

REMAKING THE FACILITIES ORGANIZATION

PART 2

Section 4:

*Transforming the Higher Education Facilities Organization***Why the customer experience matters to higher education facilities leaders**

Most colleges and universities do not traditionally think of themselves as being in the business of customer service. Faculty still resist the concept, arguing that students should not be thought of as customers (because students are definitely *not* always right). To be clear, we are not suggesting the classroom or laboratory is the place for consumerism. On the other hand, **college and university staff unquestionably provide consumer services**—from processing invoices to maintaining the electrical grid. Institutions face increasing pressure to improve those services.

Facilities organizations provide myriad services to their institutions, and the quality of those services *can be improved*. Response times can be shortened, communications expanded, and standards raised. In ways both large and small, the care and attentiveness of staff can be enhanced. Multiple benefits flow from these improvements. Stakeholders across the institution increasingly value the facilities organization. The mission of the facilities organization better supports the mission of the institution. Operations become more streamlined, efficient, and effective.

Most critically, a focus on the customer experience is really a focus on creating a engaged workforce and a culture of commitment. **Customer loyalty is the product of an organization deeply motivated by a sense of higher purpose. Every person on the team feels they are part of something greater than themselves.**

A team with that level of commitment and engagement is the most powerful tool the facilities organization can have.

Questions for Reflection:

Is there resistance in your organization to considering your work in terms of customer service or the customer experience?

Data Point:**Customer service in higher education***The language question*

In the book *Creating a Service Culture in Higher Education Administration*, authors Mario C. Martinez, Brandy Smith, and Katie Humphreys state:

We won't get caught up in the language of "customer," "client," "customer service," or any other such words. What's important are the concepts. We will tend to stay with the language of customers and service since these words still, for the most part, denote an emphasis on effective interaction with colleagues and those outside your immediate office environment who come to you for help (e.g., students, parents, and faculty).

Participants at the 2016 APPA Thought Leaders symposium adopted a similar attitude: focusing on improving interactions between facilities organizations and their stakeholders without worrying about the finer points of the language of customer service. The fact is that facilities organizations must respond to demands from stakeholders to improve their operations across the board.

Creating a customer-centric culture provides a framework for driving change in facilities operations

In fact, higher education facilities staff *are* in the business of customer service. Families choose which college or university to attend based on many factors, and the quality of facilities influences these factors. Customer service expert Robert Spector told APPA:

If the people who take care of facilities don't do their job, then if I'm a parent taking a kid to visit schools and I see that the grass isn't mowed or there's garbage everywhere, I'm going to have a negative opinion of that campus. I'm going to wonder that if they're missing these details that I can see, what details are they missing that aren't in plain sight?

The relationship between facilities staff and stakeholders isn't as simple as that between a salesperson and a customer, but the connection is still there. Spector, author of *The Nordstrom Way*, pointed out that customer service at Nordstrom is only partially the responsibility of the frontline sales staff. "Customer service at Nordstrom is determined by the **people the customer never sees**. It's those people who clean the floors, keep the lights on, display the merchandise, and make sure products get there in time." Spector added, "Even though you are not directly involved with the customer or the end user, you as a team player are just as responsible for that experience."

This message was echoed by Lee Cockerell, former executive vice president of operations for the Walt Disney Worlds Resort and author of *The Customer Rules: The 39 Essential Rules for Delivering Sensational Service*. Cockerell told APPA:

Everything matters if you want to be great. At Disney we know that poor facilities, maintenance, cleanliness, and quality of construction comes into the way a guest/customer rates us and rates their intent to return. **You must have a culture where everyone in the organization is thinking about and practicing excellence.** Reputation matters, and first impressions matter in selection of any product, including which college to attend. We make sure everyone at Disney understands their role in the show so we can perform

a perfect show day in and day out. Everyone must understand that their role eventually leads to a good or a poor customer experience. If maintenance does not maintain the AC unit in December, it will break down in May—and maybe even during commencement exercises.

Disney approaches service at its theme parks as a performance, and its staff are divided into onstage and offstage cast members. Onstage staff includes anyone who interacts directly with park guests, such as the costumed figure of Mickey Mouse or the ticket taker at Space Mountain. Offstage staff includes those working behind the scenes, such as chefs, IT specialists, custodial staff, lighting technicians, and accounts payable supervisors. All must do their jobs well to create a complete performance.

