

THE SOCIALISATION OF OUTSOURCED EMPLOYEES IN FACILITIES MANAGEMENT: A RESEARCH AGENDA

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There have been several attempts made to understand organisational socialisation in the wider construction industry, but there is a paucity of related research in the FM field. Little research has established the degree of congruence between outsourced employees and the FM companies they work for, and the part they play in the delivery of organisational goals and objectives. Today's outsourced employees are not always aware of the important role they play in service delivery and are not typically socialised by either the service provider or the client organisation. Socialisation can help them make this connection. This will increase the opportunities of service providers and clients to maximise the productivity of the employee in achieving their major aim as a company – customer satisfaction. There is an exploration of the concept: 'FM cultural fit' which is the ability of outsourced employees to integrate into the organisational culture of the client organisation. 'FM cultural fit' is important to ensure that outsourced employees are able to understand the client organisation and deliver on their company goals in addition to fulfilling the terms of their contract. It is a concept based on the application of organisational culture and socialisation theory to FM. This agenda details the important factors and forms the basis of a larger research project, so the methodology only shows the expected process before data is collected. The agenda establishes the dynamics that exist between the four interwoven players (service provider, the client, the employee and the customer) and how these relationships affect/effect efficient service delivery and customer satisfaction. It also shows the importance of an organisational socialisation process for contracted staff to enable them deliver at maximum capability.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, facilities management, organisational culture, organisational socialisation, service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Facilities management (FM) has grown far beyond the initial borders of caretaker to involve a wide variety of duties one of which is managing the outsourcing of contracts in today's offices (Cotts *et al.* 2010). This is due to the increasing need for permanent

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staff to concentrate on the core objectives of the organisation and to cut down avoidable expenses. Outsourcing non-core services such as maintenance has made it easier for organisations to keep their facilities in top shape and improve their output but it also introduces outsourced employees who in most cases have no understanding of the company's goals. Such situations can affect the perception and satisfaction of customers if they are not happy with service provision as all employees are seen as members/staff of the organisation.

This has created the issue of need for outsourced employees that are socialised in the same manner as their in-house colleagues, but little research shows that this is a reality. There is therefore a need to research what is currently available in this area and how to improve current practices. If outsourced employees are socialised, they will fit better in the client organisations they currently provide service to. This paper first discusses the novelty of the research area, research aim and objectives. Next, it gives a theoretical background on organisational culture and socialisation and their relevance to FM and outsourced services, after which it attempts to justify "FM cultural fit". The rest of the paper proposes a detailed methodology after which it concludes.

Novelty of research

A detailed research of concluded studies has shown that no prior study has been done in applying a generic socialisation theory to FM or outsourced staff in FM. Outsourced staff is a vital part of the facilities management sector and are an essential key in attaining quality service delivery and ensuring customer satisfaction. They form the bedrock of the service staff; cleaners, maintenance engineers, caterers, security and increasingly front desk/customer care. They are more often than not competent in their various fields and understand their duties but how prepared are they for the set-down cultures that exist in the companies they are outsourced to?

This research's main question thus: *Is there a widely accepted and established socialisation process for FM companies and business organisations to ensure that outsourced FM staff understand company culture and are able to portray this understanding when dealing with customers?*

Research aim

The background discussed above shows where the gaps in the industry are. Therefore, the aim of this study is: *To develop a research methodology that will be adopted in investigating the research question stated above.*

Research objectives

To achieve the research aim set out above, the following research objectives will be met.

1. Understand organisational culture and organisational socialisation and its application to Facilities Management.
2. Examine the role of outsourced services in FM and understand the need to socialise outsourced FM employees.
3. Introduce a plan of work which will be critical to answering the research question.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Culture

Culture is not an easy term to define, mostly due to the different meanings it has in diverse contexts (Edgar and Sedgwick 2002). A useful definition in this context is “A pattern of basic assumptions-invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems of external adaptation and internal integration.”(Schein 1985) Societal culture expresses its own purposes and meanings through work and communication (Edgar and Sedgwick 2002). It is what becomes accepted as the norm for everyone under its influence and provides the standard by which they relate to their environment. Culture is the underlying bedrock that defines a society and provides the moral, social, religious, economic and physical guidance for everyone connected to it. It is a particular way of life, usually of a people (Storey 1993) and affects how they work, think, relate and even their relaxation periods and methods to a great extent. It becomes embedded in our natures and often unnoticeable which is why anthropologists often spend several years with a people in an attempt to understand and document what drives them.

