

# The House that Facilities Management Built: A story of identity and metaphor in a secondary service

## **Abstract:**

Concentrating on the world of Facilities Management (FM), the metaphor of house is used alongside the concept of liminality to support further understanding of its current position as a 'secondary' service, and overall identity within organisations at a time of transition. FM is positioned as the storyteller of its own tale, creating a journey through recognised rooms of a conventional 'house' that is symbolically aligned to an associated FM function. Each room therefore contains a projection of FM stories (Gabriel 1995) that represent different facets of the discipline as it tries to live within one 'home' (Strati 2007). The study uses this unconventional approach to uncover the current identity of a discipline that strives to be strategic but is often considered 'non-core' (Price 2003), 'hidden' (Becker 1999) and 'dying' (PFM 9.6.2014).

**Keywords:** Facilities Management (FM), house, home, identity, metaphor, liminality

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to identify and explore the different facets of occupational identity within a secondary service, offering the opportunity to see possible emergent practices, knowledge and connections in a time when organisational boundaries themselves are increasingly blurred (Czarniawska 1997). It concentrates on the function of Facilities Management (FM) as a specific example of a service provider, which is associated with being a cost centre as opposed to contributing directly to organisational profit. To investigate this issue, a novel approach is used which allows practitioners to visualise their discipline as a physical manifestation of a metaphorical house, building each room as a direct expression of their professional practice.

Research has shown that FM is a profession with a convoluted identity (Leaman 1992, Campbell 2017), which is reflected within its practice (Jensen 2012). On one level, FM embodies a discipline of strategic importance (Nutt 2000) whilst on another level it symbolises organisational hyperbole as a management fad (Howard 2002). This paper investigates these issues of identity as they apply specifically to FM in a time when such concerns have come to prominence across other secondary disciplines (Keenoy 1999). To do so, the paper makes use of metaphor as an analytical tool to allow a further understanding of the practice as seen by individual practitioners. This provides a foundation for the concept of liminality to be applied as an overall framework, helping to analyse the current uncertain and transitional organisational identity of FM.

The idea of organisational landscapes containing negotiated and temporal boundaries (Keenoy 1999) has aided the introduction of the anthropological theory of liminality (Van Gennep 1909/1960) into organisation studies. The intent of this paper is to explore the concept of professional identity in terms of liminality by using a metaphorical method, which is particularly salient when applied to the hidden (Becker 1990) support role of FM. It argues that a creative approach utilising the construction of a metaphorical house aids the understanding of its current role as perceived by the practitioners of the service. Metaphors have long been used in organisation theory (Morgan 2006) as an elucidation of organisational life that supports and expands on the evident context of words. Therefore, the visual element of metaphor as applied within this paper allows FM practitioners to picture their profession, drawing upon the workplace experiences that shape their professional identity (Fraher & Gabriel 2014).

The article proceeds in the following way. An overview of FM and the current debates within the field are briefly outlined, introducing the role of professional identity. A comparison to other

secondary services is discussed, and the role of metaphor in understanding the position of FM in particular is analysed. The fluid nature of identity is captured by the concept of liminality, which also supports the link to space and the specific allocation of the house metaphor as the basis of the empirical example. In particular, the paper utilises the three stages of liminality as they relate to identity reconstruction: separation, liminality and incorporation (Czarniawska & Mazza 2003). The analysis supports the visual connection of a metaphoric approach, as a narrative of the house is presented across three areas: the organisational neighbourhood, the house, and the shed, which relate in turn to these three stages of liminality. The house, being the focus of the paper, is explored room by room from the words of the practitioners, creating the 'house that FM built'. The article closes with a discussion of the understanding of the identity of the FM discipline, and how this is understood in spatial terms using the concept of liminality and the metaphor of the house.

### **An introduction to Facilities Management**

FM is a salient secondary service to analyse as its definition and role remains unclear. There is no agreed, recognised definition (Leaman 1992, Tay & Ooi 2001), although the institutional body in the UK (the British Institute of Facilities Management- BIFM) states that it is 'the integration of processes within an organisation to maintain and develop the agreed services which support and improve the effectiveness of its primary activities' (BIFM website). This has been translated to the broad idea of the integration of people, process and places (Price & Akhlaghi 1999), where the physical environment is managed in direct relation to the people and the job process completed. Traditionally, this has manifested in roles such as caterers, receptionists, helpdesk facilities, space planners, maintenance teams, refurbishment and estate management (Becker 1990).

Practitioners refer to FM from different perspectives. For example, it is sometimes described as a combination of a 'soft FM', which emphasizes service streams most closely associated with the 'art' of management such as cleaning and catering, and a 'hard FM', which gathers what is traditionally known as 'the facilities' such as tools and infrastructure (Drion et al 2012). Others refer to FM in terms of the type of its delivery -- either FM is provided in-house, as part of the organisational make-up, or as an outsourced arrangement, where an external service provider is contracted into the organisation (Ikediashi et al 2014).

These different perspectives lead to the overall debate in terms of FM being of strategic 'core' importance, or as existing mainly as separate 'non-core' operational units. At a strategic level, FM

is positioned both as being carried out by, but also as supporting the work of knowledge workers (Pathraige et al 2008). Moravec (2013:81) uses the term 'knowmads', who are 'context workers, applying what they know into new contexts to create value within different organizational and social configurations'. These workers are not place-bound or traditional nomads in terms of going where the work/capital is, to later return home. They are not 'homeless minds' who have their roots inside their suitcase (Czarniawska 2014), but rather represent those who have no recognised sense of belonging to either a physical space, or symbolic 'home' through company allegiance or logos. FM is therefore intrinsically tied to the organization, which 'emerges ... in the symbolic co-construction of place meaning which is bound up with the experience of space' (Lucas 2014:5).

