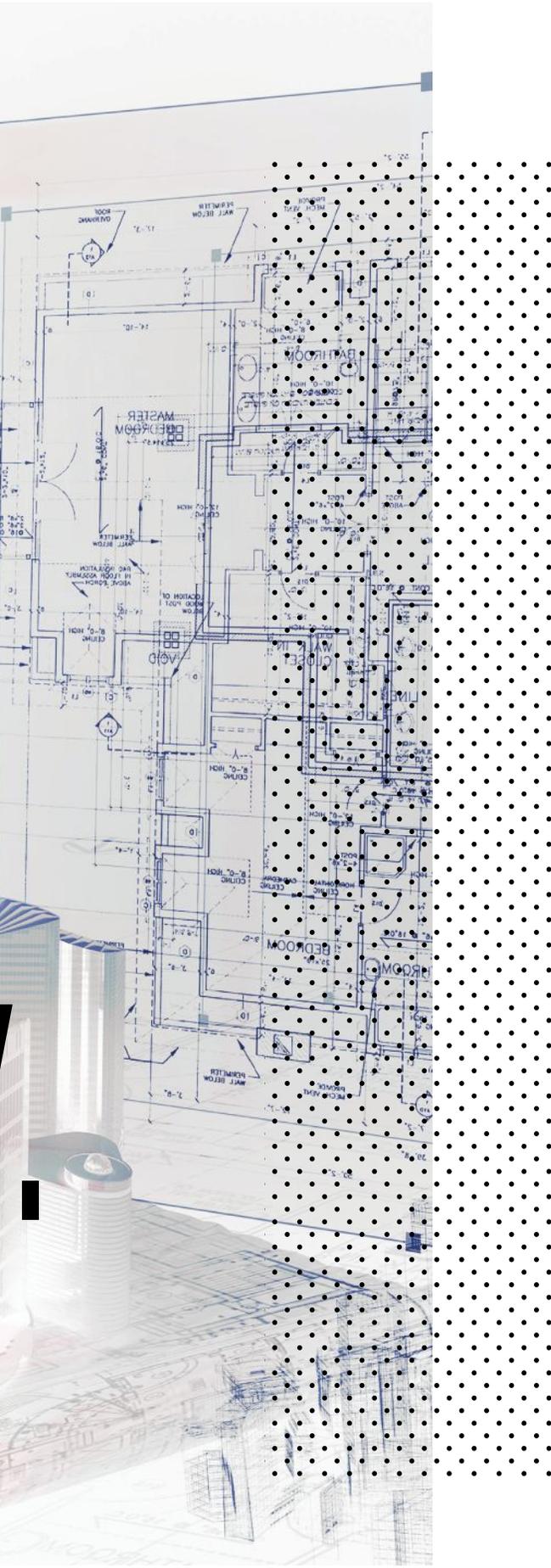




FACILITY MANAGEMENT

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Raising the Bar: From Operational Excellence to Strategic Impact in FM

BY BILL CONLEY

IT

may be apocryphal, but there's a story going around that describes the future facility department. In this narrative, the department will consist of an FM and a dog. The FM is there to feed the dog. The dog is there to make sure the FM doesn't touch any of the equipment. Far-fetched? Perhaps, and there may be some verity to the idea, but the most important part of the message is that a facility manager is still part of the equation.

The next generation of automation is here, and technology is evolving exponentially as new developments and trends appear, based on the success of current techniques. From assembly-line robotics to driverless cars, drone utilization and purported autonomous buildings, technology is transforming modern business. It's also changing the lifestyle and culture of our society. In the facility management arena, this has led to the concept of smart infrastructure with connected buildings that leverage accumulated data for predictive capabilities and energy efficiency. Some technophiles say buildings will be able to run by themselves, without intervention by people. Facility managers would tend to disagree.

The Internet of Things, or IoT, is making a big splash in the vast ocean that comprises facility management. Emulating the balance of nature in creating inter-relationships — from microbial-like sensors to the leviathan of the built environment — the IOT is one new development that is already altering the way FMs do business.

