Facilitation as a management discipline to support organisational development processes

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Private and public organisations conduct an ever increasing number of development workshops, and the focus on effective meeting and structured development processes is significant. On the basis of a literature review, this article elucidates the concept of facilitation and demonstrates how facilitation may be used as a method to support organisational development processes. The article introduces the concept of facilitation, defines the criteria that merit facilitation and demonstrates how facilitation work may be approached. Each step in the process is acknowledged and the need for facilitation and ensuring that there is enough work required. Preparation and structure is a main focus of the literature, and several studies stress the advantages of using a model to structure the project and the execution of the process. Facilitation plays an important role as a facilitator between a variety of competencies, personalities and methodological, which are very important around group interaction. The main development processes, i.e., implementation/execution, are typically found in the literature despite the fact that they are the main dimension in a project cycle. The main aim of this article therefore is to elaborate on the role of facilitation in the implementation phase of a project cycle.
Facilitation as a management discipline to support organisational development processes

Laura Møller & René Chester Goduscheit

Abstract
Private and public organisations conduct an ever increasing number of development workshops, and the focus on effective meetings and structured development processes is significant. On the basis of a literature review, this article elucidates the concept of facilitation and demonstrates how facilitation may be employed as a method to support organisational development processes. The article unfolds the concept of facilitation, identifies the processes that merit facilitation and demonstrates how facilitation work may be approached. The first step in the process is acknowledgement of the need for facilitation and ensuring backing for the work required. Preparation of the processes is a main focus of the literature in the field, and several studies stress the advantages of using a model to structure the preparation and execution of the process. Facilitation per se and serving as a facilitator both require a series of competencies, personal as well as methodological, which are very much centred around group interaction. The final phase of development processes, i.e. implementation/execution, is not a main focus in the literature despite an increased focus on this dimension in, e.g., innovation literature. This article presents a range of reflections related to the implementation phase.

1. Introduction
The concept of facilitation is gaining an ever stronger foothold in a range of different contexts, and it has become normal to hear that development, processes and collaboration need facilitation (Harvey et al., 2002). Many organisations host facilitating workshops and their popularity among the managers that initiate facilitating workshops is based more on good personal experiences than on research-based and documented effects (Mezias et al., 2001). In addition, innovation policy initiatives tend to embrace facilitation as a means to change for instance innovation within the companies that
are subject to the innovation mechanisms. An example is the Future Food Innovation initiative in the Central Denmark Region, which systematically and pervasively employs facilitation with the view to strengthen the innovation power and ensure an internationally competitive food industry in the region. The present literature review is an integral part of the formative dialogue research, which is connected to the Future Food Innovation initiative.

Several research projects have demonstrated that a new need for facilitation has arisen in a range of contexts (i.e. management) along with a need for in-depth research in the field (Clawson & Bostrom, 1995; Amy, 2008). If long-term benefits are to be reaped from the implementation of facilitated workshops, organisations and managers need to think more strategically about facilitation of development and change (Grinyer, 1992; Vreede & Briggs, 2005). The establishment of novel intellectual constructs and the creation of shared images and readiness to change in the organisation are prerequisites to targeted work on development and to a successful implementation (Mezias et al., 2001; Grinyer, 1992; Amy, 2008; McNeil, 2001). And a strong focus on the establishment of novel models – intellectual as well as process-related and the use of novel methods in the management of development (including facilitation) may be instrumental in allowing organisations to harness the full potential of staff resources and therefore in achieving a higher quality and in generating more learning, more growth and increasing earnings (Ozcelik et al., 2008; Hayne, 1999). The use of facilitation as a management tool in modern organisations may therefore be considered part of the efforts needed to face a real-world context characterised by increasing variability and uncertainty (Mønsted & Poulfelt, 2007).

This article presents a literature review to elucidate facilitation as a management discipline and aims to contribute to establishing a foundation for the use of facilitation to underpin organisational development processes.

