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# Future of the Facilities Management profession

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**Abstract.** The focus of facility managers used to be mostly about buildings and services. In this new post-Covid world, facility managers play an important role related to people and services. As organizations make significant transitions to hybrid and remote work, facilities management can ensure by its behalf that employees have productive and fulfilling relationships with their co-workers, their organizations, and their workplaces. The purpose of this paper is to identify short-, medium- and long-term professional challenges to facilities management profession caused by an increase in multilocal work. The short-term challenges may be temporary by nature, and they are based on the explorations of multilocal work. The medium-term challenges are based on a more permanent and stable situation. Long-term challenges are more fundamental by nature reflecting the constant transformation of people, processes, and buildings. The qualitative data were gathered from focus group discussions with Facilities Management professionals from five different continents. The data were organized in three different analyses. The short-term, medium-term, and long-term challenges were identified. The findings indicate that the role of a facility manager is becoming more prominent, and the facility manager should perceive this crisis as an opportunity to step up and support the organisation in its strategic policy. Facilities managers should position themselves as the liaison between the physical and the digital worlds so that they are valuable stakeholders in this emerging virtual space. The results of this study contribute to the development of facilities management training and professional development and shed light on future research needs for the profession.

## 1. Introduction

One of the top challenges for facilities management (FM) is in the multilocal and hybrid work practices in user organizations. A mobile worker uses different locations outside the primary workplace for work and communicates - when needed - with others via electronic tools [1]. The location, which is taken care by facilities manager is only one knot in the network of places – for much more mobile workers than before the Covid19 -crisis. We can see the short-term changes in facilities<sup>2</sup> management profession already now. Based on interviews among real estate managers in UK an acceleration towards hybrid working patterns is taking place. While some changes in the current use of offices may be temporary or more dynamic, other adjustments may be permanent (for example working from home, portfolio rationalizations) and trigger structural changes across cities [2]. The medium- and long-term consequences challenged facilities managers.

Facilities management as a profession encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality, comfort, safety, and efficiency of the built environment by integrating people, place, process, and



technology [3]. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) complements this definition by identifying FM as the organizational function which integrates people, place, and process within the built environment to improve the quality of life of people and the productivity of the core business [4].

As organizations make significant transitions to hybrid and remote work, it is up to facility management to ensure that employees have productive and fulfilling relationships with their co-workers, their organizations, and their workplaces. Davidescu et al. [5] highlight that work flexibility must be “business as normal”, and not just anything to be used in times of crisis. The experienced Covid19 - crisis is an opportunity for the facility manager to integrate the new office environment and the needs of employees in terms of multilocal work and new work practices in diverse organizations. Flexibility in facility services is required and the focus is shifting from fixed schedules on quality and results. The former focus of facility managers from buildings and services shifts simultaneously towards people and services.

The purpose of this paper is to identify short-, medium- and long-term professional challenges to facilities management profession caused by increase of the multilocal work. The short-term changes may be temporary by nature, and they are based on the explorations of multilocal work. The medium-term challenges are based on a more permanent and stable situation. Long-term challenges are more fundamental by nature reflecting the constant transformation of people, processes, and buildings

The consequences of multilocal work are at first identified from the literature in section 2 after the introduction. Section 3 provides insight on the qualitative research design. The results are presented in section 4 followed by conclusions.

## 2. Facilities management and multilocal work

Looking back to the development of the facilities management profession, one can refer to the research from Kincaid 1994 [6]. Nearly 20 years ago he stated that the integration of facility management as an effective function for an organization can be achieved by recognizing three key characteristics. First, facility management is a support role within an organization, or a support service to an organization. Secondly facility management must link strategically, tactically, and operationally to other support activities and primary activities to create value. Thirdly, within facility management, managers must be equipped with knowledge of facilities and management to carry out their integrated support role.

