

Investigating the Facility Management Professional Shortage

Roscoe Hightower, Jr., Ph.D.
Professor of Marketing
School of Business and Industry
Florida A&M University
Tallahassee, FL 32307
roscoe.hightower@famu.edu
and
James Highsmith
MBA Candidate
School of Business and Industry
Florida A&M University

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this manuscript is to investigate the importance of creating a collegiate educational program that focuses on attracting and training a new generation of Facility Management professionals. The sustainability of businesses and organizations in today's global economy relies on Facility Management professionals with advanced business knowledge and technical skills (Hightower, 2013). Every year fewer and fewer college students are choosing the Facility Management career path resulting in a lack of qualified personnel to fill the growing number of Facility Management job positions that are opening yearly. Two major reasons behind the qualified candidate shortage is; the lack of exposure to the profession as well as the discrepancy that exists between the skills needed by the employers and the skills that are taught in college. Educators maintain that their role is not to teach specific skills, but provide students with fundamental knowledge. As of 2013 there are relatively few International Facility Management Association (IFMA) Accredited Degree Programs (ADP). American businesses (i.e., especially multi-national corporations MNCs) are at risk when one considers that Facility Managers play a huge role in MNC operations and overall profitability.

Design / Methodology / Approach: A convenience sample of MNCs, FM professionals, Educators responded to a number of items via an online questionnaire.

Findings: The initial findings indicate initial support for the hypotheses that 1) companies will be more profitable if there are more IFMA ADPs producing FM professionals, 2) IFMA ADPs that have a recruiting pipeline that includes primary, middle, and high schools produce more FM graduates than those that do not have primary, middle, and high school contacts, 3) IFMA ADPs that actively engage in publishing FM research produce more FM professionals than those that do not engage in publishing FM research.

Originality / Value: Identifies: 1) the need for practitioners to partner with colleges to increase the number of FM professionals produced, and 2) identification of a FM recruiting pipeline.

Keywords: Facility Manager Employment, Recruiting, Facility Management Education, Accredited Degree Programs

INTRODUCTION

“Of the 1.7 million bachelor's degrees awarded in academic year 2010-11, almost one-third were concentrated in two fields: business (21 percent) and social sciences and history (10 percent). Five other fields each accounted for 5 percent or more of all bachelor's degrees awarded. These were health professions and related programs, education, psychology, visual and performing arts, and biological and biomedical sciences. These are the same seven fields in which the largest numbers of bachelor's degrees were awarded in 2000-01.” (National Center for Education Statistics 2012)

Some individuals may think that the Facilities Management (FM) profession is taking a major hit. Not because the need for Facilities Managers is declining; in fact the need for proficient Facilities Managers is growing rapidly each year. One of the potential hits in the industry apparently stems from the declining number of students graduating with a FM accredited degree. Each year more and more positions are opening up for this profession, but there is a worldwide shortage of young qualified entry-level professionals to place in these jobs. Many multi-national corporations' (MNCs) executives suggest that something must be done soon to increase the number of qualified professionals to enter the industry.

Facilities.net, Building Operating Management, and Maintenance Solutions Magazine distributed a survey to 1,164 FM personnel across the US. Findings revealed that only 7% percent of the respondents worked in the industry less than four years in comparison to 23% that have worked for twenty or more years (Lorenz 2008). In an industry that is constantly looking for new hires this number reflects the decline in qualified candidates. Companies can't afford to continue bringing in new talent that does not meet the FM industry needs.

Different reasons exist for this shortage of qualified job candidates. First, one can take into consideration the lack of public exposure there is to the FM profession in the western hemisphere, especially in the United States. Many college students are not exposed to the FM career path, if ever, until they are already years into their respective majors. High schools tend to only focus on certain academic paths that have been around for years, an example of this would be Business, Social Sciences, and Pharmacy. In general, elementary schools in the western hemisphere, virtually never mention a facility manager on "career day". Some may ask "why is this the case?" The answer is that the average person in the western hemisphere may not know what facilities management means. If that is true, how can young people, the current K-12 school systems along with institutions of higher learning be expected to study FM? More importantly, choose FM as a major while in college probably never having heard of the profession or major previously.