Culture is so ingrained in humans that what we see as our reasoning pattern is really internalised culture (Hall 1976). We are as unaware of it as the next person is unaware of theirs and we all carry these internalised patterns of thinking, feeling and acting throughout our lifetimes (Hofstede 1991). Culture is such a powerful tool which when adapted and adopted with purpose, changes the way everyone under the influence of that culture think. Culture follows us wherever we find ourselves; school, social gatherings and work. How culture affects us at work is discussed next.

Organisational culture

The current wave of interest in organisational culture dates back to the 1980's (Alvesson 2002). The possibility that managerial issues could be easily resolved by successfully managing the people in that organisation was an exciting one which CEO's and managers pursued wholeheartedly. Organisational culture thus became a fad which gave birth to several theories and models on organisational behaviour. Everyone taking up a new job comes with different expectations, goals, attitudes and ethics which are borne of the culture they have acquired from birth up till their last place of employment. (Buelens *et al.* 2006; Cox 1994). They are also highly likely to meet an already established culture at their new place of employment except where that company is a new start. Thus, organisational culture is made up of more than one subculture as there are likely various sets of professionals with varied backgrounds working in any given organisation (Brooks 2009). This leads every organisation to establish for itself whether consciously or otherwise a governing and overriding pattern of work that enables them work on similar wavelengths and deliver their set goals.

There is no agreed definition of organisational culture by the various researchers who have done work on the subject. The business, anthropological and sociological perspectives adopt different approaches to culture and therefore organisational culture. Brooks (2009) argues that strong cultures exist in organisations which exhibit a close relationship between themselves and their environment. The best societies therefore had the strongest cultures and routines which held them bound in the system passed

down in time. This system would then form the basis from which business and financial decisions can be made.

Schein (1985) also defines organisational culture as existing on different levels:

- The core at which lie people's assumptions and beliefs which influence our 'common sense' view of the organisational world.
- Cultural values which lie at the intermediate level; and,
- At the surface, culture manifests itself as behaviour.

For the purpose of this research, organisational culture will be defined as a dynamic and complex system of social patterns that govern the mechanism of core beliefs and assumptions, values and behavioural rituals by which an organisation relates with itself and external bodies. 'Dynamic and complex' because of the layers of culture that are blended together to become the 'mechanism of core beliefs' or an internalised code of conduct. 'Values and behavioural rituals' are the criteria by which the organisation and its staff assess themselves and others. This cultural behaviour is not automatically imbibed and can only be learned. The degree to which an employee inculcates this culture is known as cultural fit. Newly employed staffs are able to integrate into the organisation through training and managerial interventions (Brooks, 2009) and by watching more experienced employees. The greatest risk to company success both financially and socially is a dilution of its traditional method of getting results. Socialisation of new recruits is currently the best way to preserve these traditions.

Organisational socialisation

Socialisation provides new recruits with a set pattern of behaviour they can emulate to enable them blend into the organisation. (Buchanan 2010) in essence, organisational socialisation is the key to ensuring a seamless entry of newly employed staff. (Ge *et al.* 2010). Several theories currently exist on the best socialisation process for employees (Saks and Ashforth 1997). Not all of these models are applicable to the outsourced employee. Feldman and Wagnous have the models best suited to the study as they have designed processes which are neither too long in time length as Buchanan and Pascale; based on the punishment-and-reward system like Porter *et al.*; or believe both sides will lay false expectations like Schein.

Table 1: Table depicting organisational socialisation models theories.

