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IFMP summer school is heading for new horizons

by Pekka Matvejeff

The IFMP is an international Facility Management Program, which first started in 1996. The program offers students the opportunity to learn, and implement the latest FM ideas within real-life company project cases. The IFMP is a Summer School developed by a collaboration network of eight European Universities of Applied Sciences offering FM or related degree programs in Austria, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands and Norway.

In the IFMP Program, students study present and future oriented trends of the industry in greater depth than is possible during the regular academic program. Previous years saw the study of topics such as 'Security Management' and 'New Ways of Working'.

The main theme during the last two years of the IFMP has been 'Healing Environment'. Originally applied to hospital settings, a healing environment is an environment that contributes to the occupant's well-being, both by design and operational approach. Healthy ageing is considered one of the most challenging issues in the European Union. Many countries have to deal with a rapidly ageing population; from a socio-demographic point of view, a healing environment can be characterized as an environment that enables people to live longer independently within an environment that lasts a lifetime. In effect, a healing environment should apply to any surroundings in which people work, live, meet and enjoy themselves. A healing environment is not restricted only to care and cure facilities. It can be applied to office buildings, universities and schools that want to offer a healthy work and/or lifelong-learning environment to its stakeholders.

During the 2012 IFMP, students became acquainted with various aspects related to a healing environment and the existing methods to measure its effect. On the basis of acquired knowledge, four project groups each developed a toolkit to objectively assess the 'hardware' aspects related to a healing environment. The toolkits were put into practice in the confines of a care facility. The research outcomes were translated into recommendations for the care facility in question.

Service Design in an FM Context

The main objective of the 2013 IFMP Summer School was to emphasize the importance and impact of various actors

in service processes when creating an optimal healing environment for a service organization. To broaden the acquired insights from the 2012 IFMP, the 2013 IFMP Summer School students investigated these aspects with the use of Service Design methods and tools.

During the six week study period, students carried out two innovation projects applying existing knowledge and the newest service innovation and design method. They adopted creative problem-solving methods and gained understanding on how service design (SD) tools can be applied to support healing-environment thinking within the Facility Management context.

During the first study weeks, Tirol University of Applied Sciences in Kufstein, Austria laid the ground-work for healing-environment thinking. The

next two weeks of study were executed by Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Espoo, Finland, which specializes in Service Innovations and Design. Students practiced the use of Service Design tools in a Business Park environment owned by a leading real-estate company in Finland. During the final two weeks of their studies, students applied the SD tools of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences in Heerlen, The Netherlands in an intensive innovation project at a retirement home analyzing the patient processes and services provided by the operator. One SD specialist from Laurea UAS followed the student group to Heerlen in order to coach them with the use of SD tools.

Different Service Design tools like observations, interviews, analyzing service encounters, blueprints, and customer journeys were applied to assess the client's working environment while generating new development ideas on how to adapt "a healing way of working" to the client organizations. The use of Service Design tools can help in reorienting the consumer's and service provider's behavior and operations towards the desired goals.

Some examples of results of the IFMP include the development of a toolkit to assess hardware aspects related to a healing environment in elderly care environments and the design of innovative service concepts for a leading real-estate company that provides facility based services to SMEs. Partner companies within the IFMP that provided the real test cases have indicated that they would like to continue and augment their co-operation with the program.

Exploring new opportunities

Because of the success of the program, and since partners would

like to intensify their collaboration efforts, the IFMP steering group has decided to explore new opportunities to take the program to the next level in the form of a European R&D project. The new IFMP project would give the consortium not only the possibility to facilitate the IFMP in a more efficient way while aiming for a higher level of involvement in which joint research and development activities carried out by international researchers, teachers, and professors would have a radical impact on how healing environments are created on a European level.

Organizations increasingly believe in a holistic approach when trying to fulfill the individual's needs of body, mind and spirit. It is also evident that a physical environment can enhance healing, health and well-being. The planned IFMP Project will research, design, and develop new services that will create an optimal healing environment for service organizations. It intends to utilize a Service Design approach in which user centered research and co-design activities from a variety of stakeholders (end-users, service providers, city representatives, etc) will be deeply rooted. The results may, for example, help the service providers in hospital environments to plan the delivery of services in a more end-user friendly manner. According to the IFMP, this type of intervention in patient service processes in hospitals or care and cure environments with the use of Service Design method and its tools has not, yet, been widely tested.

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The IFMP network universities are: Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Hanze University of Applied Sciences (Groningen, The Netherlands), Tirol University of Applied Sciences (Kufstein, Austria), Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Espoo, Finland), Oslo and Åkershus University College of Applied Sciences (Norway), The Hague University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands), Turku University of Applied Sciences (Finland), Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (Heerlen, The Netherlands).