2. Definition and scope
Facilitation may be described as a process in which a person (facilitator/process manager) is dedicated to bringing into play the knowledge of the participants, and to achieving that they collaborate better and more effectively towards the established objective (Bens, 2007; Grinyer, 1992; Westley & Waters, 1988, Harvey et al., 2002; Brix et al., 2012). Facilitation is a way of assisting collaborative processes towards a shared goal by employing a range of methods and tools (Kolfschoten et al., 2007); and facilitation may occur both before, during and after, e.g., a meeting (Clawson & Bostrom, 1995). A facilitator may be likened to a conductor, whose objective is to ensure that the orchestra plays together optimally to provide a sublime concert (Hayne, 1999). The facilitator, then, serves as a catalyst of the efforts made to ensure that the participants collaborate optimally to create something new (Westley & Waters, 1988).
The transition from a rather controlling management style (management) to a more coaching management style (leadership) has spurred the need for facilitation (Yang, 2006; Clawson & Bostrom, 1995). For many years, facilitation has been used in connection with isolated meetings and development workshops, but now there is a trend towards a more facilitative management style (Bens, 2007; Amy, 2008). In this context, facilitation becomes a generalised management principle rather than a tool used ad hoc in specific contexts (Hayne, 1999; Vreede & Briggs, 2005). This is not to say that facilitation is not employed at specific meetings or workshops. It simply underlines that facilitation also forms part of other management situations such as the creation of a positive working environment and staff development efforts (Yang, 2006; Ozcelik et al., 2008; Amy, 2008). Finally, much research seems to indicate that there is a need to study how the capacity to facilitate may be trained and underpinned with a view to preparing middle-tier and senior managers so that they can meet this new demand (Yang, 2006; Amy, 2008; Clawson & Bostrom, 1995; Westley & Waters, 1988).

The coaching management style in which facilitation and facilitative properties are gaining a footing was described in several contexts in the literature – e.g. coaching and change management (Orth et al., 1987; Evered & Selman, 1989; Popper & Lipshitz, 1992; Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006; Worren et al., 1999). Therefore, this article will focus specifically on how the development processes of organisations may be underpinned by facilitation as an ad hoc management discipline, i.e. through facilitation of meetings, workshops, etc.

3. Method
Literature reviews may adopt one of two main approaches: the systematic or the narrative approach (Tranfield et al., 2003). In the systematic approach, an open search is made in academic databases such as the Thomson Reuters Web of Science to identify all publications covering a specific research field or topic. The search is generally performed using a Boolean search string related to the theme, abstract, keywords and/or the title.

In the narrative approach, the researcher performing the literature review to a greater degree employs his or her background knowledge about the research field or topic. Most frequently, narrative reviews are based on a pivotal article (the signature article) within the given topic; and from there, the »narrative« of the topic is established by describing the signature article and any central references used in this article (upstream references). Furthermore, the narrative approach focuses on the sources that have subsequently referred to the signature article (downstream references). The review, then, describes if any articles have been published after the signature article that extend, detail, and criticize, etc., the points made in the signature article in a manner contributing significantly to the research field or topic.
This article is mainly based on the narrative approach. The signature article is Mezias et al. (2001) as it is one of the first articles to provide an in-depth description of how organisations may work systematically with, e.g., development workshops. On the basis of a comprehensive data material from organisations such as the IBM, Intel and un-named larger companies within telecommunications and computer software, the article develops the so-called CHANGE model. The model is based on the below six phases: Commitment, Holistic approach, Agent, Neutral site, Group and Execution, which express the six components that need to be taken into account if an organisation is to change its collective thinking. On the basis of Kurt Lewin’s Unfreezing-Changing-Refreezing process model, Mezias, Grinyer and Guth illustrate how successful strategic reorientation of an organisation may be facilitated via the six components.

Furthermore, Mezias et al. (2001) were published in the relatively high-ranking international journal Long Range Planning, which vouches for a certain academic quality in the presented results. Additionally, the present article also includes elements that would typically be found in more systematic reviews. Thus, the authors have performed a comprehensive search in Thomson Reuters Web of Science using the Boolean search string »facilita* AND workshop*« to ensure that no »islands« of research are left out either because they are not referenced or because they do not have references to the signature article if such articles contain interesting points relating to facilitation in organisations.

4. Analysis
The review of the extant studies of facilitation as an ad hoc discipline demonstrates that facilitation is frequently implemented in relation to larger meetings and workshops where participants need to work in another manner than they are used to in order to explore new solutions (Westley & Waters, 1988; Clawson & Bostrom, 1995; Grinyer, 1992; Mezias et al., 2001; Kolfschoten et al., 2007; Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Hayne, 1999).

