

## Workplace and facilities management: a new agenda (part one)

### **Drivers of change in the organisation**

The need for workplaces is a by-product of doing business. And as goods and services change, so the environments in which they are supported should change – but so often they do not. As long as organisations are adapting to new circumstances their workplace demands will change. In recent times uncertainty in corporate life, competitive pressures, the pervasive influence of office technology and the need to attract and retain staff, have all led to new approaches to workplace management. Buildings are simply part of the business infrastructure and cannot be divorced from the business agenda, processes and operations.

Flatter and more agile organisations, with horizontal networks replacing vertical hierarchies; and group-based knowledge workers replacing clerical, departmentalised information processors are key drivers. Workforce demographics have also changed, with more women and more part-timers: a trend which is forecast to continue. The full-time eight-hour day, five-day week form of employment is being challenged with the spread of flexible working; and a 'core and periphery' workforce has become established as cost pressures have encouraged outsourcing.

### **Organisational change drives workplace change**

These organisational changes are having a profound impact on the workplace and workplace management. In the more progressive organisations, the practice of a permanent place of work with a fixed, dedicated workstation is no longer a given for everyone. And whereas previously a person's office space (in fact, 'owning' an office) reflected their status, today space allocation is more closely aligned with tasks and how they are best accomplished (with new workstation designs supplemented with break out space, "war rooms", private study rooms, collaborative space, and so on). Desktop PCs are starting to disappear, yielding to portable laptops, touchdown stations and wireless environments. This will have an impact on workstation requirements and configurations. Unified messaging technology has arrived, with combined email and voice messaging accessible via laptops and hand held devices; and VOIP (voice over internet protocol) will spell the death of the desktop telephone. Ultimately these trends all enable greater flexibility in the use of the workplace by eliminating the 'fixes' that make change in the workplace more difficult and expensive to achieve. They also allow an organisation to adapt and evolve without having to make fresh commitments to new real estate.

Alongside the business change, the spread of technology applications and increased mobility, expectations of the workplace have begun to change. In short, both management and individuals are becoming more demanding. Management has woken up to the direct link between workplace quality and business performance; while individuals are more discerning and less forgiving of a poor quality workplace. Perhaps more critically from the business viewpoint, the "war for talent" in the under-35 careers market might be won (or lost) due to these expectations.

The implications for the workplace and facilities management are profound.

### **A challenge and an opportunity**

As the changes outlined above gain ground so there will need to be more sophisticated and responsive approaches to supplying workplace services and supporting infrastructure. And this presents facilities managers with both a challenge and an

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opportunity:

- The *challenge*: create tangible value for the business via improvements in the workplace, and be recognised in the role of “work enablement” rather than service delivery.
- The *opportunity*: redefine the role of facilities management and discard the back-of-house image in favour of a core business, or front-of-house role, closer to business planning.

The latter of these two points raises further questions about outsourcing of “non-core” functions: is workplace provision non-core? Perhaps a debate for another time.

The challenge and opportunity form the basis for a new agenda which is summarised in the table below.

FM	Today ...	Reposition as ...	To deliver ...	Resulting in ...
<b>Activity</b>	Service delivery	Work enablement and front-of-house	Holistic workplace management	Alignment of workplace and business planning
<b>Focus</b>	Cost cutting and contracts	Business planning	Efficiency + productivity + brand	Service and value
<b>Partners</b>	Ad hoc	Workplace, HR and ICT	Integrated resource management	High performance workplaces

The key message here is that the future of workplace planning is about more than how the workplace is arranged. There is a much larger agenda about how it is delivered, by whom and about more integrated approaches. FM cannot do this alone – it will need to get senior HR, Operations and IT colleagues on board to deliver “integrated workplace management”.

### **The challenge: from service delivery to work enablement**

In terms of the challenge, cost cutting has only limited strategic value; it is a necessary but not sufficient part of the new agenda. Likewise, once business continuity and environmental comfort and safety have been assured, what else for the facilities manager? In this sense, the challenge is to shift the focus from simply the delivery of soft and hard services towards a more value-adding role: “work enablement”. This requires a change of mindset. It also requires new skills.

Facilities managers will no longer work in isolation, simply providing the traditional menu of hard and soft services. They will collaborate, providing support to complex business processes through space and time. The change will require closer working with other operational areas such as human resources and technology; and therefore greater co-ordination with business planning.

