

The Future of Facilities Management

By Nancy Van Elsacker Louisnord

When it comes to the future of facilities management, “connection” is the keyword. People outside your organization are developing specialized facilities management knowledge—and they’re doing it fast. At the same time, within your organization you are likely receiving more and more specific questions about facilities management—so you must find a way to bridge the gap between “inside” and “outside” knowledge.

Facilities management, then, should always be about figuring out the customer’s question and answering it to the best of your abilities. What are the wishes within the organization, and how do you link these to the possibilities that society offers? In practice this means that we don’t simply copy the interior of one building because it’s not the right solution for the other buildings whose occupants have different needs. You have to reassess what your customers need every single time, and then see how you can offer the best solution to meet their demands.

KEEPING KNOWLEDGE IN-HOUSE

Once organizations used to have all their services in-house, but now these are often outsourced. As a result, specialist knowledge is moved outside the organization. And then you have to call in the help of sup-

pliers that want to make your organization compatible with their solution, rather than the other way around.

Instead, you should always put the customers’ wishes first and find a suitable solution.

Obviously, outsourcing is something you can’t do without today, but you’ve got to make sure that you know what you’re handing over to others. Managing cleaning or security within a facility are easily contracted. The same goes for food services, but it’s also a good idea to keep some of this knowledge in-house, even if the sole reason is to stay up to date on the latest rules and regulations, and to remain a good discussion partner for your supplier.

INTEGRATING YOUR OUTSOURCING: A GOOD THING OR NOT?

A recent trend for facility managers is the integration of outsourcing. Now that we’ve reaped most of the benefits of outsourcing individual services, people are starting to look into the possibility of moving different services under one external umbrella, but this trend might be short-lived. This can be compared to the traditional butcher and baker shops. Their businesses suffered terribly thanks to the rise of the mega supermarket. However, these and other businesses like them have evolved to survive, and specialty and



artisan shops are popping up all over the place and carving out their own niche, even going so far as to find success in the world of big-box stores.

The same is happening in the service sector, and we've noticed that large parties have already discarded the idea of integration. And it makes sense: Customers are becoming more demanding and critical of services. To meet these demands, you need to return to your core business even though outsourcing still offers many opportunities. There's not much left to be gained from outsourcing entire product groups like cleaning or catering, but when it concerns specific tasks, there's still some wiggle room.

MAKING UP FOR LOST GROUND

For facilities managers in the healthcare sector, the healthcare industry has some serious catching up to do. Compared to the business world, sustainability at healthcare institutions is still at an early stage. This needs to change. For example, these organizations often have a serious CO₂ footprint, but they are finding more ways to include sustainability in their business goals—and not just their financial goals. They are also looking at the benefits of circular procurement, so they can examine the possibilities of a waste segregation facility.

Another development to consider in terms of sustainability is the further digitization of services. Thanks to the use of big data and sensors, our buildings are becoming increasingly high tech. This offers many new sustainability opportunities, which we're happy to take onboard. However, organizations shouldn't blindly trust these measuring instruments. Relying too much on them means you run the risk of distancing yourself from the customer. Talking to your users and asking them how things are going is still important—much more important than using a questionnaire to ask them whether they're happy with the opening hours.

TRANSITION FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Trying to stay "future-proofed" requires a constant turnaround in education. The transition from theory to practice is proving to be a challenge. Teachers don't have sufficient knowledge of popular themes like sustainability or rules and regulations. What we need is to integrate current developments and lessons we want to share

with our future employees. If not, this generation of students will graduate in two years' time with the know-how of four years ago.

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AS THE CONNECTING FACTOR

Finally, facilities management is the binding factor between internal and external, between the organization and the market. More and more specialist firms are popping up outside the organization, and we're getting more specialist questions from within the organization. Now it's up to us to connect the two so as to meet the customers' wishes. When I look around I can see many organizations working on this effectively and inspirationally. Organizations must collaborate more, so that we don't have to constantly reinvent the wheel. If we will just open our doors a bit wider and make our practical knowledge available to one another, I believe we will make great progress in this area. ☺

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