

Student Engagement in the Facility Management Profession through Mentorship

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Abstract

A 2008 nationwide survey found that 85.7 percent of the Facility Management (FM) population was over the age of 40, and within this group, over half (54.1 percent) were within 10 to 15 years of retirement. The survey also revealed that the rate of new entrants to the FM industry was not sufficiently high to replace those leaving the field. In other words, without a drastic change to how new personnel / students enter the industry, there may not be enough trained people to support owners' needs for professional facilities management.

One avenue to expose students to the FM profession is through partnerships of local student and parent International Facility Management Association (IFMA) chapters, through a mentorship program. Over the past 12 months, a local student chapter's leadership worked with their parent chapter to develop a first-of-its-kind mentorship program. 14 professional and associate members volunteered to be mentors. Eight students participated in the program, and of those students, four secured a paid internship or full-time position, as a direct result of their participation in the program.

The paper presents a brief literature review of the need to increase facilities management education, a detailed description of the mentorship program, results of the program, as well as lessons learned and recommendations.

Keywords: Facilities Management Career, Industry Support, Mentorship, Student Engagement

Introduction

Many organizations are realizing that facilities asset management is an important part of effectively managing the business. A 2001 study found that the Federal Government manages more than 500,000 buildings, valued at over \$328 billion (*Sustainable federal facilities*, 2001).

In short, the Facilities Management profession is responsible for a significant portion of an organization's overall financial and operational success. The challenge is that much of today's workforce will be retiring. A 2008 study published by the National Research Council found that 42 percent of the federal Senior Executive Service was estimated to have retired in 2010 (NRC, 2008). A separate survey of 247 facility managers in 2010 found that 49 percent of them would be retiring by 2020 (Sullivan, Georgoulis, & Lines, 2010). By 2025, 73 percent of the respondents were planning to retire.

Research Problem

The resulting void of institutional and technical knowledge in the field necessitates that industry leaders, practitioners, and educators identify the key skills that future facility managers must possess. The impending supply shortage of qualified FMs is challenging because of the loss of expertise in the field. The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of mentorship of students as a means to help alleviate the problem.

Literature Review

The NRC 2008 study also analyzed challenges relating to attracting, and retaining, a younger generation of new professionals in federal job positions. The report identified that three percent of the entire federal workforce was under the age of 25 (with exception to the military) (NRC, 2008). A person with a high level of institutional knowledge acquired it through both training and the learned behaviors of the organization. Knowing that the federal work force is relatively older, the reader may deduce that the impending barrage of retirements will create a gap in skills and knowledge. The report identifies that younger people do not seek federal civil service employment for one of three primary reasons: (1) there is too much bureaucracy, (2) wages are not comparable to similar work in other organizations, and (3) the hiring process is time consuming, cumbersome, and confusing. The report identified three major competencies that facility managers must possess (NRC, 2008, p. 53):

1. Utilization of life-cycle approach to integrate people, places, and technologies;
2. Alignment of facilities with the mission of the organization or department it serves; and
3. Involvement of multi-disciplinary trades and departments within an organization in strategic decision making.

Facilities management has changed drastically over time: FMs may have started their career in maintaining a single building, but are now an important part of strategic planning and financing (NRC, 2008). Some of this additional knowledge has come from professional training, but much of it derives from the facility manager's institutional knowledge with the company. There is also no plan in place to transfer this knowledge to the new generation of FMs. The previously discussed nationwide survey of FMs identified that 80 percent of the respondents believe that their division had a succession plan in place; the reality is that only 36 percent actually have a plan developed to mentor and support their replacements (Sullivan, Georgoulis, & Lines, 2010).

While technical skills are important, federal agency directors must help staff quickly increase their leadership skills (see Figure 1). As one moves through their career, they should align

personnel to the positions that best utilize their technical expertise. Project leaders (or facility asset managers) must develop their ability to understand and align their personnel.