The three characteristics have been transformed during the last three decades. Some perspectives in them are repeated annually in business development and industry as well as in research. However, while the global Covid 19 crisis caused a systemic change in the society, the characteristics transformed or renewed. The systemic change made not only facilities managers but also many other stakeholders consider different constituents and interdependencies in the ecosystem of facilities. The additional crisis concerning the economic and environmental issues because of the war in Ukraine have deepened the global crisis. Castaño-Rosa et al. 2022 [7] have investigated how different crises impact the built environment and which solutions have been proven effective, particularly as a response to multiple crises. Findings highlight that the main solutions that provide resilience to multiple crises in the built environment, are (1) green and healthy infrastructures; (2) adaptable infrastructures; and (3) equitable and inclusive infrastructures. The findings provide understanding about the scale of systemic change in society in the time of crisis, when all layers of the built environment are reshaped. However, the focus of this paper is on one phenomenon of Covid 19 crises, *i.e. what is the impact of multilocal work to the facilities management profession in the future.*

Since the facilities management encompasses the operational, tactical, and strategic levels of an organization's support activities, the domain of the facilities management is very broad. However, Madroñal-Ortiz et al [7] focused on the different approaches to the role of facilities manager that helps support the main activity of an organization. They identified six main areas and 37 main functions. The six main areas are: Asset and Maintenance Management; Real Estate and Property Management; Energy and Sustainability Management; Corporate Project Management; Workplace Management; and Facilities Services Management. A validation of the proposal was requested through an expert

consultation in facility management in Latin America, which reached 94% approval. This proposal adjusts to the evolution of facilities management today with a more strategic approach without losing the relationship between the management of people, space, technology, and the process of the support activities of an organization.

The birth of multi-locational work in the context of the information industry dates back to the late 1960s, when the development of telecommunication technologies initiated a discussion of substituting communications for transportation in work-related activities. The four main concepts of multi-locational work that have appeared in the literature nearly ever since then form the platform from which mobile work has been performed over the past few decades until today. These concepts are organisational office, home offices, mobile workplaces, and flexible offices [8]. It is challenging to understand the needs of each individual user of facilities also including the service provision and the nature of the work environment. Additionally, the ways how to use of workplaces and the significance of the digital work environment are an important feature of the post-pandemic world [9.]

The integration of physical and digital work environments is playing a major role in multilocal work. Limited connections and Internet access are the main hindrances when collaborating from different locations in addition to varying working demands in local contexts [1]. Bröchner et al [10] state that megatrends outlined in the 1980s still shape how FM develops. Digitalization supports sustainability not only through workplace change and building design but also through performance measurement, certification schemes and an awareness of the wider urban context. One need to increase the knowledge about thorough use of technology, data, and digital platforms to manage and provide services. Digital twins, simulations and artificial intelligence are yet underused resource in facilities management [13].

The support function of facilities management is now in the context of multiple locations. The users' needs are changing, and totally new need will arise. The dynamics of different user profiles is changing because the work tasks, life situations and user preferences vary. Not everyone can or want to work in the multilocal way. Based on research finding Campbell [11] states, that research traditionally focuses on hard facilities management; in contrast facilities management outcomes are heavily dependent on the way end users interact with organizational services and equipment. In practice the intuitive and in-depth facilities management knowledge about end users has yet to be captured and formalized through research.

All in all, three characteristics of facility management and six main areas of it resonate while organizations and employees work increasingly in a multilocal manner post-Covid. The core functions which need to be supported have changed. Technology, sustainability, and human-centricity drive the change, which does not include fully new facility management actions, but the existing progress will continue. According to Tagliaro and Migliore [14] positive and negative outcomes of working from home during Covid 19 -crisis confirm previous studies on remote working. The value of existing offices as collaboration and socialization hubs invites companies to rethink their key functions and layouts. Multilocal working emerges with pros and cons that should both be acknowledged in future real estate strategies in greater details to enhance diversity and inclusion. Questioning on established work practices and workplace arrangements, while deeply investigating the diversity of workers' needs and preferences, is an opportunity that multilocal work and working from home urged to take. The evidence-based approach is precious to inform real estate strategies and work policies as well as facilities management in operational, tactical, and strategic levels.

### **3. Method and research design**

The research is qualitative by nature. The data were gathered from focus group discussions with the facilities management professionals from five different continents. According to Denscombe [12] focus group consists of a small group of people, who are brought together by a trained moderator to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings, and ideas about a topic. A focus group interview provides a setting for the relatively homogeneous group to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer. The group of

experts gathered to the first international forum on FM in Brazil. The sample included senior facility management professionals who had experience on business, education, and research.

