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Service Delivery in FM: Enhancement or Enchantment?

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Abstract

Relationship management in FM is arguably essential in terms of service delivery (Coenen & Nwanna 2014). With the growth of knowledge workers, increasing socio-economic demand on space and wider political demands, the purpose of this paper is to position FM firmly as a service (as opposed to building maintenance) based industry. It uses the concepts of Disneyization to explore the elements existing within this subjective area, and then plot the contractual relationship accordingly.

This stance is novel, borrowing the concept from marketing and tying it with storytelling research to understand the different mechanisms and evolving trends of service delivery within the UK FM industry. The paper therefore seeks to utilise the role of corporate storytelling (Gabriel 2004) within FM, investigating if it is an unspoken core and unique disciplinary competence (enhancement) (Solnet et al 2008), or just smoke and mirrors, illustrative of an increasingly commoditised service in the face of wider economic pressures (enchantment).

Scenario based interviews were held to investigate personal tales of service delivery and applied across to FM practice. This allowed the basic delivery mechanisms to be identified and mapped. Concepts of disneyization were then identified, which occurred naturally within the rhetoric as opposed to being specifically asked for within the interview setting. All participants are current, UK-based FM practitioners.

The findings indicated that the use of disneyization is not only useful for understanding the current nature of FM, but also for plotting what expectations are within a practical service delivery environment.

Keywords: Service delivery, Disneyization, organisational storytelling

Introduction

The debate over what Facilities Management (FM) is; what it should be and what it is forecast to become are not new deliberations (Price 2001), and yet they are influential in understanding the fluid and evolving nature of the discipline. This paper focuses on the service delivery nature of FM, using the concept of disneyization to uncover not only how UK practitioners see their roles, but to practically align this to contractual positioning. The intangible nature of FM delivery that exists is balanced with the more traditional, easy-to-measure elements which are arguably associated with the discipline, emphasized by its close association with the world of outsourcing (Ikediashi et al, 2014).

Aspects of storytelling are utilised in order to explore this intangible side, pulling through individual personal stories and applying them into an FM organisational setting. This personal, narrative element is arguably an under-used element within FM, despite recent research indicating the importance of 'the little things' (Price et al 2013). This 'enchantment' would assist in providing FM with a distinctive quality from other secondary service professions, but could also start to represent core competency in terms of overall FM service delivery.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the concept of organisational storytelling is presented and placed in context with the empirical research. This provides the foundations for the specific theory of disneyization to be introduced, which is broken down into specific themes and aligned with existing FM theory. Empirical research in the form of scenario (story-led) based interviews with current, practicing FM's within the UK market is then analysed which suggests a strong correlation with global service mechanisms. Specific areas are then mapped out and the implications for FM are presented.

Organisational storytelling

There has been much work done on the importance of recognising organisational storytelling and the feasibility of using storytelling as a research tool. Forster et al, recognise that storytelling is "an integral part of the human experience ... dealing with issues of self-identity, group membership, past and future and good and evil" (1999, pg. 11), with Gabriel and Connell positioning it as an effective tool in the contemporary world of 'information overload' (2010). It is increasingly evident that organisations are not passive in the creation of narratives, but can orchestrate them proactively in order to achieve a specific purpose (Leung and Fong 2011).

The particular use of stories also allows the multiplicity of values and interests (Abma, 2003) to be made explicit in terms of transferring the recognised, positive elements of service identified in the story into the delivery of FM. Elements can be embellished to illustrate what the storyteller believes is an important point, as opposed to strictly relaying the facts of an event. Therefore, enhancement is arguably always an element within this form of communication, leading to possible elements of enchantment.

The term enchantment itself presents two meanings. It can indicate a more malevolent side in terms of presenting something that is not real - a manipulating force that can fool and dupe. Although this element is recognised, it is the definition of enchantment to mean "an aura of authentic presence, resisting rationalisation and promoting creative social connections" (Endrissat et al 2015, pg. 1557) that aligns to this research. It presents an interesting insight when FM as a profession is increasingly recognised as one that is under "constant

reformation in accordance with the development and the changing needs of the core business, and on the other side a market in considerable growth and consolidation" (Jensen, 2010, pg. 383). This would indicate the need for something more than the current modus operandi of enhancement, supported by evidence that indicates an 'image deficiency' (Von Felten et al 2014), aggravating a possible impending 'skills famine' (BIFM, FM World 10.02.2015). To facilitate this positioning, the framework of Disneyization will be utilised to situate the stories in terms of delivery.