The lack of an accepted definition both within and external to the discipline has led to questions over FM's credibility (Drion et al, 2012), opening the debate as to whether it is a profession at all (Price 2001). In 1992, it was projected that the creation of a knowledge base would help define FM and 'provide the foundation for professional legitimacy' (Leaman: 19). This quest arguably led to the practice extending into a number of specialist areas across several fields: project management (Jensen 2012), change management (Grimshaw 1999) and knowledge management (Pathirage et al 2008). However, this has resulted in the argument that FM suffers from 'an acute identity crisis... the roles and scope of duties of one facilities manager may be vastly different from another' (Tay & Ooi, 2001:357). With no clear distinctive qualities and representing one of the most outsourced organisational components (Ikediashi et al 2014), there is an argument that FM has diluted its market position to the extent that it is regarded as an unimportant, non-core service or a 'hidden' resource (Becker 1990) at best, or a 'a solution looking for a problem' (Thomson 1990:8).

## **Identity**

This paper therefore concentrates on the identity of the FM profession, concentrating on the practitioner's conceptions of the practice's dominant, distinctive characteristics as opposed to individual conceptions based on occupational affiliations (Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezas 2012). Identity itself is a fluid concept, representing multiple facets that are considered central and enduring, or as a shifting and therefore unstable entity (Clegg et al, 2007). Taking the context of increasingly blurry organisational boundaries, professional identity is assumed here as highly fluid and fragmented (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003), but offers a source of legitimacy - the perception that the activities presented are desirable, proper or appropriate (Clegg et al, 2007). These are

consistent in the projection of what an entity does, and why it does it. It is in the process of ‘becoming rather than being’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003:1164) that the core characteristics of occupational identities emerge, as it represents a shared understanding derived from a collective negotiation, an understanding of why they are alike together, distinct from others within their field and yet close enough to define themselves in relation to it.

This paper holds as its focus FM, but resonates with similar issues of identity formation in secondary services such as Information Technology (Willcocks 1992), Human Resource Management (Keenoy 1999) and more recently, Project Management (Paton & Hodgson 2016). The arrival of Information Technology (IT) within the workplace contributed to the development of FM, catalysing a change in workplaces that required a new type of property management. From these beginnings, IT managed to evolve into a recognised profession, visible universally and a necessity for many organisational platforms, whereas the peer profession of FM is still considered as emerging (Price 2003) despite a shared heritage. However, like FM, IT is an increasingly outsourced function, casting a question mark over its recognition as a core service (Ikediashi et al 2014).

Human Resources Management (HRM) is also a familiar department alongside IT within the daily routines of organisational life. However, it too reveals evidence of ambiguity within its profession. The 1990s saw an evolution from Personnel Management to the more commonplace label of Human Resources Management, with the name change arguably to help illustrate an increased strategic role (Legge 1995). This move to rebrand is also apparent within FM, with the argument for Infrastructure Management and Real Estate Asset Management being proposed (Price 2001), alongside the more recent title of Workplace Management ([www.bifm.org.uk](http://www.bifm.org.uk)). However, there is evidence that a name change has not clarified the identity of the profession of HRM: ‘despite a powerful almost liturgical image, it has proved impossible to ‘fix’ or ‘identify’ HRM with any degree of confidence’ (Keenoy 1999:3).

Project management (PM) is a closely related field to FM (Jenson 2012), and brings with it similar identity issues. As a relatively new discipline, it is ‘caught in the transition between technical professional and managerial professional’ (Paton & Hodgson 2016:30). Its emergence as a recognised professional identity within its own right continues to be a source of debate, but has been aided by the creation of a recognised and associated body of knowledge.

These examples illustrate the issues of identity within other secondary services. All these services share risks and experiences being outsourced and coincidentally have fluctuating identities as their role within the organisational landscape changes. It remains that IT, HRM and PM have created, and to a large degree, sustained a recognised identity. In comparison, FM is still an unfamiliar term to many, with 79% of the public not recognising the term in a 2010 Swiss study (Coenen et al 2010).

Placing this into a wider organisational context, it is clear that FM is 'firstly engaged in a Darwinian struggle to secure its niche in a wider business 'ecology' and secondly it is a system in which competing interpretations, and the institutions that hold them, are themselves engaged in such a struggle' (Price 2003:59). This supports the theory that identity is fragmentary and continually changing, allowing the argument that a single definition of FM is therefore "highly questionable" (Waheed & Fernie 2009:258), although its lack of professional legitimacy is apparent and positions FM as a suitable service to analyse.

### **The role of metaphor**

To help investigate such a projection, the role of metaphor has proved useful within organisation studies (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003). Different metaphors can illuminate points of view that may not otherwise be recognised. This can create new understandings, especially in familiar situations when pre-conceptions and assumptions dominate (Grant & Oswick 1996). In this way, 'the use of metaphor implies *a way of thinking* and *a way of seeing* that pervade how we understand our world generally' (Morgan, 2006:4, italics original). Although their use can be criticised for being imprecise, it is recognised they are inherently paradoxical, as the creation of one viewpoint can distort another, especially when 'pushed too far' (Døving 1996).

To counterbalance this, the metaphor presented here is used to illuminate the complex issue of identity, and has been carefully selected to align with FM. Specifically, the metaphor of house has been chosen due to FM's close association with the built environment. The buildings that FM is charged to maintain represents a physical symbol of the organisation that dwells within them, who have branded the space with their distinctive logos, and select the employees that associate themselves with it. They are ancient cyphers that are universal across the globe in their presence, machines designed to tell the corporate story (Rippin 2011). In this sense, FM creates the occupational house for the organisational actors (Strati 1998) to dwell within, and so utilising the

specific metaphor of house as applied directly to the practice itself resonated with the dominant function of FM.

