do.

This may be due to financial barriers or to organisational obstructions. Whatever the cause, nobody likes to do a poor job. We know that giving employees more influence over their day-to-day routines can have a positive impact by unleashing great, untapped resources.

In times when municipal finances in real terms are becoming increasingly tight, some politicians resort to the easy solution: they shirk responsibility by privatising/competitive

tendering. Without evaluating whether it will really be cheaper in the long run, without thorough quality assessments and above all, without considering existing and/or possible alternatives.

Our model municipality project is an alternative to privatisation and competitive tendering. The idea behind the project is to use the skills, knowledge and initiative that we know exists in the municipal organisation for making the municipality's services better.

NKF believes that focusing the spotlight on the association's and its members' desire to help bring about better and more user-oriented services through enhanced adaptability skills will help to guarantee its members' jobs.

Till now NKF has entered into agreements with Sørum, Steinkjer and Porsgrunn for participation in this project.

The objective for the experiment as agreed was to implement measures that can enhance the municipality's and the individual employee's capabilities to create increased user and employee satisfaction, ensure increased resource efficiency, improve the quality of services and create better co-ordination structures.

The most important instruments are

- employee and organisation development
- network and dialogue building, gathering ideas from the employees
- expanded delegating
- skills development
- developing a positive working culture
- criteria for "distributing surpluses" within the framework of the productivity
- enhancing the individual's capabilities for getting involved and taking responsibility
- improving the quality of services
- focusing on user involvement
- developing teaching organisations

### **3. Financing and duration of the experiments**

NKF is strongly committed to the model municipality experiment, financially as well, by helping to finance technical instructional resources from the research foundation IMTEC. IMTEC's role consists in training and guiding the various players in the project. The central idea is that it is the employees' ideas and thoughts that are to be systematised and tried out.

In addition to the municipalities themselves and the labour unions making their contributions to the experiment, the individual model municipalities receive support from the Ministry of Local Government.

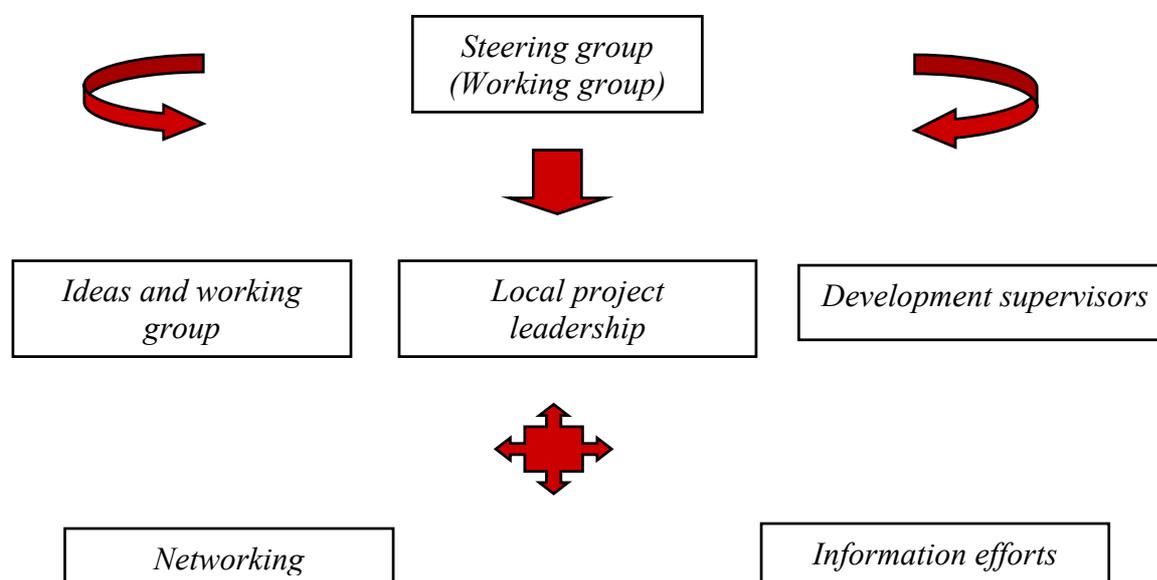
#### ***IMTEC***

IMTEC is a foundation with headquarters in Oslo. IMTEC works primarily on development and renewal of the public sector. IMTEC has been engaged by the Norwegian Association of Municipal Employees to provide technical assistance in implementing the model municipality

experiment. Among other things, IMTEC has been responsible for training the development supervisors in the model municipalities, aided the municipality through guidance and consulting, provided direct guidance in some sub-projects and conducted evaluations linked to the model municipality experiment. In addition, through reports and a dialogue with NKF at the national level, IMTEC has also provided advice on refining the model municipality experiment.