The Disneyization of FM

Disneyization highlights how the world of management has become increasingly global. It is distinct from 'disneyfication', which implies elements of infantilization and distortion (Bryman 2004), forcing the eternal 'happy ending'. Rather, it is the "process by which the principles of the Disney parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of society" (Bryman, 2004: 1). It identifies four elements: dedifferentiation of consumption, performative labour, theming and merchandising which will be detailed in terms of their perceived manifestation in FM.

The dedifferentiation, or hybrid consumption is the general trend whereby the forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres become interlocked with each other and are increasing difficulty to distinguish" (Bryman, 2004, p. 57). In terms of FM, it is formed in both the delivery and the services aspects of FM. At an operational level it may apply to the de-skilling of frontline operatives, in order to allow a more universal offer in terms of tasks i.e. the security function would also complete cleaning as multipurpose site operatives rather than a focus on a single role.

In terms of service, this manifests in the increased use of 'bundled' contracts (AMA Research 2014), and the evolution of Total FM packages (TFM). Following the definition of enhancement, dedifferentiation takes the traditional FM services, and adds new elements to aid improvement, such as event management into cleaning etc. Essentially, the hybrid consumption theory shows how FM maximises the possibility of pull through business by presenting an option to the client that they may not have otherwise considered buying or being associated with FM. Extreme manifestations are the creation of a destination "somewhere that people go to as a significant venue that will keep them there for some time" (Bryman 2004, pg. 58), moving from an enchantment of existing services, to a unified enchanted area that provides all, and more.

This is arguably connected to an increase in performative labour, where "the rendering of work by management and employees alike is akin to a theatrical performance in which the workplace is construed as similar to a stage" (Bryman 2004, pg. 103). By applying this to FM service delivery, it is not only the initial impressions of a building (a clean and welcoming reception area), but also within the ongoing people interactions (a smiling, named and helpful receptionist). The staging element is also visible in FM rhetoric, with front of house and back of house areas, often with uniforms/costumes to match, supported by the semantics of having a 'role' instead of a job. Scripted elements are also visible, such as telephone responses, voicemail and out of hours email notifications.

There is a heavy implication of control of the individual's behaviour to represent the collective organisation, and that this performative element is emotionally draining if it is a shallow representation. However, genuine efforts on behalf of a service provider (in-house or

outsource) to motivate their staff arguably leads to job commitment and therefore organisational loyalty. Ultimately, this emotional connection would result in a genuine, credible (enhanced) level of service to perhaps a more memorable experience (enchantment).

The third element is theming: the "application of a narrative to institutions or locations ... which provides a veneer of meaning and symbolism" (Bryman 2004: 15). The narrative in this case is the discipline of FM itself. The multidisciplinary nature of FM could arguably dilute theming, which in turn may aggravate the confusion over FM's identity within contemporary organisations. Indeed, on the surface there appears to be distinct dichotomies within the industry rhetoric (i.e. In-house/Outsource, Hard FM/Soft FM, Core/Non-Core), and the dedifferentiation would indicate the presence of many different logos and departmental branding.

However, by using theming, aligned identities of the industry can be illustrated, by looking at some of the metaphors that the FM industry uses. Specifically, the idea that FM is the 'Cinderella Industry' is widespread¹. It highlights the association with 'dirty work' (Cassell & Bishop 2014), with the metaphor of the ashes, but also the 'hidden' theme that aligns with FM.

However, this also pulls through a magical element, an invisible force that balances and restores. A guest speaker at a BIFM conference "talked about an army of 'Fairy Folk' magically maintaining the workplace while everyone was asleep" (FMJ, 2010). This magical, creative association is arguably not the emphasised element of this theme, but places FM in a position that resists a commoditised, off the shelf delivery through scripted staff, into a service of creativity, and inherent, core knowledge.

