

U ser Groups

Engaging with the numerous stakeholders of a facilities management function can be difficult and time consuming. The lack of a proper understand of the needs and wants of the end users of facility services will lead to customer dissatisfaction and a failure to achieve the core objectives of the FM function.

One approach is to establish one or more User Groups made up with representatives from across the end user population. A user group is a community with a common interest in specific issues and services. The benefits of a successful user group are considerable, both to the members of the group and to the services with which it is associated. This is particularly true in complex or specialist working environments where the FM needs are complicated.

The purpose of a Building User Group should be to assess issues and suggestions for the improvement of facilities services and operations and to provide the facility manager with vital feedback on the effectiveness of their service provision. What it is not, is an elected committee with authority for decision making and budgetary responsibility.

User Group members should be carefully selected to provide an accurate cross section of the target stakeholder community. In larger facilities it may be appropriate to hold separate building user meetings for different groups. Perhaps a separate meeting might be held for more senior staff or for manufacturing or laboratory personnel where there are very specific and specialist service requirements.

Membership should be a voluntary thing to maximise the benefit of an individual's contribution. The group should have some clear terms of reference to avoid difficulties around the scope and should meet regularly enough to maintain continuity of engagement. Every facility manager has a few customers with strong opinions on the quality of the service they receive. The User Group is a good way to harness that energy in a positive direction.

It is good practice to publicise the output from User Group meetings. This can be done formally by publication of meeting minutes or can be as part of a planned communication exercise. The marketing of facilities services must include the promotion of the benefits that good FM brings. Drawing attention to positive feedback and action taken in response to feedback sends out a strong message to all stakeholders and helps to manage customer perceptions.

Those interested in improving service by utilising customer feedback will enjoy reading The Institute of Leadership and Managements book "Managing Customer Service" ISBN 008046419X