

## **Facilities Management Definitions – the ongoing dilemma!**

As someone who has had more than a passing interest and involvement over the years relating to what Facilities Management is and how it is perceived there is much I could offer by way of comment regarding what is today coming out of the UK, Europe and Internationally and having been asked to do so in relation to the new SIC code 81.10 here is my two pence worth as they say.

It is both a strength and a weakness that Facilities Management (or Facility Management as most in Europe prefer to call it) does not fit easily into a box. This situation affects almost all of us that touch the sector in one way or another. It directly affects those that would like to see Facilities Management achieve Chartered Status; it has, until now, affected our ability to be a recognised sector within the UK economy; it affects the ability to develop a market that can clearly be understood by the client; it affects the ability of education and training to provide a structure that can gain recognition; and of course it affects the ability to be recognised and understood across boundaries whether they be industrial, professional or geographical, to name but a few.

### **Does it Matter?**

Of course it does, but it matters in different ways to different people equally diverse to the examples described above.

But should we be expanding the time and effort that we have in the past to shape the box so that it does fit? Perhaps not and I will endeavour to explain why it might not be just so important as we might think later in this article.

Perhaps a brief explanation regarding SIC codes within the UK and abroad at this juncture would be useful. A Standard Industrial Classification was first introduced into the United Kingdom in 1948 for use in classifying business establishments and other statistical units by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. The classification provides a framework for the collection, tabulation, presentation and analysis of data and its use promotes uniformity. In addition, it can be used for administrative purposes and by non-government bodies as a convenient way of classifying industrial activities into a common structure. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) gather statistics from all employers to capture vital information regarding working patterns in the UK and what SIC codes categories workers fall under. This essential data is issued by ONS to government to help the planning of the economy and tracking of social trends.

Without this code ONS firstly does not recognise that you exist (as a distinct discipline) and therefore cannot provide Government or any other interested party with data associated with the sector.

The system is identical to the EUROSTAT System NACE at the four digit class level and the United Nations system ISIC at the two digit Divisional level.

### **SIC code 81.10 : Combined Facilities Support Activities.**

The arrival in 2008 of a Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities Code (SIC) for facilities support activities is a significant moment for the sector. The full definition is as below:

This class includes the provision of operating staff to perform a combination of support services within a client's facilities. Units classified here typically provide a combination of services, such as general interior cleaning, maintenance, trash disposal, guard and security, mail routing, reception, laundry and related services to support operations within facilities. These units provide operating staff to carry out these support activities, but are not involved with or responsible for the core business or activities of the client.

This class excludes:

- provision of only one of the support services (e.g. general interior cleaning services), see the appropriate class according to the service provided
- provision of management and operating staff for the complete operation of a client's establishment, such as a hotel, restaurant, mine, or hospital, see the class of the unit operated
- provision of on site management and operation of a client's computer systems and/or data processing facilities, see 62.03
- operation of correctional facilities on a contract or fee basis, see 84.23

Does it fit the bill?

Does adequately describe what we do?

Does it include Facilities Management as opposed to just Facilities Activities?

Perhaps not, but I would doubt that there would be any of those likely to read this article that would not agree that it represents a significant move forward.

### **Variations of the Theme**

Everywhere you look, facilities (or facility) management is interpreted in different ways dependent upon the perspective from which you observe it. Does that really cause those of us within the profession or sector a problem? If it does I would respectfully suggest that the problem is ours and not those that perceive us in whatever way that they do.

The achievement of the SIC code as outlined above is one aspect of at least some of those who work within the profession and sector actually doing something about it.

Consider the connected dilemmas that exist around us:

- Universities who define facilities management completely differently through their courses;
- Asset skills who define the competencies of facilities management differently in Scotland as opposed to England and Wales;
- The lack of definition or understanding between Facilities Management and Facilities Services;
- The argument between Facilities V's Facility.

All of these arguably serve to attract too much of our time and attention in trying to achieve consensus that just might be irrelevant. Take a look at the other built environment professions in the UK to see how it works. In Architecture, Surveying, Engineering they have spent many years pulling together all the various strands and specialities of their particular disciplines in order to achieve the critical mass and therefore survival of their respective professional disciplines. Once they have done so they start splitting up again but within their respective organisations as to not do so would not recognise the diversity that exists within their respective descriptors.

During the work that went on within the creation of the first two European standards for Facilities Management the two single topics that required more discussion and debate than almost any other was the Facilities V's Facility logic and the definition of what Facilities (Facility) Management is. For the record, the end result of the latter is as follows:

***“Facilities Management is the integration of processes within an organisation to maintain and develop the agreed services which support and improve the effectiveness of its primary activities.”***

Consider this, replace the words Facilities Management with something else and how does it work! The statement is generic by default as that was always going to be the consensus that would have to be achieved when you try and get 28 parties to agree to a form of words, especially when for most of them English is not their first language.

#### **Does it matter?**

Of course it does, along with many other initiatives that have been developed over the years. There are, and I guess always will be, some within our profession and sector who not see the bigger picture but all of these initiatives are vital to what I for one think we are trying to achieve i.e. a sustainable profession and sector that is relevant to the future within a global economy. The proof of the pudding is in the eating as they say:

- Without a SIC code Government would not officially recognise that we exist as a sector, industry or profession.
- Without the European standards we would not have the definition or in fact the SIC code! It was one of the factors that was recognised when the application was being processed by the BIFM through ONS.
- Without the BIFM Qualification we would arguably not have the BIFM, which by the way is the biggest national facilities management organisation in the world.
- Without the BIFM we would arguably not have the academic degree choices that are available within the UK representing some of the most mature and diverse academic offerings anywhere in the world.
- Without Euro FM and Global FM we would not have the diversity, knowledge pool and diversity that is being captured from a discipline and geographical perspective.

I could go on. All of these initiatives, alongside the natural driver that is the market, represent significant aspects of an emerging industry and profession. We all have our priorities within this context and we all have our perspectives but the bottom line, and what I believe to be most important, is that they are all happening. We fail to see that, plan for it and most importantly not recognise it at our pearl.

Without hesitation, in my opinion the SIC code it is sadly lacking, from my perspective at least. I believe that it does a good job in defining Facilities Services and it brings clarity to some of the key aspects of this in that Facilities Services represents the combination of the delivery of the support services that combine together to support the organisation. In this regard I am extremely positive as it represents a significant step forward for us all, whether directly or indirectly.

It does nothing for Facilities Management directly nor does it recognise the strategic or tactical nature of our discipline, but it is a start.

Having said that I could make similar comments regarding the European Standards, the BIFM Qualification, some of the educational offerings and competency descriptions that are on offer as well of course regarding the outputs from Euro Fm and Global FM. But the negative is always easy and offers no value in the process. The positive is to get behind such initiatives in a proactive way to challenge, critique and contribute; only in that way will we build the profession and the sector that we all surly want to build.

In conclusion I would congratulate Asset Skills Council and the BIFM as two of the main bodies for making this happen. A SIC code for the facilities management sector, whichever part it is, is a very significant step forward.

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