

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two industrial workers in safety gear (hard hats, safety glasses, and high-visibility vests) crouching and inspecting a large, curved, metallic component of a turbine. The scene is bathed in a blue light, giving it a cool, industrial feel. The workers are looking at a clipboard or set of plans. The turbine's structure is composed of many curved, rib-like segments.

FEATURES / WORKING ACROSS SECTORS

POINTS OF DIFFERENCE



Sector specialist or multi-experience generalist? The choices that workplace and facilities managers make as they go about building their careers are evolving along with the profession. Martin Read and Bradford Keen report

To what extent does the practice of FM differ between sectors? Is there a fundamental difference between FM as it is practised in, say, banking compared to healthcare? Defence and entertainment? Pharmaceuticals and food manufacturing? Of course in practice there is, but perhaps the question should be to what extent does it matter?

Nick Fox, currently the deputy director of Capital Projects and Estate Management for North Bristol NHS Trust, has worked in higher education and defence, both client and supply side. For Fox, the difference in how FM is practised is not so much between sectors, but in how the FM delivery model itself is framed (see *'It's all about the model'*). Good FM, whatever the sector, has to integrate with the key organisational enablers: HR, procurement, finance, and health and safety.

Without these enablers, any FM contract will struggle, regardless of the sector in which it operates, Fox argues.

"Any FM function should have a defined contract structure with adequate support from these key enabling functions, all of which will impact on the maturity and success of the function."

The maturity of a client's approach to FM, rather than a sector's approach, is a recurring theme. Some talk of client-supplier relationships being predicated on individuals with a shared sense of purpose sparked by the initial parameters of a facilities project; and that, even today, this kind of relationship is at risk when a key individual subsequently moves on. Others talk of FM thriving where it has organisational recognition through a head or director of facilities from senior management.

The litmus test is whether or not FM needs to be seen as a valuable function beyond simply responding when something goes wrong. Mark Whittaker, a facilities management solutions consultant at Thomson FM, says: "One of the common traits where FM is appreciated is that it is viewed as a support service that helps organisations differentiate themselves from their competitors and have happy and productive employees."

"The degree of sophistication around FM is changing, but it's not a sector thing"

Legacy drivers

Legislative drivers behind the development of FM business models, such as the introduction of Private Finance Initiative (PFI/PPP) schemes in the early 1990s, with their direct funding link to facilities performance, helped propel FM to a more influential role within





MARK WHITTAKER is an FM solutions consultant at Thomson FM and a non-executive director at IWFM



ANDY CANELEN, head of FM at Leadec and chair of the IWFM Manufacturing Working Group



LUCY BLACK, chair of the Strategic FM Group at AUDE and head of facilities and student accommodation at the University of Plymouth



PAUL FEATHERSTONE, Director of Estates & Facilities at Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust

healthcare and education, says Whittaker.

Mike Grimm, director – FM Platform UK&I at Sodexo, speaks of colleagues on defence or healthcare contracts feeling particularly valued as FMs in those sectors compared with corporate office contracts, and that the common denominator was the PFI model on which those contracts were built, with its intrinsic link to maintenance of the estate.

In higher education, Whittaker explains: “When tuition fees were introduced in September 1998, university students had a right to expect value for money from both their academic and residential buildings; the associated facilities management services needed to reflect that and have evolved to meet this demand.”

Andy Candelent, head of FM at Leadec and chair of the IWFM Manufacturing Working Group, says that this has only escalated in recent years, “perhaps as a consequence of a highly competitive market and a focus on student experience as a key driver of decisions on where to study”.

Candelent makes the case that organisations for which the successful fulfilment of their core business is people-focused – for instance healthcare providers, higher education institutions or creative, thought-based occupations such as financial, media or law – appear to more generally accept effective FM as a key enabler. And this acceptance is widening.

“Increasingly, industrial/manufacturing businesses recognise that effective FM support allows them to focus on their core competences and operational productivity, with FM delivering value through the maintenance of the built environment infrastructure to facilitate this core business,” Candelent adds.

As for healthcare, Candelent says the profile of FM has broadened in recent years both as a career path of choice and a respected support function with a significant contribution to patient outcomes. “Facilities management is now identified as a career path on the NHS website, with a number of potential roles and development opportunities explained.”

Variations within sectors

Seeking to codify different sectors by the maturity of its FM function is too simplistic for some. VINCI Facilities’ managing director Phil Russell points to variations within sectors that make a blanket assessment of FM’s organisational status impossible.