A customer-centric mindset in the facilities organization supports higher education institutions by attracting and retaining students, impressing parents, and satisfying donors and governments that their funds are being well spent. A customer-centric mindset is also essential to meet the **demands of today's students**. Millennials have high expectations, and they voice their displeasure when they are disappointed. This may seem overly entitled or unfair to some of us, who may have attended school in the days when crowded dorm rooms, cold showers, and unappealing cafeteria food were part of the shared experience. Today's students—and their parents—demand excellence, and that's understandable. According to the College Board, the average annual cost to attend a U.S. public college or university in the United States is \$9,410, and nearly \$32,405 for private institutions, not including room and board; what's more, the most expensive schools cost more than \$50,000. At that price, it's not surprising that families expect comfortable, clean, modern campuses with generous amenities.

However, attracting and satisfying students is only the first of many benefits deriving from an emphasis on customer service. Expert after expert agrees that customer service is ultimately about culture. Superior customer service organizations **share a culture of commitment**—that is, everyone in the organization shares the same passion for excellence and dedication to a mission or set of goals.

REMAKING THE FACILITIES ORGANIZATION

The central message of this report is that a culture of commitment can transform the higher education facilities organization and deliver exceptional service to customers. Excellent customer experiences never happen by accident—they are the product of a committed, engaged workforce and take root in a culture that is motivated by a greater sense of purpose.

Questions for Reflection:

Do the staff members within the facilities organization have a sense they are part of something bigger than themselves?

How can you as a leader promote the idea that the day-to-day work of the facilities organization is part of the heritage and mission of your college or university?

Data Point:

Service Story

Demonstrating pride in your work and commitment to the institution

When touring the campus of a large research institution, I was approached by the paint shop supervisor, who greeted me and explained what he was doing. He showed me plans and examples of his group's works before, during, and after completion.

He was very proactive and took pride in his organization and work. He gets the big picture and exemplifies the organization's great morale.

— Michael O'Connor, Physical Plant Director,
Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina

Benefits of a customer-centric culture for facilities organizations

An engaged and committed customer-centric culture can help the facilities organization achieve the following goals:

Align the mission of the facilities organization with the mission of the institution. When facilities staff feel

motivated by the mission and vision of the institution, their level of engagement and commitment can only grow. "Most people want to do a good job," said Spector. "And most people want to feel part of something bigger than themselves." It's up to leadership, Spector continued, to make clear the connection between the mission of the institution and the day-to-day work of running a facilities department.

Understand the different customers of the organization and their needs. Students are only the most obvious customer for higher education facilities organizations. Departments have many customers, both internally and externally, and understanding customers will help facilities organizations meet their needs.

Analyze policies and processes, identify systems that get in the way of providing an excellent experience, and eliminate barriers. Colleges and universities tend to be bureaucratic bodies with innumerable rules. Some of those rules, such as those concerning health and safety, are nonnegotiable. Other rules, however, exist out of expediency, from habit, or for the convenience of the facilities organization—not its customers. Facilities organizations should examine their rules to eliminate those that separate them from customers.

Empower staff to take ownership of their work.

Empowerment is the theme of dozens of books on customer service. Organizations like to say they're empowering their employees, but few have the courage to truly trust employees to use their best judgment. A former human resources manager at Southwest Airlines told a story of a customer who was devastated when he missed his flight; he explained through tears to the ticket agent that his daughter was about to have a liver transplant in another city. The ticket agent immediately booked a chartered flight for the customer. The next day the agent was called to his manager's office and told he had overstepped—Southwest shouldn't have paid for the private jet. However, the agent had done his job by taking care of the customer and so he wasn't fired or even reprimanded. Southwest recognized that when you place trust in employees, sometimes they will go too far, and that's okay. The benefit of the employee saying "Let me see what I can do," is greater than the cost of saying "No." It's an opportunity for a "teaching

moment” essential for organizational continuous improvement.

Improve the perception of the facilities organization throughout the institution. A customer-centric culture has the potential to build goodwill toward the facilities organization throughout the institution. Every department within a college or university interacts with facilities staff on some level. What would it mean for facilities if these customers found working with the department fast, easy, and pleasant? Facilities staff could be heroes for department secretaries, lab managers, and anyone who ever got stuck in an elevator.

Promote stewardship of campus resources. Higher education operates on a longer time frame than most

businesses: Campuses are intended to last generations. The wisest among the facilities staff know they stand in a long line of caretakers who will, in time, pass supervision of these buildings and grounds onto the next generation. That sense of stewardship should be nurtured. A sense of the history and legacy of the campus and a commitment to passing it on in better shape than you received it is what Spector called feeling part of something bigger than ourselves.

Questions for Reflection:

How can the leaders and managers within your facilities organization demonstrate a deep sense of stewardship toward campus resources?

Data Point:

Finding a sense of mission

Becoming part of something bigger than yourself

Robert Spector has learned something in his time writing and speaking about customer service, and it isn't how to win at customer service—at least, not exactly.

