

THE NEW FM

Facilities managers
must adapt in real time
to growing roles.

BY MICHELLE MARKELZ



For as long as the built environment has existed, the facilities management profession has been in a constant state of evolution. While facilities managers (FMs) today are often still responsible for the nitty gritty — and sometimes mucky — work of turning wrenches and maintaining machinery, they have increasingly assumed responsibility for more assets and more decisions. Not only have facilities become more complex, thus demanding more of their managers, but the needs of the people inside the facilities have diversified as well. And as many FMs will tell you, facilities management is about people.

With so many changes to the scope of facilities management has come great opportunity. Never have FMs been better positioned to use their unique knowledge and skills to influence business. “Ten to 15 years ago, human resources wasn’t part of the C-suite, but now they’re key business leaders. That’s where FM will go,” said Randy Olson, Vice President of Global Business Development at FM credentialing organization ProFMI. “The spotlight is on now.”

To claim a coveted spot at the C-suite table, FMs will need to be multifaceted and excel at hard and soft skills, alike. They’ll also need multifunctional knowledge, spanning finance, human resources, operations and the jack-of-all-trades know-how historically associated with the job. Importantly — and possibly most difficult for some — they’ll also need to be masters of communication.



Randy Olson,
VP of Global
Business
Development,
ProFMI

A 50-year-old Evolution

In 2017, facilities management took a big step toward professionalization by standardizing the role and its competencies with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 41001:2018). But the people doing the work of facilities management — whether or not they were called FMs — have been honing this craft for decades.

Ron Rau remembers what things were like when he started his career, first in the operations department at Lazarus in 1976 before moving to the facilities

management and maintenance field in 1981. “Back in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s, we had our own technicians on staff,” Rau said, who is now Executive in Residence at Phoenix Energy Technologies. “We had painters, carpenters and HVAC technicians in house who would take care of the majority of our needs. We very seldom used outside suppliers or technicians.”



Ron Rau,
Executive in
Residence,
Phoenix Energy
Technologies

When projects did need to be outsourced, however, the varying business models of service providers put a strain on communication and transparency. “Service ticketing and invoicing, along with the numerous Excel spreadsheets being passed around, often created a disorganized environment,” Rau said. He noted he would often be invoiced multiple times over for the same service — the

result of no centralized system in place to track maintenance tickets and requests.

Rau moved to Limited Brands in 1995 to head their facilities and energy departments, and began experimenting with computerized maintenance management systems (CMMS) in 1999 with the goal of improving communication and to better manage all facilities under his watch. This system would help organize both internal and external service projects taking place across numerous facilities he managed. In 2003, Rau was able to combine all of Limited Brands’ maintenance needs under one umbrella, managing all self-performing contractors through the CMMS until he left the company in 2013. “What CMMS did was grant us visibility of what was happening across the entire fleet across the entire country — at as close to real time as you can get,” he said.



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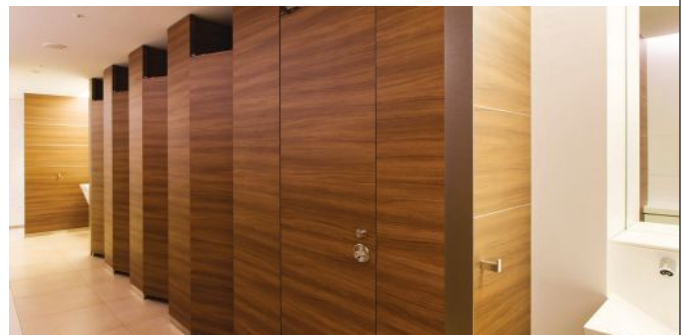
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Before



After

So while the focus of a facilities department may have traditionally been on executing maintenance requests, the overall management of these processes has become a necessary skill for FMs to master. And to be successful, communication and organization need to be priorities.

A Seat at the Table Is Earned With Soft Skills

Mike Zolton, Professor of Facilities Management at Collin College in North Texas, spent over 20 years leading facilities and energy management for national and international retail and commercial portfolios. He said FMs have had to learn to speak the language of other professionals to meet the demands of their multifunctional jobs. On top of the language of the trades, “FMs need to be proficient at budgeting, forecasting, asset management, technology/automation and contracting so that they can work effectively with the accounting, finance, legal or real estate teams,” he said.



Mike Zolton,
Professor,
Collin College

One language that FMs are beginning to speak more fluently is that of the executive, framing things in dollars and cents — particularly dollars saved or earned by shrewd facilities management.

“Traditionally, FM has been viewed as a cost center as opposed to bringing tremendous value and contributing to the bottom line,” Olson said. “FMs have to communicate what they do and sell their initiatives up the chain, and they have to know their audience.”

Thinking in ‘Shades of Grey’

An ever-increasing part of the C-suite conversation is people — selling to or serving them, hiring them, supporting them, retaining them and keeping them safe. FMs have always had an impact on people, but with increased



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environmental concerns, stiff competition for talent and a global pandemic, facilities have become just as important as the product a company sells or the wages it pays its employees.

Rau explained that the C-suite needs to be properly informed and aware of the impact facilities management has on staff and consumers. “To me, it’s extremely important for the C-suite to understand that the facilities department is involved in setting the tone for the associates working in the facilities, as well as the customers that come into our stores,” he said. “If those two groups aren’t being serviced properly and feel uncomfortable with what’s happening inside the space, problems can arise. Executives should know and appreciate you because you have the data to support the types of changes or initiatives that need to happen to correct the issues.”

“I think FM is changing, and it will become more about workplace management,” said Yvet Brummelhuis, Co-founder and Co-owner of international FM training company, The World of YES. “It started out in the ’70s or ’80s with changing the lightbulbs and making sure the place was heated, and it evolved into a department with different suppliers who think along with us about how to shape the workplace in a way makes people feel safe and productive. Now, we’re thinking much more about how the workplace can help employees connect, be productive and be happy — and you don’t do that by changing lightbulbs,” she said.