In terms of the built environment that FM manages, theming would align with the creation of a physical landscape that reflects the identity and lifestyles that the company represents (van Marrewijk and Yanow 2010). This also links to the growing presence of customer co-creation, collaboration and connections (Vargo and Lusch 2004) to borrow from the domain of marketing, which may prove to influence the next evolution of partnership-based contracts.

The last element of the disneyization theory is that of merchandising, "the promotion of goods in the form of or bearing copyright images and logos" (Bryman 2004, pg. 79). BIFM have created 'FM TV' (<http://www.bifm.org.uk/bifm/about/facilities>), and there are FM based games and simulation packages. However, the most visible merchandising is arguably the staff themselves, and the logos they wear, a point often highlighted in TUPE arrangements. There is also the common stereotype of a FM uniform - the fleece. Dominate brands, logos and merchandising is appearing more and more within public arenas. Linking with the concept of performative labour, it is the idea of FM companies presenting staff with 'a way of life' - a manner in which staff are developed to deliver a service that can become a unique selling point in the overall contract. In this, "staff are trained to pick up on clues from customers that can later be used to surprise the customer" (Solnet 2008, pg. 186), such as a housekeeper overhearing a child's birthday and arranging (corporate) balloons to be left in the room.

¹ BIFM (FM World, 2011), IFM (<http://www.ifm.net/documents/file/whitepaper/FM%20realising%20the%20value.pdf>) and RICS (<http://www.rics.org/Documents/RICS%20Strategic%20FM%20Case%20Studies.pdf>).

By the use of merchandising, FM can not only create an enchanted service for the clients, but also empower staff to want to work within more 'enchanted' spaces, not necessary being visible in physical presence, but in trusted service. The FM industry is increasingly focusing on client loyalty and value propositions (Coenen, & Nwana, 2014), pulling on the idea of FM offering a 'brokerage role' (Heng et al 2005), and the idea that value will be through the delivery not only of the service, but of something highly memorable. The idea of merchandising in this sense brings to light the focus on the staff that are to deliver these new types of services.

In closing, the concept of disneyization reveals many different insights into the service of FM. It represents a system, concerned "with the diffusion of modes of delivery of goods and service... it is a means of providing an efficient and highly predictable product" (Bryman 2004 pg. 162, italics original). Viewed within an FM context, it allows different avenues of service delivery to be explored within the confines of contractual arrangements, and in the next section we explore how many of these concepts are already visible, or feasibly possible, within the UK FM industry, and how they affect service delivery mechanisms.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with three UK client-side facilities managers (although it is acknowledged that some of the companies represented operate globally). Anonymity was ensured, and the hour long interviews were later transcribed, and identified numerically (P1= Participant one).

Although semi-structured, the main approach was scenario-based, with the participants being asked to describe a personal experience of good customer service. This was then probed in terms of identifying the elements they deemed important to allow an insight into the individual's perception of the event they had selected. The mechanism of storytelling captured the more fluid, emotive service experience- both enhancement and enchantment elements. The format of personal stories also allowed the learning from current or past experiences to be preserved and transferred (Leung and Fong 2011), in this case to an FM service delivery example.

The elements of disneyization were not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, allowing the stories not only to flow, but to ensure that the concepts were not being specifically targeted, but were embedded within the experiences that the FM practitioners identified.

Findings

The four elements of disneyization were all visible within the research. In terms of dedifferentiation of service delivery, there was clear evidence that a number of FM services were being delivered together ("single source supplier") in a variety of packages. This in itself is unsurprising, but the dominate thoughts in terms of the blurring of services was generally a positive move in the discipline. At the operative level it translated into widening skills as opposed to deskilling: "It's all about getting people to do the obvious things" P1, and presenting opportunities throughout the delivery chain "*the skill set ... people have to have now is not just technical in the areas that they're responsible for, but to have a good understanding of the business*" P3".

Although the segregation of services were assigned to roles such as a clear division between service provider and service receiver, there was a call for this dedifferentiation to decrease at this level "it would be brilliant if....a contractor [*could walk up to a client*] and say I want to learn more about your business, I want to be able to operate my business so that it absolutely fully, fully works alongside your business", P3.