“I’ve been out speaking all over the world to every kind of business about customer service,” he told APPA. “Talking about practices and strategies is such a transitory thing.” Spector has seen organizations in all sorts of industries decide to focus on customer service and quickly fall back into old habits. In his experience, adopting a list of tactics doesn’t work, because customer service isn’t about what you do. It’s about who you are.

“If the members of APPA are really serious about this, then the question is ‘What is our culture? What do we stand for?’” Spector said. “The overall message is look within yourself and see what you stand for, what makes you different. What are your values?”

Values and mission give employees something to believe in, something to be part of. Spector said,

“People want to feel part of something bigger than themselves.”

It’s up to leadership to make clear the link between each individual’s day-to-day work and the mission of the institution. “If people in your organization don’t feel there’s a connection, they’re not being told that what they’re doing is crucial,” Spector said. “It’s up to the leadership to communicate that everyone’s job is important. Everyone’s job is essential.”

Facilities leaders should look for opportunities to recognize those employees who are advancing the mission of the institution.

“If you feel like you’re operating in a vacuum, you’ll never have a larger sense of purpose,” said Spector. “That’s where the administration comes in and finds ways to single out and recognize people who are engaged on behalf of the university. Everyone should feel part of something.”

Section 5:

Addressing APPA Core Competencies through Customer-Focused Transformation

With a clear understanding of the benefits of a customer-centric focus for higher education facilities organizations, participants at the 2016 Thought Leaders symposium began to consider the implications of such a focus across the four core competencies that comprise the major responsibility areas of the facilities organization.

Opening lines of communication

A major theme of this part of the symposium centered on communication. Facilities organizations have traditionally focused on the (sometimes literal) nuts and bolts of operating buildings and campuses. Communicating what they were doing and why took a back seat to actually doing the work. This approach poorly serves the facilities organization today, however. Customers need information to understand and be satisfied with the service they are receiving from the facilities organization.

There are two main categories of communication: standard, everyday interactions and crisis communications. Standard communications include exchanges about the status of construction projects, progress toward resolving problems, and what to expect from preventive maintenance. Facilities organizations should consider all their day-to-day interactions with customers and determine how well they are communicating. Generally, customers want more information, delivered more frequently, and through more channels. For example, if your organization once created periodic newsletters detailing the progress of a construction project, consider moving toward daily updates on a dedicated Web page, plus posts on Facebook and Twitter.

Crisis communications must be even more frequent, thorough, and widely dispersed. Even if all you have to say is “We are aware of the problem and working on solving it,” get that message out. Continue updating customers regularly about your efforts; customers hate feeling like nothing is being done to resolve a problem

and want to know as soon as possible about further delays. Then, keep communicating through recovery efforts. One Thought Leaders participant described a catastrophic water leak that flooded a residence hall. He pointed to the importance of continuing communications with students and parents over the weeks following the crisis as the residence hall was repaired. Proving your commitment and concern during a crisis builds up your customers’ trust and fosters a sense of loyalty that lasts long after the crisis is over. Communicate early; communicate often!

Questions for Reflection:

How do you communicate with customers about day-to-day operations? How many channels of communication do you use? How often do you communicate?

Do you have a plan in place for communicating in a crisis? For continuing that communication during crisis recovery, however long that takes?

Addressing APPA’s four competencies

Symposium participants next considered their operations through the lens of APPA’s four competencies: general administration and management; operations and maintenance; energy and utilities; and facilities planning, design, and construction. Participants developed specific goals for each core competency and defined the steps needed to achieve these goals.

Facilities planning, design, and construction: Ensuring new buildings fulfill customer needs

The goals:

1. Implement design standards that optimize total cost of ownership and support the institution's mission.

Just as institutions should adopt standards for operations and maintenance, they should also establish standards for new buildings. Defining these standards will require two-way communication between facilities and end users. Campus customers need to educate facilities about their needs and goals for new facilities. At the same time, facilities departments need to educate the institution about cost-effective and sustainable design and construction. In particular, senior facilities leaders need to promote the concept of total cost of ownership. The idea is simple: The cost of buildings includes not just initial construction but also long-term operations and maintenance, and eventual decommissioning and demolition. The smartest and most sustainable designs take total costs into account and make decisions that minimize expenses over the lifetime of a structure. In other words, the air-handling unit that costs more upfront may be easier to maintain and cheaper to operate over the long haul, and so it actually costs the institution less than a unit that is cheaper upfront but time consuming to maintain and costly to operate.