Organisational Socialisation Models	Degree of adaptability to study.
Buchanan's Three-Stage Early Career Model (Buchanan 1974).	This model bases organisational socialisation on a 5-year plan which will not be practical in the ever changing field of FM.
Feldman's Three-Stage Model (Feldman 1976a, 1976b)	Feldman's model is one of the most applicable to the facilities management sector as its stages can be adjusted to fit the outsourced FM staff.
Pascale's Seven Stage Model (Pascale 1984)	Pascale's model is not for the typical outsourced employee who is placed to do a specific duty in an organisation for the duration of a contract.
Porter, Lawler, & Hackman's Three Stage Model (Porter <i>et al.</i> 1975).	This model will not be applicable as it focuses on just the reward and punishment of behaviours and uses this as its key socialisation method.
Schein's Three-Stage Socialisation Model (Schein 1978).	This model is impractical as it expects the laying of false expectations by both parties. In FM, the contract should be honoured by the FM company, the client and the outsourced staff.
Wanous' Integrative Approach to Stages of Socialisation (Wanous 1980)	This model picked the best points from the other models and makes its stages succinct. It also fits the scenario of the outsourced staff and can be adopted for this study.

FM and outsourced services.

The service sector in the UK is currently responsible for 77.7% of the national GDP which includes financial and health services, public, private and the 'third' sectors (CIA World fact book 2012). With that overwhelming percentage and the need for efficient management of their physical premises, these organisations seek avenues to maximize output from their facilities while reducing running costs (Kurdi *et al.* 2011). This explains the need for an efficient facilities management system. Facilities management is a profession that encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality of the built environment by integrating people, place, process, and technology (IFMA 2007). (Tucker and Pitt 2008) have defined it as: "the integration and alignment of the non-core services, including those relating to premises, required to operate and maintain a business to fully support the core objectives of the organisation". FM has evolved to become a component of the business value chain, providing most services which directly relate to business indicators e.g. customer satisfaction (Becker 1990).

FM typically covers the non-core but crucial services of the organisation. To better monitor these services and reduce costs, these services get outsourced to the service provider with the most favorable contract (Kurdi *et al.* 2011). Staff involved in these non-core services have roles: clean office premises, fully functional facilities and friendly staff which when successfully managed, often improves customer perception (Tucker and Pitt 2009; Chiang, and Birtch 2009).

‘FM Cultural fit’

Most organisations prefer to outsource these non-core services to professional service providers and concentrate on hiring employees who have a direct impact on their goals (Booty 2006). This often results in outsourced employees from different providers who likely have no idea what the company’s goals are and who might come into the company with pre-ingrained culture in them from their employers. They have most likely imbibed the culture of their employer (the service provider) and the culture of other client organisations they have worked with over the course of their careers. This further shows the importance of socialisation.

Whilst Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2005), believe the employee’s commitment to their contracting organisation might actually improve their commitment to the client organisation, there is still a need to socialize the newly outsourced employee. Research done by Tucker and Pitt (2009), show that the customers who rate “people involvement and cultural fit” as ‘good’, tend to rate service delivery as ‘good’. While these customers might not realize what this means, the service organisation is made aware that the employee’s degree of efficient and effective service in the organisation directly affects customer perception of service received. This means that there is a ‘knock on effect’ that can be controlled by the employer to a great extent.

The discrepancy in the cultures of these two organisations (the service provider and their client) may cause the outsourced employee to deliver below target and find it difficult to integrate with the client organisation where an in-house colleague blends in with relative ease. Outsourced employees in most cases, cannot answer customer enquiries about issues that are related to the company’s core business. Worse, they might not be able to direct the customer to anyone who can help. This difference in the degree of congruence between an outsourced FM employee and the client organisation will be termed ‘FM Cultural Fit’. A higher ‘fit’ level will make it difficult or even impossible for outsiders to distinguish between the in-house and the outsourced employee. A lower ‘fit’ on the other hand, will make it glaring that an employee has been outsourced from a service provide and has not/is yet to be socialised by the client organisation. ‘FM Cultural Fit’ will be used to determine if the discrepancy between both organisational cultures is been managed, how it is being managed and if the management is done by the FM organisation or the client organisation. The current gap identified above in the field of facilities management shows the importance of employee management as a key to achieving KPI’s (Key Performance Index) and delivering quality service as agreed in a contract and as expected by the customer.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is an investigation conducted with the aim of understanding phenomenon or solving a problem. Research results need to be valid, descriptive, and informative before they can be applied to social or organisational problems (Miller and Salkind 2002). To achieve this, a proper and systematic research design which will ensure successful functioning of the research process needs to be developed (Maxwell 2005).

Research design and strategy

The literature study has revealed questions which when answered, will revolutionize the perception of the outsourced customer in service delivery.

