

Facilities Management; the return of the caretaker or taking care of the future?

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For many years the role of Facilities Management was often seen as a caretaker of buildings.

A lonely place mostly viewed as a drain of resources. Gradually over recent years Facilities has developed into a profession, as organisations looked organically as to how they could streamline services, manage their estates, added value services, reduced costs, reduced focus on non-core activities, help retain and attract valued human resources, These and more buzz words became the norm.

Facilities Management began to be recognised as a tool that can be used to enhance a business and add to the bottom-line performance rather than take from it. The delivery of facilities became embedded as part of the brand and culture of a business, with workplaces being transformed to enhance the work experience.

Facilities Managers gradually became a valued member of an organisation and started to be invited to the top table with their input valued. High level posts now often seen in the marketplace.

Universities introduced degree and post graduate qualifications. Organisations such as The Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM), and The British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) became more influential in the market, offering their own professional qualifications, training programmes and their much

sought after annual awards including the much-coveted Facilities Manager of the Year. A whole array of Facilities Management companies arrived on the scene from huge global blue-chip organisations to smaller

local businesses, all of whom identified opportunities. And so Facilities Management grew as an industry and a profession: – Out-sourcing services; multi-tasking operatives; many previous traditional jobs disappeared; long term Facilities contracts; partnerships; soft and hard services boundaries blurred.

The non-core services industry grew. As time passed credibility and confidence grew so more previously classified core activities began to be passed over to facilities management companies and momentum in the facilities industry increased. Then along came the global pandemic and world apparently changed, at least for some.

Those Facilities Managers operating production-based sites have tended to remain operational requiring tweaks to their systems and procedures, however those who run office based operations have been affected to a greater extent. The question is – Is this a permanent change?

Many decisions have been made during the pandemic that have affected and challenged the role of Facilities Management. Often these decisions were taken based on immediate business needs to keep a business viable, government guidelines and legislation and more importantly safeguarding employees.

These decisions are now leading to long term challenges for the Facilities Professionals. New strategies are having to be developed to cope with new demands, working from home looks set to continue to name just a few of the key headline challenges; Owned buildings which are empty or part occupied; Leased buildings with long leases that are empty or only partially occupied; Long/partnership contracts with providers based on full occupancy. Buildings and real estate need to be mothballed safely and securely.

Properties with long leases, laying dormant, will need sensitive negotiations with landlords, does this become a procurement/legal matter and taken out of the Facilities managers portfolio.

Hard services (mechanical & electrical) contracts with providers or in house resource will require re-negotiation/re-structure to deliver the future requirements. Again is this taken off the Facilities and managed through by procurement experts or human resource if an in house re-structure is required.

Long soft service (cleaning, catering, security, photocopying, grounds. etc. etc.) contracts again will require re-negotiations, contractual termination clauses, redundancies. These may fall at the Facilities door alternatively other experts within the business may be called upon to deliver exit strategies.

As some areas of facilities may have shrunk or will shrink, so other areas and opportunities will emerge and Facilities Managers need to be fully prepared and equipped to deal with this, There are now many cases of organisations offering employees the opportunity to work remotely. What does remotely mean? Is that working from the employees home base or remotely at any location the employee chooses?

If an employee's home is the new workplace what is the role of the employer? Do they have a duty of care to provide a safe, secure, clean and fit for purpose work environment within the employee's home? Is it the employers responsibility to set up an office area, clean it, secured it, maintain it, establish secure IT links, carry out risk assessments, propose a location within the employees home? All manner of procedures and protocols need to be established, agreed and implemented.

As this is the relationship with the employee would this come under the remit of Human Resources and not Facilities? One such opportunity that has been simmering away is that of global warming. The Global Pandemic sent a clear message to the world that we can survive and carry on whilst making major in-roads

into our waste and energy consumption.

Facilities Managers with their wealth and depth of knowledge of managing diverse portfolios are so well placed to pick up this baton for their organisations and lead the way by delivering solutions, reaching goals and enriching their business. At the same time maintain the Facilities profession at the decision making end of the business and not let the role drift backwards to the lonely caretaker of empty or part empty buildings.

Perhaps the future is Environment and Facilities Management.