The metaphor of house holds many associations: “always container, sometimes contained, the house serves as the portal to metaphors of the imagination’ (Bachelard 1958, ix). Firstly, the ‘house’ element can take many physical forms, holding physical demarcations clearly aligned to function. It allows the fragmented nature of professional identity to manifest within the different rooms contained within it, ‘constituting a body of images that give mankind illusions of stability’ (Bachelard 1958, 17). The ‘house’ as a built structure is also familiar in terms of universal imagery, allowing its application to expand to future applications to other organisational disciplines. Secondly, there is also the element of the house as a ‘home’, which has by implication, a more emotive element. Home invokes a place that is 'invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life' (Blunt & Varley, 2004:3). The imagery of the individual rooms can 'evoke strong feelings and be important for generating a sense of identity, security and a role' (Marmot & Eley, 2000:118). As such, the concept transcends both the family 'home' but also the personal 'home' that is aligned with personal space (private offices/desk space) in a more corporate setting. The house-based societies of Levi- Strauss that constitute 'hybrid, transitional forms between kin-based and class-based social orders' (Carsten & Hugh Jones, 1995:10) are aligned with kith in terms of colleagues, and the concept of fictive and voluntary kin (Nelson 2013). The emotional connection between organisational members is cemented in the routinized interactions that constitute office life (Inalhan & Finch 2004), with the idea of clan- based social orders affiliated to the hierarchical nature of organisations that dominate within FM.

These twin implications also support the concept of liminality to be illustrated through evolution and change. The physicality of workspace as demonstrated through the house is affected by the growing impact of flexible working i.e. work that is 'time flexible', 'place flexible' and 'location variable' (Nutt 2000). A reduction of time spent within these corporate structures indicates the maintenance of static buildings needs consideration in line with the maintenance of the perpetually evolving organisational communities (Price & Akhlaghi 1999), the emotive connection of corporate home.

This is a hallmark of the increasingly liminal work environments FM is charged to create and support, with the FM practice itself becoming the prototype of its creation. As such, the

overall identity of FM is increasingly fluid, arguably still considered an emerging as opposed to established practice, despite being in existence for over four decades. This metaphor offers evidence of a shared and valued entity represented by the house structure, and a sense of shared belonging in a home. The fluidity and transitory nature of these issues of identity and legitimacy need an overarching framework in which to analyse them, and so the concept of liminality is introduced to support the metaphor of the house.

## **Liminality & Space**

The concept of liminality developed from the anthropologist and renowned French folklorist Arnold Van Gennep in 1909, and later through the works of anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983). Its main association is with initiation rites, allowing an analysis of change in social positions, such as the rite involving transition from boyhood to man. The theory has been used within organisational studies to analyse fluidity within concepts such as identity reconstruction (Beech 2011), organisations and leadership (Küpers 2011) and the role of consultants (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003). As such, liminality denotes rituals where an individual enters a state 'betwixt and between more stable states and realities' (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera 2011:7). It can be demarcated by place, as with modern examples of test centres, and by time, as illustrated by the process of restructuring, (detailed by Johnsen, & Sørensen 2015).

Following the analysis of Beech 2011, and Czarniawska & Mazza 2003, this paper draws upon three distinct stages of liminality as it applies to the construction and reconstruction of identity within FM. First, there is a *separation* stage, a disruption from the status quo and what is considered normal, or routine. This isolation is physical or metaphorical, and signifies entry into a state of blurred boundaries and destabilisation, where previous and understood rules no longer apply. This second stage is the state of *liminality*, a place of experimentation and ambiguity. Old conventions and identities are replaced and reformed, subverted and transformed (Küpers 2011), which paradoxically offers freedom and instability, creation and loss, excitement and anxiety. Those within the liminal space hold many diverse identities, or none at all, creating a place of non-status and therefore space for investigation and reflection. As a collective within the liminal (Paton & Hodgson 2016), there is an identity formed in terms of why they are alike together, a special bond and that enables the creation of a *communitas* (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera 2011).

Linking back to the origin of the concept in anthropological initiation rites, the liminal state is



portrayed as temporary, a limbo that provides space and time for a metamorphosis that opens the gateway to the final stage of *incorporation*. This is an acceptance back into the pre-separation state, but as a different form, a new legitimate and recognised entity. It is where the concluding boundary is transversed, allowing a final emergence as something new that is adapted to comply with different social norms (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003). As such, liminality represents a transition in states, but also captures the ambiguity and fluidity of identity.

Figure 1 summarises these three stages of liminality, drawing upon Beech's (2011) model of identity reconstruction. The first stage is marked by separation, a detachment from the norm, leading to a secondary state of ambiguity and a possible final incorporation, 'the consummation of the passage' (ibid: 287). This is applied to the professional identity of FM, where the initial evidence indicates the presence of liminality within the practice. The possible evolution from the traditional bricks and mortar of the practice denotes a physical separation, but this initial stage of liminality is most evident in FM's increased role as an outsourced entity. In a similar vein to consultants (Czarniawska & Mazza 2003), and a division of project managers (Paton & Hodgson 2016), FM in this guise sits both within and outside the organisation, operating apart from the norms of conventional roles (Lucas 2014). They are 'socially if not physically invisible' (Beech 2011:287), and 'temporarily undefined' (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003:271). As discussed previously, this manifests in FM being marginalised and hidden (Becker 1990). Other elements, such as being powerless and displaying complete obedience to the elders align to the more cynical view of contractual FM (Thomson 1990). The liminal state also offers reflection, for different roles to be tried out that would be accepted by the client organisation, ultimately offering incorporation and acceptance to this new state.

