

Integrated Facility Management

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The formal practice of facility management as a recognized discipline is a new phenomenon and as such is vulnerable to being misunderstood by those outside, and sometimes within, its ranks. This article explores the role, purpose and potential of facility management from the standpoint of the activities within the discipline and in relation to the place where facility management belongs in managing the infrastructure of organizations. The breadth of application of facility management and the depth of the management role are also explored.

Many facility managers, one suspects, would confirm that their calling is seldom recognized even now outside of the building and administrative professions, and sometimes not even among these groups. However, facility management as a discipline emerged out of practice, just as did the great established professions. This occurred because of a clear need to focus on the elaborate and expensive facilities which crucially support the activities of most of today's organizations. It is a distinctive part of the overall management function and borrowing from the concept of business process analysis, is the process that provides the working environment in which an organization functions.

Facility management emerged with the integration of three main strands of activity. They are:

- (1) Property management (real estate).
- (2) Property operations and maintenance.
- (3) Office administration.

They have in common the fact that they all exist to support the main (core) activities of an organization. However, they are quite different in

respect of financial impact and skill requirements. For instance, the capital needs of a major building investment, often the largest single asset of an organization, are widely at variance with the modest cost associated with the all important mail service. In satisfying skill requirements, a wide spectrum of people with different job cultures, expectations, attitudes and even values must be brought together. Both these differences are in practice overcome by the common need to have an intimate understanding of how the organization works, the extensive linkages between day-to-day activities and, most crucially, the critical relationship between the continuity of activities and the ability of the organization to function. Thus these three strands are brought together and thus the management challenge is to integrate effectively a disparate set of complementary activities with dramatically different skill-bases, a vast knowledge base and a full management range from the routine operational to the long-term strategic.

It is perhaps not surprising, given these disparate origins, that practitioners often feel that there is a lack of internal coherence in facility management. Outside observers have also commented on the apparent lack of external coherence. However, this issue may well prove to be the root of the strength of facility management. Many of the well established professional disciplines, particularly those related to buildings have great coherence but have achieved this through a level of specialization that damages their ability to meet the requirements of their clients. Thus it may well be that the most important thing that facilities managers do is to integrate these wide ranging activities. This is a major management challenge, but one which also requires a sophisticated level of understanding of the technical issues. Therein lies the excitement of facility management and with it the potential for future further growth.

Present Practice and Future Scope

Offices appear to have dominated the attention of the facility management profession in the UK with hospitals at least in view but little else seriously considered. It may also be fair to suggest that operational and tactical management have dominated with occasional reference to strategic considerations. However, these limits perhaps only apply to the literature and the institutions, as most practitioners regularly find opportunities to extend their services beyond offices and health care into other building centred activities and beyond operations into strategic property planning. If the development pattern is repeated, as occurred with offices, professional practice and theory will follow in the wake of the activities of facilities professionals and managers. Operational contracts, management contracts and consultancies on a major scale, already exist between facility management firms and manufacturers, educational institutions, laboratories, retailers, health-care providers and the like. The reasons for this are, unsurprisingly, that the operational needs of all of these types of facilities have of course much in common, both in terms of buildings and administrative services. The operative skill base is therefore similar as are many of the operational and tactical demands on managers. Strategic management challenges may well be different as will the culture of these organizations. However, such variations already occur within even the office sector and should be well within the skill range of good facility managers.

Again, the common factor in all of this lies in the integration by the facility manager of all of the support roles which provide a working environment for an organization. It is not what goes on in a space that matters, even in offices, as much as the fact that space is needed and must be organized and allocated and that administrative services are required to enable the activities and the people within that space to function effectively. The disaggregated deployment of specialists could not meet this challenge, though these same specialists organized within a facility-knowledgeable management framework can and do meet the challenge.