The interview data were collected on 32 key points. The interviewees produced also written material after the workshop. The data were organized in the first analysis under six thematic macro titles: education, people, places, process, standardization, and technology. Then, the second analysis was conducted by clustering professional challenges to the facilities management profession caused by an increase in multilocational work.

In the third analysis the identified challenges were structured to short-, medium- and long-term challenges and development steps for the profession. The short-term changes are temporary by nature, and they are based on the explorations of multilocational work. The criteria to set the data to this cluster was: The perspective was not new as such to the discussion of facilities management profession but the topics were weighed differently than before the time of the global crisis.

The medium-term challenges are based on more permanent and stable situation in user organizations. The criteria to set the data to this cluster was: The datasets which indicated the structural change beyond the built environment and its service provision as well as structural changes in the user organizations and the society.

The long-term changes are more fundamental by nature reflecting the constant transformation of people, processes, and buildings. The criteria to include the data in this cluster was: The topics which included perspectives of global development and transformation.

#### 4. Results

The short-term challenges include issues that have been so far weaker signals for the development of the profession. Additionally, there are topics that have been strong already for a longer time. The mid-term development is providing insights to the era when the life after crisis is somewhat stable. The long-term challenges are focusing on issues, which are requiring a longer time to develop. In what follows, direct but grammatically modified examples from the interviews are presented for each category in *Italics* to underline the main points.

##### 4.1. Short-term challenges and development

When the changes and explorations into multilocational work are taking place and organisations are looking for new practices on the organisational, team and individual level, it is important to support the change. Facility management needs to react immediately to experience management, sustainability issues in remote work, human-centric approach to capture the new needs of the user organisations. Additionally, the inspiration towards the technology is important because there is still unused potential in the digital facility management.

The importance of experience management is increasing. The experience is a fundamental element of the service: *“Creativity in the innovation of human relationships and the way the services are delivered are always welcome to produce positive changes in the workplace.”*

The experience management has been on the agenda of facilities management also earlier, but the meaning and significance of the workplace is changing. One need to manage the experience in the context of isolation and lockdowns as well as in the context of more flexible ways of working than earlier in many organisations. The new context provides the wider perspective for understanding of the connection between people and buildings: *“Serviceability, Usability, and Influencing behaviours must be on the radar of all modern Facilities Managers to improve outcomes.”* The ease of use and in-time services as well as services on demand will increase. This requires flexibility in service provision as well as in service agreements.

The change in organisations was seen important driver not only to new ways to work but also to sustainable ways of work:

As the COVID-19 pandemic has already pushed companies and organizations to reflect on their practices, it provides a good opportunity to create workplaces that are more human-centered and

sustainable by placing more emphasis on employees' needs and the well-being of individuals and community - FM has a major role towards co-creation of user-centric workplaces.

The triple-bottom line of sustainability has been important for facilities management decades, but the emphasis to social sustainability has been now increasing as a consequence of the experienced crisis.

The global crisis has been increasing the learning mode within organisations and this sets challenges for participatory approach within facilities management: *“Workplace development is about collaboration, co-creation, co-commitment, and co-learning - both with and without the help of digital tools.”* Again, the participatory approach is not new issue on the agenda of Facilities management but as a short-term challenge one can identify the increased weight of co-creation especially in terms of co-learning. The new, even unknown user needs will require new, yet even unknown services and solutions from the facilities management. The learning is part of the shared change process. *“Facilities Managers must understand the value of the change processes as part of the workplace solution and its ownership.”* The ownership of the workplace solution in the multilocal work is different than the ownership of workplace solution for the more fixed work practices. The role of facilities management as a change agent is more connected to the systematic change of society.

The significance of supporting people was mentioned in the interview several times – this is the topic, which is not brought to the discussion only due to the changes by crisis. Additionally, it is not only an operational issue, but it provides a strategic position to facility management profession: *“Positioning FM as a key enabler towards achieving client needs and core business objectives. Facilities Managers are critical to organizations, managing the 2nd largest asset for the organization which supports and enables the most important asset: staff.”*

The role of technology is increasing rapidly, and the FM-profession should *“have a hunger to align all technological trends and innovations”*. It is evident-that the three-dimensional digital reality will have a more significant role in the near future:

