Towards facilities management practice within a different environment

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines facilities management practice within a different environment. It assessed how the facilities manager responds differently in a different environment. Therefore, an extensive review of documented literature related to the concept of FM and the role of the facilities manager was conducted which forms part of the methodology. The review revealed that FM entails an integrated approach to maintaining, improving, and adapting the buildings, systems, and services of an organization to create an environment that strongly supports the primary objectives of that organization. The facility manager or the FM practitioner is therefore responsible for the effective and efficient provision of facilities and services to support an organization in achieving its primary objectives through operational and strategic approaches. The provision of these services follows the specific needs and requirements of the organization regardless of the application of generic standard solutions and practices or a universal approach. The paper suggests that the facilities manager or practitioner respond differently in a different environment rather than confining to generic standards and best practices. This is because appropriate FM practice and arrangement for a given organization determines by factors such as the organization's characteristics, facility features, business sector, and environmental factors.

Keywords : Facilities Management, Facilities Manager, FM Practice

INTRODUCTION

Management response to the growing complexity and changes in organizations that increased the range of services required by organizations gave birth to innovation in management techniques known as Facilities Management [FM] (Olayonwa, 2008). FM is an integrated approach to maintaining, improving, and adapting the buildings of an organization to create an environment that strongly supports the primary objectives of that organization (International Facilities Management Association [IFMA], 2010). Organizations, therefore, depending on facilities and services to support and sustain their business operations. These facilities and services required as put by Chotipanich and Nutt (2008) are to be provided through different support arrangements in different business sectors, in different types of organizations, and different countries and cultures. This calls for modification of the support environment from time to time when organizational priorities shift or business circumstances changes. This has necessitated the facilities manager to function within different environments and contexts as different organizations in different environments rely on the services provided by the facilities manager. Atkin and Brooks (2000) concurred that to

achieve effective facilities management there is the need to understand the organizational needs, circumstances, environment, actual characteristics as well as constraints. As such, FM functions are prioritized differently to suit the core businesses of different organizations. Thus, the role, scope, and priority of the FM function need to be designed to fit with these contingent issues. Appropriating the FM functions to a particular need and requirement of the organization that is influenced by the surrounding environment, therefore, remains pertinent.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this paper are to review and reveal how the facilities manager react differently in different environment and context. This is in line with an ongoing study which is an in-depth investigation in a unique environment of the semi-arid climate with a particular climatic condition as well as housing management challenges.

METHODOLOGY

An extensive review and synthesis of related documented literature on facilities management functions and practices in social science research from different sources are adopted as the methodology for this paper. The sources of the literature are from online peer review electronic journals archives such as Elsevier, Emerald, Myilibrary, Sage, SciVerse, Science Direct, and SwetWise; including online libraries and search engines such as Google and Google Scholar/Book; Online publications such as e-books, textbooks as well as contributions from experts at virtual research conferences/webinars. The basis for the adoption of this method is connected to the opportunity offered by a such approach where prompt answers to questions are required. In addition, this approach is not only less expensive to use, but also provides a useful comparative tool that new data may be compared to existing data for purpose of evaluating differences or trends (Kothari, 2004).

NATURE AND MEANING OF FM

Meaning of FM

Researchers in the built environment advanced different meanings and definitions of the term FM. According to Becker (2003), FM means the coordination of all efforts related to planning, designing, and managing buildings and their systems, equipment, and furniture to improve the organizations' ability to compete successfully in a rapidly changing world. Similarly, Ismail (1996) averred that FM entails the management and maintenance of the physical asset, space management, or user requirements; and financial management inclusive of property valuation, acquisition, and disposal; property investment management and tenancy management. Likewise, Nietubiez and Lewis (1999) view the term FM as the effort expended to provide complete operations and maintenance service support for the physical facility such as buildings, equipment, and machinery, and the system operates at an optimum. Moreover, to Wong (1999) FM is the work carried out to manage and maintain the facility as well as its functional parts at the level that will retain or enhance the value of the facility; create a safe, functional, and conducive living environment for the occupants. In the same vein, Amaratunga et al. (2002) posit that FM is a housing management technique that operates on the premise that the efficiency of any organization is related to the physical environment in which it operates and that the environment can be improved to increase its efficiency. While Tay and Ooi (2001) think that FM entails an element of the value chain of a business through which an organization provides and maintain the quality of the work environment for its human resources and materials. Equally, Amaratunga et al. (2002) asserted that FM is responsible for coordinating planning processes and managing a building's continuous development and changing use patterns as well as for maintaining the building.