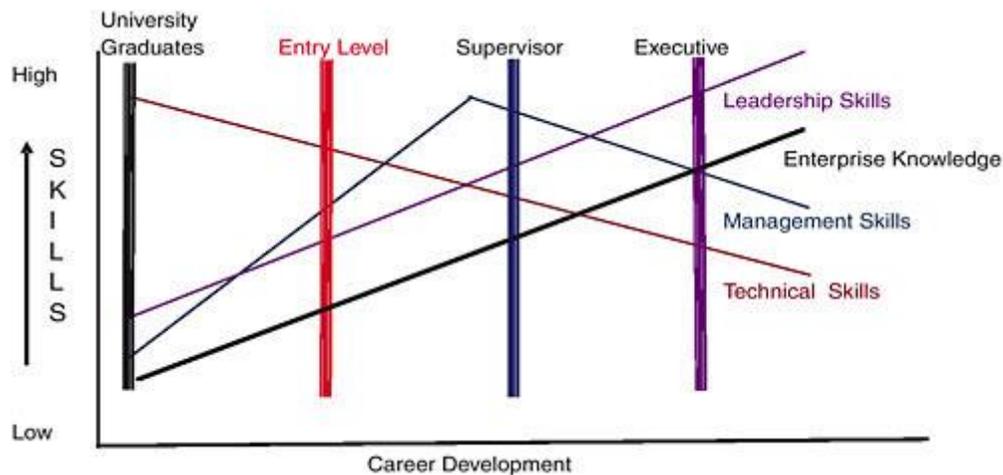


Figure 1. Changing skill sets for career progression. SOURCE: Badger and Smith (2006).

Resolving the approaching shortage of facility managers requires a strategic, industry-wide approach. Though the lack of future resources will be resolved on a company-level basis, it is something that must be addressed collectively by the industry.

Research Objectives

The research performed has two main objectives

1. To recommend a framework for a student-professional mentorship program
2. To provide specific guidance sustaining a mentorship program

The research was carried out through a partnership between the Greater Phoenix Parent and Student Chapters of IFMA.

Methodology

The authors first developed a framework based on feedback from IFMA chapter members and student needs. The authors also surveyed facility management professionals of a local IFMA chapter, and analyzed student career advancement rates for participants in the mentorship program.

Mentorship Framework

The authors have found (through informal discussions and meetings) that both students and mentors are very interested in participating in the program. The resulting framework is shown in Figure 2.

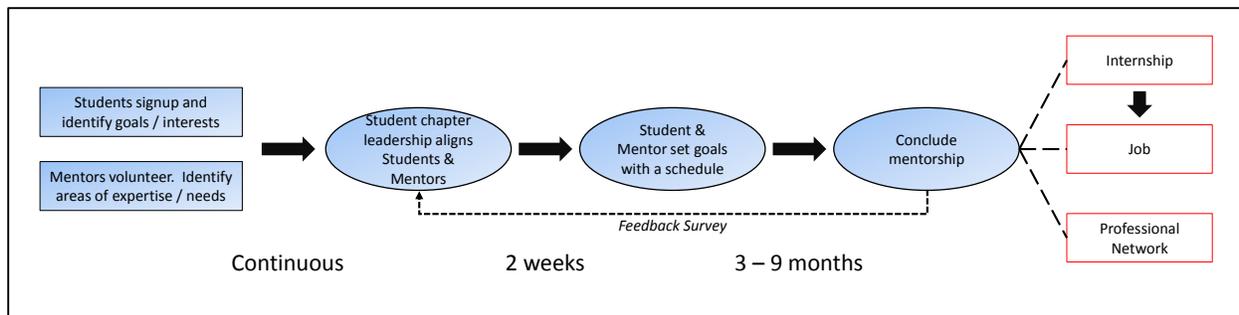


Figure 2. Student-mentor framework

There are four basic components of the framework:

1. Students and mentors volunteer to participate in the program. Students will fill out an informational form describing their career goals, interests, and any prior experience (see Appendix 1 – Student Information Form). Mentors volunteer by contacting the student chapter leadership. Most of the student signups occur during the first two months of the academic school year (August – September). As students signup, student chapter leadership will recommend a mentor based on the student’s interests. The student chapter leadership will also make the initial introduction and encourage the two parties to set goals and a schedule.
2. After the initial introduction is made, a Student and Mentor will meet in about two weeks, depending on their availability. Goal setting and clear expectations are very important to a successful mentorship. Students will have a better experience if they are participating in activities that they feel will increase their overall knowledge and eventual employability. Mentors will benefit from clear goals as it will help identify in what areas they can add value to the student. A meeting schedule should also be discussed. Most mentors and students meet on a monthly basis for three to four hours. There are several options to facilitate an effective mentorship:
 - a. Lunch with Mentor, Student and other professionals from the Facility Management field to discuss challenges faced within the field, FM-related topics, etc.
 - b. Mentor and Student attendance of a company staff meeting
 - c. Mentor and Student attendance of a company training program
 - d. Mentor and Student attendance of IFMA chapter meetings and events, in which mentor introduces student to other professionals
 - e. Student involvement/observance in the development of a project
 - f. Student job shadows mentor
3. Initially, it was envisioned that a formal Student-Mentor relationship would exist for approximately one semester (three to four months). However, the authors found that it was simply not enough time for both parties to adequately achieve their goals. A period of seven to nine months was found to be sufficient. At the end of the formal relationship, the student chapter leadership surveys both the Student and Mentor, and incorporates any lessons learned into the program.