Establishing institutionwide standards that incorporate total cost of ownership helps colleges and universities accomplish multiple goals:

- Consolidate and organize institutional knowledge within the facilities department.
- Build a sense of campus identity with common architectural features and materials.
- Establish baseline sustainability standards.
- Streamline communications between the facilities department and contractors.
- Achieve economies of scale through standardized purchasing.
- Improve budget planning over the long term.

- Enhance institutional understanding of the value and contribution of the built environment to the institution's success.

2. Create and integrate data systems to build consensus and improve decision making.

As college and university buildings grow more complex, the need for data-management systems increases. Institutions should take advantage of advanced systems for asset management, space utilization, energy management, and building maintenance—systems that only grow more powerful when their data is integrated and consolidated. Such systems allow colleges and universities to fine-tune the management of resources such as space. For example, a classroom that is only occupied for a few hours a few days a week is an ineffective resource, costing the college or university money. Institutionwide management allows campuses to make the most of the space they already have.

Clearly presented, consolidated data about the institution's facilities can be a powerful tool in building consensus and supporting decision making. Regarding the example of classroom space, an academic department may have the impression the campus is running low on classroom space and lobby for a new building. Space-utilization information could demonstrate that the campus has plenty of classrooms but that those classrooms are located in an undesirable building, one that perhaps lacks integrated technology or is a long walk across campus. With the facts in hand, the academic department and the facilities organization might decide to seek funding for renovations and provide a dedicated shuttle route—solutions that cost far less than a new building, can be implemented quickly, make smart use of the institution's resources, and improve the experience for the faculty and students. Space-utilization systems may seem many steps removed from customer service, but it's all part of the offstage process that creates a positive experience for customers.

Needed steps:

1. **Contribute to the institutional planning process, including development of the mission, strategy, and master plan.** Senior facilities leaders need a voice in

REMAKING THE FACILITIES ORGANIZATION

the creation of the institution's mission, since facilities will be essential to fulfilling that mission and will rely on that mission to give staff direction and purpose.

2. **Create data systems for asset management, space utilization, energy, and maintenance.** Integrated data systems will give facilities managers the data they need to act as good stewards of the college or university's resources.
3. **Promote a culture that incorporates the concept of total cost of ownership by establishing metrics and implementing or updating facilities standards.** The benefits of total cost of ownership can be demonstrated to institutional leaders—as long as the right data is being tracked. Cost savings can be calculated from energy data, parts orders, and maintenance schedules. Be sure you can demonstrate what total cost of ownership can achieve.
4. **Include operations and maintenance staff in the design process, and develop a process to turn over projects from one unit to another.** On small campuses, it might be easier to get the input of maintenance staff on new project designs. In institutions with large facilities organizations, however, the first time operations and maintenance staff might see a new building is the day it opens. Yet, these are the staff who must keep buildings operating for decades into the future. Senior facilities officers need to integrate operations and maintenance review of plans and develop a process to ensure critical information is exchanged when the commissioning team hands over the building to operations.

Questions for Reflection:

How many people outside the facilities organization are familiar with the concept of total cost of ownership? How can you promote the concept within the institution?

Are the key O&M staff part of the decision-making team during the design process? If not, why not?

Data Point:

Design and construction standards

How standards are like a roll of cookie dough

If you buy a roll of cookie dough with its premeasured and premixed ingredients, slice it and bake it at the indicated temperature, you'll get the cookies you expect to get, every time. Established, campuswide standards for materials, equipment, and construction are like slice-and-bake cookies. They contribute to efficiency, time, and cost savings; provide standardized components; streamline communication between college officials and outside vendors such as planners, designers, architects, suppliers, and construction personnel; and contribute to everything from budget savings to campus aesthetics.

— Shannon O'Connor, *"By the Book: Campuswide Design and Construction Standards,"* College Planning and Management, July 1, 2006.

Energy and utilities: Balancing needs and sustainability

The goals:

1. Create an efficient, cost-effective energy system that meets campus sustainability goals.

Maintaining the campus energy grid and performing superior customer service may seem unrelated—but there is probably no more fundamental customer service you can provide than “keeping the lights on.” This seems an easy job for customers who have to do nothing more than flip a switch, but facilities professionals recognize the complications of energy management for enormous, power-hungry campuses. Many colleges and universities rely on decades-old electrical systems that are pushed to the limit by the demands of the 21st century. But remember that we don't build buildings to save energy. The finished product must also meet customer expectations for comfort. Meeting these demands requires tough decisions when institutions also need to keep costs low and meet campus sustainability goals.

2. Achieve a balance between reliability and resiliency.

No electrical grid is 100 percent reliable or 100 percent resilient—that is, hardened against failure. It's simply not possible to pour enough money into either goal, and unexpected calamities from natural disasters to human error can still interrupt power. Institutions must prioritize those portions of the campus where power is most essential (hospitals, research labs, and residence halls usually top the list).