The workplace is a system including physical, digital, social, and mental spaces, places, and realities - FM need to collaborate with human resource management and ICT-department in workplace development and since people will have more options to choose the time and place to work, it is important to design workplaces where people feel comfortable and variety of areas for diverse work. The ecosystem of digital service provision is an essential stakeholder group for facilities managers. It is crucial to identify the capabilities needed in future facilities management. All this sets new requirements to the education. The content of education and competencies need to be future-oriented. *“We must acquire the necessary education, leadership skills, and business acumen, to become technology savvy.”* In the systemic change one can also question the significance of the facilities management profession. *“Sustaining the FM profession depends on investments made today in the education of future generations of Facilities Managers.”*

All in all, the short-term challenges and development of the profession are naturally construed to the existing strengths: *“FM is always about adding value and supporting the core business, regardless of how different it is applied and practiced in various sectors of the industry.”* However, all the identified short-term challenges are redefining the agenda of Facilities management by setting stronger weight to experience management, social sustainability and wellbeing, co-learning and understanding the systemic change. Additionally, the stakeholders and ecosystem play more important role than earlier. The never-changing principle in facilities management was stated in the interview:

*“Aligning FM with a demand organization’s business strategy, objectives, and plans to provide a workplace that supports the core business, safeguards user well-being, and raises productivity.”*

#### 4.2. Medium-term challenges and development

After multilocal working has found its tracks in the society facility management profession will focus on space segments, which are not so fragmented and fixed any more. Digital development is setting requirements to the profession in the service provision in multiple ways: in the operations, in the performance measurement and in the management in general. The ecosystem of facility management will include the new actors.

One need to be prepared to the dynamic built environment, which is more a network of places and which is serving in a new way the multilocal work.

Future work will consist of a combination of work from home, the office, and various places for remote work, and the design of workplaces is based on the value of being together in person, however, the number of days in the week in the office can vary among different users - FM can identify users' profiles based on fixed or flexible time and use of space.

The service provision of workplaces will change its nature because the traditional space segments will be mixed. *"Networks of places are always changing in a complex world at a fast speed. FM is the way to assure the reduction of the gaps between needs/desires and what we have in a dynamic built environment."* This is a medium-term challenge, because the question is not only about the transformation of the space segments but also a transformation of structures in the administration of built environment and its services. There will be certainly differences in the different industries, disciplines as well as in between private and public actors. The understanding of the user needs is important but in the long run it is also important to understand the underlying systems.

Learning how to listen and talk appropriately with different organization levels is a kind of concierge service for users and a strategy piece for the administrative board at the same time. Influencing the top management should be a priority, to ensure they understand and support our efforts to meet organizational objectives.

The medium-term goals for the development of facilities management profession include the strategic approach, but one need to be aware of the larger changes in built environment: *"Establishing and maintaining an overall approach to FM on the strategic level."* It is for sure that the policies and protocols will transform:

*"The FM profession is gaining significant recognition in emerging economies and FM practitioners must up their games to play at the strategic levels within their organization."* The markets of facilities management will involve globally.

The medium-term considerations also question the capability of the profession in terms of development: *"Our profession has not progressed as much as it should have, with most of us remaining outside the strategic decision-making of our organizations."* The ways how the structure of society e.g. in terms of logistics and urban structure will transform provide new challenges for the profession of the facilities management. *"Kinetic/Moving Real Estate Assets are being developed as a cutting-edge solution for dense urban environments (transportation)."* One need to prepare also to the business models where the facilities management is not only connected to fixed real estates with long term agreements in service provision: *"Facilities Managers will need to learn how to manage non-stationary 'real estate' as a new key value as a profession."* It is also essential to understand the new avenues digital platforms will provide to profession: *"An understanding of value creation that digital worlds bring to the workplace will be critical to the future of work and Facilities Managers are positioned to be valuable stakeholders in this emerging virtual space."* The more embedded the digital and physical environments are more integrated way they need to be managed:

As blockchain technologies and solutions are integrated into virtual worlds in the Metaverse, Facilities Managers should educate themselves about the valuations of digital real estate and how physical performance measures will affect both digital and physical assets (digital Real Estate & FM).

Facility Managers need to be able to indicate the new value and impact of the performance. The frameworks can provide tools how to reimage facilities management:

For the value of sound FM practice to be planned, delivered, and realized, we need to provide a performance framework for the measurement of success and improvement. We can use IoT inside the FMS (Facility Management System) of organizations (including metaverse). Provide low-cost or no-cost resources to support FM Professionals with Data.

