

---

# Facilities management: a "Jack of all trades"?

---

*Linda Tay and  
Joseph T.L. Ooi*

---

## The authors

Linda Tay and Joseph T.L. Ooi are both Assistant Professors at the Department of Real Estate, School of Design and Environment, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

---

## Keywords

Facilities management, Professionalism, Improvement, Strategic management

---

## Abstract

Despite its rapid development in the last decade, facilities management (FM) stills suffers from an identity crisis as the definition and scope of FM remains a contentious issue. To this end, three fundamental issues are re-examined in this paper: what FM constitutes; what a facility manager is; and how the FM profession can be enhanced. These issues remain critical as they represent the building blocks of the FM discipline. Without a common platform, the development of FM is likely to be fragmented. An evaluation of the definitions of FM provided in the past suggests that the focus of FM is clearly on the workplace. The key issues confronting FM are the location, type, quantity, quality, content and allocation of the workspace. A professional facilities manager is one who is formally trained and whose main responsibility is the strategic management of the workplace. Three factors are suggested to be important for the development of FM as a professional discipline. They include a clear role and scope of FM in the industry and firm, contribution to the bottom-line of the firm, and development of specialist knowledge and toolbox for addressing the problems of strategic workplace management. Some potential areas for theoretical developments have been suggested in this paper.

---

## Electronic access

The research register for this journal is available at  
[http://www.mcup.com/research\\_registers](http://www.mcup.com/research_registers)

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at  
<http://www.emerald-library.com/ft>

## Introduction

Since the late 1980s, facilities management (FM) has gradually gained a foothold as a discipline and profession within the property and construction industry. The establishment of professional FM institutions around the world (e.g. IFMA in the USA, JFMA in Japan, BIFM in the UK, FMA in Australia, etc.) testify to its growing importance. Nonetheless, ten years on, the profession still suffers from an acute identity crisis. Indeed, the role and scope of duties of one facilities manager may be vastly different from another. Such confusion does not appear to occur quite as often in the other professions within the property and construction industry such as architecture, project management and town planning. While it may be argued that FM is a relatively new discipline and thus still evolving, it is necessary at this formative stage to evaluate the core competence of FM as a discipline and profession.

Against this backdrop, this paper re-opens a fundamental debate and attempts to examine three pertinent issues that still plague the profession:

- (1) What constitutes FM?
- (2) What is a facilities manager?
- (3) How can the FM professionalism be enhanced?

The purposes of resurrecting these contentious issues are threefold. First, it is hoped that the discussion will pave the way towards some denominational consensus on these issues. Second, the issues raised represent the foundation of knowledge in FM and only with a good foundation can the body of knowledge in FM be built incrementally. Third, by anatomising the FM discipline, this paper attempts to position FM within the context of competition from other professions.

## The focus of FM

Over the years, researchers and practitioners alike have provided many definitions that specify the objectives and scope of FM. However, these definitions have prevented a common platform that is so crucial for a cohesive theoretical development in FM. Through an examination of definitions introduced through the last ten years, this

section will attempt to identify the core competence that distinguishes the FM discipline. Table I presents a sample of FM definitions.

From the table, it is clear that the definitions are far from harmonious in providing directions on the objectives and scope of FM. Consequently, it is not surprising that many facilities managers, too, are unsure of their roles. For example, the definition by Nourse (1990) suggests that FM does not have a strategic orientation. Nutt (2000), however, affirms the strategic role FM plays in the business organisation. In addition, Nourse (1990) opines that FM does not have a "bottom-line emphasis". This view runs contrary to Becker's (1990) definition in which FM is seen to be able to make a positive contribution by "enhancing the firm's ability to compete successfully" through good FM.

