Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper seeks to examine the nature of “service innovation” in the facilities management (FM) context. It reviews recent thinking on “service innovation” as distinct from “product innovation”. Applying these contemporary perspectives it describes UK case studies of 11 innovations in different FM organisations. These include both in-house client-based innovations and third-party innovations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study described in the paper encompasses 11 different innovations that constitute a mix of process, product and practice innovations. All of the innovations stem from UK-based organisations that were subject to in-depth interviews regarding the identification, screening, commitment of resources and implementation of the selected innovations.

**Findings** – The research suggested that service innovation is highly active in the UK FM sector. However, the process of innovation rarely followed a common formalized path. Generally, the innovations were one-shot commitments at the early stage. None of the innovations studied failed to proceed to full adoption stage. This was either due to the reluctance of participating organisations to volunteer “tested but unsuccessful” innovations or the absence of any trial methods that might have exposed an innovation shortcoming.

**Research limitations/implications** – The selection of innovations was restricted to the UK context. Moreover, the choice of innovations was partly determined by the innovating organisation. This selection process appeared to emphasise “one-shot” high profile technological innovations, typically associated with software. This may have been at the expense of less resource intensive, bottom-up innovations.

**Practical implications** – This paper suggests that there is a role for “research and innovation” teams within larger FM organisations, whether they are client-based or third-party. Central to this philosophy is an approach that is open to the possibility of failure. The innovations studied were risk averse with a firm commitment to proceed at the early stage.

**Originality/value** – This paper introduces new thinking on the subject of “service innovation” to the context of FM. It presents research and development as a planned solution to innovation. This approach will enable service organisations to fully test and exploit service innovations.

**Keywords** - Innovation, Services, Facilities, Property management