Align the energy system with the mission, goals, and master plan of the institution. The goals of the institution should be supported by the energy system. An institution seeking to be a leader in advanced research requires a robust electrical grid that will withstand threats to program interruption. A college or university that prioritizes environmental stewardship can support its goals with an energy program that reduces carbon consumption, relies on renewable sources, and promotes conservation. Institutions seeking to improve their financial stability can structure their energy system to reduce the impact of energy cost fluctuations while lowering operating costs. Aligning the utility plan with the plans of the institution yields long-term results for the entire campus.

3. Support a sustainable business model for the institution.

Energy costs are currently low, but global demand is expected to rise steadily over the next few decades. Meanwhile, the remaining supply of fossil fuels will become more difficult and more expensive to acquire as easy reserves are tapped out. It's a recipe for increasing uncertainty and rising prices. Institutions must take charge of their energy future and reduce the risks posed by sudden jumps in fuel costs. Diversifying fuel sources is a wise first step.

Needed steps:

1. **Create a rigorous system to capture and analyze energy data.** Colleges and universities once had little idea where energy was being used on campus, but

today's systems can track the flow of electricity to individual offices and dorm rooms. Smart institutions are capturing this data and employing a variety of tools to search for trends and identify problem points.

2. **Diversify energy sources.** Institutions should seek to widen the base of sources for their electrical grid both to increase the use of renewable energies and to reduce the risk of overreliance on one source.
3. **Establish service standards.** Energy service standards offer the same advantages of design or maintenance standards: They establish a framework for maintenance and create efficiencies. Institutions should standardize their electrical service as much as possible.
4. **Create a utility master plan that addresses potential future scenarios.** Few markets are as global as energy—or as unpredictable. Nevertheless, institutions can posit a range of future scenarios and craft a utility master plan that addresses multiple possibilities. The result will be a far more useful plan than one that assumes a single rosy outlook.
5. **Create a customer communications system to keep stakeholders informed under a variety of conditions.** Customers are most frustrated when they're left in the dark—both literally and figuratively because of lack of information. Facilities organizations should work with IT experts on campus to design a communications system that will keep customers informed if the lights go out. Such a system must be easy for staff to use in a crisis and should communicate across as many forms of media as possible.

Questions for Reflection:

Does your energy plan reflect the mission and goals of your institution?

Do you have a sustainability plan with metrics and measurable goals?

Data Point:

The Customer Experience

Extending service at every opportunity

While in a small resort town in Idaho, we ran over a board on the highway and got a flat tire. We drove to Les Schwab Tires, even though the tires on the car were not from Les Schwab. The company fixed the tire for free because it had us as a past customer in the database.

The lesson I took away from this is that Les Schwab values its customers and will make sure that we stay customers by treating us well even when we are using a competitor's product. Relationships and good customer service matters.

– Stacy M. Pearson, Vice President of Finance and Administration, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho

Operations and maintenance: Creating a first-class offstage operation

The goal:

Fulfill all operations and maintenance tasks to the standards outlined in APPA's operational guidelines.

APPA has identified operational standards for maintenance, grounds, and custodial services, clearing defining what constitutes exemplary levels of service for higher education facilities. For example, the *APPA Operational Guidelines for Education Facilities: Custodial* employs a common language to define the cleanliness of buildings, ranging from “Level 1 – Orderly Spotlessness” through “Level 3 – Casual Inattention” to “Level 5 – Unkempt Neglect.” These levels are then defined in detail; at Level 1, “Floors and base moldings shine and/or are bright and clean, colors are fresh. No dirt buildup in corners or along walls.” Levels for different types of spaces are proposed (public spaces should be maintained at higher levels than storage or utility spaces, for example), and methods are given for calculating the time required to clean to each level.

Facilities organizations that adopt these standards are doing their part to improve what Cockerell called off-

stage operations. While facilities staff may not regularly engage with external customers—students, parents, etc.—they create the stage on which these interactions take place. In the language of a theater, they maintain the set, manage the sound and lights, and ensure the seats are comfortable and the floors clean. Failure in the offstage staff leads directly to failure of the entire performance.