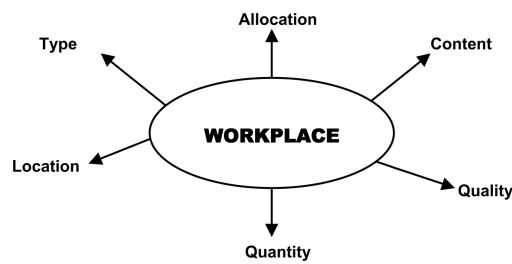
The definitions were also not helpful in specifying the scope of responsibilities for facilities managers. The early definition provided by Becker (1990) suggests that FM is only concerned with the "hardware" such as buildings, furniture and equipments. Later definitions, however, included "software" such as people, process, environment, health and safety in the responsibilities of FM (e.g.

Alexander, 1999; Then, 1999). Others have taken the definition further by expanding the scope of FM to cover the entire property life cycle of designing, building, financing and operating. Payne (2000) notes that there has been an emergence of a "super league" of facilities providers who are able to cover the broad remit of FM in a comprehensive "cradle to grave" approach. Similarly, Varcoe (2000) projects that organisations and consortia will seek to provide a complete infrastructure for business by embracing other "working environment" components such as IT, finance and human resources.

While the definitions may appear diverse and different in their emphases, a closer examination suggests that there are some common recurring themes that threads together to give FM its identity. First, the focus of FM is the workplace. The workplace in this instance refers to a place where work (of any nature) is carried out. Thus, it is not limited to commercial office buildings but also includes other types of workplaces such as medical, educational and industrial workplaces. The sample of definitions presented in Table I illustrate that the issues confronting FM all relate to the workplace. This is summarised in Figure 1. Second, FM

**Table I** Sample of FM Definitions

Author	Definition of FM
<b>Becker (1990)</b>	FM is responsible for co-ordinating all efforts related to planning, designing and managing buildings and their systems, equipment and furniture to enhance the organisation's ability to compete successfully in a rapidly changing world
<b>Nourse (1990)</b>	FM unit is seldom aware of the overall corporate strategic planning, and does not have a bottom-line emphasis
<b>NHS Estates (1996)</b>	The practise of co-ordinating the physical workplace with the people and work of an organisation; integrates the principles of business administration, architecture, and the behavioural and engineering science
<b>Alexander (1999)</b>	The scope of the discipline covers all aspects of property, space, environmental control, health and safety, and support services
<b>Then (1999)</b>	The practice of FM is concerned with the delivery of the enabling workplace environment – the optimum functional space that supports the business processes and human resources
<b>Hinks and McNay (1999)</b>	... common interpretations of the FM remit: maintenance management; space management and accommodation standards; project management for new-build and alterations; the general premises management of the building stock; and the administration of associated support services
<b>Varcoe (2000)</b>	... a focus on the management and delivery of the business "outputs" of both these entities [the real estate and construction industry]; namely the productive use of building assets as workplaces
<b>Nutt (2000)</b>	The primary function of FM is resource management, at strategic and operational levels of support. Generic types of resource management central to the FM function are the management of financial resources, physical resources, human resources, and the management of resources of information and knowledge

**Figure 1** Key issues of FM

is applicable to all organisations because they all occupy space for their work. Third, FM plays a supporting role in enhancing the performance of the firm. Finally, an integrated approach is required in practising FM. In other words, while FM has a single focus on the workplace, to enhance the performance of the workplace requires a multi-faceted approach (e.g. space management, environmental management, support services management, human resource management, financial management, etc.). Therefore, FM may be succinctly defined as: "The integrated management of the workplace to enhance the performance of the organisation".

### The facilities manager

The above discussion has shown that managing facilities is a multi-faceted undertaking. Consequently, it is common to find people calling themselves "facilities managers" whether they are in charge of one or all aspects of FM. The question is: When is a facilities manager a "facilities manager"? Would it suffice if one were charged with only the management of support services such as cleaning and security to be known as a facilities manager? Clearly, in the other more traditional disciplines such as architecture, the scope, too, is varied; from draughting to designing. However, one does not find a draughtsman calling himself an architect. There is no confusion of identity and roles here.