Grinyer (1992) underlines the importance of planning a process in accordance with a specific model to ensure progression and a good process for the participants. Several researchers have proposed various models for the planning of facilitative processes. One of the models developed to ensure an overview of the planning of a workshop/process is the CHANGE model. Specifically, the model is designed to underpin a workshop on the development of the organisation’s strategic course and creation of new intellectual constructs. It is not a phased model, rather every letter (CHANGE) refers to a circumstance or a topic that the management and the facilitator should be aware of when planning a workshop to ensure organisational learning and development and to overcome any barriers (Mezias et al., 2001). In the analysis section, this model will provide the structure for our explanation of the various perspectives that an organisation and facilitator may benefit from keeping in mind when planning a facilitation process.
4.1. C: Commitment
When initiating a facilitative process, it is essential that senior management is committed to exploring the development potential and to pursuing the identified initiatives through execution/implementation. Furthermore, it is important that the organisation – and its employees – have acknowledged the need for change. (Mezias et al., 2001). Additionally, research indicates that managers/the management need to clearly define what the objectives of the process are as this will allow for a more targeted facilitation process (Mezias et al., 2001; Hayne, 1999; Grinyer, 1992; Westley & Waters, 1988; Tan et al., 1999; Huxham, 1991). A final pivotal element presented in the literature is that both the facilitator and the employees are afforded sufficient backing and competence development, and that the whole organisation is willing to take risks, as this will yield a context of trust and signal that it is OK to commit mistakes. This will, in turn, allow the employees/participants to become involved with and committed to the development efforts (Amy, 2008; McNeil, 2001; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

4.2. H: Holistic
A holistic and heterogeneous approach is needed in the selection and involvement of the workshop participants to ensure a varied input, multiple perspectives and organisational rooting. Furthermore, research by Cuijpers et al. (2011) indicates that involving various departments from the organisation increases the degree of innovation. Additionally, the group size and the group composition in part determine how effective and smoothly the participants will work (Cummings et al., 1974; Horsfall & Cleary, 2008; Mezias et al., 2001; Kolfschoten et al., 2007).

4.3. A: Agent
The process needs to involve a competent facilitator who is capable of driving the process independently. There are indications that it may be advantageous to involve external facilitators, particularly in ad hoc facilitation of strategic development processes as it may otherwise be difficult to maintain a focus on the overall objective of the process and to avoid getting absorbed in contents (Mezias et al., 2001; Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Hayne, 1999; Grinyer, 1992). Extant research, however, points to a range of benefits and drawbacks associated with internal and external facilitators, respectively, and it is therefore not possible to provide a clear recommendation on this issue (Huxham, 1991; Hayne, 1999; Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Mezias et al., 2001; Grinyer, 1992). An internal facilitator may be able to better underpin continuous learning and development, and to ensure coherent development and continued commitment and knowledge building (Amy, 2008; Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Yang, 2006). The drawbacks are that it may be difficult to maintain a focus on the process when you are involved in the issues being discussed/the contents, and that it may be difficult to escape your everyday role as colleague, manager, etc. (Hayne, 1999; Mezias et al., 2001). These drawbacks in particular are among the advantages associated with choosing an external facilitator.
who will frequently also have more experience as a facilitator and therefore may have more avenues of action at his/her disposal (Hayne, 1999; Mezias et al., 2001; Westley & Waters, 1988; Kolfschoten et al., 2007). The drawbacks of external facilitators include lacking knowledge of the organisation, its employees and the challenges that may arise during the facilitation process (Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Yang, 2006).

A limited number of research projects have devoted efforts to determining which type of training is needed – i.e. which competencies need to be strengthened – for the facilitator to act optimally (Clawson & Bostrom, 1995). Below we present some of the competencies that need to be developed and underpinned:

![Figure 1: Essential facilitator competencies](image)

As illustrated in the above figure, a range of personal competencies as well as a series of more methodology-related competencies need to be supported. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that facilitation is a competence that is built up over time through hands-on experience (Westley & Waters, 1988; Hayne, 1999; Kolfschoten et al., 2007), but competence development (knowledge, methods and tools) within a range of professional areas helps prepare the facilitator for the task (Hayne, 1999; Clawson & Bostrom, 1995; Grinyer, 1992; Amy, 2008; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