4. Once a mentorship has successfully ended, both parties should discuss future opportunities. An internship or job opportunity is not guaranteed as part of the program. At a minimum, the mentorship program has helped both parties expand their respective professional networks. Both parties should stay in touch in a regular basis.

Implementing this new program occurred over a series of five phases.

Phase 1: Program Inception (May 2013)

The IFMA professional chapter and the student leadership identified that students need more opportunities for students to directly interface with the FM industry. Students participated in networking events and facility tours, but it was not sufficient to provide them with experiential knowledge of facilities management – before they started their full-time career. Further discussions with students and facility industry professionals revealed that there was strong support for a program that allowed students gain more in-depth knowledge of the field, while professionals wanted a way to give back and help sustain the FM profession.

Phase 2: Request for Volunteers (July 2013)

The student chapter leadership presented at an IFMA parent chapter luncheon on the program and its benefits. The presentation included a synopsis of the program and a timeline. At the conclusion of the meeting, volunteers were requested to provide a business card or to somehow make contact with the student chapter leadership.

Phase 3: Kickoff Meeting (October 2013)

The kickoff meeting was held three months after the IFMA presentation (and two months after the start of school) to give time for professionals and students to sign-up, and for the student chapter leadership to align potential mentors and students. The primary objective of the kickoff meeting was to help each student-mentor team outline their plan, identify goals, and facilitate discussion amongst all participants on the best way to have a successful program.

Phase 4: Mentoring (November 2013 to May 2014)

The students and mentors began meeting on their own for about six months. Many students came to their mentor's place of work on a monthly basis. While the student chapter activity schedule is front-loaded to start the mentorship program early on in the academic year, mentors and students may join or leave the program at any time. As the year progressed, new mentors regularly joined after hearing feedback from professionals in the program.

Phase 5: Program Improvement Survey (May 2014)

The student chapter leadership conducted a survey of the mentors and the local IFMA chapter's board in May 2014 on their feedback of the program (see Appendix 2 – Mentor Feedback Survey).

Results

The authors analyzed two criteria to measure the program's overall success. The first is participation and subsequent student career advancement opportunities (paid internships or full-time positions). Table 1 shows that there were 14 mentors, and eight active student participants. Of the students, four of them received some sort of paid internship or full-time position as a

direct result of their participation in the program. Table 2 shows a profile of each mentor in terms of their relative company size, ownership, and areas of expertise.

Table 1. Mentorship Program Participation

Criteria	Results
Total number of mentors	14
Total number of student participants	8
Total number of student career advancements	4

Table 2. Mentor Profile

Company	Size	Ownership	Areas of Expertise
Company 1	Small	Private	General Contracting, Construction Management, Self-Perform Design, Pre-Construction
Company 2	Large	Quasi-Public	Construction, Project Management, Abatement, O&M, Procurement, Compliance, Energy, Water, Business
Company 3	Large	Private	Pre-construction, Construction, Self-Perform, Construction Management, Design, Project Management,
Company 4	Large	Private	Facility Consulting, Facility Management, Facility Services, Business, Resource Management and Optimization
Company 5	Large	Private	Manufacturing, O&M, Project Management
Company 6	Medium	Private	Security, O&M, Landscape
Company 7	Large	Private	Real Estate, O&M, Commercial
Company 8	Small	Private	Facility Consulting, Facility Management, Facility Services, Business, Resource Management and Optimization, Design, Space Planning & Efficiency, Utilities, Public Sector
Company 9	Small	Public	Facilities Management, Public Sector
Company 10	Large	Private	Construction, PPP, Project Management
Company 11	Large	Private	Facilities Management, Communication, Leadership
Company 12	Large	Public	Facilities Management, Project Management, Public Sector
Company 13	Large	Private	Design and Implementation, Real Estate, Operations, Project Management
Company 14	Large	Private	Healthcare, Operations, Facility Services, Leadership

The second criteria to measure success feedback from the mentors and IFMA board members (see Appendix 2 for the survey). Data in Table 3 shows that 12 people were surveyed and 100% of them identified that the program will help sustain the facility management profession, and help students advance their career. The respondents rated the overall importance of student participation 9.6 out of 10, and overall satisfaction with the program 8.4 out of 10.

