

## **Identity and image of FM: Two sides of a coin to promote productivity in FM**

Daniel von Felten, Manuel Böhm, Christian Coenen and Gregory Meier  
Institute of Facility Management, Zurich University of Applied Sciences

### **ABSTRACT**

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to present answers of two key questions: (1) How is the FM industry perceived by the general public (FM image, external view)? (2) How do FM employees perceive their own industry (FM identity, internal view)?

Design/methodology/approach: In a quantitative national telephone survey with a total of more than 2,100 randomly selected participants from the general public, the image and awareness of FM were analysed. In a second step, FM identity was ascertained and analysed in a national longitudinal survey, repeated after three years, with a total of about 1,800 FM managers and skilled professionals.

Findings: An industry-based survey model for FM is developed. It explores FM image and identity on an industry-specific basis. The dimensions of FM image and FM identity are defined and analysed. The FM image and the FM identity in Switzerland are evaluated and will be presented. Initial results show that FM identity is somewhat higher positioned than FM image. However, FM identity declined slightly over the three years between the two surveys.

Originality/value: In the on-going discussion on ways how to increase value creation in FM, issues such as process optimisation, outsourcing and cost savings are often in the foreground. A frequently overlooked aspect which receives little attention is the commitment of employees. This seems all the more surprising since we know from recent research that high employee commitment significantly increases productivity, contributing to sales growth and value creation. Because FM can be described as a service management discipline, people and their ability to identify with their work are key factors in increasing value creation. In addition, the image of the entire industry plays a crucial role. This is the first published scientific study on the current status of FM identity at the sector level.

### **Keywords**

Facility Management, Image, Identity, Reputation, Switzerland.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background and definition of the problem**

Facility management is still a comparatively young business sector and has become established as a service industry. Image and identity are critical to the success of this new sector. The fact that FM employees identify closely with their products, as well as with the FM sector as a whole,

can be seen as the lifeblood of high, quality-oriented productivity. Knowledge about the image and identity of the FM sector is particularly important in this regard. However, no study has so far been published on the current status of FM identity at the sector level; the only work available is a pilot study on the image of the FM sector by Coenen and von Felten (2009) and Coenen, von Felten, Schmid (2010).

## 1.2 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to survey and analyse the identity of the Facility Management sector in Switzerland for the first time. The second aim is to compare this identity with the image of FM in Switzerland. The third goal is to analyse possible changes in the identity of FM, as shown in the longitudinal survey carried out in 2010 and 2013.

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The effect a company's activities have on every aspect of the business, from customer perception to economic success, is analysed and presented in the form of success chains (Bruhn, 2009, p 66) and in the case of strategy development and monitoring, as part of a Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). For service industries the Service Profit Chain identified by Heskett et al. (1994) examines the relationship between internal service quality and the profit of a company as follows: profit and growth are driven primarily by customer loyalty. This in turn is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by the value and quality of the service provided to the customer. This value is provided by satisfied, loyal and productive employees. The satisfaction of employees is in turn influenced by high internal service quality, which enables employees to deliver good results to their customers.

Moreover, the image of a product and/or a company has an impact on customer expectations and satisfaction. The importance of image in services is particularly important, since services are intangible and their creation and consumption take place simultaneously; unlike material goods they cannot, therefore, be examined objectively in advance (Meffert & Bruhn, 2006, p 210). In this paper, the term image is understood to comprise an aggregated and subjective overall picture of all the attitudes that a person has towards a brand, product, organisation or institution (based on Apitz, Benad & Poth, 1987 and Meffert & Bruhn, 2006, p 210).

Furthermore, image as understood by Buss and Fink-Heuberger (2000, p 64) can be differentiated into the close-range and long-range image. This refers to proximity or remoteness from an organisation. That is, someone who is not aware of an organisation, or only has information about it from a third party, has a different image of the organisation than do groups which interact with, and thereby generate various experiences of it. In terms of image management and improvement, this means that an organisation should invest in its close-range image. By distinguishing between these two types of image and combining them appropriately when evaluating the results of surveys, an organisation can identify and appropriately position its image-related opportunities and threats. In this paper, those respondents who had a correct understanding of the term Facility Management are assigned to the close-range image group, while those who have heard the term facility management but have an incorrect understanding of it are allocated to the long-range image group.