In processes that serve to trigger development and where the output is therefore not known or clearly defined in advance, it will, as described above, be of great value to involve a facilitator (Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Mezias et al., 2001; Grinyer, 1992), whereas if the issue at hand is well-defined or known in advance, a facilitated process is bound to fail, regardless of the level of experience and the facilitator’s preparation. These points are summarised in the figure below:
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4.4. N: Neutral
Some researchers note that the workshop/process should be held away from the participants’ daily workplace to ensure that the participants are dedicated to working on the process and do not become bogged down by everyday work tasks. Furthermore, a neutral venue may underpin the participants’ mind-set and willingness to do things in new ways (Mezias et al., 2001). Another aspect is the facilitator’s approach to guiding or managing the process. As described, the facilitator’s task is to enable others to work with commitment and motivation towards a shared objective. This applies to the facilitation of meetings, workshops, groups, learning, creating a positive working environment, etc. (Hayne, 1999; Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Kolfschoten et al., 2007; Mezias et al., 2001; Cooper, 1990). The facilitator therefore maintains a strong focus on the process – rather than the contents – and serves to initiate and underpin the activities that are needed to achieve the desired goals (Tan et al., 1999; Hayne, 1999; Liu et al., 2003). It may be perceived as something of a paradox that the facilitator needs to be neutral and at the same time plays a central part in the efforts to enable participants to act freely and trust their personal capabilities – i.e. needs to be visible and invisible at the same time (Tan et al., 1999).

4.5. G: Group
It is the group as a whole that develops the contents and builds a sense of ownership towards the contents (Mezias et al., 2001). To optimise the commitment and involvement of the participants/group, several research results indicate that a process divided into several, clearly distinguishable divergent-convergent phases may help to reduce complexity and increase the participants’ focus and capability to contribute productively to the process (Liu et al., 2003). Furthermore, group size and group composition are important in achieving efficient and smooth collaboration between participants. Studies indicate that the optimal number of participants for facilitated workshops may be about 20 persons, and that the optimal group size is 4-6 participants. (Cummings et al, 1974; Horsfall og Cleary, 2008; Mezias et al., 2001; Kolfschoten et al., 2007).
4.6. E: Execution
Mezias et al. (2001) makes evident the importance of working with execution/implementation of the results achieved at the workshop (and the planning hereof) itself to increase the likelihood of success. This aspect is not very well described in the facilitation literature, even though implementation is increasingly a focus area of innovation literature in relation to ensuring success (Cumming, 1998). According to Cumming (1998), innovation definitions tend to extend beyond the creative process and the inventions themselves to include the aspects of implementation and value-adding. Innovation, then, has not been achieved until the results have been implemented and have triggered added value (e.g. new processes and technologies in the organisation) and external innovations (e.g. client-targeted products and services) (Damanpour & Gopalakrishnan, 1998).

5. Discussion
The elements that are not addressed in the CHANGE model, but which other literature considers to be important to facilitation of ad hoc processes, are primarily focused on the facilitator’s role – including the process sequence, facilitation competences, the composition of the team and initial establishment of the framework and scope of the process. These elements may be absent in the article on the CHANGE model because the authors found it expedient to involve an external facilitator, and therefore it is not necessarily the organisation that is facing these issues. Furthermore, the CHANGE model fails to address several aspects relating to the initial considerations the organisation should make concerning the objective of the process and knowledge of the organisation’s strategy and objectives. These aspects are elucidated in the below to supplement the CHANGE model.

The objective of the process and the desired output should be established in collaboration with the organisation and the person responsible for the facilitation process (Mezias et al., 2001; Kolfschoten et al., 2007). A clear statement of the objective and agreement on the desired output (not the contents, but the type of output – e.g. a catalogue of ideas, concepts, action plans, etc.) are instrumental in ensuring a shared understanding of what needs to happen and why. Furthermore, these elements help realign expectations and provide a clear framework (Mezias et al., 2001; Hayne, 1999; Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Kolfschoten et al., 2007; Grinyer, 1992).

In order for the facilitator to plan the process optimally and to achieve that the participants focus on the topic at hand, it is important that the facilitator knows the organisation well and is familiar with its strategic objectives and the decision-making competence delegated to the process (Mezias et al., 2001; Grinyer, 1992). It is also important to know the processes and any decisions that lie ahead of the current process in order to build on the existing basis rather than starting from square one (Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Hayne, 1999). In connection with the planning of the process, it is also
important that the facilitator knows how much time has been allocated for the process (is aware of the scope of the process) so that he or she may plan a series of activities each of which builds onto the previous one while also ensuring the desired output (Hayne, 1999; Kolfschoten et al., 2007; Mezias et al., 2001; Westley & Waters, 1988).