**Figure 1: Liminal stages aligned to FM (adapted from Beech, 2011: 290)**

In essence, liminal spaces are dangerous and yet creative, unsettling and yet sites of togetherness (Lucas 2014), displaying the paradoxical traits as identified within FM. To move past the liminal stage, traits which are valued are shared as aspects of an identity are formed, allowing the initiation rite to be completed. From this, a recognised profession is created, permitting a formal acceptance into the business community.

However, it is increasingly evident that liminality, when applied to organisational studies, may not be the creation of a temporal space, but is increasingly becoming a permanent feature (Johnsen &

Sørensen 2015). Czarniawska & Mazza (2003) analysis of consultants illustrate the possibility of this permanence, where the role of consultants is to intentionally create liminal spaces, resulting in a perpetual liminal state as they move one from one contract to another. Such an eternal presence within the liminal phase is not necessarily detrimental, but allows a fluidity aligned within the concept of an unanchored identity.

By outlining the presence of liminal spaces, and linking those traits to the FM profession, this paper highlights the precarious, unrecognised and ambiguous nature (Lucas 2014) of FM, opening a way for an understanding of why FM has persisted as an industry without a stable identity for nearly half a century. The research indicates that FM has no firm organisational identity nor accepted legitimacy, supporting the argument for liminality. The metaphor of the house is uniquely placed as a tool to test this theory within FM, aiding the understanding into the lived space of FM- the practitioners interpretations of the discipline they deliver.

## **Methodology**

The concept of occupational identity manifests itself within the creation and then projection of a shared and valued purpose, a common home. To capture this, FM practitioners formed the participant pool, tasked with creating a visual projection of how they see their profession through the mental construction of a house. The use of the house metaphor gives ‘concrete substance to an impression that is difficult to express’ (Bachelard 1958: 74), relying on using creative juxtaposition (Morgan 2006). To support this, the role of imagination is captured by the visual method employed (Bachelard 1958), creating a robust way to form ‘both abstract and concrete thoughts in an economical fashion’ (Weber, 2008:43). In this manner, the creation of the metaphorical house rhetorically evaluated and identified positions, representing a vital resource to capture the ‘partial multiple, complementary, but also the alterative projections of ... complex workplaces’ (McEntree-Atalianis 2013: 320)

The participants were attending a university course in FM, one group at undergraduate level and one at postgraduate. These are part-time courses, designed for full time practitioners, and so all volunteers had at least two years practitioner experience as a course entry requirement. It also indicates that they all identified themselves as being FM practitioners as opposed to being labelled as such by the researcher. The rationale of the research was explained in terms of being an exploratory and visual investigation into how they viewed the practice of FM, utilising the imagery

of a house. Participation was voluntary and held during a break time (i.e. not part of the teaching programme). All data would remain anonymous and the ethical policies of the institution followed. From a total of forty, twenty-three agreed to participate, representing a range of in-house practitioners, service providers and consultants, working across both the public and the private sectors. To preserve anonymity, the biographical details of each participant were not requested, in line with the aim to investigate a holistic picture of the FM practice.

These two class groups were selected due to the close alignment with the scheduled teaching topics -communication and organisational storytelling, familiarising the participants with the use of metaphors. At the time of data collection, the researcher was part of the teaching team and a previous FM practitioner, which was judged to help build the receptiveness of the participants, but necessitated the clarification that this data was to be utilised for research purposes only.

A data sheet was devised and given to all participants, which contained ten sections indicating different areas of the house for reference. The researcher then reiterated that the purpose of the session was to create a visual representation of what they believed FM would be, through using the metaphor of a house. Each section was then walked through orally, and all 23 participants were asked to note down what they projected. For example, section one asked the participants to state what type of house they imagine FM to be, and why. When they had completed this, the researcher then guided them to the next section: 'looking at the house of FM, you look around to the neighbourhood it is in. What do you see? Who are the neighbours of FM?' As such, the layout of the house followed suit, supported by probing questions ('what do you see in that room/who did you meet' etc.) as they mentally moved from the front door, into the hallway, from the kitchen into the bathroom and then to the living room and the bedroom. It was clarified that they did not have to write something in relation to each area of the house, but to note down any visual images that they associated with the different areas.

Although this route was pre-determined, no other information was given. A final comment box invited additional remarks. The answer sheets were collected and numbered from one to twenty-three, and coded using Microsoft Excel to provide an overview of each story, noting the overall positivity/negativity of each narrative and the details held within the rooms. The coding process was completed to preserve and track the voices of the participants. This formal process was supported by a more iterative and reflexive approach to address personal interpretations that influenced the formation of the overall narrative (Fraher & Gabriel 2014). The results reflect the

house that FM built - in the sense it was constructed by FM practitioners as a representation of how they see the current practice in the UK. The familiar imagery of the house allows the exploration of what the practitioners' project onto certain areas and chart any presence of liminality. The approach also allows a specific profession to assume the role of the narrator, to illustrate how they see themselves in their own storyline, exploring the orthodoxy and self-perception the practice promotes of itself, and incorporating the empirical research into an overall narrative (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2014).

The following section details the imagery as presented by the practitioners. In line with the metaphorical aim of providing a 'way of thinking and a way of seeing' (Morgan 2006:4) that aims to add inspiration and evoke interesting associations (Czarniawska 1997), it invites you as a reader to enter the metaphor and journey around the FM profession. Three areas are identified - the neighbourhood, the houses and the shed – which are presented in relation to the stages of liminality. The first stage of separation is examined by the positioning of FM within its organisational neighbourhood. This allows the threshold into the liminal stage to be crossed, which is illustrated by the metaphor of the main and then hidden house. These are explored through a series of rooms viewed from the main liminal area of the hallway. Due to the fluid nature of identity, the metaphorical interpretation lends itself to multiple views, accounting for the inclusion of the shed, which appeared organically from the participant's responses. This is positioned as FM's final boundary, representing a possible move towards a final stage of incorporation and professional legitimacy within the organisational neighbourhood – the 'house' of FM becoming a 'home'.