Infrastructure

To understand better where facility management fits into the overall management needs of organizations it may be useful to consider how management theorists might see things. In the model of the business organization proposed by

Michael Porter[1] in his landmark writings on competitive advantage, he makes a clear distinction between the support activities and primary activities of an organization. In this model, facility management is clearly a part of support activities and can be included under the heading of "infrastructure" within the concept of a firm or organization. Such functions as personnel, procurement and research also belong in this category. This infrastructure serves the needs of those who perform the primary activities of the organization, thus the facility manager has two key roles:

- (1) Management of major capital resources of an organization, often the largest capital resource.
- (2) Management of both routine and critical support services in an organization.

In both of these management roles the facility manager is being asked to cover the full range of the management spectrum from the routine through the tactical, preventative and integrative to the strategic and innovative.

The facility manager is then both a specialist in infrastructure and, if successful, a manager with a broad base of skills and knowledge. This being the case, as the professional practice of facility management matures, the scope for practitioners extends beyond buildings to such infrastructure fields as transport, utilities and whole urban areas. To those facility managers who are responsible for major mixed use sites with many buildings this is not a vision of the future but a present reality.

Management Challenges

In the facility manager's support role, the potential range of management challenge is virtually as large as that of a general manager. The complexity of the tasks managed range from the simple to the sophisticated, while the criticality of the tasks cover the range from the operationally routine to the strategic and essential. Figure 1 illustrates where at least some of the recognized responsibilities might lie in this complexity/ criticality universe. Of course the criticality of a task varies depending on the needs and whims of the organization being supported, which is yet another challenge to the facility manager.

There is no shortage of management challenge, then, either in the depth of the facility management role or in the breadth of the role in supporting infrastructure of an organization or

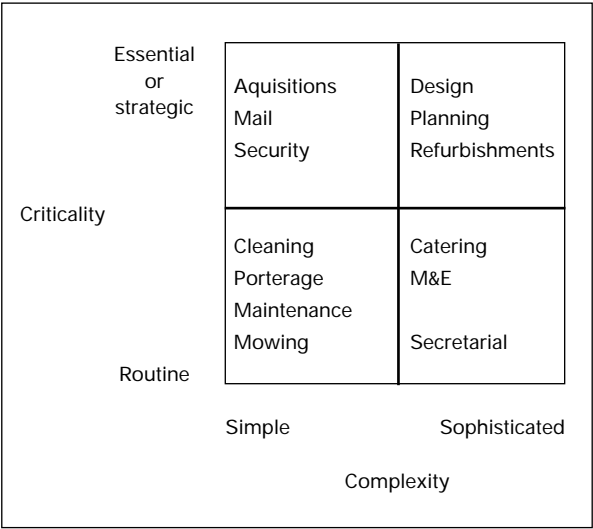


Figure 1.
Facility Management Task Characteristics

even a community. However, this challenge can only be met through a holistic view of the role. It is neither just a technical role, where a detailed knowledge of such things as space planning or building maintenance is in itself sufficient, nor is it an administrative role where simply a good understanding of procedures and people skills will do. Quite unlike many highly touted management areas, facility management demands a sound technical base, formally or informally acquired, and most of the knowledge and skills required for management of whole enterprises. When those two are successfully combined then the working environment can be properly provided to support organizational needs and perhaps even to run a railway system.

Sceptics are entitled to ask for some evidence of the benefits of all of this endeavour. This presents some difficulty, but most facility managers, being of a positive frame of mind would, one suspects, point to improved costs, fewer breakdowns, improved user satisfaction scores, better project results and similar important specifics. Another way to view the question is to consider the large-scale failures, or near failures, that have occurred in infrastructure areas that can be associated with a total absence of even the recognition that there is a need to have the activities and management of facilities integrated to protect the full value and utility of essential physical assets. Thus we have seen the total failure of pre-integrated facility managers to argue successfully for the funding necessary to maintain assets and to invest to avoid obsolescence. In these environments project work is driven only by expediency and cost

minimization, and strategic considerations are ignored or never seen. Service provision is grudging and wasteful, distorted only in favour of the most powerful. Where does all this happen? It is too easy to point fingers, but it is unlikely that much effort would be required to find examples within both public and private sectors and often even among otherwise successful companies.