“Even within healthcare, there are variations around maturity,” says Russell. “And I think that’s likely to be

All the right moves

Facilities managers moving within and between sectors has been a characteristic of the profession over the years. But is pursuing a portfolio career still the right thing to do?

The choice of a sector in which a facilities manager may wish to specialise is vast. Local or central government, healthcare, education (primary, higher, further); pharmaceuticals, social care, law enforcement utilities, banking, manufacturing (in its many varieties), telecoms... the list goes on, and there are further public to private sector splits.

Should facilities managers work in a variety of sectors to progress their careers? Consultant Anne Lennox-Martin believes that doing so remains vital.

“This growing perception today, that it’s better to only employ an FM with experience of your sector, is a dangerous and worrying trend,” she argues.

“I’ve heard, anecdotally, if a candidate doesn’t have experience in a sector, they’re not even considered. But the blessing of people who’ve worked across a number of sectors is the innovation they can bring.”

Lennox-Martin’s career includes time in the oil industry, the NHS and local authorities. Best-practice NHS cleaning knowledge, for example, was then transferred to the oil industry employer.

“I was able to bring so much from the NHS and local authorities about cleaning and the way that they run cleaning.”

In the opposite direction, Lennox-Martin took the oil industry’s work on peer review to other sectors.

“You carry this knowledge from one sector to another, each sector giving you something as an FM, and each sector will take something from you. So I think it’s a complete ‘win-win’ that FM’s don’t get typecast into one sector.”

“You also certainly need to have

“Benchmark data doesn’t exist for the new normal; you are going to be the benchmark”



experience of both public sector and private sector, there's no doubt about that, and you need to have worked for both client and supplier. To be really rounded, those are the pivotal things."

And it's not just different service priorities - it's different cultures. "The organisation you're working for doesn't just get the benefit of an FM with knowledge of other sectors, they also bring knowledge of other working cultures; businesses in the same sector can have company cultures that are completely different.

A choice of paths

Today's outsourced suppliers tend to offer both a specialist and a 'generalist' path. VINCI's Russell says that his company tends to move people around within the

same sector. "But we're very conscious that you need to get experience from other environments, and people do operate elsewhere in the business," he says.

VINCI does tend towards managers moving within contracts servicing the same sector, but, says Russell, "that doesn't mean to say we're not sharing best practice from other sectors across the business, which of course we are."

People move across contracts within sectors to gain a more rounded experience. But best practice from other sectors comes through the sharing within VINCI of performance data from different sectors or the sharing of case studies, be that a particular project, an instructional new technology or a Capex project.

"A huge amount of benchmarking is

shared across the business so we can compare the performance of different different projects," says Russell, "so they will have insight into what happens in, say, a hospital or a retail fuel station."

"Generally speaking, it's easier to move people who have worked in acute healthcare to another hospital than to put them into a completely different sector. FMs in healthcare have a range of specific skills, and a lot those skills will be to some extent wasted in retail. And to move people from retail to healthcare has its own challenges as well."

The compliance connection

Russell believes that the criticality of compliance to clients is forcing more career specialism than perhaps used



to be the case in the past. Again, no hard and fast rule applies, although Russell sees an FM committing to healthcare staying in that sector for some time. But someone working for a transport authority, for example, will find it easier to transfer to another large local authority; the bridge from one to the other being the public sector environment and understanding how that works.

At Sodexo, Mike Grimmel points out that his company, as with other providers, Sodexo runs an academy for its emerging management talent.

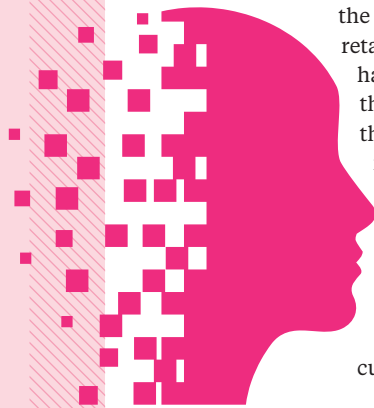
"We see that the newer members of our FM teams have that aspiration to challenge themselves, and that's refreshing because it's easy to get stuck into something and stay there," Grimmel says.

Nevertheless, Sodexo also has FMs who stay within the lanes of a specific sector. Grimmel cites specialists in custodial environments who have come to Sodexo from the original in-house operator; "that is a real specialism. being able to work in that environment and understand it.

"It's horses for courses: those who want a wide breadth and those who are keen on specialising in an area. What the industry needs to do is cater for everybody."