For many services, the employees embody for customers the brand or company that provides the service, as they are often the only point of contact within the service process (McDonald, de Chernatony, & Harris, 2001, p 346). In addition, McDonald et al. conclude (2001, p 342): "... customers' perceptions of the brand depend highly on individual interactions with staff..."

The image that employees have of a brand, a product and the company itself, and which they transfer into their dealings with outsiders, is therefore especially important for people-oriented services. This self-image as an aggregated and subjective form of all the attitudes of an employee to their own brand, product, organisation or institution is referred to in this paper as identity. According to Burmann and Maloney (2004), brand identity in the strict sense is what expresses the essential characteristic features of a brand: what it stands for at first internally and later externally. Brand identity in the strictest sense is therefore a statement of a concept. In a broader sense, brand identity can be interpreted as a brand management tool which aims at a) the communication of the brand's promise of value and b) the brand-related behaviour of all those involved in providing services for the organisation. All of this can be understood under the general heading of identity.

In the field of image and identity research, the image and identity of an individual brand, product or company have already been considered many times, while the image and the identity of an entire sector have not been the subject of such focussed attention.

The image of a sector is understood in this paper to be the sum of the images of individual organisations. Similarly, the identity of a sector is defined as the collective identity of the individual organisations working in it. In turn, the image and identity of a sector influence the image and identity of particular organisations and brands operating within that sector. The image and identity of a sector are therefore involved in a permanent dynamic exchange, which can lead to changes in both aspects. A company only has a direct influence on its own brand or company identity, but through exercising this influence, contributes to forming the identity of the entire sector. In this study, the identity of the FM sector in Switzerland is investigated for the first time, and is related to the sector's image.

### **3. STUDY DESIGN**

In order to examine the external image and reputation of Facility Management, a nationally representative survey was designed and implemented in German- and French-speaking Switzerland in 2008. When defining the term "image", the approach used in the pan-European studies on the European Performance Satisfaction Index (EPSI) (EPSI, 2007) was chosen, particularly for reasons of international comparability. Based on the EPSI product and service image construct, a further battery of questions was created regarding the image of the sector. As with EPSI, the data collected is based on telephone interviews. Familiarity with the concept of Facility Management was surveyed in a first part without support, using a filter question. Participants who had already heard the term were then questioned, inter alia, about the image of FM. Of the total of 2,100 randomly selected subjects between 15-75 years of age, 451 people (21%) had already heard the term Facility Management and were therefore interviewed about the image of FM.

To survey the internal perspective, or the identity of FM, a longitudinal study was designed, conducted for the first time in 2010 and for the second time in 2013 as part of an FM sector

survey. Here the questions on FM identity constituted one among several blocks in the overall survey, which was conducted online with FM management and professionals in Switzerland. The questions on FM identity were designed to ensure comparability to the FM image study. In the FM sector study in 2010, a total of 1,038 participants from German- and French-speaking Switzerland were surveyed and 1,017 valid data records were obtained. About three-quarters of the participants had a managerial function in lower, middle or upper management, or were self-employed. 43.5% worked in middle management, 21.3% in lower management and 9.6% in upper management. In the FM sector study in 2013, a total of 1185 participants, mainly from German-speaking Switzerland, were interviewed and 788 valid data records were collected. Almost 80% of participants had a managerial function in lower, middle or upper management or were self-employed. The largest share, 44%, worked in middle management, 21.9% in lower management and 11.4% in upper management.

#### **4. STUDY RESULTS**

Following the presentation of the study design above, the study results will be presented in this section. First, the results of the evaluations of the image study in 2008 and the FM identity surveys in 2010 and 2013 are presented. The data from the 2010 FM sector study are then compared to those collected in the 2008 image study.

