

Workplace and facilities management: a new agenda (part two)

Introduction

While businesses are seeking to manage rapid and largely unpredictable change, to implement aggressive business efficiency measures, to stay ahead in the talent war, and to take on challenges as diverse as brand management and compliance, many are re-examining their traditional approaches to the workplace. Traditionally seen as a “sunk cost”, there is now a need for a more sophisticated and responsive approaches to supplying workplace services and supporting infrastructure.

Part One of this two part article (*EFMR July/August No59 pp2-3*) highlighted the impact of a rapidly changing business landscape on the workplace and workplace management, proposing both a challenge and an opportunity for the FM community:

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

The paper concluded that if the challenge is to be met and the opportunity grasped, then facility managers will need to take steps to reposition their roles. This paper presents a ten-point action plan.

Integrated workplace management: the action plan

While not comprehensive, nor indeed specific to any type of organisation, the action plan shown below provides a framework for an integrated workplace management regime; one which will help facility managers add value as work enablers and which will help reposition their role in their organisations.

Integrated workplace management: a ten point action plan	
1.	Connect with the business: align property with <i>specific</i> business objectives.
2.	Communicate the workplace as a tool of competitive advantage.
3.	Connect with HR and IT: develop a shared agenda.
4.	Develop a service culture and value-add ethos.
5.	Think concierge rather than static provision.
6.	Connect with users: introduce a simple, <i>relevant</i> performance contract.
7.	Simplify the service and user interface.
8.	Audit the FM team’s skills and identify gaps.
9.	Align external service providers with the new agenda.
10.	Create relevant and accurate management information to monitor progress.

1. Connect with the business: align FM with specific business objectives. It is essential within integrated workplace management to align the objectives of the FM team with those of the business. If the business is seeking to improve staff attraction and retention, then consider how to track staff satisfaction. If the business is looking for efficiency savings, then translate this into strategies for space and cost saving. The challenge of creating tangible value means helping the organisation achieve its strategic objectives, and this can only be demonstrated when the FM strategy is directly supportive of those objectives. It will be necessary to work closely with business units to

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understand their operating environment and priorities, and success will have been achieved when FM issues are embedded in the annual business planning update.

2. Communicate the workplace as a tool of competitive advantage. The workplace can play an important role in creating competitive advantage, and the facility manager should manage it as a component of business planning; one that needs to be provided with the same effectiveness as other resource areas such as people and technology. Many financial and business services companies now benchmark their total occupancy costs against those of competitors, setting ambitious targets for achieving competitive advantage. Similarly, the human impact of workplace decisions should be considered as part of the FM agenda. For example, they can negatively affect a company's ability to attract, retain and motivate staff, with knock-on costs in recruitment, low productivity and training. The workplace thus becomes a tool of competitive advantage.

3. Connect with HR and IT: develop a shared agenda. Much of the new workplace agenda requires a co-ordinated approach that not only provides people with appropriate work settings, but also the technology infrastructure to work effectively, and HR policies to support working styles. Take, for example, agile working where at least a proportion of staff no longer have an assigned desk. Such staff will require the ability to work seamlessly anywhere, and new management styles and workplace protocols will be required. These cannot be imposed by the facility manager alone. Integrated workplace management means working with other resource areas to enable work in a broader sense. This requires that the facility manager must have something to offer colleagues in other areas, a reason for working together – traditional reporting lines and budget boundaries do not make such co-operation as easy as it should be.

4. Develop a service culture and value-add ethos. Facility managers are sometimes regarded as contract managers, even an extension of the procurement department with a key focus on cost reduction. This perception has impeded the profession's evolution into a value-adding activity. In moving from a "cost containment" to "value adding" culture there needs to be a very clear, shared vision within the team and a commitment to deliver consistently, perhaps with more outsourcing of technical skills. As noted in Part One, there are now many well documented examples of the workplace being used to catalyse organisational change in which FM played a key role in securing major business benefits. An underlying theme is the enhancement of the quality of workplace services within an overall reduction in total property costs.

5. Think concierge rather than static provision. More and more people are adopting some form of agile working using enabling technologies. In doing so they create the need for a greater variety of work settings such as touch-down space, break out areas and informal meeting spaces. In such environments, the number of assigned desks diminishes and the role of the office changes from a white collar factory to a knowledge environment. It becomes a place to meet, to collaborate, to plan, to train, to sell. Under these circumstances the FM function needs a "concierge" capability, offering staff flexible support and a customer service focus familiar in hotels.

6. Connect with users: introduce a simple, *relevant* performance contract. Taking on a front-of-house role involves becoming more visible, and with greater visibility comes higher expectation. It is important therefore in embracing and redefining customer service to manage expectations. Being clear about performance in key areas is

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important, but the emphasis must be on simple and relevant, as a bureaucratic log jam will be counterproductive. An approach that emphasises outcomes rather than outputs is a step on the way, although something as simple as an agreed and transparent set of standards for services and accommodation will make a difference. Surveys to monitor satisfaction with facilities provision are a good means of capturing what is important to staff, although the FM team must be ready to respond.

7. Simplify the service and the user interface. Facilities services are often experienced when there is a problem. And it is at this point that their complexity is revealed. Similarly, facilities are often placed in the “too difficult” box by senior management because of their apparent complexity. Integrated workplace management requires FM processes to be simplified and integrated, made more transparent and easier to understand. This could involve, for example, bringing greater clarity to the internal budgetary cycle; more simplicity and transparency to business case planning, or more identifiable responsibility for service interruptions.

8. Audit the FM team’s skills and identify gaps. To take up the challenge of work enablement and to move into a front-of-house role will involve the FM team in “doing things differently”. It is important to undertake a full and honest skills audit to identify what behaviours might need to be changed and what skills might need to be acquired to fulfil on the new workplace agenda. For example, what skills will be required to move from a reactive, task oriented *modus operandi* to one where the team is helping set the workplace agenda? Financial management, leadership, technology, service delivery and performance measurement are just some of the possibilities.

9. Align external service providers with the new agenda. Most organisations have at least some dependency upon outsourced services, and more often than not these are in those areas that directly affect every member of the workforce each day: hygiene, reception, security, printing, reprographics and so on. All of the preceding steps could be highly developed; but if external providers perform to a lower level, then the whole service is jeopardised. Service providers must at least match the quality of service delivered by the in-house team. A continuous improvement regime with appropriate KPIs will help; but there must also be hearts and minds buy-in to meeting expectations.

10. Create relevant and accurate management information to monitor progress. The collection and analysis of accurate and appropriate information about space use and cost is essential for facility managers: how can you report on occupancy costs without good management information? The ability to report regularly to senior management and to monitor long-term improvements strengthen the position of the facility manager as work enabler. Good information will enable the normalisation of space use, costs and accommodation standards. It should be used in conjunction with benchmarked data from other organisations and a knowledge of best practice. Targets can then be set to reduce costs and improve occupational effectiveness.

Conclusion

Today’s rapidly changing business world is creating the need for agility – the ability to respond to changing markets with new products and services; to minimise the cost base and to organise the business for maximum efficiency. In short, the agility agenda demands close alignment between organisational imperatives and resource planning.

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The preceding discussion sets out an action plan. It is generic and necessarily generalised. But placed into the context of a specific organisation with its own particular culture, it provides a useful framework on which to hang a tailored, integrated workplace management strategy, with the explicit agenda of moving from service delivery to work enablement, and of taking the FM function into a more recognisably front-of-house role.

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.

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