For Lennox-Martin, the other key consideration is the wider profile within the facilities management profession that can come from moving across sectors.

"You'll find that the people who stand out are the people who have created a profile," she argues. "And so often they then move from job to job."



"As we see things like BIM and digital twins emerging more readily into the world of FM, we will see the encouragement of more technologically minded people into that environment"

the case in all sectors. Look at retail – you've got fuel retailing, FMCG retailing, food retailing, and they all have their own characteristics. Some are more mature than others in terms of their use of technology, but they've all used FM for many years and FM is mature in those sectors. It's just that in some cases they're more innovative than others.

"Okay, there are more advanced hospitals than others. And the public sector, in some respects, is perhaps more mature around asset management than the private sector."

Every sector, says Russell, has common cultural, technical and regulatory aspects, but the organisations themselves will be slightly different, each having slightly different objectives or being at different stages of their journey, for instance in terms of technology or outsourcing.

"The degree of sophistication around facilities management is changing," says Russell, "but it's not a sector thing."

And it is in this increasing sophistication that facilities management will start to surprise people, Russell thinks.

"There are aspects to our industry which will make people sit up and think, particularly going forward with the changing landscape around the workplace and the whole sense of place in the conversation about where people work. Increasingly, they'll be looking to FM to make better use of the facilities that are out there, just for financial reasons."

As AI and predictive maintenance marry, the visual representation of a built environment will become a routine part of the conversation, with BIM and the digital twin concept becoming commonplace.

With higher expectations from employees about their workplace experience, the moment is ripe for organisations "to realise the crucial role facilities management plays", says Whittaker.

He adds: "The facilities management industry has to evidence the value it can bring to the workplace, whether that is the 'customer experience' or creating workplaces that both



attract and help retain their people, as well as creating environments where productivity, creativity and collaboration can thrive.”

The value vector

The need to “demonstrate value”, while certainly not new to the profession’s to-do list, could perhaps finally get the big tick. Those sectors or organisations in which FM thrives depends on a number of factors. Chief among them is recognition of the head or director of facilities by senior management. Additionally, FM is seen as a valuable function not just when something goes wrong, Whittaker says, such as when the heating stops working or the toilets are blocked.

Lucy Black, chair of the Strategic FM Group at AUDE and head of facilities and student accommodation at the University of Plymouth, wonders if the pandemic offers something new.

“Maybe on the back of the pandemic, this could be an opportunity. People in organisations are really noticing that they need to increase the cleaning, or understand more about ventilation or how we do distancing within our workplaces. Maybe FMs can ride on that wave: ‘Yes, we have always been here; we have always been doing this for you, and it’s critical.’ FM plays a key part in delivering successful outcomes for the business, rather than just being seen as the people who come in to clean.”

Squeezed budgets

Frustratingly, Andy Candelant recognises the contrast of some occupiers of corporate office estates investing significantly in recruiting and developing their FM function, while others still see it primarily as a cost centre to be outsourced at the lowest possible cost.

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“A lot of organisations in the manufacturing sector see the contribution that an informed and capable FM function can make to both productivity and profitability,” says Candelant. “However, there can be prioritisation of knowledge of the product at the expense of specialist knowledge of FM disciplines, with redeployment of resources from manufacturing functions.

Similarly, in the wider education sector the profile of FM does not match its more important role in higher education; “responsibility [is] often delegated to “hands-on” individuals in a caretaking role at site level, rather than a regional or even local estate management strategy.

Whittaker offers the caveat that any generalisation that whole industries do not see FM services as relevant would be inaccurate. However, he continues: “I suspect that within some industries, such as retail, facilities management is sometimes seen as a cost drain, without providing the added value benefits / increase in turnover.



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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MODEL

Nick Fox says the critical issue in terms of FM's status is how the delivery model is structured and adopted, not the dynamics of the sector in which it is performed. The fundamentals of these are:

- How well the contract was bid for and procured;
- How robust, descriptive and deliverable the contract may be;
- The maturity and management of the SLA/KPI structure;
- The accuracy of the asset register;
- How compliance is managed and reported;
- The amount and quality of collaboration between client and service provider;
- The intelligence of the client; and
- How well the supply chain is contracted and managed.

“I suspect that when budgets are being squeezed, FM services are sometimes the first to be asked to make difficult cost cutting measures.”

Paul Featherstone, director of Estates and Facilities at Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust, says there is strong awareness in healthcare of how FM sits within the facilities directorate, but the past decade has seen “a real presence at the top table in terms of facilities having a voice, alongside nursing, and other core corporate functions. That awareness is greater now”.