Additionally, when preparing a facilitative process, the facilitator needs to develop the process design, including – among others – thoughts as to which activities will be included and their sequence, and which methods and tools will be used to support each activity. In relation to process design, several researchers stress the importance of initially establishing the objective of the process, and only then proceed with the planning of the process. Finally, the methods and tools that best underpin the process and objective are selected (Hayne, 1999; Kolfschoten et al, 2007; Vreede & Briggs, 2005). This approach is presented in figure 3.

Hayne (1999) focuses on the facilitation of meetings and states that: »The meeting goals would drive the choice of process, in turn determining the structure support, and then the exact tool to be used.« (Hayne, 1999 p. 78), which is in line with the above figure. Several research results also indicate that the better prepared the facilitator is, the more flexible he or she can be (Bens, 2007; Westley & Waters, 1988; Kolfschoten et al., 2007).

**Figure 3: Preparation of a process**

- The objective of the process (guides all other elements)
- Process design (to underpin the objective)
- Selection of methods and tools (to underpin the process design)

Own adaptation based on Hayne, 1999; Kolfschoten et al., 2007; Vreede & Briggs, 2005
6. Conclusion and future research
This literature review on facilitation as a management discipline to support organisational development processes provides the basis for the below model that presents the phases and considerations that may assist the planning and facilitation of ad hoc processes.

As figure 4 shows, the organisation initially needs to consider a series of issues before starting the planning of a facilitated development process. Once the organisation has decided that a facilitated development process is relevant and that it should be executed, the planning of the process is initiated. In this process, it is essential to be aware that the objective of the process guides and determines how the process is structured including the choice of methods and tools. Furthermore, it is considered beneficial to consider the elements of the CHANGE model at this point to optimise learning and development in the organisation. As a whole, the preparations provide a framework and a direction for the facilitated development process. During the execution of the process, focus is on the actual facilitation, teamwork and contributions made by the team and on documentation. After the execution of the process, focus should be on implementing the results, which, among others, include further development and project management during the transition from the development to the operational stage.

Figure 4: Phases and considerations in the facilitation of ad hoc processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial considerations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the company/the strategy</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation/planning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing a process</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Execution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Implementation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Follow-up and further development</td>
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</table>

Own presentation based on the sources of this review.
The problems that may arise during the execution phase of development processes and which a facilitator should be able to handle are very much centred around the group of people involved, but they also include conditions that the facilitator may influence in advance (Hayne, 1999; Westley & Waters, 1988). Figure 5 presents potential facilitation process challenges in relation to the CHANGE model.

As shown in the above figure, the main focus in the literature on facilitation of ad hoc processes is on preparation, execution and the facilitator’s role; however, as mentioned under E in the CHANGE model, implementation is also an important focus area. The lacking acknowledgement that implementation is essential for the success of facilitated processes is, as mentioned previously, reflected in the innovation literature where definitions have tended to only include creativity and generation of ideas (Axtell et al., 2000; Cumming, 1998; Damanpour, 1997). However, this attitude started changing in the late 1980s (Cumming, 1998) when Van de Ven (1986) and others defined innovation as the development and implementation of new ideas. More recent research indicates that the lacking focus on implementation and realisation of value may be the decisive factor causing failure (Klein & Knight, 2005). This indicated that there may be a need for an increased focus on and in-depth research into the implementation aspect of facilitated ad hoc processes.

### Figure 5: Challenges of facilitative processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group is the cause</th>
<th>The facilitator him-/herself is the cause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>At variance with the group’s wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of commitment and sluggishness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants are freewheeling and non-productive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hidden agendas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>One or more group members dominate the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants compete for status</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Poor information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor coordination</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lacking process design</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor wording of questions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>«Production block» due to lack of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Lacking inter-group socialisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to assess and self-criticize</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants do not listen to the facilitator or to each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants forget what others have said</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Own presentation based on Hayne, 1999 s. 77; Westley & Waters, 1988 p. 138 and 139*
A limited number of studies focusing on the relationship between facilitation and project management indicate that facilitation combined with project management methods may be very effective (Vreede & Briggs, 2005; Male et al., 2007). This aspect also warrants further research in the future and will be integrated into the formative dialogue research, which will be carried out in the context of the Future Food Innovation initiative in the Central Denmark Region.

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Notes
1. www.futurefoodinnovation.dk