##### **4.1 FM image**

One in five Swiss has heard the term Facility Management and was therefore questioned on the image of FM (N = 451). The participants who were able to define the term FM correctly were classified as having a close-range image, and those who have already heard the term once, but were not able to define it correctly, as having a long-range image. 10% of the Swiss market had a correct understanding, and this group was characterised as having a close-range image, while a further 10% of respondents were characterised as having a long-range image. The image of the industry is relatively low and the potential earnings are perceived as below average. There is hardly any awareness in the Swiss population of tertiary education for Facility Managers. Rather, it is assumed that FM knowledge is acquired through vocational training.

##### **FM image based on the EPSI dimensions**

The statement that Facility Managers have an image of being professional and state-of-the-art produces a mean of 5.91 on a ten-point Likert scale. Customer-oriented service shows a mean of 6.03. The value for money comes last with a mean of 5.28. Also low, with a mean of 5.32, is the assessment of responsible behaviour towards the environment. The reliability of Facility Managers (m/w) showed the highest value: 6.10.

##### **The image of the FM profession**

With a mean value of 6.78 on a ten-point Likert scale, those surveyed basically expect an increase in demand in the future. The social prestige of facility management is strikingly low at 4.73, which can be explained by the fact that the respondents were doubtful about the image of Facility Management. The mean value of respondents' estimation of job security in the industry

was relatively low, at 5.64, as was their view of earnings potential, with a mean of 5.71 (see also Coenen and Felten 2009).

## 4.2 FM identity

The identity of Facility Managers in Switzerland was first surveyed in the FM sector studies in 2010 and 2013. The results are presented and interpreted below for the first time.

### Longitudinal study of FM identity in 2010 and 2013

What is the identity of FM and how has the self-image of Facility Managers developed in the three years from 2010 to 2013?

Table 1 shows the current situations in 2010 and 2013 as well as the development shown through comparing 2013 to 2010. The data also shows whether the change has two-sided significance at a level of 0.95 (values <0.05), or insignificant (values >0.05).

Table 1 Comparison of identity in 2010 and 2013

Comparison of 2010 and 2013	2010	2013	Difference	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
<b>FM identity based on EPSI</b>				
Being professional and state-of-the-art	7.12	7.06	-0.06	0.040
Customer-oriented service	7.24	7.28	+0.04	0.001
Value for money	6.71	6.58	-0.13	0.001
Responsible behaviour towards the environment	6.64	6.78	+0.14	0.000
Reliable work	7.38	7.28	-0.10	0.021
<b>Image of the FM profession</b>				
Increasing demand in the future	8.24	8.21	-0.03	0.823
High prestige in society	5.33	5.19	-0.14	0.841
Secure jobs	6.55	6.49	-0.07	0.651
Good earnings potential	6.04	5.88	-0.16	0.955

The self-image of the facility manager is quite balanced, levelling off between about 5.2 and 8.2 on a 10-point Likert scale. Within these parameters, identity differs depending on the identity factor surveyed. The mean values for the prestige in the society shows the lowest values in the identity surveys, while the mean values for increasing demand in the future are highest there.

This means that Facility Managers see potential in their own industry, but see themselves as having a relatively low status in society.

With a standard deviation of between about 2 and 3, all values are at approximately the same distance from the mean. Thus, Facility Managers have quite a similar picture of their own profession.

The self-image of Facility Managers has deteriorated slightly overall, whereby the two identity factors “Customer-oriented service” and “Responsible action towards the environment” improved slightly. The respective minimal differences in the identity dimensions based on EPSI are significant, but no noteworthy changes could be found in the identity of profession.