Table 3. Mentor and IFMA Board Feedback Survey Results

Criteria	Results
Does the mentorship program help to increase the long term sustainability of the facility management profession?	100% - Yes
Would you recommend that students participate in the mentorship program?	100% - Yes
Do you feel the mentorship program better prepare students to get a job someday?	100% - Yes
How important is the mentorship program for students to participate in? (10 = very important)	9.6 out of 10
What is your overall satisfaction with the mentorship program? (10 = very satisfied)	8.4 out of 10
Total number of respondents	12

Lessons Learned

The authors were generally very pleased with the program's overall success, especially in its first iteration. There are, however, two major lessons learned based on experiences and feedback from the mentors:

1. Clear expectations and goals for the mentorship are very important. This step was part of the original framework (see Figure 2), but it was sometimes skipped over or only given minimal effort. As a result, some of the mentors identified that they were unsure of what to show the student, or what they'd like to learn. Paradoxically, students may not know much about the FM profession (and thus, they are not sure what they want to learn about). In the future, students wanting to participate in the mentorship program will be asked what interests them, based on the IFMA core competencies. Their responses will be used create a better plan and clear expectations.
2. Students need to document what they experienced or learned from the mentorship. Again, this is part of the original framework, but most students did not do it. This documentation will be helpful to not only the students themselves, but also for other student members that might be interested in the program. The vision is to have a website that hosts a summary of the students' experiences in the program.

Conclusion

The facility management industry as a whole will experience (and is currently experiencing) a shortage of qualified personnel, as the current generation of FMs begin to retire. The problem is further compounded by a general lack of understanding, or perhaps misconceptions, of the FM profession. Research has identified that new FMs need to possess certain core competencies, namely (1) utilization of life-cycle approach to integrate people, places, and technologies; (2) alignment of facilities with the mission of the organization or department it serves; and (3) involvement of multi-disciplinary trades and departments within an organization in strategic decision making.

A local student chapter of IFMA, through a coordinated effort with the parent chapter, developed a mentorship program. The program directly addresses the need for a new supply of FMs by providing firsthand experience to students who might otherwise not consider a career in FM. The program has had great initial success, with 50 percent of the student participants receiving a paid internship or full-time job position. The mentorship program is a symbiotic relationship between academia and the industry. Both groups receive significant benefits through participation in the program.

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Appendix 1 – Student Information Form

IFMA Greater Phoenix Student Chapter

Arizona State University

www.ifmaphoenix.org

Mentorship Program 2013-14 Overview

Overview

The IFMA Greater Phoenix Student Chapter Mentorship Program provides student members with professional development and networking opportunities. Students will learn the FM organizational culture, projects, challenges, and industry practices. Mentors and Students will be matched based on academic and professional experience and interests. Activities include:

- Participation in the IFMA Greater Phoenix Student Chapter FM Challenge (Mentors and Students work together to solve or better understand a problem FMs face)
- Lunch with Mentor, Student and other professionals from the Facility Management field to discuss challenges faced within the field, FM-related topics, etc.
- Mentor and Student attendance of a company staff meeting
- Mentor and Student attendance of a company training program
- Mentor and Student attendance of IFMA Greater Phoenix meetings and events, in which mentor introduces student to other professionals
- Student involvement/observance in the development of a project
- Student job shadows mentor

Mentorship Duration

The suggested Mentorship duration is approximately three months. The duration may vary case by case, but will be formally agreed upon by mentor and student before the beginning of a mentorship.

Mentorship Deliverables

- Each student is encouraged to submit a summary of their experience at the end of their mentorship
- Students and Mentors that participate in the IFMA Greater Phoenix Student Chapter “FM Challenge” will be asked to provide a copy of their results and may be asked to present this information at an IFMA Greater Phoenix meeting or event
- Participants will be asked to fill out an evaluation upon completion of the mentorship program



IFMA Greater Phoenix Student Chapter
Arizona State University
www.ifmaphoenix.org

Mentorship Program Enrollment Form

Name

Date

Email

Phone

Best Time to Call

Professional / Academic Interests

Summary of Professional / Academic / Volunteer Experience

Major

Year in School

College / Department

Expected Graduation
Date

Please return form by e-mail to XXXXXXXXXXXX



Appendix 2 – Mentor Feedback Survey
IFMA Greater Phoenix Student Chapter
Mentorship Program
Mentor Survey

The IFMA Phoenix Student chapter wants to collect your feedback of the Mentorship Program. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. Your responses will only be used to help improve the program!

Your Name: _____

Student's Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

NO	CRITERIA	Rating
1	Does the mentorship program help to increase the long term sustainability of the facility management profession?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2	Would you recommend that students participate in the mentorship program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3	Do you feel the mentorship program better prepare students to get a job someday?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4	How important is the mentorship program for students to participate in? (10 = very important)	_____ (out of 10)
5	What is your overall satisfaction with the mentorship program? (10 = very satisfied)	_____ (out of 10)
6	Additional comments or suggestions for improvement:	



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