Based on the general principles of management, it is clear that there can be different levels of managers, i.e. lower level managers and senior managers. Similarly, FM operates on both the operational and strategic levels and thus it appears that there could be different levels of facilities managers. According to the classical management

theorists, Fayol, the defining activities of a manager are planning, organising, commanding, co-ordinating and controlling. Again, this supports the proposition that the "facilities manager" in charge of cleaning and security management is in fact a "manager" based on Fayol's definition as planning of schedule and organising of manpower is involved. However, it is also true that many jobs that involve planning, organising, commanding, co-ordinating and controlling are not necessary given the title of "manager". For example, a delivery driver has to plan and organise his trips, a construction site foreman has to plan, organise, co-ordinate the materials supplied to the site.

It appears from the preceding arguments that it is not simply the activities that determine who is a "manager". Perhaps another characteristic of a "manager" is professionalism. Are facilities managers professionals? Based on interviews with 100 major companies, the main findings of a study by Debenham Tewson (1992) suggests that "more often than not property is viewed as incidental, as an asset which requires little management". Similar findings were reported by Ernst and Young (1993). In a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews of 61 organisations, they noted that few firms had a property strategy for their operations that amounted to more than "we'll find space when we need it". More recently, the British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) 1999 survey findings sketched a profile of the "facilities manager":

He is a 45-year-old man, directly employed by the facility user. He reports to a director or senior manager yet earns a relatively low £30K (UK sterling) per year considering the fact that he holds such a responsible position. He does, however, enjoy a good benefits package including a company car. He doesn't hold a relevant professional qualification, nor is he a graduate. Most of his training has involved short courses and on-the-job training, yet he is responsible for a wide range of tasks from building maintenance to space planning and health and safety (Eltringham, 1999).

The above findings show the current perception of the FM profession. Facility users in general, do not regard FM as requiring professional management as such, they employ a "facilities manager" who does not hold a relevant professional qualification but is able to do the job by attending short courses and learning on-the-job. However,

there is also contrary evidence to the professionalism of FM. Nutt (1999) noted that there are currently seven UK postgraduate courses in FM. Similarly, Williams (1999) observed that training seminars and degree courses for facilities managers are now increasingly available and the take-up is growing at a reasonably encouraging rate. Considering these conflicting evidences, either of two mutually exclusive deductions can be made:

- (1) FM is mostly a neglected and misunderstood profession; or
- (2) FM is basically a non-professional discipline but its increased demand has spawned these courses.

To establish whether FM is a professional discipline, some yardstick is required. Bennion (1969) identified six attributes of professionalism which allows the professional status of facilities managers to be assessed. The six attributes of professionalism identified by Bennion and summarised by Wilson (1972) are:

- (1) *Intellectual bias*: an intellectual discipline requiring a good educational background and tested by examination.
- (2) *Private practice*: the essential expertise and standards of profession derive from meeting the needs of individual clients on person-to-person or organisational basis.
- (3) *Advisory function*: often coupled with an executive function in carrying out what has been advised or doing ancillary work; full responsibility is taken by the person in the exercise of both functions.
- (4) *Tradition of services*: based on an outlook which is essentially objective and disinterested.
- (5) *Representative institute*: representing members of the profession and having the function of safeguarding and developing the expertise and standards of the profession.
- (6) *Code of conduct*: laid down and enforced by the professional institute.

Following this definition, Wilson (1972) suggests that professional services are typified by such areas as property services, legal services, medical care, management consultancy, architecture, accountancy, engineering, etc. On the other hand, non-professional services are typified by such as hotel services, entertainment, security, cleaning services, etc. The scope of FM falls

into both categories and thus this explains the anomaly of FM's professional status. Those who regard FM as non-professional requiring "little management" are possibly considering only the most visible part of FM that affects them as facility users, i.e. security and cleaning. These areas of FM in general relate to operational level issues, while the professional services according to Wilson (1972) using the Bennion definition of professionalism are the strategic level issues such as decisions on property location, space forecasting and usage that can potentially enhance the competitive advantage of the firm.

