

Facilities Management from A to Z



Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
published monthly in Facilities by Lexis Nexis between 2008 and 2016

N

egativity

Nothing can be more damaging to the performance of a facilities team than a culture of negativity. It damages morale, stifles innovation, reduces productivity and causes more damage to the reputation of FM than any other problem. It may stem from one justified complaint or be traced to an individual troublesome team member or it may be a full blown tradition of pessimism and unconstructiveness but the end result is the same. Negativity is an infection that must be addressed head on if the team is to have any chance of success.

A good facility manager knows that the FM team extends far beyond the organisations direct employees and includes all the frontline service delivery operatives provided by third party contractors. This can make it particularly difficult for the FM team leader to keep in touch with the attitudes and behaviours of everyone involved. However keeping a finger on the pulse of the team is vital if you are to pick up on the early warning signals of workplace negativity.

Good communication practice like listening to team members' complaints, making time for open forums in team meetings and carrying out proper exit interviews provides the opportunity to identify potential grievances or misunderstandings before they have the chance to fester into a morale problem. These issues must be addressed if attitude problems are to be avoided.

No matter how good a communicator the FM is, it is impossible to change someone's attitude. Only the individual can do that for themselves. The team leaders' objective is to achieve a change in the undesirable behaviours which result from a negative attitude. This can be achieved by actions like removing the cause for complaint, providing better explanations so that people properly understand the necessity for unpopular decisions or by giving demonstrable evidence of commitment to a promised course of action.

Where a facility manager truly empowers their team and allows them to make decisions about their own activities or at least involves them in the decision making process the opportunity for a negative reaction is diminished. Treating people fairly and consistently within a set of boundaries that demonstrate respect rather than treating them like naughty schoolchildren is part of true leadership. A structured communication plan with appropriate training and honest intent is the number one weapon in the battle against negativity in the FM team.

Two excellent books on managing negativity in the team are: "Managing Workplace Negativity" by Gary Topchik and published by AMACOM ISBN 0814405827 and "Performance: The Secrets of Successful Behaviour" by Robin Stuart-Kotze published by The Financial Times ISBN 0273707981