



REVISITING THE FACILITIES MANAGEMENT (FM) DEFINITION DEBATE-
A STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICAN STAKEHOLDERS

RESEARCH REPORT

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Abstract

Facilities Management (FM) stakeholders have been struggling to define precisely what FM is. FM is defined differently, and the debate is ongoing. Lack of a criteria to appraise definitions appears to be the root cause for variations. Sadly, multiple definitions have led to confusion which affects the cohesive theoretical development to underpin the discipline, and the establishment of a unified profession.

This study attempts to seek a solution, that could possibly settle this never-ending definition debate, by adopting a criterion for a good definition, as a basis for appraising proposed FM definitions to alleviate variations in definitions. The study entails applying the criteria to selected current definitions to identify flaws, and thereafter conducting a focus group discussion with experienced FM stakeholders to arrive at a preferred definition in South African context.

From literature review, current definitions of FM, characteristics of FM, and a criterion for a good definition were identified. Subsequently, FM definitions were analysed based on the criteria, and it was discovered that current definitions do not satisfy the conditions for a good definition, due to either lack of focus, clarity or both. At that point, a focus group discussion to explore what FM is, as well as the establishment of a preferred definition was conducted.

Focus group findings indicates that participants are generally knowledgeable on the subject. While only eight FM definitions were appraised, the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) definition of FM was found to be more comprehensive compared to the rest. In spite of this attempt, the study does not claim to have reached a consensus definition due to small sample size of study. Further, empirical research to establish consensus in the industry is required.