The projected benefits of IoT include lower costs, easy deployment and maintenance-free technology that performs in an inter-related network. An IoT-based system should enable the monitoring of physical parameters, thereby transforming the built environment into smart buildings with environmental awareness. Integrated building management systems monitor and control lighting, heating, fire safety and security. Advanced analytics now monitor energy consumption, system performance and energy supply. There are smart buildings existing today that do just about anything except brush someone's teeth. Doors open on their own; lights go on and off; temperatures are automatically adjusted to accommodate individual needs, toilets flush and faucets are touchless. CCTV cameras read license plates to allow access to parking areas; facial recognition monitors can track personnel throughout a facility ... the list goes on.

Not needing a person on-site is the main idea behind the ultimate technology trend objective: creating a truly autonomous building. Thinking that building managers have better things to do than manage buildings, the vision is to move them away from reactive and preventive behavior, as well as enabling their property to become more predictive and proactive.

That is all well and good. However, if the plan is to create autonomous buildings that need no oversight — and eliminate the need for a facility manager — these visionaries are actually short-sighted. Building technologies have been part of facility operations for some time. In today's world, technology supplies FMs with the ability to better predict maintenance requirements, but an FM professional is still needed to interpret and best utilize the data.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Changes in the technology landscape are nothing new to the FM. Facility management professionals are no longer surprised by anything — they have always embraced new realities. From changing light bulbs as a supply supervisor or office manager, to the creation of a facility management professional position to handle a whole building, the FM rules have evolved and roles have changed over time.

The advent of the computer and subsequent programs like CMMS, CAFM, IWMS and BIM introduced technology to the FM profession and altered the mindset and performance within the FM arena. The rise and implementation of sustainability shifted priorities again, combining with the triumvirate of life cycle costing, life cycle analysis and life cycle assessment to help FMs re-evaluate their operations and long-term goals. In each

instance, the profession has adapted and continued on, utilizing lessons-learned to improve efficiency.

Without a doubt, FMs will take advantage of any tools available to them. Their relationship with technology will be a symbiotic one, creating interdependencies between their proficiencies as best complemented by technology.

For instance, in today's business environment, reducing energy consumption is essential. Buildings typically waste 30 percent of energy in supporting the built environment. This can be due to various factors, such as equipment running outside of schedules, excessive energy use caused by simultaneous heating and cooling and/or simple building drift.

Facility managers will learn to rely on technology that not only determines where and how energy use can be reduced, but will automatically reduce the energy use. There are platforms available now that have the ability to identify wasted and excessive energy use. These programs will also permanently reduce energy use and costs and keep the building from drifting back to old energy use patterns, eliminating one major headache and allowing FMs to focus on more important issues.

BEEN THERE...DONE THAT

FMs provide valuable services that not only maintain occupant comfort, but also help continuously save money through operational efficiency and resource management. Energy efficiency is the easiest way to reduce energy costs, save money and contribute to the bottom line. So, technology that enables customers to reduce energy costs will be an integral enabler in the busy world of an FM. It will allow more time to handle responsibilities other than monitoring building management systems for current weather and/or occupancy conditions.

Buildings were originally built as protection from the weather. Obviously, their use has changed over time, but that need has not gone away. If buildings are not going to disappear, neither will the need for competent professional facility managers.

As an adjunct to that premise, humans are social beings and they perform better collectively. Anthropological research on how people work has shown physical proximity increases interactions. This highlights the importance of having workers together in a physical space. The office is an important factor in stressing the cues of leadership, as well as enabling collaboration and communication. Many businesses are arriving at the realization that dialogue and face-to-face meetings

are much more effective than relying exclusively on technology for job tasking. What goes around comes around, it seems. As long as there are buildings — and people in them — there will be a need for FMs.

However, it is a delicate balancing act. Rumors have been wafting through the clouds that the role of the facility manager will be diminished and ultimately disappear. It has been posited that anyone with computer skills and a keyboard can run a facility. Maybe this is plausible, but it is far from possible. The IoT may automate many systems, but this automation will only minimize the challenges an FM faces when dealing with energy efficiency and water conservation.

