

Facilities Management from A to Z



Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
published monthly in Facilities by Lexis Nexis between 2008 and 2016

Jargon

Communication is easily the most important and most powerful of all management skills. That is doubly true for facility managers who need to be expert listeners, speakers and writers. The large number of stakeholders involved in a facilities operation and the breadth of the discipline means that effective communication is vital but it can also be very difficult

There can be many barriers to good communication but one of the most damaging is the use of language that the recipient may find difficult to readily understand, in particular the use of technical and business jargon often places clear communication at risk.

Facilities managers operate through communication with colleagues, management, team and customers. The perceptions that these stakeholders gain from these transactions and from observations made by others will influence everything from credibility at budget time to the chances of career advancement. Meanwhile the effectiveness of service delivery teams can be seriously hampered where instructions are not fully understood leading to error, omission or accident.

The Oxford Dictionary defines jargon as “Special words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand.” Facilities jargon can therefore be both a tool for effective and efficient communication with fellow FM professionals and a significant barrier to understanding with others. The nature of the audience determines whether jargon can hinder or help communication.

Jargon is a language of familiarity. It can be a useful tool when everyone has a common understanding of the terms at hand. The problems arise when service professionals let jargon creep into their everyday speech. This is when our technical language can separate, insulate, and intimidate. Good communication is the result of the use of common terms that are clearly understood by both parties.

Facility managers have to develop a good understanding of the jargon used by the multiple disciplines covered by the FM remit. Understanding what engineers, caterers, surveyors or safety specialists are saying when they are providing technical information is critical, but so is the ability to translate that language into plain English for wider consumption.

FM professionals must be on the lookout continually for the use of overly complicated language in their communications. This includes the use abbreviations like *BMS* or *DSE*, using overly specific technical terms such as telling a caller that the problem is in their *Heat Exchanger*, or simply using words commonly understood by facilities professionals that aren't as well known to others, as in telling someone that *Churn* levels are up.

Successful efforts at clear communication, including the reduction or elimination of Jargon are components of quality that are bound to decrease risk, improve both customer and staff satisfaction and enhance the reputation of the FM team.

The Plain English Campaign has a number of useful free guides to help better communication on their website at www.plainenglish.co.uk