Although the scope of FM straddles between professional and non-professional services, the core competence of a facilities manager is strategic level FM matters while overseeing operational matters. This view is supported by current facilities managers who feel that FM must play a bigger part in overall business development, becoming a strategic rather than operational issue (The Henley Centre, 1996). Another factor perpetuating the trend towards a strategic FM focus is that FM clients are increasingly knowledgeable and intelligent thus demanding more from facilities managers (Alexander, 1999). Thus, to give a clearer identity to facilities managers, there should be greater differentiation in job titles to reflect the different levels and scope of FM responsibilities. A profile of the professional facilities manager is provided below:

A facilities manager reports directly to the director or top management of the firm on workplace issues and performance. He/she has received formal training in multiple skills (e.g. people management skills, financial management skills, technical skills) to manage the workplace for the purpose of enhancing corporate goals. He/she is likely to lead and manage a FM team which assists in the day-to-day operation of the workplace while he/she focuses on strategic workplace planning and organising issues.

### The professionalism of facilities managers

The fact that FM requires multiple skills results in the frequent involvement of professionals from various professional disciplines and background. Payne (2000)

listed four areas in which these professionals are involved in FM:

- (1) property and built environment required the professional skills of architects, legal services, space planners and quantity surveyors;
- (2) the way that people interact with the built environment has required the input of human resources professionals, building services and environmental engineers;
- (3) the technical expertise of maintenance staff; and
- (4) the processes that take place within the buildings such as catering, cleaning, security, mail room, reprographics has required input and practical operational management from a range of specialist professional backgrounds.

Consequently, it is not surprising that quantity surveyors, architects, maintenance engineers, office managers, catering managers, human resource managers are responsible for the delivery of the full range of facilities services in their particular organisation. The heterogeneous backgrounds of current facilities managers are in part responsible for the confusion FM faces today. As Quah (1999) notes: "Active debate on the definition and scope of facilities management is expected to remain unresolved for a while as the range of *different professions* and organisations involved attempt to promote their body of opinion". While it is true that FM involves other professions both within and without the property and construction industry for managing the workplace, to accept that a range of other professionals can undertake FM strongly undermines the professionalism of FM. To put it another way, a lawyer specialising in property may need the assistance of a valuer in preparation for a case. However, does it imply that the valuer can be a lawyer simply by taking short courses and/or learning on the job? The answer is no. Should FM be any different if it is to be regarded as a professional discipline?

There are three main building blocks of FM professionalism. First, FM as a discipline must be clear on its roles both in the industry and in the organisation. Taking the property life-cycle of design, build, finance and operate, the main role of FM is at the operate stage although the input of facilities managers may also be required at the design stage. The

operate stage is the "turf" of the facilities managers just as the design stage is associated with the architect's role. The role of FM in the organisation is to manage the workplace. A performing workplace is the end product of FM.

Second, for FM to be taken seriously by the management, it should be seen as a resource capable of contributing to the bottom-line of the firm. Currently, many companies are missing opportunities to reduce cost and enhance performance because they give limited attention to managing their property assets (Arthur Anderson, 1995). It is thus important that the FM profession "get their acts together" first by having a clear focus of its roles and responsibilities and displaying capabilities in managing the facilities to enhance the performance of the firm. This leads to the third point on FM professionalism.

FM must develop its own specialist knowledge and toolbox in managing the workplace. While the relevance of FM is becoming recognised by business, industry and government, it remains reliant on management and technical knowledge that has been plundered from other fields. FM is challenged to build its own distinctive knowledge-base to underpin best practice, to advance the field, and to bridge the gap between its promise and performance (Nutt, 2000). In the management of any products of services, it necessarily involves the management of people, management of information, management of finance, etc. However, these are basic management skills that all managers must be equipped with. Without the knowledge and skills specific to FM, the ability of FM to stand as a distinct profession is diluted. The specialist FM knowledge and tools should be built around the scope of FM as presented in Figure 1. Table II suggests areas in which theoretical developments in FM will be useful.