What follows is therefore a peek into the window of this secondary service that represents one stream of organisational studies, and yet reflects similarities across all those business disciplines considered as secondary, or as support functions only. It starts, like any journey into a house, at the front step.

### **Separation within the organisational neighbourhood**

Come in to the front door and cross the threshold to the FM household. Not met before? I think you have, maybe by another name (Price 2001). Let me introduce you and we can see if it rings any bells.

The clan of FM claim a historical heritage (Price 2003), but their house appeared about thirty

or forty years ago (Drion et al 2012) in the organisational neighbourhood (see figure 2). A trace of their genealogy reveals ancestors in IT and Engineering (Price 2003), and they argue they can track back at least three generations whenever their legitimacy is questioned (Price, 1999). Their house is in the 'bottom floor of high rise flats, interconnected to all its neighbours but acting as the enabler for the flats to rise from' (Story 1). From its position, all the different layers of the building are visible and they are always moving around, 'like a house of Lego' (Story 2). Generally, they are only called on when something is needed; to give directions or borrow some household goods (Stories 8 & 14). There is great diversity in the neighbourhood, with the house of HR, Engineering, Design, IT, Clinicians, Contractors, Finance and Academics all being represented.

### **Figure 2: the organisational neighbourhood**

The flats are situated on a crossroads (Story 2), beside a busy roundabout where people eternally go round and round (Story 10). On one side, there is a nice, well maintained and busy city area, but the other side reveals a slum (Story 2), a 'disgruntled area, good in the day but bad at night. There are lots of riots. It's not welcoming'.

Looking closer, we can see that the flats that bear FM's name are well maintained (Stories 1, 2 & 7), but are the poorest in the area (Stories 1, 8 & 15). It looks like a recent attempt has been made to modernise it, but it is only surface deep (Stories 12 & 16). There are maps etched on the window glass (Story 12), and although one pane is cracked, it remains functional (Story 2). It is the door itself that dominates, 'clean, business-like, and automated (Stories 3 & 13), its strength emphasised by its biometric access control panel (Story 6) and intercom system (Story 2).

These initial impressions confirm the fluid and fragmented nature (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003), of FM's professional identity (Coenen et al 2010). The imagery of the block of flats was the most dominant response, and presents FM as the foundation of the organisation. This projection indicates that FM practitioners are very aware of their service provider status, and therefore of their clients, but this level of visibility is not returned. There was a strong rhetoric that FM was only sought as a reactive service to fix an issue, rather than a proactive partner within the environment (Becker 1990).

This separation stage of liminality is most clearly visible by how FM was physically positioned – by a busy crossroads. A clear symbol of being ‘betwixt and between’ (Beech 2011:287), FM is apart from both the ‘disgruntled area’ and the well maintained city area (Story 2). The comparison of being the poorest in the neighbourhood reinforces the underinvestment of the ‘slum’ positioning, emphasised by other voices who stated that much investment was just for show as opposed to being useful. This is balanced by the inclusion of the affluent area, which held equal geographical positioning. It remains that the house that FM built lies on the boundary of these two worlds, close enough to define themselves in relation to it (Clegg 2007), but separated from both.

### **The Liminal House of FM**

And so as the front door opens, and different areas within the house can be glimpsed (see figure 3). The conventional rooms portray the everyday and invisible roles of FM, revealing the ‘hidden’ (Ng & Hopfl 2011), and different guises of identity. This is where ‘versions of the self are tried out as a new or modified identity is sought’ (Beech 2011:289), and much of the activities presented within the rooms are viewed as important, but taken for granted (the biggest room in the FM house being the bathroom). The house is comfortable overall, but holds a confusing array of activities, with the kitchen showing ambition but a lack of knowledge, and the living room being old-fashioned, but being modernised. Overall, the house represents the main liminal space, displaying reflection and self-questioning in a recognised changing situation (Beech 2011).

### **Figure 3: the house of FM**

Crossing the threshold brings us into the hallway. This is a place of transitioning, a choice of direction. It is the hallway that facilitates the liminal process, and so it will be the point of reference to guide you through the main house. This space is neither public nor private, but both, with its only defined function being to move the occupants to their chosen destination. Its unimportance is matched by its unavoidability. The carpet is well maintained and the walls are modestly decorated with certificates of achievement (Stories 1, 2, 3, and 9) and fire action notices (Stories 6 and 11). These displays show that there is a drive for professional recognition, although this space is quite minimalist (Story 4) otherwise. However, there are hints of well-hidden storage areas (Story 8). Like the space itself, there are objects here that are also in transition, some furniture, tools (Stories 2, 9, 14, 15, and 16) and outdated home gadgets (Story 14). This is “the worst area of the house, still well kept, but not to the same standard as the rest of the house” (Story 7).

The hallway leads into the kitchen. This space is open and bright (Story 5), with 'non-stop, [people] whirling around, a hive of activity. It's mass catering, attempting to meet everyone's needs' (Story 1). There are 'cakes, sweets, to get everyone through the day, and make them smile. They should eat lunch here, but people have no time to' (Story 10). The positive spirit displayed here is not matched by a perceived level of competence, with the kitchen staff being 'eccentric, a bit nuts, loves their job, but isn't very good' (Story 13). There is a sense of experimentation here, of different identities being tried out, with 'modern gadgets to hand, but no idea on how to use them' (Story 12), with a focus on food preparation without anyone to consume it. This is in line with different identity projections, with 'school dinner ladies in the canteen-like kitchen have a newly-placed Gordon Ramsey picture on the wall, as something to aspire to' (Story 2).

