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Smart Spaces

By Mark Mobach

Smart spaces

Recently, Gartner published its Top 10 on strategic technology trends for 2019. One of these trends is 'Smart spaces', a topic in which I believe Facility Management (FM) has an important role to play. According to Gartner a smart space is: "a physical or digital environment in which humans and technology-enabled systems interact in increasingly open, connected, coordinated and intelligent ecosystems." What kind of impact can this smartness have on the user level? How can we as FM community direct all user-related information that will be unlocked over the coming years? And how can we best apply this information for the benefit of FM business and user and on what topics?

Impact

FM can increase its impact on organizations and society by focusing on four major topics:

1. health & well-being
2. hospitality
3. safety & security
4. sustainability

Health & well-being

Spaces can be much healthier by creating prompts for user behaviour. Christina Loitz reported many impactful interventions: sit-to-stand desks, treadmill workstations, cycling workstations, stepping workstations, exercise facility, bike racks in secure space, stair use, walking meetings, hourly prompts to stand up or walk, individual or group goal setting and on-site consultation with a health and wellness expert, tailored messaging or feedback via email and phone applications, step, pedometer, and stair climbing challenges, daily physical activity and sedentary behaviour log books and behaviour monitors. These are all tools that can be tested in practice and custom-made for specific work environments. Moreover, sensor technology can provide FM with the means to couple actual behaviours with perceptions, create feedback loops to users, and seducing them to develop

"Spaces can be much healthier by creating prompts for user behaviour"

healthier behaviours.

Hospitality

Smart spaces allow facility managers to harvest a constant stream of information on the hospitality experience: a mix of actual service delivery and quality, user needs, and related responses. Apart from the omnipresence of hospitality training of staff at FM services and existing knowledge on service delivery and quality, the alignment with the spatial properties of the workplace is an area where much can be learned still. If a front desk employee is taught to smile and be friendly (what we currently teach our students and staff), but the service desk is in the wrong place: dissatisfaction is our harvest. Knowing the spots where dissatisfaction emerges with simple feedback tools, will provide us with ample opportunities to create a better experience. A simple counter may be the start. By measuring how many people are present at what location in a building, valuable information is released that can be used in the management of the services offered. Consider prioritizing activities by location and scheduling of facility staff. If, in addition, it becomes clear which facilities are used when and how often (e.g. offices, canteen, toilets), cleaning staff can be directed to the places where they are mostly needed. Better service delivery, better experience.

Safety & security

Safe spaces enable visitors to leave a football stadium as quickly as possible during incidents, while separate compartments advance visitor security as a precaution. Cameras, smart phones, emergency buttons, staff presence, sensors to measure sound, movement, and behaviours, and spaces that breathe safety and security by showing measures (creating awareness) or hiding them (avoiding provoking aggression) are tools capable to mitigate undesired behaviours. Digital and social safety in organizational settings are increas-

“If a front desk employee is taught to smile and be friendly (what we currently teach our students and staff), but the service desk is in the wrong place: dissatisfaction is our harvest”

ingly important, and hopefully it will be a matter of time to restore the disruption with public spaces that has emerged in so many countries in the world. Smart spaces and smart cities can help us doing so. Again, by unlocking the vast potential of information that is already present. But also seeking the right ethical balance: restoring trust after the recent social media debacles, a block chain for privacy, and prevention of potential misuse by authorities and businesses. Transparency may be key to manage these dark side of organizations (Vaughan, 1999), e.g. workplace aggression, abuse, retaliation, repression, and discrimination.

Sustainability

Smart spaces can advance user-building interactions and by doing so, advance sustainable behaviours. The simplest known is measuring absence/presence with related functions, for instance, influencing lighting, climate control, staffing. But it may also include a digital materials archive per building allowing it to be re-used smartly. It also deals with the whole supply chain at FM: Where are our products and services produced? How are they produced? With what materials? Under what working conditions? Fairly paid? Zero waste? Can it be re-used? Completely, partially? Can we use fun to close to our supply chain? Like beer made of festival urine at Roskilde (collect festival urine, apply it as barley fertilizer, brew beer with barley, serve at next festival, communicate widely, especially at toilets).

Funding for alignment

We should continue our efforts to study and understand these topics holistically. This will demand new approaches and practices. It also implies that practice and research in FM must join forces around these topics. Together we can

“But, more importantly: together we should start a quest for fruitful cross-overs. It is there where spaces can become truly smart”

contest existing evidence, refine methods and create better findings. Findings should be directly applicable to daily routines to advance the added value of FM. To do so scientists need to align with practice. (Showing the importance of a network as EuroFM!) At the same time, it should be done with rigour: reliable and stable facts. Smart spaces allow us with ample opportunities to do so. Money may be a good tool to balance our mutual interests: ethically sound research funded by practice. When employed wisely this can manage practical relevance (creating results that be used to improve FM practices) as well as respect scientific independence (creating rigour and reliability). No one says that this will be an easy road to take, it may sand, it may be inconvenient and complicated, but it will be rewarding. We will learn. So, in FM we can and must include a structural debate on questions and answers,

create constant feedback loops, and mutually manage applicability, and scientific rigour. But, more importantly: together we should start a quest for fruitful cross-overs. It is there where spaces can become truly smart.

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Although Mark Mobach has a strong interest in all areas of facility management, his research expertise strongly relates to topics surrounding spaces and services, especially the simultaneous change of organization and space and its impact on the performance of humans in and around organizations. With his research team Mark is particularly engaged in the health and well-being of users in the built environment. He does so by initiating projects on the crossroads of research, education, and practice as a professor in Facility Management at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen (HG), The Netherlands. Mark is also professor in Spatial Environment and the User at The Hague UAS and leading professor of the Research Centre for Built Environment (HG).

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“Money may be a good tool to balance our mutual interests: ethically sound research funded by practice”