Goals in support of the primary aim to meet operational standards include the following:

1. **Collect and utilize key performance metrics.** APPA's operational standards give facilities professionals clearly defined measures that can be tracked over time to understand failures and improve performance.
2. **Make workload primarily preventive/predictive rather than reactive.** Facilities shouldn't always be managing the latest crisis. The bulk of the workload should consist of ongoing maintenance—that is, maintenance that prevents crises from ever occurring. APPA's guidelines lay out maintenance schedules that should keep system failures to a minimum.
3. **Rely on mobile communications and data management technology to streamline operations, track work orders, and gather data.** If Domino's can tell its customers the moment their pizzas leave the oven, facilities organizations should be able to tell their staff what jobs need doing and alert customers that help is on the way. Technology has advanced rapidly, and new systems allow organizations to communicate with staff on the go, manage assets, and schedule preventive maintenance. Materials or supply management systems speed purchasing and enable next-day delivery of supplies while optimizing inventory levels, whereas automation systems monitor building systems and notify the facilities organization of problems before customers even notice something has gone wrong.

Needed steps:

1. **Create a business case for change.** Senior facilities professionals can quantify many of the improvements gained by implementing APPA's standards. The cost

of preventive maintenance, for example, can be compared with the cost of cleaning up after a crisis.

2. **Train staff at all levels.** Staff need technical training to master unfamiliar technology, fulfill additional requirements, and achieve higher goals. They also need training that helps them understand the meaning behind their work and the connection between maintaining high standards and the goals of the college or university. For example, overgrown flower beds and dirty bathrooms create a negative impression in the minds of key customers—from potential students to members of the community.
3. **Establish metrics, gather and analyze data, and re-align resources as needed.** Implementing standards won't be a one-time activity; it will be an ongoing effort in which key metrics are assessed regularly in a bid for continuous improvement. One important measure would be to periodically assess your *internal* customer service; that is, the work environment of the staff.
4. **Empower staff and encourage innovation.** It's not easy to let go of control and trust your staff, but remember that the companies with the highest reputations for customer service are those that give their employees enormous leeway in doing their jobs. Build your culture, train your staff, set high expectations, and then let your employees meet those expectations. Make sure to reward those who go above and beyond, and remember that the real test comes when someone goes too far. Empowerment means backing employees even when things go wrong. When someone makes a mistake, do you help them clean it up—or do you throw them to the wolves?

Questions for Reflection:

How much of your work is preventive and how much is reactive?

How do you increase the proportion of predictive maintenance?

Data Point:

The Customer Experience

Serving through catastrophe

Hurricane Katrina hit the University of Southern Mississippi in 2005 and left the campus at a standstill. No power. No water.

The campus staff stepped up to the challenge—Aramark [the food service contractor], physical plant staff, residential life staff. Aramark cooked three squares a day for 10 days. They trucked ice, food, and hygiene products for students. Physical plant and residential life employees worked even though their families needed them. They got the campus up and running again in record time!

The lessons learned were the importance of teamwork—and that the need to take care of your students sometimes prevails over yourself.

— Sid Gonsoulin, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, Southern Mississippi University, Hattiesburg, Mississippi

General administration and management: Getting a seat at the table

The goals:

1. Be a strategic partner of the institution and a critical team member at the decision-making table to achieve the institution's goals.

This goal ties directly back to Robert Spector's call for customer-centric organizations to help their employees feel part of something bigger than themselves. At every level, facilities staff need to understand the goals of their college or university and work diligently toward the fulfillment of those goals.

This process would be easier and more straightforward if facilities were involved in setting institutional goals in the first place. Facilities leaders involved in institution-wide planning and decision making can contribute

to the process with critical information about the infrastructure and built environment. Senior facilities leaders can help institutions avoid costly mistakes and make wise investments. At the same time, facilities will have a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the institution's plans.

2. Implement systems, technologies, and practices that provide a framework for enhancing the customer's experience.

Once the mission of the facilities organization is identified and goals are set, senior facilities officers must consider which administrative and management functions need to be remade to support those goals and enhance the customer experience. For example, clear and prompt communication with customers is an essential element of excellent customer service, but a facilities organization will be unable to provide that level of communication if it lacks the proper work-management systems and customer feedback tools.

Needed steps:

1. **Define what's getting in the way of facilities taking a high-profile role within the institution.** A number of factors could be limiting the role of senior facilities leaders. Is it simply a question of expressing a desire to participate to key decision makers? Or do senior institutional players need to be convinced of the value facilities can bring?
2. **Identify key stakeholders with the power to help advance facilities.** Facilities staff need champions. They need to know who backs their involvement and who stands in the way.
3. **Take the initiative in developing relationships with stakeholders and introducing them to the potential of partnering with facilities.** Don't wait until you're invited to the table. As one participant in the symposium said, "Set your own table." Create forums for discussion of critical institutional issues and involve the right people.