Traditionally, universities may not have been interested in creating efficient pipelines to attract elementary, middle, and high school students. This is especially true for 'publicly unaware majors' similar to FM in the western hemisphere. Unfortunately, without proper marketing programs in conjunction with high quality undergraduate and graduate degree programs, the United States and other western hemisphere nations may never produce enough FM graduates to meet industry demand. As an example at the time this research project was conducted, the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) Foundation had a total of 25 Accredited Degree Programs (ADPs) in three continents (North America, Europe, and Asia/Oceania). In summary, three out of 25 of these institutions offer an Associates of Arts or "other" FM degree, 14 offer a Bachelor's FM degree, and six offer a Master's FM degree or its equivalent. Of note here is the fact that IFMA is the largest world wide professional organization for facilities management professionals; such that we assumed that the IFMA Foundation's impact on higher education can be generalized to the many other FM professional organizations' respective impact on higher education throughout the world. Thus we offer the first of two hypotheses, FM companies hiring ADP graduates are more successful than FM companies that hire from non-accredited colleges and universities.

Services Marketing Industry Background

Services are defined as any deed, act, or performance (Zeithaml 1988). Thus one can see why it is posited that the FM profession falls within the larger context of the services businesses with respect to discussing economic terms like the service industry sector both on a domestic and global basis. The U.S., as well as much of the world economy, is dominated by services. In the U.S. approximately 75% of the labor force, 70% of the GNP, 45% of an average family's budget, and 32% of exports are accounted for by services. Virtually every type of industry utilizes some space in a physical facility during some part of its service delivery process (i.e., Online gambling, electronic funds transfers, and specific companies like *AirB&B*). FM jobs are opening up on a daily basis; there is no reason students should be left in the dark about these current and future career opportunities, and forced to continue to choose traditionally saturated professions while in college.

As an example for those that may not be familiar with the FM industry let's look at the following US example of the services industry sector. How does FM fit into the overall services sector? FM companies could be but are not limited to the following: "Any institution that has a large number of people and physical infrastructure that includes building, grounds, food service, a vehicle fleet, water/wastewater facilities, intensive use of energy, lots of equipment and appliances that use electricity, a transportation network, and the large-scale procurement of goods and services will eventually require a sustainability manager." (Doyle 2008) As one thinks about this discussion, he or she can begin to

realize that almost everything that regular US citizens utilize these things daily. For example, school districts, utilities companies, colleges, universities, corporations, governmental agencies, and military bases. These and other entities combine to account for a large percentage of the domestic economy. The United States has approximately some 3,300 county, 19,400 municipal, 16,000 township, and over 35,300 'special district' governments. There are also estimated to be almost 14,000 school districts along with and over 4,100 colleges. There are many large military bases, and the 50 state governments with their related departments.

Some of the positions like the ones below depict common job titles in the facility management discipline, but are not limited to the following: Occupational Safety and Health, Industrial Hygiene/Indoor Air Quality, Display Screen Regulations, Contractor Safety Rules, Risk Assessments, Control of Hazardous Substances, Fire Protection and Safety, Smoke, Heat, Carbon Monoxide, and Radon Detector Maintenance, Fire Alarms, Sprinkler Systems, Fire Extinguishers, Dry Risers, Maintenance of Fire Stoppers, Security, Access Control, Close Circuit Television and Manned Guards, Disabled Access, Cleaning, Waste Management, Mail Room, Photocopying, Vending, Parking, Asbestos, and Business Continuity Planning, Disaster Recovery, Lease Negotiations, HVAC Maintenance, Building Automation, and Grounds Maintenance/Horticulture, etc. Note here that at this time there are more than 7,500 specific job descriptions that fall under the general FM category.

