

Shadowing – a valuable approach to Facility Management research

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to add to the methodological discussions within FM research. To discover how FM can add value to core businesses and society, new and deeper knowledge regarding FM and the different services it manages is needed.

One method of data collection is shadowing - a technique that may be a useful approach to FM research, especially for those studying work practices in action. Shadowing is a non-participatory observational method in which all variations of the method give vast amounts of information regarding the studied object in its natural settings. One risk when gathering data through interviews and surveys is that the respondents may actually act differently than they report acting. Shadowing can eliminate this risk, as what the respondents actually do is observed. The other benefits include the first-hand indication, which may allow unexpected discoveries through the extensive information the method provides, and the valuable time saved by the persons participating in the research. However, shadowing has downsides, including the researcher's ability to interpret what (s)he observes and the influence of the researcher's presence on the studied object. The method is also exhausting for the researcher and the vast information it provides comes with a risk of drowning in the data.

Examples of shadowing results are used to reveal the different types of information that can be collected. The purpose of the examples is not to validate the shadowing method but to present the method, to illustrate the immense amount of information the method provides and to discuss whether shadowing may be a valuable approach for FM research. Different facets that need to be considered are highlighted, as are the various ways of collecting, analysing and conveying the information.

Shadowing seems to be a little known research method within FM, and the findings show that shadowing is a valuable method for developing knowledge and discovering un-noticed issues, especially when in-depth knowledge is needed.

Keywords

Facilities Management, Method, Shadowing, Cleaning.