The subject area being novel, poses the first hurdle of scarce relevant journals. Relevant literature will be derived from the subject matter and the study sector. There should however be relevant data gathered once the research commences.

The purpose of this concurrent, mixed methods study will be to explore the socialisation culture that exists in FM companies and client organisations for outsourced employees. The research theory demands a pragmatic approach from which we shall infer/induce patterns based on previous research (Creswell 2009). The unpredictability of the results led to the adaptation of an exploratory approach to gathering data. The question survey will cut across FM companies, their clients and employees.

Further research will involve simultaneously conducted semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys to determine what is obtainable and to develop a working theory. A flowchart detailing the research methodology can be seen below.

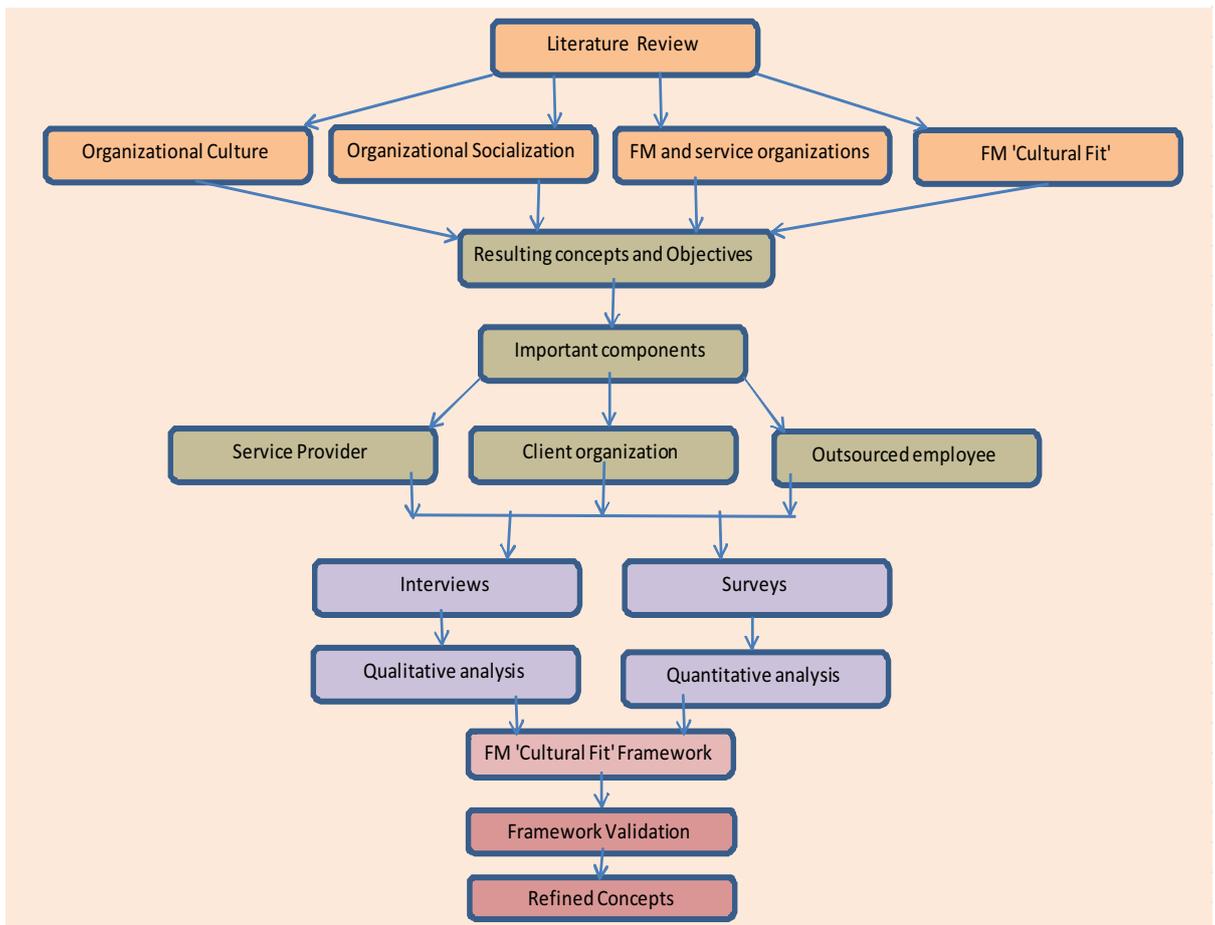


Figure 8: Research Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative stages will be conducted together to produce data. A detailed research strategy which also reflects the target population is shown below.