The way to affect productivity and employee satisfaction is much less black and white than that. “In facilities, things are shades of grey because you’re not only dealing with systems but with people,” Olson said. “FMs have

direct responsibility for the second-largest asset — the built environment — but that has a direct impact on people. Finally, businesses have understood that when people are comfortable in their work environment, and it supports them, we get the most productivity.”

But what makes one employee productive may impede another. HR Exchange Network reports that there are as many as five generations in the American workforce right now, each with their own wants and needs around communication, telecommuting flexibility, childcare and even seating arrangements. FMs need to be experts in space planning and asset management. They’re being called upon to facilitate these diverse working conditions while making facilities energy efficient and safe.

Adopting a Learning Mindset

With so many demands, some of them competing, how do FMs do it all? According to Brummelhuis, a desire to learn is necessary for the profession to advance. “Within the next five to 10 years, half of FMs will retire,” she said. “That’s a harsh statistic, but I hope it lights a fire in the older generation to keep learning as much as they can, because they’ll have to educate the ones who come after them, and everything they can pass on is of incredible value.”

While some of the foundations of disciplines like carpentry and plumbing may not have changed substantially, the emergence of automation technologies and energy concerns mean that no FM can be complacent for long. The role demands that FMs keep themselves abreast of changing technologies, standards and regulations to help their companies comply.

“Look to resources such as the Department of Energy Better Buildings Initiative, Retail Industry Leaders Association, American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers and American Society for Health Care Engineering,” said Stephanie Moon,



Yvet
Brummelhuis,
Co-founder and
Co-owner, The
World of YES



ARE YOU AN FM LEADER?

Trick question. The answer to the question, “Are you a leader?” is always “Yes.” Some people have the misconception that only a certain type of person can be a leader and that leaders possess a specific set of personality traits or skills. Nothing could be further from the truth. Randy Olson, Vice President of Global Business Development at ProFMI, suggests FMs study leadership theory to understand not whether or not they are a leader, but what type of leader they are. “Look inside first and understand, whether you are authoritative or

collaborative. Then set aspirations for where you want to go,” Olson said.

Leadership is one aspect of the ProFM credentialing program that helps prepare FMs to supplement the hard skills of their jobs with the soft skills necessary to thrive in management and leadership roles.

ConnexFM Members receive a special discount for the ProFM Credential. Visit [go.connex.fm/credentials](https://go.connexfm/credentials) for more information.



RFMP, Vice President of Education & Resources for ConnexFM. “Monitor trade associations and know what’s going on as far as codes and regulations go, because they change by state, by province and by federal government. You must be up to speed. It could cost your corporation a lot of money in fines if you’re not.”



Stephanie Moon,
VP of Education
& Resources,
ConnexFM



Marcia O'Connor,
President, AM
FM Consulting
Group Inc.

Marcia O'Connor is the President of AM FM Consulting Group Inc. and has been the lead instructor for the facilities management education offerings with the University of Toronto for more than two decades. She sees FMs every semester who’ve embraced a learning mindset. “We have real newbies coming into the industry trying to advance in the FM profession, such as administrators, coordinators and tradespeople. I’ve had director-levels come in, as well, because they may have parachuted into an FM role and want to support the team,” O'Connor said of her students. In other words, no one is too green or too seasoned to learn.

FM is still a burgeoning field in the American secondary education market, but it’s not the only way for FMs to advance their knowledge. FM training courses and

credentials like those offered by Brummelhuis, ProFMI and ConnexFM target a variety of skills and subjects to help FMs become or stay well-rounded and current.

On a Path to Leadership

The new FM is a multi-functional professional whose behind-the-scenes influence is tough to match, but the spotlight is moving toward them. With an intricate knowledge of some

of the business’ largest assets, FMs have the chops to contribute to discussions at the executive level.

“FMs are on a path to be CEOs,” Olson said. “They have a such rich background and affect so much of their organizations. They just need the opportunity to get to the table.” ✕



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FM TRAINING: BY THE NUMBERS

According to ProFMI's 2021 FM Training Outlook Survey:

79% of FMs say FM training and credentials result in better job performance.

According to FMs, the **top 3** benefits of FM training and credentials are:

- Better job performance
- Increased confidence
- Addressing the FM skills gap

72% of managers say a credential or qualification is an influential factor in hiring or promoting FM staff.

Industry training data says that every **\$1 invested** in training returns a minimum of \$5 to the organization.

Agility and knowledge of a breadth of subjects are requirements for any facilities manager. From current technologies and trends to ISO standards and best practices, the education required to stay up to date on these issues can be burdensome. While there's a wide number of one-off education courses, webinars and white papers on individual topics, wouldn't it be easier to learn about all FM standards and practices in one comprehensive program? That's why ConnexFM began its partnership with ProFMI in 2019 — to bring thoroughness and simplicity to FM education through the ProFM credential.

"Today's facilities professionals require knowledge and skills that go beyond traditional facilities management to manage large capital budgets, satisfy the needs of building occupants and support the strategic goals of the organization," said Randy Olson, VP of Global Business Development at ProFMI. "However, FM staff are entering the profession from diverse

backgrounds and often have no facilities training, leaving many to learn by trial and error. Employers can fill those knowledge gaps with the ProFM credential."

The benefits of the program for organizations are numerous, including:

- Overcoming knowledge gaps created by retirement
- Having your team all speak the same "language" and share a fundamental understanding of all FM concepts
- Showing clients and prospects that your team has met a global standard of knowledge and skill, and is dedicated to excellence
- Helping organizations retain top talent and minimizing the need for external recruitment
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