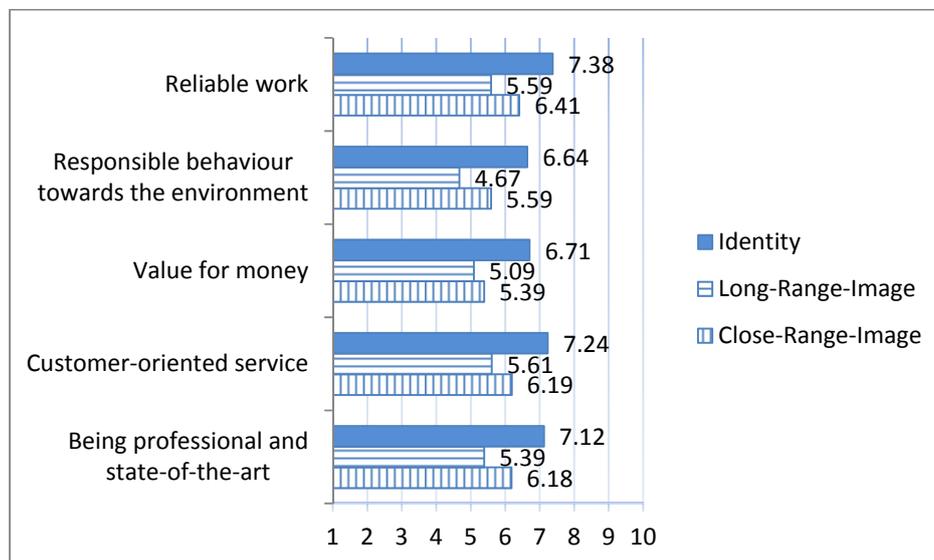
### 4.3 Comparison of FM identity to FM image

There are different possible approaches to comparing the image study of 2008 with the identity surveys from the FM sector studies in 2010 and 2013. Each identity survey could be related to the image study on the basis of a) each individual year, b) both years aggregated, and c) a mean value from the two years. The approaches a) through c) are not used in this paper, however, partly because the FM identity study of 2010 is nearer in time to the FM image study of 2008, but also because the amount of change in FM identity from 2010 to 2013 is negligible or non-existent. The FM identity from the 2010 survey is therefore analysed below together with the FM image from the 2008 survey, illustrated by diagrams and described in the text.

#### 4.3.1 Image and identity based on the EPSI dimensions

In Figure i, the mean values for identity based on EPSI are compared with the mean values for long-range and close-range image based on EPSI. The answers allow assessment on a 1 to 10 approval scale from “1 = totally disagree” to “10 = fully agree”.

Figure i FM identity and FM image based on the EPSI dimensions.



#### Assessment of reliable work

The mean value regarding “reliable work” of those who have a correct understanding of FM is 6.41 on a 10-point Likert scale. It is thus above the figure of those who have an incorrect understanding of FM, with a relatively low mean of 5.59. Facility Managers themselves estimate the reliability of their work much more highly, with a mean of 7.38.

**Assessment of responsible behaviour towards the environment**

The mean of those with a correct understanding of FM lies at 5.59 on a 10-point Likert scale and is thus significantly higher than the mean of those who have an incorrect understanding of FM, at 4.67. Facility Managers assess their actions towards the environment as responsible, with a mean of 6.64.

**Assessment of value for money**

The mean of those who have a correct understanding of FM is located at a low 5.39 on a ten-point Likert scale, while the mean of those who have an incorrect understanding is even lower, at 5.09. Facility Managers themselves assess the price-performance ratio in the FM sector as being significantly higher, with a mean of 6.71.

**Assessment of customer-oriented service**

The mean of those who have a correct understanding of FM lies at 6.19 on a 10-point Likert scale, while the mean of the respondents with an incorrect FM understanding is 5.61. Facility Managers themselves see FM services as customer-oriented, with a mean of 7.24.