Walking from the kitchen back into the hallway, you glimpse into the open door of the bathroom. This room is very well maintained, simple and very clean (Stories 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 12). It is 'the biggest and most modern room in the house' (Story 13). There are "plain, freshly washed hand towels with nice smelling soap and a huge bath" (Story 4). Despite this being presented as a 'throne room', it still needs updating (Stories 2, 10, 12, 14). The installation of motion-sensor lights (Story 6) illustrates the highly functional nature that is increasingly evident throughout the house (Story 8). This space is taken for granted as a basic requirement, 'everything is in there, but no-one notices' (Story 8). This room carried with it the possibility of an FM stereotype:

'The English call them *bogs* and *loos*. We [Americans] call them *toilets*. Whatever the term, until recently facilities management was associated with - to the extent it was consciously considered at all - as cleaning, maintenance, and other routine building-related functions... This is odd really, when one considers that facilities account for a huge proportion of most large organisations' total assets. They are a hidden resource' (Becker, 1990: 3, italics original).

This portrays the front line operative who is highly visible in terms of moving around the buildings completing their roles, but paradoxically remains unseen, unnoticed unless they need to react to a reported fault. In terms of liminality, there is clear link to the absence of status, as this represents the biggest room in the house that FM built, and yet it is taken for granted and invisible (Beech

2001). The desire to change their status with improvement and modernisations is visible across all the rooms you have seen.

Continuing down the hallway, we journey into the living room. In this space, you get the sense that this is 'the power base where the decision-making happens' (Story 1). It is the main office (Story 3), and 'information area with a comfortable atmosphere. It's creative, verbal, social' (p5, p4), where strategic decisions happen (Story 8). The traditional, oak beams (Story 4) are being updated with a 'modern change makeover [with] conference areas' (Story 9), as they symbolise being old fashioned (Stories 2 and 13). The chief executive is here, 'watching Corrie' (Story 6), and the TV never goes off (Story 2). Everyone eats together in here, and there is constant communication (Story 3). Overall, this space presents a 'relaxing, informal environment for working on new ideas' (Story 8), cosy with 'old-style carpets' (Story 13).

In terms of representing liminality, the continued theme of ambiguity is present here. The area is vibrant, active and inclusive, having outgrown its overtly old-fashioned appearance. The plans to modernise symbolise another possible change of direction, supporting the industry's overall drive to have an established identity. The chief executive is placed here, with the familiar TV show being mentioned to possibly show a personal connection, but it could also be construed as being distracted, and focused on the wrong thing. The constant stream of the TV symbolises FM's constant presence in terms of service delivery- on call but running in the background.

This room is a place of reflection, offering space to consider the changing roles of FM, with the old-fashioned imagery representing a state that necessitates the separation stage. The state of liminality that is now apparent directs a new emergent identity that allows acceptance back into the organisational landscape, the aggregate stage (figure 2). The living room shows an awareness of this transition, and the possibility of new routes and options forming, creation of new ideas to be tried out, some successful, some not, in the unstable entity of identity creation (Clegg et al, 2007).

From our position in the hallway, we can see there is just one area remaining within the house. This is the bedroom, 'the back of house area, which is well ordered and hardly used by others' (Story 1), with 'knock before you enter' (Story 3) and 'do not disturb' signs (Story 17). Despite being a private area, a sense of order is still apparent. There are echoes of a 'hotel room, organised, calm, a place to be alone away from activities' (Story 4), a place for thoughts (Story 5). The comfortable bed has a 'notepad next to it for middle-of-the-night remembering's' (Story 6).



This creative element is also apparent on the walls, which are painted 'lots of colours, to show what could be done' (Story 8).

This place sits a little uncomfortably. The identity-orientated marking of FM clashes with the control-orientated marking (Ng & Hopfl 2011), as not only does FM not show this side of its character, it regularly erases that of others, being referred to as the 'midnight gestapo' routinely rearranging furniture, then having it magically reappear in its original position (Becker 1990). In this way, the bedroom represents the unsettling (Lucas 2014) element of the liminal state, and so you turn into the hallway. With the tour of the house complete, you head towards the front door again.

### *The Hidden House*

The organisational neighbourhood and the house of FM was built were formed by correlating the majority of responses, which painted a predominately positive picture. However, the minority voice is nonetheless present, carrying with it the rejected features that are an integral part of professional identity (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera 2014). The liminal space allows different projections to be tried out, some positively, reflecting the freedom of this state, but some negatively, linking more to the anxiety of this stage. This forms the hidden house, which sits in the shadows of the house as presented above. Geographically, they remain unconnected, but symbolically, it represents a different yet undeniable area of the liminal stage of FM

This house is 'old and dilapidated' (Story 18), and in the 'middle of nowhere' (Story 18), with no neighbours (Story 4). The front door is old, wooden and hanging off due to overuse (Stories 9, 14, 15). It opens into a 'long, long, long hallway, [which is] grey, boring, with no windows and an echo' (Story 10). A piece of art on the wall is 'misunderstood' (Story 13) as a sign of the changing nature within the liminal state. There is no-one in the kitchen, but an 'engineer looking for a kettle in his overalls, eating a bacon sandwich' (Story 14), and the odd jobs person, 'who does repairs to the house to maintain status' (Story 16). There is little else in this room, as it has 'been all outsourced [leaving] a small fridge' (Story 9) and a 'water boiler for instant drinks' (Story 17).