The project leader of the model municipality experiment at IMTEC is Kristen Dalby. IMTEC has also previously had commissions from the Norwegian Association of Municipal Employees.

#### 4. Experiment structure and forms of collaboration



The experiment's structure includes a separate steering group. It consists of representatives of policy makers and administration, representatives of NKF at the local level, other local labour unions and the NKF at the national level. The steering group works according to the consensus principle, i.e. there is to be agreement among policy makers, the administration and labour unions on any decisions.

The work committee prepares matters for the steering group and is also authorised by the steering group to perform the day-to-day work between the meetings of the steering group.

We have purposely invited all labour organisations to join in the project as this is the only way that we can develop the municipal organisation as a whole and ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction when decisions are reached through broad participation and debate.

## 5. Methodology

In what follows the terms “project” and “experiment” will be used somewhat interchangeably. The reason for this is that the model municipalities have chosen differing designations for their projects/experiments.

The main idea behind the model municipality experiments is for initiatives and suggestions for change to come chiefly from the employees, with proper support from the administration, and without the labour-intensive and bureaucratic structures that rob change efforts of most of their dynamism. Our method does not require oral or written fluency. The basis for our thinking is that it is the employees themselves who best know the work processes, the work culture, collaborative relationships and the users – and who often have good suggestions for changes or solutions for doing their jobs better or improving municipal services.

We have also required a duration of no less than three years for the model experiments; this in our view is the only way to bring about a rational process.

We laid the groundwork for a process that primarily runs as follows:

- An employee has an idea and wants to promote it in the model municipality experiment.
- The employee contacts the experiment leadership, the employee representative or labour union to inform them orally or in writing. All three model municipalities have devised their own registration forms for ideas/projects/experiments.
- After that the idea’s originator is notified about how the idea will be handled and will also be given a deadline for being notified as to whether the idea has been accepted by the experiment’s steering group.
- The leader of the experiment takes the idea to the working committee and together they determine the parameters for the idea.

The parameters are determined in the following manner:

- The working committee/those involved in determining the parameters meet and interview the originator of the idea. This interview serves as a basis in subsequent work on the working committee and the steering group.
- The working committee takes a position on the idea and recommends to the steering group the ideas they feel should be focused on within the framework of the model municipality experiment. The steering group makes the necessary decision and the originator of the idea is apprised of the result.

When the working group is finished with its job the idea(s) are implemented after an overall evaluation of the consequences of implementation. Ideas that have a relatively large cost element attached to them will be discussed in the normal manner by municipal bodies prior to any implementation.

### *Working groups*

In collaboration with the leader the working groups are to plan, implement and evaluate the implemented sub-projects in their departments/sections. The working group’s members are designated from among the employees by the local leader and local employee representative

acting jointly. In order to sustain the commitment to the idea, it is essential that the originator of the idea become a member of the working group.

The working groups must themselves organise their efforts as a sub-project and will be able to avail themselves of the advisory skills at the disposal of the experiment. Funds have been set aside to defray the cost of release time for participants so that their work does not negatively impact the quality of their day-to-day job tasks. The working group may also apply for funding for study travel in connection with work in the group if there is a need to study various solutions in other places. Heads of department is responsible for following up sub-projects in their own departments/areas of activity.

### ***Development supervisors***

In the experiments we have made a conscious choice to focus on supervisor training. In this way we ensure that the methods will continue because there will be people able to manage change even when the experiments are over.

The development supervisors have the following duties: studying other operations, data collection, evaluation, process supervising, assisting in experiment development, conflict handling, and serving as an advocate for and involving and motivating the idea-generating and working groups. They function as development supervisors throughout the entire period of the experiment and are also expected to play the same role in the organisation also when the experiment period itself is over.