Bringing Activities and Knowledge Together

Of course facility managers operate at different levels at different stages of their careers. Thus the roles referred to previously apply only totally to a few, though parts apply to all. It is not the intention of this article to deal with the stages of responsibility that occur or the stages of training or education that relate to these responsibilities. However, it can be worth considering the whole picture again in an attempt to link the areas of activity with the areas of knowledge.

In attempting this linkage, four components can be identified as comprising the major parts of integrated facility management. These are operational activities, management roles, facility knowledge and management knowledge. Within each of these can be listed the subsidiary parts of which they consist as is shown in Figure 2. No doubt some parts that the reader may regard as important, from his or her experience will have been left out of these lists. In that case they belong in the list which will grow as the discipline broadens and management understandings develop. In compiling the list under the heading of management knowledge, personal and management skills have been included in recognition of the often hectic nature of the real world of keeping facilities operational. This also acknowledges Mintzberg’s findings that most managers do not spend their time in the classical roles of planning, controlling, etc. but in responding to and influencing people in a series of short disaggregated dialogues. The intention of this four-part structure is to provide a basis from which the considerations of both the technical needs and the management needs of facility management can be assessed. It should also reinforce an understanding of the importance and sophistication of the whole role.

Clear Definitions and Roles

One of the great barriers to explaining to others what facility management is about is perhaps that

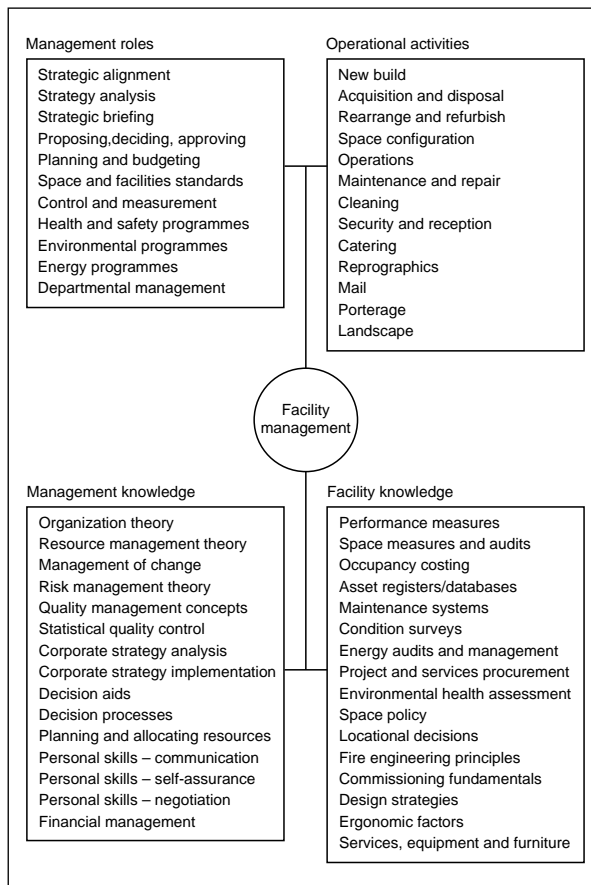


Figure 2.
Integrated Facility Management

we have inherited a rather tortured definition from the American pioneers in this field. When that is allied with the popular notion of FM as providing janitorial services we are in some trouble.

I am grateful to my colleague Bev Nutt at UCL for suggesting a somewhat simpler, non-derivative definition which in itself integrates one's understanding of facility management. The definition proposed is: "The management

of facility resources and services to support the operation of an organization."

Summary

The integration of facility management as an effective function for an organization can be achieved by recognizing three key characteristics.

- (1) Facility management is a *support* role within an organization, or a support service to an organization.
- (2) Facility management must *link* strategically, tactically and operationally to other support activities and primary activities to create value.
- (3) Within facility management, managers must be equipped with a knowledge of facilities and management to carry out their integrated support role.

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Reference

1. Porter, M.E., *Competitive Advantage Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, The Free Press, New York, NY, 1985.

Further Reading

- Mintzberg, H., *The Nature of Managerial Work*, Harper & Row, London, 1980.
- Handy, C., *Understanding Organisations*, 4th ed., Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1983.

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