In addition to the aforementioned definitions, IFMA (2010) submits that FM is "an integrated approach to maintaining, improving and adapting the buildings of an organization to create an environment that strongly supports the primary objectives of that organization". Another related institutional definition of FM offered by the University of Strathclyde Centre for FM cited by Olayonwa (2008) is that FM involves the "process by which an organization delivers and sustains support services in a quality environment to meet strategic needs". More so, Atkin and Brooks (2000) consider FM as a technique that involves service delivery and best value through the use of integrative, inter-dependent disciplines whose main goal is to support an organization in the pursuit of its objectives. IFMA (2010) also suggests that the term FM is "a profession that encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality in the built environment by integrating people, place, process, and technology". FM is therefore a discipline that involves the management of built assets as well as the integration of services necessary for the successful business operation of an organization (Lavy et al., 2010). Moreover, Adegoke and Adegoke (2013) also consider FM as the process by which an organization ensures that its building structures, systems, and services support the main operations and processes and contribute to achieving its strategic objectives. Whilst, Seymour-Jones (2017) maintains that FM is concerned with the design and management of physical space with people and work processes.

Meanwhile, the reviewed definitions and meaning of FM suggest that the concept involves a continued reorientation of working space and environment, systems, and the provision of support services to the organization to achieve the strategic objectives of the concerned organization. In other words, FM is the management of peripheral services to allow the organization to concentrate on core operations and processes. The review also suggests that like all other forms of management, FM remains an inexact science and continues to evolve, to a large extent reflecting something of an umbrella term under which a range of both property and user-related functions are brought together. The scope of FM, therefore, covers all aspects of property, space, environmental control, health and safety, and support services. It is also identified from the review that FM is relevant to organizations in all sectors of the economy irrespective of whether in developed or developing countries.

The Role of Facilities Manager

According to Alexander (1996) as well as Barrett and Baldry (2003) the facility manager is responsible for the effective and efficient provision of facilities and services to support an organization in achieving its primary objectives. This implies that the task of the facility manager is classified into operational and strategic. Operational FM is the continuous provision of facilities and services now to support employees and the organization as a whole. It, therefore, focuses on the following: preventing damage and maintaining buildings and installations in good condition; provision of security services; providing facilities and services to employees-internal customers, and creating and maintaining a comfortable and efficient working environment. While Strategic FM means that FM extends beyond operational matters to include strategic considerations for future facilities and service provision. Strategic FM as noted by Barrett and Baldry (2003) also involves anticipating change. The internal organization and the company's external market are affected by changes in technology, communications, regulations, and the behavior of people. Thus, the facilities manager needs to be not only knowledgeable about the organization's quantitative and qualitative objectives, and the qualities of an effective, and comfortable work environment but, also needs to be aware of the ever-turbulent external market in which the organization operates.

THE FACILITIES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Chotipanich (2004) suggests that FM practice and arrangement are principally pertinent to the characteristics and contexts of the given organization. In upholding this view, Nutt (2004) concurred that FM practice is expected to be case-specific by nature as it deals with a different range of facilities within a different environment, context, and circumstance. Hence, fitting the FM function and role to the environment of a practice is significant. As such, a handful of researchers such as Alexander (1996); Amaratunga et al. (2002); Nutt (2004); Atkin and Brooks (2000); Barrett and Baldry (2003); and Chotipanich (2004) argued and strongly emphasized that it might not be possible the application of standard solutions and practices to the varied environment and contexts as there is no universal approach to managing facilities as a result of the difference like organizations that influences the use and management of the facilities. Chotipanich (2004) added that the decision for choosing appropriate FM practice and arrangement should be based on the characteristics of the organization and its contexts and circumstance. This agrees with Barrett and Baldry (2003) who concurred that setting the FM profile based on case-specific-basis goes a long way in achieving appropriate FM practice and arrangement. To this end, to achieve best practice in a given FM organization, Chotipanich and Nutt (2008) submit that the facilities manager has to consider factors such as organizational characteristics, facility features, business sector, and culture and context.

However, one of the most important factors that influence the needs of facilities and support services of a given organization is the organizational characteristics (Chotipanich, 2004). This submission is also in line with earlier assertations of Stephens (1994) as well as Atkin and Brooks (2000) who also posits that organizations can have different needs in facilities and FM function even within the same sector as the characteristics or nature of the organization reflect its business objectives, operation process as well as the organizational culture. This, therefore, affects the organization's needs and management technique of its facilities. Similarly, the extent of the scope of support services under FM depends on how the organization has evolved in its allocation of managerial responsibilities, as well as its particular needs and requirements of the organization. For instance, support services may be accorded priority to the role they play in support of vital business activities. The role of FM is likely to differ by the particular characteristic of the organization as a result of diverse factors such as the organization's goals characteristics, constraints, and operational process among others (Kennedy, 1996). Likewise, Olayonwa (2008) maintains that it is important to recognize and address the specific characteristics of the organization by facilities managers. This need to be carried out periodically because the organizational objectives and characteristics can be dynamic due to the business cycle and external environment. Thus, Nutt (2004) avowed that the facilities management functions or serves differently at different stages in the life-cycle of a given organization. In the stable periods, the manager's role is to secure the routine operations which is the dominant function. Whilst, in an unstable period when organizations tend to expand, restructure, or attempt to enter new markets, the manager's vital role is to focus on strategic function to reduce risks and gain advantages for the organization on facilities resources issues.

