

Facilities Management from A to Z



Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
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Strategy

A common criticism of facility managers is that they are too reactive and don't effectively position the discipline in a strategic context. In an operational service function like facilities it is easy to become distracted by the daily need for problem solving and to struggle to find enough time for strategic planning but it is an essential factor in successful facilities management and must be prioritised accordingly.

The term strategy is derived from the Greek 'strategia' meaning generalship. It was originally used in the context of warfare to describe the overall planning of a campaign, as opposed to tactics, that enabled only the achievement of specific, short term, objectives. In short, a strategy can be summarised as a planned course of action, undertaken with the goal of achieving the aims and objectives, of an organisation or part of an organisation.

Once strategic planning was the responsibility of a few very senior people who, it was considered, 'knew best' for the organisation. This worked well when markets were stable and changes took place over decades rather than, as can happen now, over weeks. In more recent years many organisations have made efforts to make organisational strategy formulation more open to input from staff, customers and stakeholders including FM, in order to involve everyone in the quest for sustainable competitive advantage.

A successful facilities strategy needs to be consistent and flexible and anticipate changing conditions rather than being led by them. It needs to be creative and stimulating so that it inspires commitment, but not so visionary or challenging that achieving and sustaining it seems unrealistic.

A workable facilities strategy needs to be suitable, with a good organisational fit that builds on strengths, overcomes weaknesses, meets threats and takes advantage of opportunities; feasible in terms of finance and physical and human resources; and acceptable to stakeholders.

These three perspectives of suitability, feasibility and acceptability can be used as a test of the likely effectiveness of a draft strategy. This includes assessing how the FM strategy contributes to and fits within the broader organisations strategic framework and translating the overall strategy into local strategies and policies

A strategic facility manager must also contribute to the generation and analysis of strategic options and provide information and feedback on the success of the strategy. Strategic leadership includes specifying the programmes of activities and policies needed to achieve major objectives and assisting in the design and implementation of processes by which these activities are to be carried out.

Every organisation has different facilities needs and drivers, so no two facilities strategies will be the same. However, the techniques and skills involved in developing a strategy are similar for all facility managers at every level. These include the personal skills, knowledge and competencies to formulate a workable FM strategy and to sell it to the organisation using a good knowledge of strategic tools and a thorough understanding of the current facilities market and workplace trends.

One of the most successful recent books on strategic thinking is 'The Strategy Book: How to Think and Act Strategically to Deliver Outstanding Results' by Max McKeown published by The Financial Times ISBN-10: 0273757091