The development supervisors undergo a two-year training programme that includes several meetings each year. The skills and knowledge they gain from training and practice are intended to be a resource for the municipality also once the model municipality experiment concludes. The development supervisors are municipal employees who have elected to undergo training as a development supervisor, for which there are no formal educational requirements. The decisive requirements are real-world skills and knowledge.

## **6. Presentation of the model municipalities**

The model municipalities have been chosen after first asking labour unions and county organisations in their own association which municipalities which municipalities would be interested in such an experiment. It was important to us that the labour unions in a test municipality were capable of handling such a demanding experiment. After discussions with unions NKF, in collaboration with the local union, then invited the municipality to participate in a model experiment.

Our invitation was debated by the municipality's deliberative bodies, crucial for us due to the experiments' three-year duration.

Below we present the three model municipalities, Sørums, Steinkjer and Porsgrunn.

**Sørums Municipality, Akershus**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Population:                              | 12,133 (8.6% increase from 1991 to 2000) |
| Area:                                    | 207 sq. km                               |
| Man-years:                               | 634                                      |
| Chief industry:                          | Primary/manufacturing                    |
| Largest employer:                        | GE Hydro                                 |
| Municipality's administrative structure: | Function principle                       |

**Sørums Model Municipality Project**

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Project period         | 1 January 1998 – 31 December 2001           |
| Project management     | Steering group/working committee/consensus. |
| Project leader         | Kari Granlund                               |
| Number of sub-projects | 33  |
| Number of supervisors  | 16  |

Examples of implemented sub-projects:

- *Home care services – developing an attractive working environment*
- *Melvold Primary School – a school in transition*

**Steinkjer Municipality, Nord-Trøndelag**

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Population:                              | 20,459 (0.6 fall from 1991 to 2000) |
| Area:                                    | 1,563 sq. km                        |
| Man-years:                               | 757                                 |
| Chief industry:                          | Services                            |
| Largest employer:                        |                                     |
| Municipality's administrative structure: | Sector principle                    |

**Steinkjer Model Municipality Experiment**

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Project period:        | 1 June 1999 – 1 June 2002                  |
| Project management     | Steering group/working committee/consensus |
| Experiment head        | Kjell Gulstad                              |
| Number of sub-projects | Approx. 20                                 |
| Number of supervisors  | Approx. 15                                 |

Examples of implemented sub-projects:

- *New waste disposal scheme*
- *Flexible rota*

**Porsgrunn Municipality, Telemark**

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Population:       | 32,892 (6.0% increase from 1991 to 2000) |
| Area:             | 161 sq. km                               |
| Man-years:        | 1,518                                    |
| Chief industry:   | Primary/manufacturing                    |
| Largest employer: | Hydro Porsgrunn                          |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Municipality's administrative structure: | Sector principle  |
| Porsgrunn Model Municipality Project     |   |
| Project period                           | Spring 2000 – summer 2003   |
| Project management                       | Steering group/working committee/consensus                        |
| Project leaders                          | Geir Magnussen, project head<br>Jo Inge Bjørntvedt project leader |
| Number of sub-projects                   | Approx. 25  |
| Number of supervisors                    | 16  |

Examples of implemented sub-projects:

- *Substitute bank*
- *Enhancement of interdisciplinary co-operation in the care sector*

## 7. Networking

Networks have been set up among the municipalities in the experiment on all levels: policy makers, administration and labour unions. The steering groups in the three municipalities meet twice a year, with the host function for these meetings rotating among them. In addition, networking meetings are held among the employee representatives in the model municipalities three to four times a year. Individual model municipalities have also held seminars for the neighbouring municipalities in their region.

The experiment aims to use documentation and active promotion to cast a spotlight on what is possible, documenting this potential as well as the results attained to central government authorities and the municipal sector, also highlighting the qualities and resources inherent in the municipal sector generally. Because NKF is hoping these ideas will rub off onto the other Norwegian municipalities, the association is working to develop a concept or a guide that will enable other municipalities to start their own experiments.

## 8. New projects in the wake of the model municipality experiments

Once the model municipality experiments were underway, the model has been adopted and or adapted to experiments and projects in other municipalities. The Oslo urban districts Stovner and Bekkelaget/Ekeberg have implemented their own experiments with some financial support from NKF.

In addition the Åsane district of Bergen has recently initiated its own model experiment with technical assistance from NKF. IMTEC is involved in supervisor training.