## Conclusion

Despite its rapid development in the last decade, the definition and scope of FM remains a contentious issue. An evaluation of definitions of FM provided in the past suggests that the focus of FM is clearly on the workplace. The key issues confronting FM are the location, type, quantity, quality,

**Table II** Suggested theoretical developments in FM

Scope of FM Suggested areas for theoretical developments	
<b>Location</b>	Developing a model for locational decisions Studies on the relationship between locational choice and business performance
<b>Type</b>	Understanding workplace requirements for various facility users, e.g. schools, hospitals, factories, etc.
<b>Quantity</b>	Developing a model to forecast space requirements
<b>Quality</b>	Performance measures to assess the quality of workspace Developing performance standards
<b>Allocation</b>	Studies on emerging work patterns and their impact on space allocation
<b>Content</b>	Studies on the relationship between content layout and work performance

content and allocation of the workspace. A professional facilities manager is one who is formally trained and whose main responsibility is the strategic management of the workplace. To enhance the professionalism of FM, it is argued that there must first be consensus on the role and scope of FM in the industry and firm. Second, FM must be seen to be able to contribute to the bottom-line of the firm and, finally, FM must develop its own specialist knowledge and toolbox for addressing the problems of strategic workplace management. Some potential areas for theoretical developments have been suggested in this paper.

Then (1999) notes that any attempts to dwell on this fundamental issue are inevitably met with displeasure in some quarters of the FM industry. It is recognised that effective FM needs professionals from various disciplines. The purpose of this paper is not to provoke or discriminate any quarters but purely to provide an impartial re-evaluation and examination of the foundational issues on which clearly stands the future developments of FM as a professional discipline. At best, this paper hopes to have provided a common platform on which the diverse nature of FM can stand and progress. At worst, this paper hopes that the discussion presented has been a catalyst for re-igniting interests and debates on this important issue.

## References

- Alexander, K. (1999), *Facilities Management*, E&FN Spon, London.
- Arthur Anderson (1995), *Wasted Assets? A Survey of Corporate Real Estate in Europe*.
- Becker, F. (1990), *The Total Workplace*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, NY.
- Bennion, F.A.R. (1969), *Professional Ethics*, Charles Knight, London.
- British Institute of Facilities Management (1999), *Survey of Facilities Managers' Responsibilities*, BIFM, Saffron Walden.
- Debenham Tewson Research (1992), *The Role of Property – Managing Cost and Releasing Value*, Debenham Tewson Research, London.
- Eltringham, M. (1999), "Facilities management", *FMX Journal*.
- Ernst and Young (1993), *The Property Cycle – The Management Issue*, Ernst and Young, London.
- (The) Henley Centre (1996), *The Milliken Report: Space Futures*, The Henley Centre, London.
- Hinks, J. and McNay, P. (1999), "The creation of a management-by-variance tool for facilities management performance assessment", *Facilities*, Vol. 17 Nos 1/2, pp. 31-53.
- NHS Estates (1996), "Re-engineering the facilities management service", *Health Facilities Note 16*.
- Nourse, H.O. (1990), *Managerial Real Estate: Corporate Real Estate Asset Management*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Nutt, B. (1999), "Linking FM practice and research", *Facilities*, Vol 17 Nos 1/2, pp. 11-17.
- Nutt, B. (2000), "Four competing futures for facility management", *Facilities*, Vol. 18 Nos 3/4, pp. 124-32.
- Payne, T. (2000), *Facilities Management: A Strategy for Success*, Chandos Publishing, Oxford.
- Quah, L.K. (1999), *Facilities Management and Maintenance: The Way Ahead into the Millennium, Proceedings from the International Symposium on Management, Maintenance & Modernisation of Building Facilities*, McGraw-Hill, Singapore.
- Then, D.S.S (1999), "An integrated resource management view of facilities management", *Facilities*, Vol. 17 Nos 12/13, pp. 462-9.
- Williams, B. (1999), "Foreword", in Alexander, K. (Ed.), *Facilities Management*, E&FN Spon, London.
- Wilson, A. (1972), *The Marketing Of Professional Services*, McGraw-Hill, London.
- Varcoe, B. (2000), "Implications for facility management of the changing business climate", *Facilities*, Vol. 18 Nos 10/11/12, pp. 383-91.