4. **Develop partnerships with key stakeholders on projects going forward.** Don't just tell others within the institution that you can help them, show them your strengths. Remember the importance of internal customer service, and treat each of these stakeholders as a million-dollar customer. Be their hero.
5. **Identify the Moments of Truth** (*see sidebar next page*) **where your organization interacts with customers, and target those places where failures can occur.** The facilities organization interacts with its customers in dozens of ways—and you can either satisfy or frustrate your customers at each of these points. Draw up a map of how and why customers interact with you, and then assess what can go wrong along the way. The points where interactions go wrong should be your focus.
6. **Assess what needs to change to improve the customer experience.** How do you smooth out the rough places on your customer interaction map? Do you need better technology—that is, communications and work-management systems that streamline how you address problems? For example, when someone on campus calls in a problem, does your system automatically know where they're calling from? Do you have the data analysis systems that help you plan maintenance and predict service needs? If the right technology is in place, do problems arise out of gaps in training? Do staff know how to interact with customers to provide an exceptional experience?

Questions for Reflection:

Which point of interaction between the facilities organization and your customers routinely creates tension and bad feelings? What would it take to resolve that problem point?

Data Point:**Improving administration and management functions*****Identifying Cycles of Service and Moments of Truth***

To improve the customer experience, experts Martinez, Smith, and Humphreys, in their book *Creating a Service Culture in Higher Education Administration*, recommend two well-established customer service concepts, Cycles of Service and Moments of Truth.

A Cycle of Service breaks down customer interactions into a series of steps. At every step, the customer experience can either be enhanced or diminished. Here is an example of the Cycle of Service that occurs when a potential student visits campus: If the student can't figure out where to park, the student's opinion of the institution will fall; if the tour guide is knowledgeable and engaging, the student's opinion will rise.

The points along the Cycle of Service are called Moments of Truth. The quality of those Moments shapes the customer's impression of the entire organization. "A critical Moment of Truth may determine whether a customer maintains a relationship with your institution or tells 10 other people what a bad experience he or she had on your campus. Well-executed Moments of Truth . . . produce customer satisfaction and, perhaps more important for the long term, loyalty."

Facilities organizations can map their own customer interactions by walking through every step of a typical customer interaction—for example, a faculty member calling to report the heat is out in the office. What happens at every step along the way? How long does the process take? What can go wrong at each point of contact? What should go right? Facilities leaders can use this assessment to identify problems and develop targeted solutions.

Benefits to the facilities organization and the institution

A transformed facilities organization will reap the rewards of its transformation efforts in myriad ways. By creating a committed culture that prioritizes exceptional customer experiences, facilities will become stronger, more capable organizations better able to support the mission of the institution.

Specific benefits include the following:

Improved use of institutional resources. The facilities department can stretch the institution's dollars by fine-tuning processes, implementing advanced management and operational technology, and working from standards. For example, preventive maintenance is perhaps the least visible but the most cost-effective element of the APPA standards. Buildings and building systems that are maintained on a schedule cost less to operate because they rarely get a chance to fail; at the same time, staff are better utilized because they're not constantly combating the next crisis.

Improved customer experience. Customers should have an exceptional customer experience every time they call to report a water leak or walk into a new classroom. When operations are optimized, customers may not even consciously notice that the temperature of rooms is comfortable, the lawns are impeccable, the public spaces invite interaction, and the energy grid hums along efficiently. But the stage will be set for a great performance by the other players at the institution.

Improved sustainability of the campus. Many campuses have incorporated sustainability into their mission, while others have made strong commitments to environmentally-conscious operations. The facilities department can make some of the greatest contributions to sustainability by reducing energy use, limiting waste, and educating consumers about their choices.

Fewer disruptions from emergencies. A facilities emergency ruins everyone's day—from the students and faculty unable to continue class to the administrators

REMAKING THE FACILITIES ORGANIZATION

struggling to explain the problem to visiting donors. A focus on preventive maintenance is a powerful solution to multiple problems.

Reduced risk. Many senior administrators have no idea of the risks posed by energy failures; however, the threat to the health and safety of the college or university community—as well as to the bottom line—is enormous. Institutions manage risk all the time. It's time to include maintenance operations and energy among those risks.

Improved morale among facilities staff. Work that feels purposeless is the least satisfying. Work that is connected to a greater purpose is meaningful and re-

warding. By taking steps such as increasing predictive maintenance and streamlining processes, you will give your employees more opportunity to focus on the big picture. What's more, building a culture of commitment will help staff understand their role in the institution as a whole.

