

I nnovation

Innovation is described by the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) as “the successful exploitation of new ideas”. That is a very different competency to Creativity which is about the generation of new ideas and yet the two words are often confused in common use. The ability to generate new ideas and original thought or a fresh application of an existing paradigm to a different problem is the result of using the imagination rather than routine skills. Innovation is quite different making use of logic, problem solving and an entrepreneurial attitude.

Innovation is highly desirable in facilities management where constant change, highly variable external influences and pressures on cost, quality and timeliness are ever present features. It has become increasingly popular to include a requirement for innovation in tender documents and performance management regimes. What must be made clear in these circumstances is what kind of change is desired. This could mean cost reduction, service improvement or productivity enhancement. Unless it achieves a desired result the initiative is merely a change, it is the application of new ideas to realize aspiration that makes it innovation.

There are two distinctly different types of innovation each of which requires the application of different skills and techniques and which manifest their results in different ways. These are Continuous Improvement and Step Change.

Continuous Improvement creates incremental change through a structured process of exploiting existing systems and technologies. Management techniques such as Total Quality Management, Six Sigma or Kaizen are utilised to identify efficiency improvement and eliminate waste. The resulting innovations are small but continuous and there is little uncertainty or risk involved.

Step Changes involve radical transformation making maximum usage of creativity skills to identify new systems and technologies leading to dramatic transformations of cost, service or process. The criteria used to evaluate a radical idea and concept should differ from those applied to evaluating incremental innovations. Viewing radical ideas - associated with high uncertainties - from the perspective of business-as-usual and applying traditional evaluation methods and criteria to them is inappropriate and counterproductive.

The introduction of Facilities Management itself was a major innovation in its own right. Strategies such as outsourcing, hotdesking, multi-skilling and service integration have all been significant milestones in Facilities Innovation. Continuous Improvement in FM builds upon these step changes refining and evolving their operation in practice.

The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) has useful site with information on Innovation Policy available at www.berr.gov.uk/dius/innovation