A second significant contributor that is hypothesized to exist is the 'disconnect between the skills that universities are teaching current FM students and the skills that the FM industry needs their graduates to have.' This disconnect can cause major professional labor shortage problems in the industry. Universities are graduating students with FM degrees, but these graduates may not meet the industry's needs for entry-level employees. According to some industry executives, some universities may be producing/graduating under qualified FM professionals for the workforce. Historically, many academic institutions have insisted, "...their role is not to teach specific skills, but to provide students with fundamental knowledge." This manuscript posits that, in order for an academic FM program to have adequate industry standing (be successful in the 21st Century), the academic program must have a full understanding of what the FM industry needs (i.e., specific skills acquired during college) for their entry-level employees. Without this understanding and long-term partnership (i.e., between FM industry organizations and academic institutions) the current shortage of FM talent produced by colleges and universities may never be corrected.

BRIEF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY HISTORY

The facilities management industry covers many different types of services that can be categorized into two different responsibilities, operational and strategic. The operational aspect ensures that there is proper maintenance of the building its equipment, allowing for a safe cost effective environment that delivers value to the organizations' shareholders. The strategic aspect is where they analyze information to give reports to owners about the impact of their decisions in regards to space and services. Successful Facilities Managers from 2013 forward must not only possess traditional technical skill sets, but also have an enterprise wide appreciation of a leading a profitable business. This last point should not be taken lightly because preliminary feedback from the FM executives indicate that the 'enterprise wide perspective of leading a profitable business' may be one of several key missing elements in traditional academic FM degree programs.

Key Leadership Point From Extant Literature

According to Kashiwagi (2012), "...people do not know the difference between leadership and management. People assume that managers at the top of a department, division or organization are leaders. People do not know how to identify a leader..." The researchers agree with this approach to differentiating leadership from management, especially as it relates to applying this concept to the FM profession. Kashiwagi (2012) furthered his point by describing leadership as identifying expertise and the alignment of expert resources. Management was suggested to use direction and control to address risk while enhancing performance. Leadership was posited to hire experts, while management assumed that they were the experts. Management changes the people while leadership changes the complete environment. Leaders have an enterprise wide perspective while management see the environment with a technical only approach. In summary, Kashiwagi (2012) suggested that the business world becomes more globalized in the future with respect to the FM environment; leadership becomes the key to success and not FM technical expertise.

INDUSTRY SKILLS REQUIRED vs. SKILLS TAUGHT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Organization and industry executives attribute the shortage of qualified FM personnel to a failure on the part of the university system to teach the appropriate skills. A large majority of schools are not teaching skills that are industry specific. In many cases you find students that are classified as enrolled in the Facilities Management major but are not taking the appropriate classes that would differentiate them from an engineering major. More universities need to research the FM industry in order to create a curriculum that not only meets the FM industry's stated needs, but that also allows the student to graduate ready to enter the workforce and compete immediately. The complex duties and responsibilities of a well-prepared FM professional require an extensive and diverse educational background. This type of educational background is realized when colleges and universities obtain certain FM industry credentials like the IFMA Foundation's ADP.

EFFICIENT RECRUITING PIPELINE

Some elementary, middle, and high school students are counseled to decide on a college major early in their K-12 matriculation. A collegiate recruiting pipeline helps build FM profession brand awareness that results in more high school seniors choosing to go on to college and become FM professionals. Many students are not exposed to FM until they are deep into their curriculum. Universities and organizations can fix this issue by creating long-term partnership programs. It is critical that universities build these relationships with K-12 schools across the country as well as FM organizations. These K-12 relationships can afford colleges and universities an opportunity to consistently message facilities management as a profession to the youth. It is posited that this consistent positive messaging may help establish a permanent positive image on future generations of K-12 students, more successful university FM recruiting, more FM majors, and ultimately more highly qualified FM graduates for the profession.

It is recommended that FM organizations and universities work hand-in-hand to create a pipeline composed of high quality students and leading edge curriculums that insure these students are studying exactly what the FM profession needs. Again, the colleges and universities would best accomplish this by obtaining academic accreditation from highly respected FM industry organizations like the IFMA Foundation.