The bathroom is 'the remnants of a grand old bathroom with a roll top bath, but is degraded and lacks maintenance' (Story 14). It is not recommended that you go in (Story 17), with images of the filthy bathroom portrayed within the film *Trainspotting* being referred to (Story 15). The TV is on

in the living room, but there is generally no-one there (Stories 2 and 10). Occasionally, 'a work weary caretaker, as old as the furniture there' (Story 17) appears, and when people do appear, they 'are minions, all people longing about living in the past, reciting how good it used to be' (Story 12). The living room still has associations with power, with the 'boss, trying to keep up' (Story 18) appearing. The bedroom is 'small ... like a dorm in an army barracks' (Story 10), or a 'first aid room, basic, boring, dull colours with old fashioned wall paper' (Story 13). There is lots of junk as although the room 'has a function, it is used for everything but' (Story 12).

This house represents the 'darker realities' (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera 2014), the anxiety and instability of liminality. It presents vivid imagery that is rife with frustration of a silent, unseen and isolated service. There is a projection of a service past its prime, that has separated from a legitimate organisational function, reflecting on the relevance it offers, and the ability to adapt to new positions.: 'FM is in a poorly maintained or old building as the focus is on the rest of the building. It is a hard working hub that needs recognition and updating' (Story 10).

### **Signs of Incorporation? The Shed**

At the side of the house, you notice a shed (Stories 6, 15, 16, 20 and 21). This is a modest construction, but is used more than the rest of the house (Story 20). This is outside the safe boundary of the house, where everything has its place within a sense of common understanding, yet the shed represents a hive of activity. This is built and solely owned by FM themselves, and it was not a structure considered previously, appearing in the 'additional comments' section of the empirical research. Described by the participants as 'the hidden place where the work goes on' (Story 20), it is 'something that is kept in the back garden. It houses valuable tools to keep the property in good repair, but it is often forgotten' (Story 16).

The shed as a construction from the practitioners represents a possible recognition of the permanent state of liminality. It stands separate from the main house, forgotten, but this separation from a community can be liberating, with enough people being outside one community leading to the creation of another (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003). Here, there is a feeling of togetherness and creativity (Lucas 2014) that indicates a sense of belonging, a symbolic home that allows a freedom to construct new identities in line with the fluidity of organisations (Czarniawska 1997). It is through the self-construction of the shed that FM can be said to be moving towards a conclusion of the liminal state. There is clear development of an identity that is more fully formed than that

illustrated within the main house, indicating a new concept of self (Beech 2011) that would trigger incorporation back into an organisational landscape.

However, it remains that this process is nearing completion rather than being fully accepted. Taking into account the fluid nature of identity construction (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003), the shed could represent an end to the liminal state not through incorporation, but by accepting that the liminal state is not temporary but permanent. Taken in this light, there is an argument that FM represents a growing number of professionals who ‘move in and out and consider it a stable state’ (Czarniawska & Mazza 2003: 286), as illustrated in recent project management research (Paton & Hodgson 2016). Therefore, the concept of liminality as it applies to FM is not so much the reconstruction of identity, but ‘more longitudinal experience of ambiguity and in-between-ness within a changeful context’ (Beech 2011:288).

As a divided discipline, there is also an element of transformation apparent, where a strong recognition of FM's limitations is matched by a strong sense of self- awareness and dedication. If the permanence of liminality is not recognised or accepted, the frustration could drive the discipline into a fragmented identity, absorbed into organisational landscapes and ensnared into a perpetual liminal space. Alternatively, it could drive the industry to professionalize, achieving the sought after legitimacy and hence take its place in the wider organisational world.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has illustrated the fluidity of identity construction within FM as a secondary service, utilising a metaphorical construct of the house and placing this within a wider context of liminality. FM was chosen due to its historical ambiguity over its internal and external identity, and this is positioned within a current landscape that highlights these issues across other secondary positions.

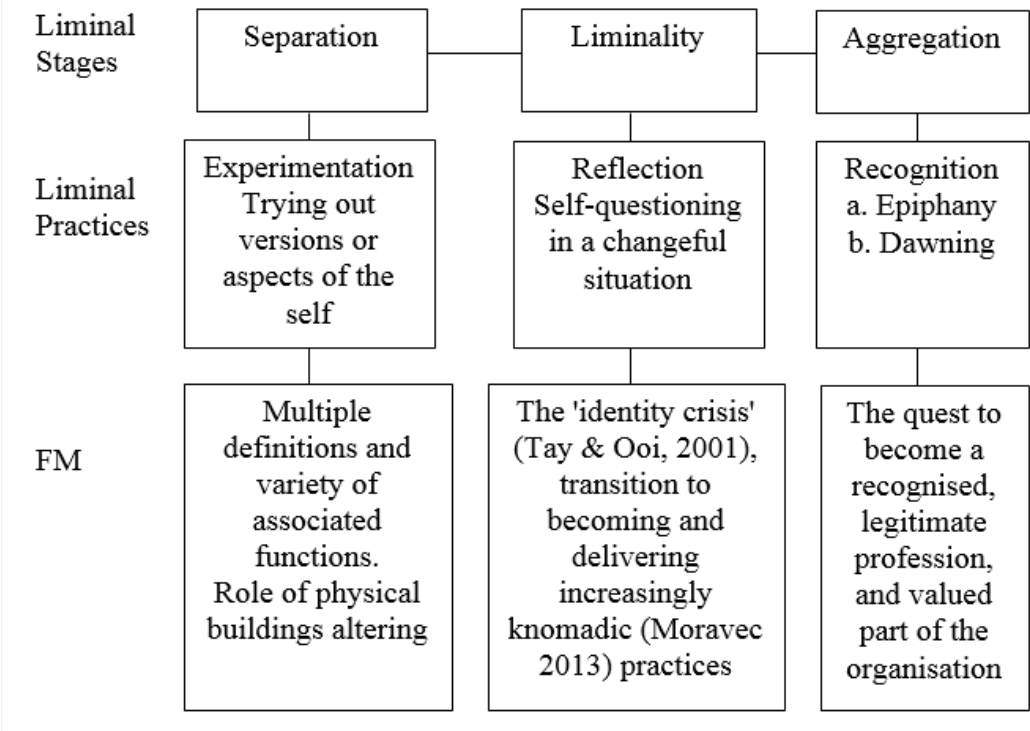
The use of the house metaphor was well received by the FM practitioners, and allowed a clear, visual representation to be formed on how they view their profession, capturing the fluidity of identity creation within the stages of liminality. The metaphor itself provided a rich source of clear imagery that allowed an insight into how FM is viewed by practitioners, presenting a unique and vivid journey through their profession. Each room invited creation and therefore reflection. The use of the metaphor allowed this questioning and experimentation, typical of a liminal space, to be captured.

