

Energy management: making it work

By Paul Lynch 📅 1st October 2017

Energy is on every FM's agenda. But actually achieving the goals of efficiency and cost reduction almost certainly requires some fresh thinking. Paul Lynch explains what's needed.



Energy is central to the whole-life costing calculation of a building or facility in terms of asset selection, replacement and ongoing performance. That is what many facilities managers will tell you, but it is only one perspective.

Unfortunately, energy management sometimes struggles to really connect with building users and owners. The problem is that we all take it for granted. If you do not have direct responsibility for the utility bill, then why care about switching off lights or keeping windows closed when the heating is on? For senior management, this perception is complicated further because building owners and estates managers now often deal direct with third-party energy consultants. Rightly or wrongly, consultants are often more about cherry-picking the low-hanging fruit rather than offering more considered advice and management services over a longer run.

This means there is room for confusion. Or worse, a clash of incompatible technologies leading to energy inefficiency and a rise in costs – the opposite to what everyone is aiming for. To add value, to make a real tangible difference to the bottom line and cut carbon, energy management needs to be an integral part of FM strategy.

The answer is an integrated approach. Coordination is key: FM, energy manager, asset management, maintenance staff, commercial, procurement, HS&E and building users - all of them need to work closely together and physically see (not just perceive) the impact each activity has on the project. That is a cultural issue as much as a building services problem. To achieve such an integrated approach requires a strategy to be driven from the client side – albeit guided and managed by the FM team.

If energy management can be included within the detail of a facilities management contract we can mitigate the traditional conflict between running a building to meet the KPIs set for the FMs and running a building efficiently – which is the goal for the energy manager. We need to take a holistic view. We need to know how and why the efficient running of plant and equipment has an impact on maintenance regimes, the reliability of assets, the lifecycle management of the building and the cost of operations. If we sit back and look at the bigger picture then we can build a service contract with KPIs that meet these needs and provide the maximum benefits to the end client.

It might mean that we will need to adjust or redraw totally processes that up to that point have been regarded as sacrosanct, to enable a holistic approach that meets or exceeds the facilities' needs. However, it is not about reinventing the wheel. It is all about trying to coordinate and co-deliver essential activities that previously have been delivered in isolation (sometimes in opposition) to one another.

This is positive change. Too often adversarial or competitive approaches to energy management mean no benefits to anyone.

How do we do it? Improving awareness of energy and water use, the benefits of good management and the implications of poor management are key to delivering an effective management and reduction service. That means we need to measure what is used by the building occupiers, including transient workers, guests and visitors – everyone. And we need to educate the end users.

Occupiers – from the post room team to the board room – have a huge impact on a building's utilities use but are often overlooked when it comes to training or incentivisation around efficient practices – again reinforcing the cultural importance of an energy management strategy.

The key to all this is for the board to take a strong and visible stance and be the role models. The rest of the business will quickly follow suit and feel empowered to take responsibility themselves. Alongside this, it is essential to deliver effective and clear communication to all, backed by appropriate training and empowerment and incentivisation for all staff members to act in an efficient manner. Data needs to be presented as information – i.e. in a way that the recipient understands, which means multiple forms of communication are required to suit the various audiences, from visitors through general staff to the board. Processes and procedures, such as procurement, maintenance and so on should be reviewed to ensure efficiencies are built in as standard.

These changes will start to embed efficient practices as habits – and habits, once embedded, are hard to break. The behaviours of all the occupiers set a pattern. That behaviour needs the example of senior management, but it also must be driven from the bottom up. To really make efficient behaviours endemic within an organisation, it is just as important to educate and empower the general staff as it is for the MD or CEO to lead by example.

FM's holistic position in the built environment hierarchy allows providers to play a pivotal role in educating the client about energy use, changing behaviours, reducing costs and increasing efficiencies.

Paul Lynch is Head of Energy Services at VINCI Facilities (<http://www.vincifacilities.com/>).