

Getting on the right path

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Self-awareness is the key to making your FM practice strategic. Dan Weiss offers a model for your service

For some time now, there has been a recognition that facilities management (FM) has not been living up to its potential; much is written about how the profession should be more strategic and could have a greater influence on the success of organisations.

Being strategic requires a move beyond reactive management and taking a planned, standardised and good-practice approach to service delivery. The continual review of operating plans, service suitability, delivery processes and performance will bring FM closer to optimum performance, benefiting operations across the organisation.

Some sceptics think this is simply rhetoric ? a tactic to combat supply-side commoditisation and manage the persistent problem of attracting talent into the discipline. There is no doubt that the prevailing perceptions of FM are that it is the poor cousin of the more 'glamorous' sectors of real estate and capital construction.

But whether it is rhetoric or not, more strategic approaches to service delivery are a way to add value and elevate operating margin for a business that is suffering from commoditisation and a vicious cycle of underinvestment and falling service quality.

It is also true that a lower value is assigned to a facilities manager than to a project manager or a building surveyor. Attracting, retaining and developing high-calibre people is a constant barrier to FM's strategic operation and perception as unimportant. This shortfall in the way FM's value is perceived is matched by an internal perception of a low-value status quo. One well-known model demonstrating this is the Johari Window (see Figure 1).

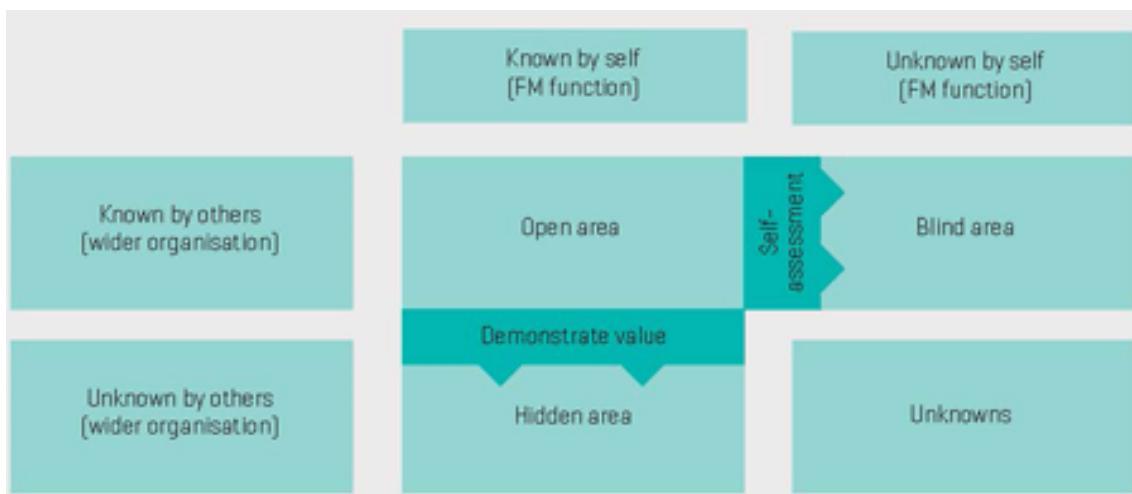


Figure 1: A version of the Johari window

This models self-knowns and unknowns against the knowns and unknowns of others. Applied to an organisation's FM delivery function, it makes clear that in order to expand the area of transparency ? and therefore commercial value ? external communication must be matched by increased internal awareness.

The importance of self-awareness in making change is clear; self-assessment is therefore key in establishing a successful FM strategy.

The development cycle

Knowing how to advance your FM arrangements is analogous to personal development. It is never the same for 2 individuals, and the process is neither generic nor linear. Developing awareness of yourself, of yourself in the team and of yourself as a leader are steps that need to be taken in fulfilling the strategic potential of FM: you must understand where your FM operation stands against its potential (self), then appreciate FM's potential contribution to your business (yourself in the team) and, finally, consider how FM can drive and develop the business (yourself as leader).

Accessing FM's strategic value is never the same for heads of property or FM directors at 2 different organisations ? the context, ambition, contingencies, constraints and opportunities are specific to every business.

That said, whether you are buying out your joint-venture partner, procuring the next generation of FM contracts or putting a new landmark building into operation, there are tell-tale signs that organisations can use to gauge whether or not they are on the right path to realising the strategic potential of their FM operations.