FACILITY MANAGEMENT COLLEGE CURRICULUM

According to Minners (2012) 49% of business executives surveyed recently believe today's graduates are less prepared for work than they were 15 years ago. Business and industry leaders attribute the lack of qualified entry-level FM professionals to the failure of colleges and universities to teach the necessary skills required for the new hire's job. Universities may need to become more aware of the industry standards when they evaluate/create the FM curriculum. There must be a firm academic understanding of the specialized skills needed to be an efficient Facilities Manager. Initial results appear to indicate employers cited that a lack of specific skills as the primary reason for rejection of current college applicants. A clear discrepancy exists, between the need for specialized skills and those presented in degree programs. Some colleges and universities may create FM curricula that do not offer the proper classes. Universities and colleges can avoid this issue by reviewing the standards set in place by the industry groups like the IFMA Foundation. The information gained could assist them in becoming an ADP.

Building relationships between the Universities and FM companies not only corrects the curriculum issue, but it also allows the ADP students to more easily interact and interview with FM industry professionals. Historically, industry executives accused higher education of either teaching students outdated FM practices or failing to teach core FM concepts. Industry executives also complained that universities have not kept pace with the FM industry and are unaware of the skill set required for Facilities Managers today.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The authors suggest that both educators and FM organizations must expand their efforts to prepare students for the future FM industry. Businesses should invest in training their entry-level workers, and colleges and universities should provide more opportunities for students to learn state-of-the-art skills required by industry. Educational institutions and business organizations must cooperate if they hope to resolve the growing shortage of FM professionals. Before effective cooperation solutions can be put in place, more specific empirical research is necessary. The current research begins to anecdotally investigate the severity of the FM labor shortage and the disparity between skills taught by

academia and those desired by industry. A limitation for the current research project is the lack of empirical data and subsequent results. The authors call for future research to more fully investigate the exact nature of FM academic and industry needs. Thus, the first informal hypothesis, FM companies hiring ADP graduates are more successful than FM companies that hire from non-accredited colleges and universities, shows initial support from the preliminary data. The second informal hypothesis, that a 'disconnect between the skills that universities are teaching current FM students and the skills that the FM industry needs their graduates to have' currently exists and may heavily contribute to the current shortage of FM talent produced by colleges and universities.

REFERENCES

- Doyle, K. (2008). *Job market sees growing demand for sustainability managers - Experience.com*. Retrieved May 2013, from https://uahcareer.experience.com/alumnus/article?channel_id=energy_utilities&source_page=editors_picks&article_id=article_1208550373072.
- Hightower, Roscoe (2013), "Investigating the green Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) servicescape scale in Brazil," *Construction Innovation: Information, Process, Management Journal*, 13(3), 242-265.
- Kashiwagi, D (2012), "New leadership model: changing the playing field," IFMA World Workplace Conference Proceedings, San Antonio, TX.
- Lorenz, B. (2008, September). *New Survey Reports on Industry Job Satisfaction, Job Security and FM Pay - Facilities Management Facilities Management Feature*. Retrieved June 14, 2013, from <http://www.facilitiesnet.com/facilitiesmanagement/article/New-Survey-Reports-on-Industry-Job-Satisfaction-Job-Security-and-FM-Pay--9639>.
- Minners, J. (2012, February). *Survey Says: College Graduates not Prepared for the Workforce*. Retrieved May 2013, from <http://www.lexisnexis.com/legalnewsroom/lexis-hub/b/career-news-and-trends/archive/2012/02/01/survey-says-college-graduates-not-prepared-for-the-workforce.aspx>.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2012). *NCES 2012 spotlight Chapter 4: Undergraduate fields of study*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cta.pdf
- Zeithaml, VA (1988), "Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means end model and synthesis of evidence," *Journal of Marketing*, 52(July), 2-22.



Want even **more Content?**



Since you're already a user, you know that IFMA's Knowledge Library offers all FM content in one place. But did you also know that by signing up via email to become a registered user, you can unlock even more resources?

Signing up via email for registered access within the Knowledge Library brings more content and functionality to your fingertips. Expect to grow your facility management knowledge, career and network faster than ever before.

REGISTER TODAY