At a collective level, the framework of liminality allowed the three stages to be clearly identified in practice. The separation that FM as a profession feels manifests in the freedom and yet anxiety of the main and hidden houses, but in this case, full incorporation may take one of many forms. By never having an established identity within the organisational neighbourhood, FM may be on the verge of creating one, with the practitioners increasingly united in a shared purpose (Clegg et al 2007). However, developments in the theory of liminality (Czarniawska & Mazza 2003, Paton & Hodgson 2016) indicate that this may not be a temporal but a permanent state, which would explain why FM has yet to cross this final threshold. Rather than this being viewed as a negative, everlasting liminality may provide the elasticity that service providers need in order to navigate the eternal climate of change within contemporary organisations.

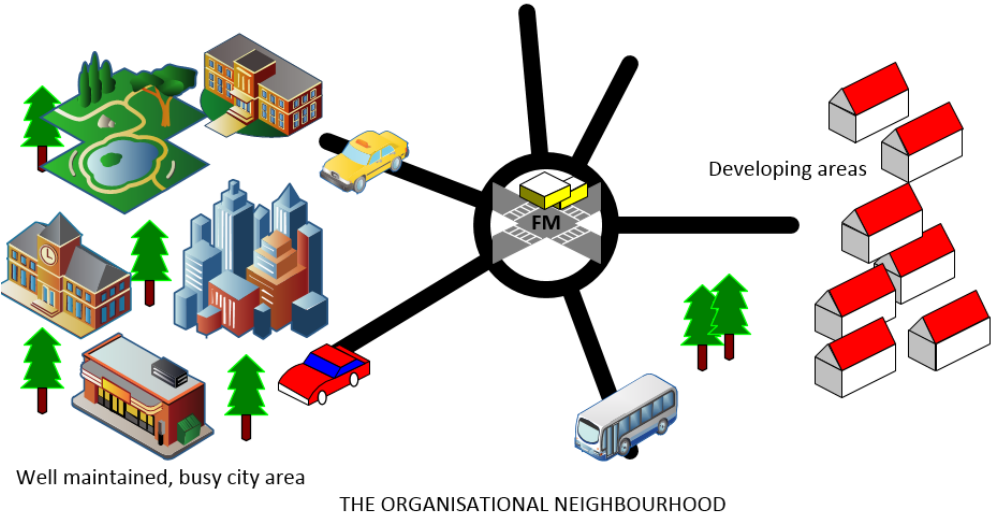
What remains is the acceptance of such a state, whether FM as a profession will endure and thrive within the shed it has created, continue to seek a stable identity within the main house, or disappear away from organisational recognition into the disparate hidden house. As identity formation is the process of 'becoming' (Svengsson & Alvesson 2003), it would serve purpose to repeat this research longitudinally, to uncover if the elements of liminality within the profession still exist, and to chart any movement, which indicates that FM practitioners are moving from imagining a house to finding a home.

Although this paper is limited to the specific areas of FM, the use of metaphor is versatile (Morgan 2006). As such, the approach could be applied to a range of other managerial sub-disciplines to help explore degrees of professionalization and identity. The house appealed to FM due to the link with the physical environment, and so a different selection under the same method may work better for other services. This approach allowed the stages of liminality to become visible, and it has proved a useful framework to diagnose the contemporary condition as it captures 'in a precise manner, the blurring of boundaries' (Johnsen & Sørensen, 2015:322) that are increasingly commonplace within the organisational landscape.

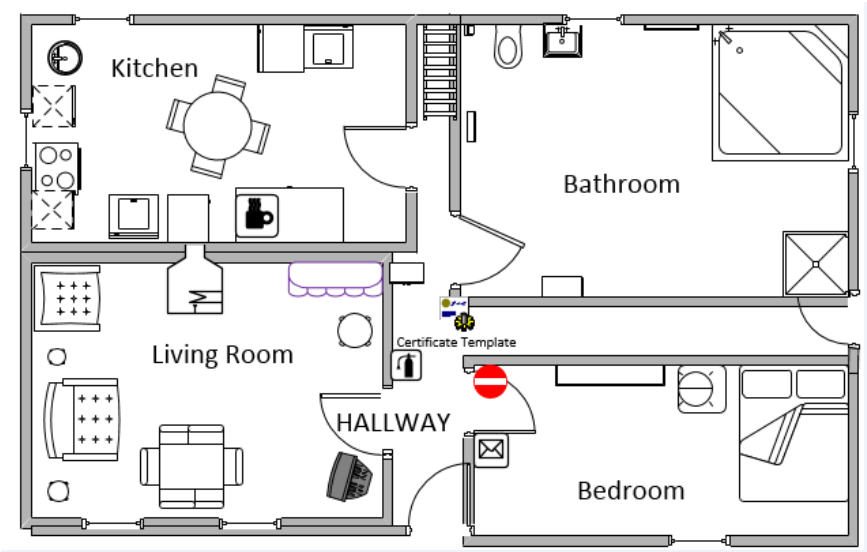
**Figure 1: Liminal Stages aligned to FM**



**Figure 2: The Organisational Neighbourhood**



**Figure Three: The House of FM**



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