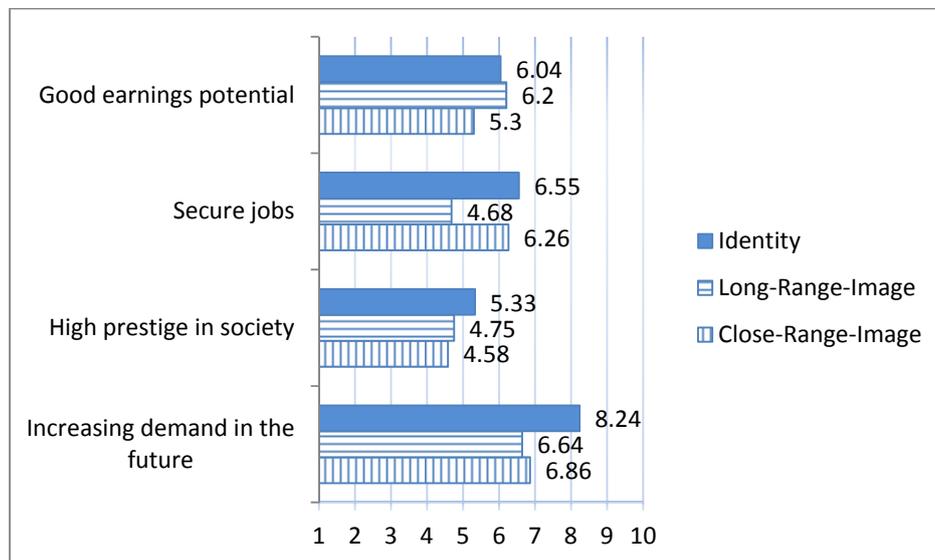
**Assessment of being professional and state-of-the-art**

The mean of those who have an incorrect understanding of FM is significantly lower on a 10-point Likert scale - at 5.39 - than those with a correct understanding - at 6.18. Facility Managers again see themselves as considerably more professional, with a mean of 7.12.

**4.3.2 Image and identity of the FM profession**

In Figure ii, the mean values of the identity of the FM profession are compared to the mean values of the long-range and close-range image. The responses allowed assessment on a ten-point Likert scale from "1 = strongly disagree" to "10 = strongly agree".

Figure ii Image and identity of the FM profession.



The individual identifying characteristics are commented on below.

### Assessment of income opportunities

The mean value of those who have a correct understanding of FM lies at 5.30 on a ten-point Likert scale, and is thus lower than those with an incorrect understanding of FM (6.2). Facility Managers estimate potential earnings somewhat lower than respondents with a long-range image, with a mean of 6.04, but higher than the overall image.

### Assessment of job security

The mean of those who have a correct understanding of FM is, at 6.26, far above the mean of those who have an incorrect understanding, at 4.68. Facility Managers themselves estimate their job security slightly higher than those with the close-range image.

### Assessment of social status

Facility Managers themselves assess their standing in society as somewhat better, with an average of 5.33 on a 10-point Likert scale, but in general they see it as relatively low. The mean of those who have a correct understanding of FM lies below this figure, at 4.58, while for those with an incorrect understanding of FM lies between the other two values, at 4.75.

### Assessment of demand

With a mean of 8.24 on a 10-point Likert scale, Facility Managers have a firm expectation of a growing demand in the sector in the future. The mean of those with an incorrect understanding of

FM points to a stronger demand in future, at 6.64, while those who have a correct understanding of FM also see a stronger demand, with a mean of 6.86. Both groups therefore give a much lower estimate than Facility Managers themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This study, based on three surveys of a representative cross-section of the population and the FM sector in Switzerland, presents interesting and unprecedented insights into the self-image of the FM sector in comparison to its external image. It is striking that people with a long-range image of the FM industry assess the sector less positively than people with a close-range image – ones who can properly define the term FM. The most positive assessments come from Facility Managers themselves.

Comparing overall image with identity, the internal and external image people have of Facility Management are consistent in the sense that the mean values of each show the same, but parallel development. The self-image of Facility Managers is slightly higher in each case than the external image that the public has of the profession. The striking feature here is the consistent difference between the respective mean values of image and identity factors.

Since the identity of FM is consistently higher than its image, and the close-range image higher than the long-range one, a large gap becomes visible, which could be closed through provision of information about the FM industry. This gap represents the image deficiency which could potentially be corrected by means of communication. In addition to individual FM companies, the FM industry as a whole is therefore challenged to communicate about the attractive careers available at various skill levels in FM, and to give the public a multidisciplinary picture of the profession.

At the research level, it would be desirable if this country-wide study on the image and identity of Facility Managers could be repeated in other countries, so that these value-adding factors could be compared at country and company level.

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