However, the recent poor economic climate resulted in some contracts offering a multitude of services in a style that could align itself to dedifferentiation the thing is, at the moment, it *has been like a "dog eat dog", but everybody wants to work, you know, everybody wants the contract, so of course they'll fight for it, rather than holding their hands up and saying, can't do it for that amount of money, sorry, we have to walk away at this point, we're not going to get the service that we... which we want to give you*, P1.

In terms of performative labour, the research revealed the importance of the visible staff and the recognition of how important these roles are. This was visible across all the interviews:

"[people] who actually want to do a better job and who actually want to be involved, not just in the contract piece, but they actually want to make the area better, the workplace better, whether it be through cleaning, *maintenance, landscaping, administration, whatever that facility's piece* maybe is, but they want to be part of the bigger, wider client team, rather than to be known as the contractor, so, yeah.P3.

To support this, schemes to encourage staff in terms of increased service delivery were evident: "getting our people to understand effectively who their customer is and understand what their needs are" P1, but this was also motivated in terms of staff morale, recognition and also to increase personal job satisfaction. The idea of performative labour would arguably have a natural alignment with those 'frontline' services as the name would imply, but there were indications that it became more malignant at a managerial level "sometimes I *get the feeling they just didn't bother thinking about it*" (P3).

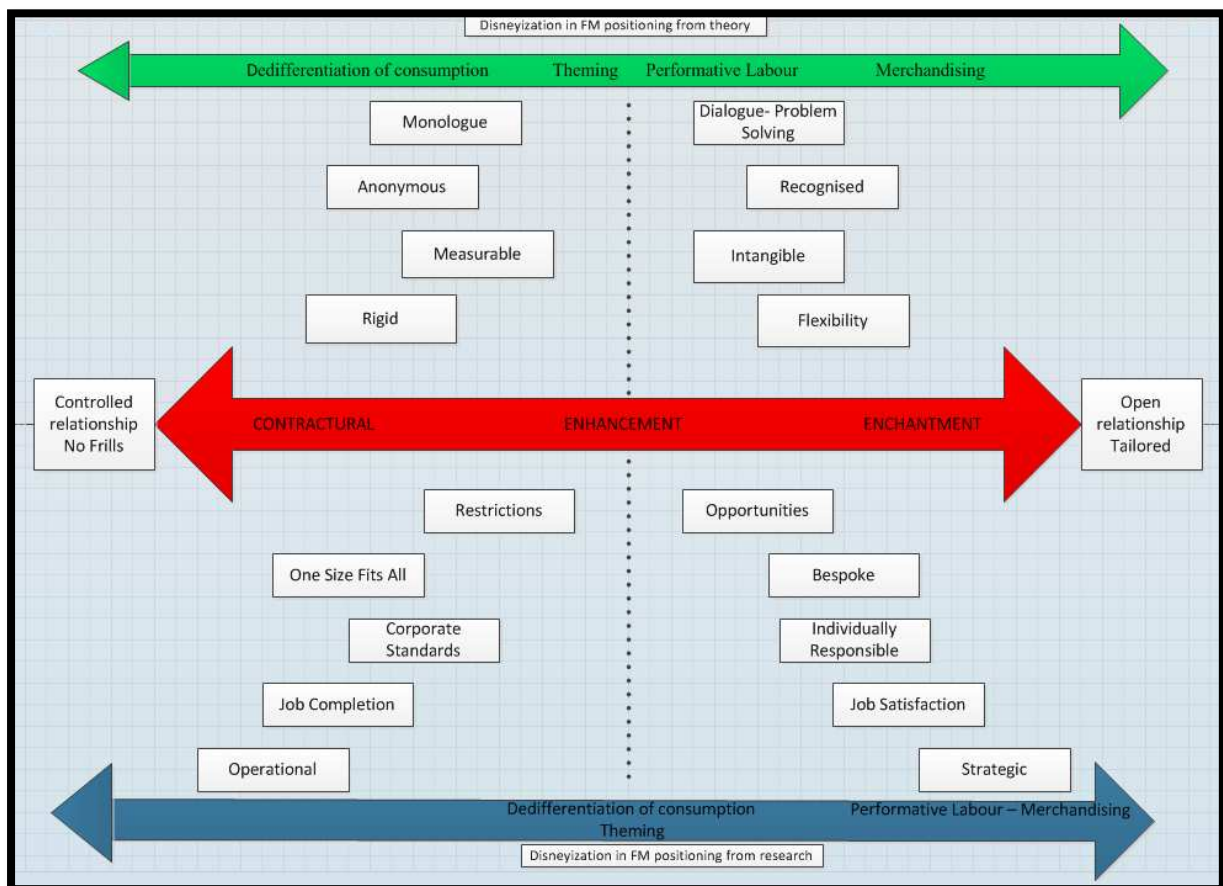
There were elements of certain roles having scripted elements, with one participant commenting that their engineers were given cards on detailing frequently asked questions (P1), but these were viewed more as a helpful tool rather than an enforced script. The idea of being on 'stage' was visible in terms of different levels of service being allocated into different physical areas, with different corresponding behaviours and costumes being directly stated in one interview: " well, she's just a bit up-market. She is front of house, isn't she? She's not the normal (P2). This would also dispute the visible implementation of dedifferentiation, which is also supported by themes of service roles "because sometimes organisations believe that they can probably beat up a soft service contractor more than they can beat up a *hard service contractor, just because of the nature of the work that they're doing. So I think it's as bad on both sides and both are as important* (P3)".