Furthermore, another factor that the facilities manager considers is the features of the facility in the given organization. The manager usually designs or selects facilities in consideration of the needs of the operational processes of the organization. McGregor (2000), as well as Price (2004), are of the view that the features of facilities reflect the specific needs of occupying organization and occupants. Facilities vary with several aspects such as building type, architectural design, building engineering systems, the scale of the facilities, location, as well as ownership. McGregor (2000) averred that these features cause differences in approach and methods to FM and should be a primary concern of the facilities manager because it

needs to be reviewed, selected, and operated in an efficient manner that addresses the needs and requirements of the given organization.

Moreover, Loosemore (2004); McLennan (2004), and Price (2004) argue that the consideration of the business sector in FM practice remains significant. Nutt (2004) considers it as one of the principal factors in selecting facilities and support services needed in a given organization as the type of business influences the operational processes of the organization which in turn determined the need for facilities. In addition, Adam and Ebert (1992) and Slack et al. (1998) maintain that different operational processes require different transformation situations and facilities. As such, the role and function of facilities and support services differ with the business environment that the given organization is situated.

Furthermore, Becker (2003); Chotipanich and Nutt, (2008), and Adewunmi et al. (2009) identified cultural and contextual issues are also factors that influence FM practices in many different regions of the world. This view is consistent with the earlier assertion of Wong (2000) who noted that culture has a strong influence on FM practice in regions such as Asia concerning standards, perception, and quality. As such, facilities managers or FM practitioners need to consider cultural and contextual issues as the differences in conditions and specifications of facilities, standards, costs, cultural tolerance, economic capacity, and local preference can affect FM practice. In addition to these Nutt (2004) further added that the difference in capacities and conditions of FM markets in different countries in terms of services availability, supplier capability, and available technology also influences the decision-making and choice of service delivery method. These identified issues such as cultural, legal, environmental, economic, and social contexts are not only serving assets of national and regional priorities concerning FM practice and arrangement but are also significant to FM practice (Chotipanich and Nutt 2008). There is therefore the need for FM practices in different countries to be adopted and adjusted differently concerning preference, beliefs, values, local contexts and paradigms, and standard and local practices (Chotipanich and Nutt, 2008). Hence, facilities managers/FM practitioners should therefore be competent enough to consider internal and external factors to prioritize organizational needs on facilities as it determines the decision-making, choice, priority, and constraints of the organization concerning FM practice.

MANAGING FM WITHIN DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS

The facilities manager is proficient in operational and strategic competence in the provision of organizational support facilities and services as well as support arrangements (Adewunmi et al. 2012). Although, Barrett (1995) cautions that facilities managers should avoid selecting service items from the generic list at random, and instead provide only those services that conform to the organizational requirement. This is because FM practice is seen as adapting to organizational contexts. Stephens (1994) and Grimshaw (1999) are of the view that the FM function needs to find an appropriate position that fits the particular organization's local culture, and contexts to support and serve the core process of the organization effectively. This is because the under-positioning FM function seems to limit its potential to support and provide positive responses to the organization's key values and success. While over-positioned FM function may result in redundancy of work process and inefficient resource utilization. Proper positioning enables the FM to function with the appropriate delegation and authority to provide the right environment for the organization's core business, which results in effective resource management and provision in the short and long term. Chotipanich and Nutt (2008) asserted that FM support arrangement depends on internal factors such as organizational policy; organizational structure; the stage of organizational development; business processes and operational strategy; corporate culture; and stakeholder interests and priorities. While some external factors that influence FM working practices in a

given organization include: the local and national economic conditions; the legislative and environmental context; the community and cultural context; and the local labor market, its skills, and expertise. Changes in any of these identified factors exert pressure for change to the FM support environment. This prompt the Facilities manager/practitioner to review the current support arrangements, their capacities, and capabilities for decision making. Chotipanich and Nutt (2008) identified six (6) steps to be followed before deciding on FM support arrangement. These steps include: assessing the available facility resources and support services (supply); investigating organizational needs, priorities, and expectations (demand); predicting/estimating future support needs and their dynamics; clarifying the purpose and extent of FM change that needs to be undertaken; and determining ways in which the implementation of change is to be carried out.

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on how managing FM is different within a different environment. The review of the literature suggests that a facilities manager given his requisite skill blends the generic FM principles and concepts to specific environments and contexts through the integration of FM service with strategic business planning and operational asset management in an organization. This is identified to create continuous dialogue between the strategic management of core business development and the operational management of business resources. This helps to put an appropriate physical resource structure in place that integrates demand and appropriate support strategies. The review also highlighted the generic nature of FM practice and arrangement as case-specific because of organizational internal and external factors. This suggests that appropriate FM practice and arrangement for a given organization determines by these important factors that are categorized into the organization's characteristics, facility features, business sector, and environmental factors. As such, the facilities manager or practitioner responds differently in a different environment rather than confining to generic standards and best practices.

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