Quality management

Quality management is a set of management theories which consist of three main components: quality assurance, quality control and quality improvement. Quality-management systems are used to formalise an organisation's approach to quality and are very useful to facilities managers looking for a means to provide consistency of service and operation.

Quality assurance (QA) processes are intended to ensure that products or services are delivered consistently and in a systematic, reliable fashion. QA includes regulation of the quality of materials used; operational procedures; and management, delivery and inspection processes. In a multi-disciplinary function like FM, the integration of parallel and overlapping processes is key to the delivery of fit-for-purpose services on time, every time.

Quality control (QC) procedures are intended to ensure that the product or service adheres to a defined set of quality criteria or meets the requirements of the client or customer. QC activities include inspection, testing or statistical analysis to compare actual output against targets. In FM, auditing processes for inspecting the performance of outsourced service providers are key QC activities for both input- and output-specified contracts.

Quality improvement (QI) is the area of quality management with the widest possible range of approaches. Management theorists and academics have developed many different methods for quality improvement that are relevant to facilities managers. These cover service improvement, process improvement and people-based improvement. Popular QI methodologies include total quality management (TQM), Six Sigma, Kaizen, ISO 9004, lean management and business process re-engineering.

Quality management is often seen as part of a much wider concept that addresses overall organisational performance and recognises the importance of processes. The British Standard (BS) 5750 for quality systems was published in 1979, and in 1983 the National Quality Campaign was launched, using BS5750 as its main theme. Since then the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) 9000 series has become the internationally recognised standard for quality-management systems. It comprises a number of standards that specify the requirements for the documentation, implementation and maintenance of a quality system.

The European Foundation for Quality Management and the Chartered Quality Institute both have lots of useful information, publications and case studies on quality management at www.efqm.org and www.cqi.org.