The personal stories revealed the significance of being made to feel important, and treated as an individual person rather than part of a collective customer body. When these were aligned to FM service delivery, many of these themes remerged under the terminology of interaction, transparency and partnership. Consistency in service delivery was also evident, alongside a narrative of cost - "*that's been the driver, cost. For all you say it isn't, it is*" (P2).

The idea of merchandising arguably would be better suited to a more observational technique than interviews, but by aligning performative labour with the concept, this widens merchandising to include the front line staff and their kit:

"Usually the complaints tend to come from where *you've got evening cleaners* who come in after people have gone. But I think in the areas where the cleaner is *visually there in the daytime, you don't tend to get the complaints as much.....* a couple of years ago, we went away from using polish ..., *'cause polish doesn't* actually clean the dirt off a desk. It just puts a layer over the top and it looks *shiny. But people have the perception their desks weren't being cleaned because* when they came in, *they couldn't smell polish... We use polish now, but it's* mainly just so that people have that impression that their desk has been cleaned" (P2).

To summarise, the different elements as identified were then mapped as illustrated in Figure One:



A relationship defined by the contract is illustrated on the left hand side, with the boxes identifying the main characteristics of the service delivery. Disneyization theory (green bar) would indicate that dedifferentiation would be evident, but this is disproved by the research (blue bar). Enhancement is placed in the middle, leading to an 'enchanted' contract aligning to a more open, yet tailored relationship and pulls on the specific areas of performative labour and merchandising. From a service provider point of view, figure one can be used to

map the position of the client, and therefore the associated tools to aid service delivery, and vice versa.

To conclude, all the elements of disneyization were evident in the interviews. Dedifferentiation is arguably the least applicable, being considered as upskilling, but there was little evidence of pull through business operating in a proactive way. The narrative saw some themes common to the industry, although much of this was framed in future tense as opposed to current conditions. Cost was a common theme, indicating the industry may be faced with trying to maintain and enhance existing services, rather than investigating possible routes to enchantment, as illustrated in figure one (middle). The importance of performative labour was clearly recognised, and manifested itself as genuine and therefore positive phenomena, with perhaps an indication that it is not consistent across hierarchical levels.

It is unsurprising that FM in practice within the UK has, at its bedrock, a strong contractual element. By applying the concepts of disneyization, more intangible elements become visible, illustrating that there is a clear focus on enhancing already existing services, but also demonstrating a possible shift to more of an enchanting service - giving credibility to the profession, balancing the need for consistency whilst resisting rationalisation by developing creative social connections. If physical space starts to fade in terms of organisational priority, it is supposed in this paper that FM's understanding of its function through using mechanisms such as enchantment will be one of the vehicles to solidify the discipline and influence the next evolution of service contracts.

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