

Changes in facilities management - trends and progression

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Facilities abilities has grown from a mixed array of isolated services that were perceived to be menial tasks performed by 'unskilled labour' to a fully fledged service offering par excellence.



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For a country that is commodity driven and highly reliant on exports, the changing landscape of the facilities management (FM) industry has contributed greatly towards employment, upskilling and offerings that were once thought to be unsophisticated. What started as a simple isolated service, has grown to an estimated worth of R39.2bn (Source: parts extracted from 2016 SAFMA industry survey StatsSA, BER, SAMI).

Preparing for uncertainties

FM has moved from a function to a service and, more so, a service offering, as any other consulting or outsourced profession. In this regard, trends are an important factor in creating awareness of what is to come in the future. To anticipate a client's needs is to prepare for uncertainties in all aspects of the political, economic, social, technical, legislative and environmental climates, as well as advancements in the sector.

The recent battle towards insourcing has seen many companies grapple with the concept, as the socio-economic factors directly affect the economics of a business. All organisations are working towards cost-cutting measures and the ease of doing business. This includes among others:

- outsourcing services that are not core to the business;
- reducing the company's liability by contract staffing of non-core-services;
- offering services to employees and clients, without comprising on quality.

Further issues arise when it comes to finding competent and skilled labour, service offerings are niched and fragmented, poor ethics and practices are often engaged and the cost to the company is compromised. What should be a benefit to the employer and employee often comes down to very little, with no upskilling, very little to no innovation, all to the disadvantage of a company's bottom line.

A 2017 Facilities Management South Africa Knowledge Executive Report found that there are six game changers that will influence the FM industry over the next five years, these include:

- Digitisation and technology
- Customer experience (CX)
- Cost savings
- Knowledge
- Leadership
- Employee experience (EX)
- Sustainability
- Good data

Areas of innovation for FM

Innovation is considered to be a strategic business objective for most, if not all businesses. For the FM industry, these include, among others, the internet of things (IoT), drones, automation and robotics, and wearable technology. A good example of this is using drones to sight problems from afar and addressing it immediately, such as security breaches. The customer experience (CX) is enhanced and positively affected by the expediency of solving problems, for example when robotics is used to identify the exact location of a rat infestation, as another example.

As the client does not have the need to invest in such technology, it provides savings through the use of an FM company, which has the knowledge, expertise, data and sustainability to continue to provide innovative solutions to the end user. All of these factors positively impact the client, the FM employee's capabilities (EX) and provides for collaborative leadership.

Integrated services in the FM arena are not common, and niched offerings require that companies have to manage multiple service providers with disparate service level agreements and reporting structures, not to mention the dissimilar skills sets, trends and lack of innovation in service provision.

'Beyond cloud computing and telecommunications'

The [*ISS 2020 Vision Future of Service Management whitebook*](#) describes the service, as an “emerging paradigm, which is characterised by the everything-as-a-service (XaaS) mantra that is rapidly expanding beyond cloud computing and the telecommunications sector. Buyers will increasingly expect a service provider to proactively anticipate their needs within a given set of circumstances and to offer a matching service that reduces user complexity.

As a result, the new normal of service in the 21st century will be that which is highly individualised, data-driven and primarily relationship-based. Users will expect more personalisation, more options, constant contact, or at least the ability to reach service providers, increased responsiveness and greater control”.

Service level agreements are key in regard to the monitoring and evaluation of services, but so is expertise and regulation

of industry standards, remuneration of employees, cost cutting measures and environmental advancements. Imagine for a moment the efforts that go into a hospital as an example, the considerations and services are so diverse, it would include catering, cleaning, hygiene, office plants, landscaping, parking management, clean drinking water, pest control, security and others. This is a multitude of different disciplines which require different skills and different handling. Hygiene in hospitals, for example, is much more than just mopping a floor. There are stringent waste disposal methods and if it is not complied with, it can have dire effects on the hospital or business, but also the employee and the environment at large.

Ensuring that your diverse labour force is constantly upskilled and equipped with new innovations and tools is no easy feat – and this does not even include the monitoring of the different areas of fields of work, neither the regulation of the specialities or contributing towards the employee's worth, who ultimately is the custodian of a brand.

Building relationships, bridging communication gaps

Service quality, access to technical expertise, and reducing costs are the top three most important factors that will drive outsourcing, according to research. However, building relationships with clients and bridging communication gaps are key to the success of working as a team, to whom the service is rendered.

Being customer centric in a way that an FM provider services a client is key. What do they want? How do they want it? How much human interaction do they want and to what degree do they want automated services? Each company has different needs and packaging the service offering accordingly to specifications is of utmost importance.

The future of FM is ever evolving, ever expanding and provides for ease of doing business without the hassle of managing multiple services providers.

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