

Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
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If there is one thing that every facility manager will find themselves doing at least once a day it is Problem Solving. Nothing in FM ever goes completely to plan as there are far too many variables involved with multiple stakeholders, changing expectations and a multitude of disciplines and environmental factors that can influence events.

The classic process for problem solving is divided into four phases: diagnosis of the problem; choosing a solution; implementing the solution; and monitoring the result. This model is extremely useful but in FM can sometimes be difficult to apply. As the complexity of managing facilities increases, so do the difficulties of managing problems. FM's rarely deal with isolated problems and when several problems exist simultaneously both the problems and their consequences can be multiplied.

Successful facility managers are quick to intuitively recognise the symptoms of a situation arising and are able to work with their teams to define the problem and identify possible solutions. They maintain flexibility as a change of course is often necessary and find ways to interrelate problems so that several issues can be addressed at the same time. If they can they will use progress on one issue to support advancement on another.

Prioritisation may be necessary when dealing with multiple problems and this can be a useful way of linking the stages of diagnosis and solution finding with solution implementation. In FM not all problems need instant solutions. Often a quick-fix can be short lived and sometimes allowing a little time can change perspectives, sometimes meaning the problem no longer needs solving at all.

There are a variety of problem-solving techniques that can be used. Some of these techniques are oriented more to individuals who are more structured, more rational and analytical, and more goal-oriented in their approach to problem-solving. This kind of rational problem solving may rely heavily on trend analysis, cause-and-effect and statistical probability.

Other techniques are more suited to individuals who demonstrate a preference for an approach that is more holistic and parallel, more emotional and intuitive, more visual, and more creative. There are many useful problem-solving techniques that harness the creative power of the brain such as brainstorming, metaphors and mind-mapping.

A good facility manager should try to master two or three of each. Different kinds of problems are better suited to different techniques and experience will show the best approach to take in each circumstance.

Monitoring the result is the final step in the problem-solving process. The Manager should review the effectiveness of the solution against its desired outcomes. Did it work? If not, why not? What went right, and what went wrong? What adjustments could be made to ensure that the solution works better? This stage requires careful analysis and can help to improve upon what was previously considered the best solution.

A useful book on problem solving techniques is Decision Making and Problem Solving Strategies by John Adair published by Kogan Page ISBN: 0749455519