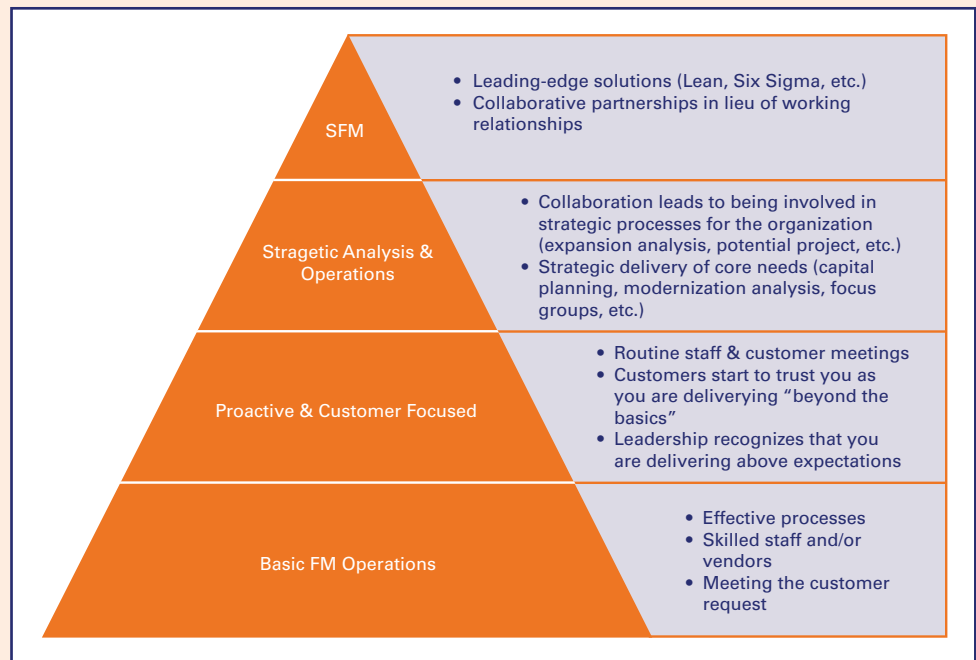
Better reputation as an employer within the community. Higher education should be an employer of choice within the community—but that reputation must be earned. Word will get out if the organization treats its employees fairly, empowers them to do their jobs, and creates a culture of commitment.

Data Point:

From effective operations to strategic management

Building a foundation of facilities management success

If the ultimate goal of higher education facilities leaders is to play a strategic decision-making role at the university, they should start with the basics, urged Ellis Kirby and Kathy Roper in the article "A Path to Strategic Facilities Management." They propose a process whereby facilities leaders motivate their organization to optimal performance by moving from effective basic operations through proactive and customer-focused service to strategic analysis and operations and, ultimately, strategic facilities management.



– Ellis Kirby and Kathy Roper, "A Path to Strategic Facilities Management,"
(from *Effective and Innovative Practices for the Strategic Facilities Manager*, APPA 2014)

Section 6:

Conclusion

Creating exceptional experiences for the customers of higher education facilities organizations will require hard work, but one part of the job, at least, will be easier for higher education than many other industries. Colleges and universities have always had a strong sense of mission and purpose.

This is a unique advantage that higher education should employ to its benefit and purpose. Colleges and universities were founded to further learning, expand knowledge, push the boundaries of research, and preserve our cultural heritage. This mission can get lost in the day-to-day workings of institutions, but in fact the foundational principles of higher education are deeply meaningful.

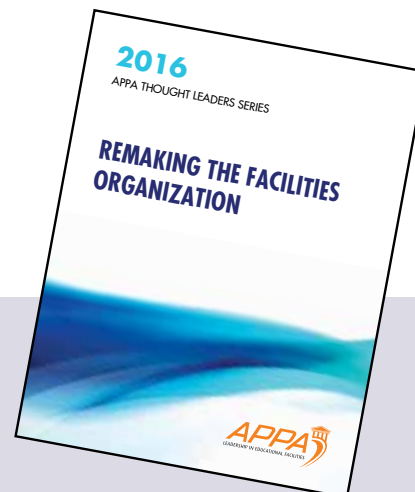
Few other organizations can claim such an inspirational purpose and overall mission. We encourage institutions to **claim their mission and use it to motivate their organization**. Employees who feel part of something bigger than themselves are the most committed to the

institution and will bring their best efforts to all they do. An organization working together toward higher goals cannot help but create exceptional experiences every day.

Remember this time-honored story:

A man came upon a construction site where three people were working. He asked the first, "What are you doing?" and the man replied: "I am laying bricks." He asked the second, "What are you doing?" and the man replied: "I am building a wall." As he approached the third, he heard him humming a tune as he swept the dust from the floor. The visitor asked, "What are you doing?" The man stood, looked up at the sky, and smiled, "I am building a cathedral!"

Every employee of the facilities organization can feel like that cathedral worker, motivated by the greater purpose of the institution. It's up to senior facilities leaders to inspire their staff and create a culture where the exceptional is possible, and even expected.



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