New techniques and developments affecting the built environment necessitate ongoing adjustments to the job specifications of the facility manager. Changing light bulbs may be a thing of the past, but quality lighting will always be needed. Manual dampers may have given way to electronic ones — with sensors and actuators that are computer controlled — yet any damper can get stuck, stop working or just ignore signals from the “mother ship.” Someone needs to be there to keep things in order.

FMs may be doing more watching and less doing, but analytics and measurement will still be taking up a couple of pockets in the tool belt. The key component in making this data valuable is planning how to best leverage it.

The future of facility management will be a self-directed determination derived through an understanding of upcoming needs, the evaluation of possibilities for tomorrow and strategizing how to adapt to new developments. It will create better opportunities and possibilities for facility managers to oversee space allocations, project management, building strategic master plans and concentrating more on the management of facility management.

The measure of success in this new era is based on having an FM available and knowledgeable enough to receive, digest and act on the information technology delivers. It is consciously creating a strategic plan based on foresight and legitimate assumptions on what FMs are tasked to do. FMs will still ensure the well-being of personnel, their facility and the environment while continuing to contribute to the bottom line. Digital success isn't all about technology — strategy is the key driver in the digital arena. FMs have learned to be

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THE FM OF THE FUTURE MAY ASSUME NEW ROLES, BUT EVOLUTION DOES NOT ALWAYS LEAD TO EXTINCTION.

master strategists, moving away from the analog world has been as linear as 0 1, 0 1.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Knowing technology is here, and acknowledging the impact it will have, should serve as an incentive to plan future actions in which FMs can fulfill their responsibilities. Their role has always been service oriented, but the focus in this regard may need to be broadened. New ways of working in managing intelligent buildings need to be devised, and holding to the status quo is no longer relevant. Facility managers need to look at job titles and roles where their expertise can be expanded and best utilized:

- **Community outreach:** FMs can reach outside their immediate building(s) and take a larger role in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) — not only reporting, but also helping to implement sustainable practices.
- **Student/teacher:** It's never too late to learn. Whether an FM is learning or explaining — or both — the benefits of education will never fade. If time is available, this may be one of the best ways to use it.
- **Risk managers:** Recent events with hurricanes Harvey and Irma have once again reinforced the need for a disaster recovery/business resiliency plan that doesn't just sit on the shelf but is a viable, tested, living document reflecting future considerations.
- **In-house consultants:** FMs can become more of a product broker, devoting more time with the purchasing department in determining optimal vendors that serve sustainable purchasing.
- **Compliance manager:** As laws and legislative mandates proliferate and become more proscriptive, being free to monitor and respond to issues in a timely manner could be invaluable.
- **Service manager:** Facility management is service-centric. Continually improving and fine-tuning activities that take care of all stakeholders is critical for long-term success.
- **Marketing expert:** Not only must an FM be an indispensable asset to the organization, they need to publicize that fact. Communication and regular

updates of how the facility department has helped a company achieve its goals or save money goes a long way in establishing credibility.

- **Sustainability expert:** Resource management, indoor environmental quality, processes and procedures that promote environmentally safe practices actually create long-term sustainable value for the organization.

Some facility managers may do all, or most, of these activities already. But for those who don't, it might be time to branch out and investigate how else to serve the company. Planning ahead for worse case scenarios is always a smart move.

THE END? NOT QUITE!

Intuition, experience, consideration and care are not built into computers. Even the sci-fi projections of artificial intelligence don't account for the most important element of facility management — the human touch. The FM of the future may assume new roles, but evolution does not always lead to extinction.

For as long as the profession has been in existence, facility managers have always been there to serve as leaders. The psychology of a good FM includes the traits of empathy, consideration and confidence. These attributes cannot be duplicated artificially or digitally. FMs have the knack of getting things done and a comprehensive ability to maintain a facility under any circumstances. And maybe now they should keep a few dog treats in their pocket, just in case. **FMJ**



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