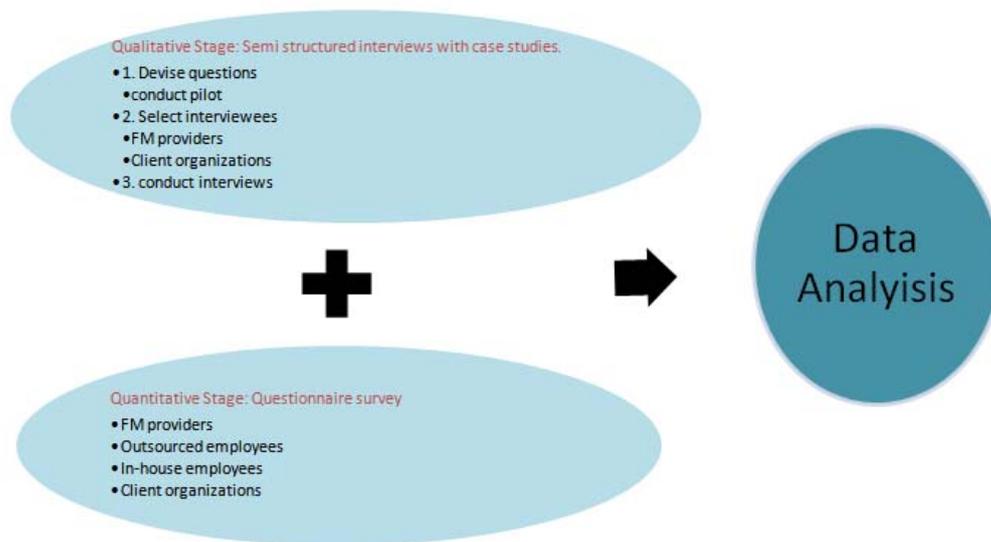


Figure 9: Research Strategy

Work packages

The work packages have been divided into 3 sections for ease of execution as revealed in the appendix 2. The first stage covers the literature review and the first data collection round. The second stage covers the second data collection round as well as an analysis of the data to produce the proposed framework. The third and final round will involve the validation of the proposed framework and the final write-up which will be submitted to Liverpool John Moores University.

Study population and sample

The focus population of the research is the British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) whose members' work in various sectors of the economy which will ensure unbiased results. The sample size was calculated using a 95% confidence level and a confidence level of 5 which gave a sample size of 372. This sample will be the minimum number of surveys expected back to ensure valid data.

Data collection method

Primary data used for this research will be collected from various sectors in the economy through members of the BIFM who work in Facilities Management units of target organisations. The research problem requires a pluralistic approach as one method is unlikely to provide a holistic solution which can be implemented in the FM industry. A detailed study of the research questions shows that the concurrent mixed research method will be most appropriate for this study. Interviews and questionnaire surveys will be used at the same time to gather data which will be used to develop a framework for application.

Data analysis

The research will be conducted in the order shown above and the results collected at each stage will determine the direction of the next stage in the aspect of objectives and question structure. The results will be analysed using NVIVO for qualitative and SPSS for quantitative to test assumptions and make comparisons (Field 2009). This

paper introduces the need for the socialisation of outsourced employees in FM and provides a theoretical base. It has only presented the first stage of the study and is yet to collect data for analysis. It is hoped that the results of further study can be adapted for the use of FM organisations in the various sectors.

CONCLUSION

An organisational socialisation gap currently exists in the Facilities Management industry which affects the outsourced employee; a crucial part of organisational KPI's and customer satisfaction. This paper is a review of initial findings made for a more detailed research on the best way to correct and adjust this deficiency in FM. There will therefore be a concurrent mixed methods research carried out in due course to test and validate the study aim and objectives discussed above. Further research is expected to improve the cultural fit of outsourced employees who work in the Facilities Management sector which will have a positive ripple effect on the FM industry.

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