There are now many well documented examples of the workplace being used to catalyse organisational change in this way: ABN Amro, BA, BP, BT, DTI, Ernst & Young, IBM, Surrey County Council and Sun Microsystems to mention a few diverse cases. Facilities management has played a key role in these transformation projects which have

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secured major business benefits through purpose-designed, business-aligned workplaces. This way lies value add rather than simply cost cutting.

New skills and new tools will also be required: moving from “cost cutting to value adding” is a trite phrase unless tangible benefits can be gained. This requires that facilities managers will need to be able to translate the needs of stakeholders into the language of the business, thereby allowing them to communicate effectively with managers of the business. In short, they will have to become fluent in the organisations’ culture and objectives. And to achieve this they will need to adopt some of the increasing number of techniques and tools available to demonstrate the impact of workplace improvement initiatives on business performance.

As corporate planners consider areas such as best practice, knowledge management, change management programmes and cost control measures, so they will require integrated approaches and strategies for dealing with them. One of the implications of integrated infrastructure management is that management tools become more generic so that they can be used together, and “cross border” relationships and knowledge become critical.

### **The opportunity: from back-of-house to front-of-house**

If the challenge outlined above is met, then there is an enormous opportunity to reposition facilities management. The opportunity is to not only become the focal point for workplace planning and provision, but to lift the management discipline of FM from its largely back-of-house role to one that is an integral part of core business planning: a front-of-house role.

Workplace planning and provision is currently highly fragmented. Designers, space planners, systems engineers, service providers and fit-out specialists all work in parallel, but separate, silos, resulting in inevitable inefficiencies and missed opportunities. There is a need to harness these skills to create workplaces that are appropriate and sustainable. Who is in a position to do this apart from the facilities manager? Those responsible for the holistic operation of the workplace, and whose job entails “living with the consequences”, are in the ideal position to take a lead role.

At a time when the attraction and retention of staff is becoming a key boardroom agenda, and when management teams are recognising the direct link between business performance and the quality of the workplace, those responsible for delivering a “high performance” workplace are in a position to take on a front-of-house role to deliver

- not only **efficient** workplaces, but also
- **productive** workplaces that respond to business agendas, and
- workplaces that are “**branded**” to convey the essence of the organisation.

Efficiency will remain an essential measure of workplace management success, but as noted above, it is a necessary but not sufficient measure. In addition the workplace will need to be shown to be more productive. This does not mean chasing the chimera of worker productivity, but taking away the inhibitors to achieving a business strategy based on agility, fast decisions, responsiveness and staff satisfaction.

The workplace will also increasingly be used to remind staff of their purpose and to

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convey to clients and visitors the values and objectives of the organisation: it will be “branded”. Facilities services are an essential part of this *experience* of an organisation, whether for employee, customer or visitor, and so they must reflect the values, processes and brand of the organisation.

The more productive, branded workplace will be one where service quality is high, much more akin to a hotel-type experience than a 1970s paper factory. Consequently, it is increasingly important to consider the design and management of the workplace from the perspective of the users rather than traditional supply-led criteria.

This will involve the facility manager translating the operational characteristics of the organisation into a brief. Not only for a perfect match on day one, but also for continuing alignment throughout occupation. But is the FM discipline ready?

### Integrated workplace management

If the challenge outlined above is to be met, and if the opportunity is to be grasped, then what practical steps can be taken to help meet both agendas? While not comprehensive, or indeed specific to any type of organisation, the table below provides a flavour of the kind of action plan that will help with a road map to meet both agendas.

Integrated workplace management: a ten point action plan	
1.	Connect with the business: align FM objectives with <i>specific</i> business objectives.
2.	Connect with users: introduce a simple, <i>relevant</i> performance contract.
3.	Connect with HR and IT: develop a shared agenda.
4.	Communicate the workplace as a tool of competitive advantage.
5.	Embrace and redefine customer service.
6.	Simplify the facilities/user interface.
7.	Audit your team’s skills and identify gaps.
8.	Align external service providers with the new agenda.
9.	Develop robust workplace models to reflect business unit requirements.
10.	Create relevant and accurate management information to monitor progress.

What are the consequences of not following the agenda outlined above? Perhaps just business as usual, with the on-going frustrations and under fulfilment. However, there is of course a threat: that if the FM profession fails to position itself correctly to meet the new workplace planning agenda, then it will become increasingly marginalised as a back-of-house, task oriented function.

Or a two-tier market will form, as it may have started already, where the business-aligned FM is part of the core business (and earns a senior executive salary!) and the “second division” FM looks after the FM contracts.

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