Healthcare’s compliance and quality service provision balance has clearly been under a pandemic spotlight.

“Failure to meet legislative compliance in cleaning, for instance, could end up with infection prevention issues that could negatively affect a patient’s recovery. Contrast that with catering; there’s a whole heap of legislative compliance in terms of food-handling regulations and statutory responsibilities but, ultimately, when we’re serving food to patients it becomes part of their recovery; part of their wellbeing plan. Nutrition is really important.

So what of higher education, where FM is grouped with the wider property function under the term ‘estates’?

“Look at the vast amount of capital that has been spent in universities over the last 10-15 years – that has been done to attract students, our customers,” says Black. “That’s where our income comes from, making the function of estates and facilities really critical to organisational success.

“To some extent, the estate is the physical embodiment of the organisation – it is sort of what we’re selling, and maybe that’s less so in some other sectors.”

The recognition of FM in higher education, Black adds, is also due to the visibility of services to end users during the typical day. End-users are at university for extended periods, whereas customers at a retail outlet, for example, are not. She also points to an absence of



competitiveness within FM in university estates, which is beneficial to those working in the sector.

While universities are highly competitive with each other in terms of attracting students – through the academic offering or the capital build such as a state-of-the-art engineering building – conversations around how services are delivered to these students and academics tend to focus more on knowledge sharing, and the means of delivery tend to be consistent across estates.

“That really helps as a sort of function cutting across a number of different universities. There’s a feeling of having a supportive network within the sector.”

Consultant Sarah Hodge cites pharmaceutical and banking as sectors where a focus on employee retention in globally competitive markets has led to an enlightened approach to the FM that supports them.

Beyond the likely yet difficult-to-calculate impacts of the pandemic on corporate real estate requirements, the government’s legally binding commitments to net zero emissions can only help drive up the profile of FM in sectors where it is still seen as a back room function.

Hodge says that manufacturing firms, because of their focus on physical products, may better understand the need to treat FM as a specialist requirement. Some manufacturers may still have general operations managers who perceive their FM colleagues as entirely different entities, primarily tasked with servicing the offices; but when such organisations choose to sign on to accreditations such as the ISO collaboration standard, FM ends up in a dramatically more valuable place within the organisation. She points to the IWFM award-winning Johnson & Johnson’s relationship with service provider Sodexo as a particularly pertinent example.

The stars align

Whatever the sector and its appeal to an ambitious workplace and facilities manager, there is potential for a combination of emerging technology and pandemic-imbued enhanced status, not just to spark weightier conversations about workplace worth, but to sustain that newly broadened spotlight on the FM function.

Whittaker says that “the impact of the coronavirus outbreak internationally will see FM having increased respect and profile, particularly in relation to indoor air quality and cleanliness of workplaces”.

The opportunity exists in 2021 for FMs in white collar office environments to prove that they, rather than external consultants, can take the lead in introducing, for example, better hygiene regimes by integrating them with an existing building management system.

Hodge talks of FMs being able to work for their organisations to benchmark data that doesn’t currently exist – “for the new normal, you are going to be the benchmark”.

And at Sodexo, Grimmel is convinced that FM’s emerging connection to a range of enabling technologies will attract a new generation, and a



“Facilities managers, not just in our organisation but in hospitals in other trusts, have significant reach to integrate all of the services they provide with the core business”

new type of individual, into the profession.

“As we see things like BIM and digital twins emerging into the world of facilities management, we will see the encouragement of more technologically minded people into that environment because it will become really quite interesting, and quite exciting as well,” Grimmel argues. “That whole technology piece will only accelerate and enhance FM as a career.”

Russell agrees that the steady march of technology has already led to building engineers sporting a greater variety of expertise. “Historically, the jack of all trades argument has been an issue. But we’re now in a situation where it is multiple trades, as it were, but these are relatively new components, and really two new disciplines.

“It’s not just a question of tying all the existing strands together, it’s about looking into fresh directions as to development, the workplace,

the technology and software required to run estates.”

Observations

We started out seeking to determine the sectors within which FM is most mature. Certainly, practice differs between sectors, and there are good arguments for young FMs to expand their horizons by jumping from to the other; but it is also clear that an organisation’s culture and structure, rather than the sector in which it trades, can make a real difference to the FM position.

The promise of enabling technologies looms larger than ever, and the profile of the sector post Covid can help; but FM remains a profession in search of client organisations that simply ‘get it’ – and the number of those that do can only increase in the years ahead. 🔗