

Facilities management offers great potential career path for unemployed youth

Latest statistics reveal that the unemployment rate in South Africa stands at 29%. Over 40% of those unemployed are young and are between the ages of 15 and 34. In addition, 45% of recent graduates cannot find employment.



Xolile Sizani, group chief executive officer of Servest

This is a problem of crisis proportions, and the only way to resolve it is to find a sector of the economy that is growing steadily and in which there is a need for the skills that young people can supply.

Industry options

The Servest 2018/9 Market Analysis Survey concluded that the local Facilities Management (FM) sector has grown from providing services such as landscaping, maintenance and repairs, security, cleaning services, etc, into an integrated service offering in partnership with and covering the entire business activity of the client company.

Whereas those isolated services were usually perceived as requiring low skills levels and menial labour, the study notes that the new end-to-end offering has potential for greater employment, upskilling and entry into career fields that are far more sophisticated.

The current state of the economy is at the same time forcing organisations to look closely at costs, and to find ways to cut down on those costs without affecting the quality of their offerings. The answer has been an increased tendency towards outsourcing non-core activities and the use of technology. This frees enterprises to focus on their core functions and makes doing business easier.



Servest 2018/19 Facilities Management Market Analysis Survey results released

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Outsourced services

Integrated facilities management is precisely that – a professional service that lies outside core activities and competencies of many enterprises. As a result, according to the Servest survey, companies are looking to outsource several aspects of their facilities management.

In fact, the facilities management industry is estimated at R52 billion and has generally been growing on average at about 10% – in 2017 to 2018 the facilities management industry grew by 10.4%. Insourced Services grew by 3.4% while outsourced services grew by 7%. With 87% of services still insourced, there is a growing trend of services to be outsourced.

“The facilities sectors currently present one of the highest potential opportunities to lead in alleviating the youth unemployment challenge,” says Xolile Sizani, group chief executive officer of Servest. For example, in the cleaning services there are about 180,000 employed colleagues, where 100,000 employees are employed by cleaning contractors and a range of 70,000 – 80,000 are in-house cleaners. According to PSIRA’s registration records, there are currently 2.36 million security officers registered in South Africa – of which over 498,435 are employed by just over 9,000 registered and active security businesses. We estimate another 30,000 people are employed in the Landscape & Turf industry. With 420 registered Pest Control companies, about 6,000 Pest Control Operators are employed.

“We provide a number of integrated facilities solutions across sectors including mining, real estate, retail, manufacturing, commercial offices, student accommodation, health, construction and transport industries,” Sizani continues.



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24 Jul 2019



Careers in facilities management

He explains that the facilities management sector involves a wide range of solutions that impact a company’s triple bottom line. These solutions include management and maintenance of assets such as property, buildings, infrastructure, equipment and other environments that house personnel. Other solutions include productivity improvement and important elements of operation within a business, encompassing both the internal and external built environment. At Servest, the built environment includes the marine environment.

Sizani is of the view that the facilities management sector is well positioned to provide a number of entry points into different careers for unemployed youth and graduates. The 2017 SAFMA Market Quantification and Analysis study showed that the following are some of the skills desperately needed in the industry: skilled tradespersons, engineers, accounting and finance staff, sales representatives, admin and office support staff, receptionists, drivers, technicians, trainers and IT personnel, to mention just a few.

“These could vary; in some instances, young people have the opportunity to start at the bottom and build their way to the top. Starting as a cleaner earning a minimum wage could be the path to becoming a specialist hygienist in this sector. In fact, one of our colleagues in Marine Division started as a cleaner and was given an opportunity to train as a skipper. She now sails one of our 14 vessels in Marine Division.”



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Youth need a new perspective

He highlighted that one of the biggest challenges is that young people, especially graduates, are not looking to explore these opportunities. However, young people need to take a different perspective on the way that they view opportunities for employment entry. With experience they can be employable, as they would have been exposed to a work setup and a better understanding of the basic processes and systems within a work environment. It provides graduates with a “foot in the door”, with the opportunity to build their careers and ascend the ranks of leadership within the organisation. “Another colleague started as a waiter some 20 years ago serving burgers in one of the prominent fast food outlets. She is now a director in our organisation. So it matters not where you start, it is where you end up that counts.”

The approach is one of partnership, with the facilities management service provider becoming part of the team and working to enable its client organisation to operate productively and efficiently. The skills of teamwork and collaboration acquired while working as part of a multi-disciplinary team, along with the emphasis on service excellence, are invaluable to a young person entering the world of work.

Team player

This is a people-orientated industry. Success in this field depends on good relationships. Team members must be candid, caring and approachable. A sound reputation built on integrity, sound business ethics, diligence and credibility is critical. Working in a field that demands these things provides a grounding in these aspects of sound business practice that will serve the young person well in whatever career he or she may eventually end up in.

The nature of the work inevitably calls for innovative and creative thinking, as every client’s situation is different, and their needs vary and change frequently. An entrepreneurial approach to the work is essential, a positive perspective and professionalism are essential. Again, these are the skills required in a career for a new entrant into the world of work.

The facilities management service provider will often have a permanent presence at the client’s premises; this is also a big part of Servest’s approach, as it enables the business to work as an extension of our client’s business, to allow the company to respond immediately to the client’s needs and to proactively identify potential issues before they arise. People working in the field, therefore, need to be flexible, adaptive, nimble and responsive. All these are skills required by the 21st century worker.