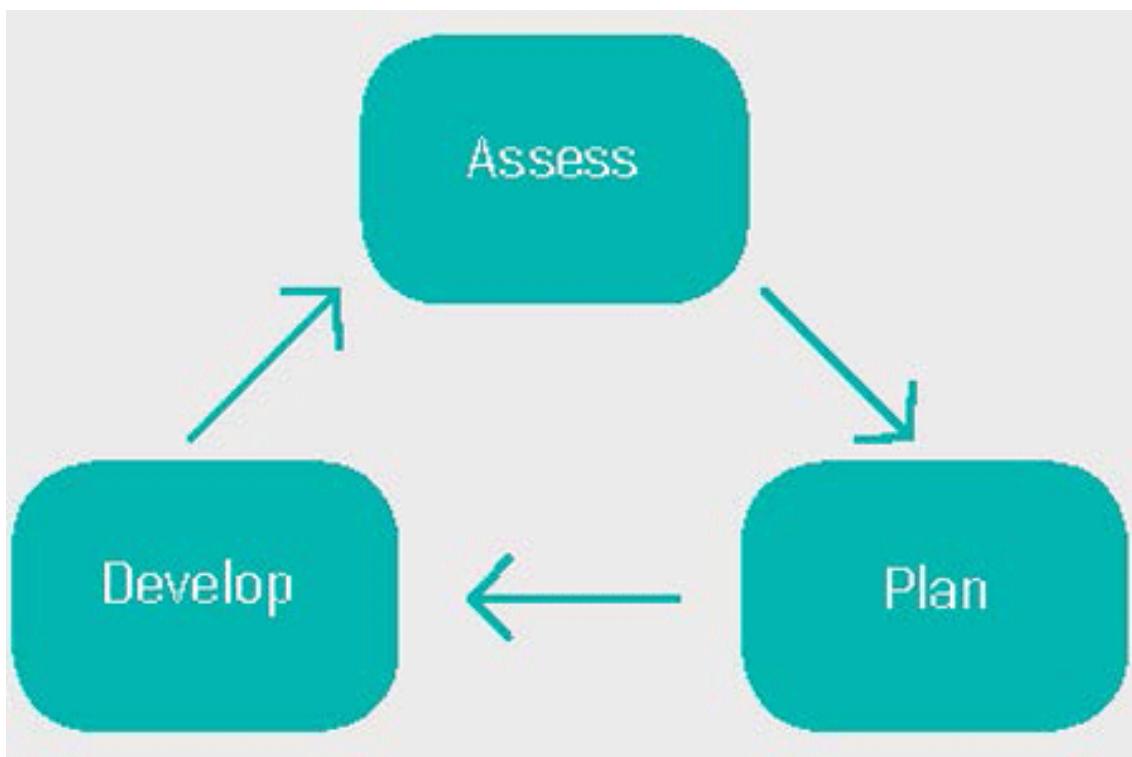


Figure 2: Development cycle

As with personal development, plans are required to move forward through these phases and enable FM to fulfil its potential. This development cycle (see Figure 2, above) must be periodically repeated in order for it to become a culturally embedded method for ensuring continuous improvement.

Asking the right questions

Even though all FM arrangements are unique, reflecting the fact that no 2 client organisations are the same, a common framework can be applied to develop a strategic service. As ever with self-assessment, understanding where you are in relation to that framework depends on asking yourself the right questions ? questions that challenge you to think about how both you and others see your FM organisation, and questions that require you to provide evidence of your response.

Figure 3 identifies the key steps in accessing FM's strategic potential. These are: doing the basics right; ensuring control and transparency; aligning the FM operation with the business; optimising asset and space performance; and driving business improvement. For all of the key steps, having the right people, the right strategies and the right plans is critical.



Figure 3: The strategic pathway

There are in each key step a number of questions that can be asked about the fundamental components for a successful strategic FM operation. Each is suffixed with the instruction "? and prove it", encouraging the respondent to be accurate and objective. The answers to these

questions will indicate the maturity of an organisation's FM arrangements.

Doing the basics

Clients can often think that they rate well in the 'business alignment' assessment by having a mission statement and strategy plan for FM that accords with the corporate estates strategy. Unfortunately, the reality for many is that there are some significant shortcomings in their building blocks, which will prove to be critical to the FM operation.

For example, asset data is often misunderstood as being better than it actually is. Once this misconception is discovered, a lack of confidence in the FM function follows, with questions asked about its ability to ensure critical service outcomes; for example, statutory maintenance compliance.

Trust in the accuracy of reporting and effective management of performance is therefore undermined. The desire to have FM contribute meaningfully to investment decisions quickly evaporates. Clearly, this situation must be avoided when strategic contribution to the organisation is the ultimate objective.

For FM to be considered strategic, it must provide the basics. Credibility grows from confidence in a core data source that is known to be accurate and that enables transparency, control and decision-making. By consistently providing this, the FM function will give itself both credibility and opportunity to contribute more strategically.

Moving forward

The strategic FM pathway (see Figure 3) models a successful development process, starting with knowing where you are and what it is possible to achieve. The actions required for change will, however, be specific to each organisation.

This is where solutions need to be designed and planned by specialists that know, in detail, what 'good' looks like and what it means for the organisation's progress. After all the hard work, the FM team should not fall at the final hurdle by failing to manage change effectively. It needs to ensure the development is sustainably implemented and the benefits of the investment realised.

Above all however, as with any personal development review, the first step in testing the hypothesis of how strategic FM is in your organisation is to become self-aware in the context of what can be achieved.

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Further information

See the guidance note [Strategic facilities management, 1st edition](#)

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This feature was taken from the RICS *Property journal* (November 2016)