Smart environment and even digital environment are part of the future of facilities management profession. Sustainability has its role in the value adding performance: *"Continue supporting the development of new technologies that help reduce carbon emissions or create clean energy."* *"The*

profession need to be ready to active role in translating the upper level environmental goals to the professional practice:

Facilities Managers are key professionals for proper implementation of ESG practices and the SDG of the United Nations.” Additionally, it is possible to learn of global references to develop the profession: “Recognize (learn & adopt) that all the ISO 41000 series standardization is the base (foundational) for all Facilities Managers around the world. The ISO 41000 series of Standards sets the competence base for professional recognition of the management practice of FM. The ISO 41000 series will assist FM professionals to move the delivery of FM from a commodity-focused output to one of meeting the FM needs of the demand organization with measurable, sustainable outcomes. The standards will act as a reset tool.

The middle-term challenges indicate the structural changes which are important to transform to the new facilities management practices and protocols. The structures of workplaces, cities, real estates, and value chains are the elemental changes in the society which have the impact to the facilities management of the future.

#### 4.3. Long-term challenges and development

Long-term development of the profession is based on the continuous change globally. Facilities management has been led by western countries: USA and Europe. However, it is time to have increase in global practices. The global actors have developed the profession and now we need to look also to new continents to learn: “*The Global FM community should pay attention to the growth witnessed around the African continent - new amazing city developments, partnerships, and collaboration are key in the new phase of FM development in Africa.*” “The strength of facilities management in this transformation is in its multidisciplinary nature. Facilities management has been based on diverse skills and in the long run the important issues to focus are the resilience and human-centered approach. “*FM is about maintaining continuous improvement of people’s quality of life through the development of better built environments and human experiences. Interpreting users’ and other key stakeholders’ needs and translating them into requirements for FM.*” The global approach is connected to values and cross-cultural understanding:

Appreciate the evolution of FM over time so it can be leveraged for further growth and development of the profession. We must be careful not to be distracted by “bright shiny objects” and trends of the day and build the foundations of excellence in FM practices.

Next to the national cultures one need to consider the long-term challenges connected to the digital and physical reality and their cultures: “*Facilities Managers should position themselves as the liaison between the physical and digital worlds (digital twins & the metaverse).*”

#### 4.4. Summing up the results

The data-analysis provide three different kinds of challenges to the profession of facilities management:

1. Short term challenges which focus on emphasizing the topics which are not new ones but the weight of them is different after global crisis.
2. Middle term challenges which focus on highlighting the systemic and structural changes in the organisations, society and built environment as well as in the service provision.
3. Long term challenges which focus on global initiatives in the markets but also in global interconnectedness e.g., in resilience and responsibility in environmental issues and impacts.

Three layers of challenges can be used both in the development of business and education for facilities management.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of this study contribute to the development of facilities management training and professional development. Our study focused on both the future of facilities management profession and the multilocal work. Using the focus-group interview method, we studied the expert opinions about

the future of facilities management. The paper highlights short-term, medium-term, and long-term development of the profession.

Our study has demonstrated how the existing topics stay in the agenda of facilities management and they are even stronger after the Covid-19 crisis. However, we were able to identify new topics, especially related to new spatial concepts and significance of technology, which will have impact to facility management profession especially in medium-term development. Also, working environments can have a significant role in so-called approach crafting or avoidance crafting of work [16], which consequently can be seen as another layer for facilities management to consider.

The weakness of the study could be seen to relate to its illustrative nature. The scenario building tools or other ways to be more specific with the short-, medium- and long-term development could have increased the quality. Additionally, the general approach without difference e.g., between different industries or organizational structure decrease the reliability.

With its overall focus on development of the facilities management profession, our work offers insights into the future competence building by discussing aspects of new capabilities needed. Likewise, in this paper, we have focused on the context of multilocal work.

Future studies could investigate how facility managers' actions may influence the wider field of built environment – that is, the broader group of partner companies, and the end users of the premises. In future research, it would also be interesting to study diverse organizations to determine how they craft their organizational culture, new user needs and multilocal work practices. A follow-up question is thus, how sustainability affects the value-adding elements of facilities management in the future.

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