

The 'F' Word

Businesses leaders don't want to talk about facilities and 'dirty' details associated with cleaning, maintenance and other non-core activities. In this series of articles, Martin Pickard will highlight six reasons why this should not be the case, starting this month with FM's contribution to the battle for talent

ACCORDING TO THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) latest survey of its members, 85 per cent reported difficulties in filling vacancies and 72 per cent were experiencing retention problems. With growth anticipated across the economy and average staff turnover running at 14.7 per cent at an average cost of £4,625 per leaver, this is a significant business problem that is impacting organisational development and directly impacts upon the bottom line.

Facility managers who want to capture the attention of senior management must be aware of such issues and how they are affecting their own organisation. When CIPD members report that attracting and retaining quality staff is their number one issue this creates an opportunity for the ambitious facility manager.

Finding ways to solve or to contribute to problems that are vexing the boardroom is the most effective way to change the profile of the FM operation, and to gain credibility for the individual manager and for the profession as a whole. Nobody is impressed by an efficient planned maintenance regime or a clever piece of CAFM software. These are the 'dirty details' we should keep to ourselves. What matters is the way our activities affect the organisation. Facilities can be an invisible service viewed as a 'necessary evil' and funded through gritted teeth or it can be a wise investment that delivers substantial and demonstrable returns for the organisations that embrace it as such.

The best workplaces

The use of a well designed and supported working environment as part of the battle for talent is hardly new. The companies who top the Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work for have staff turnover figures as low as 5 per cent and the citation for almost every one includes references to the workplace, flexible working systems, catering services, sustainability agenda and a host of other facilities related issues.

Nobody is pretending that anybody would stay with a company just because of a nice office! But as part of a comprehensive package of measures designed to demonstrate the organisation's commitment to its workforce the workplace is as good a place to start as any.

Those who remember the hierarchy of needs theory hypothesised by Dr Abraham Maslow in the 1950s will recall that basic human needs like warmth, light and health are only motivators in extreme circumstances but can demotivate if not catered for. The same applies to higher level

needs like safety and security. In facilities these are frequently the areas we are concerned with and their inconsistent delivery can contribute to an organisations retention difficulties.

However, once basic needs have been met, people are motivated by the opportunity to meet their higher level drivers. A really well designed workplace strategy will support team working and sustain the creation of work communities. A positive service ethos can be used as part of a recognition culture and the best working environments will both support and enable creativity and innovation.

When the BBC embarked upon their move from Pebble Mill to the Mailbox in Birmingham this approach was a key driver throughout the project. The BBC Property team vision is to "evolve as an organisation to deliver the best workplace for the most creative organisation in the world and help build public value."

Recognising the creative nature of the workforce and demonstrating a spirit of trust and inclusion the staff at BBC Birmingham were encouraged to design their own leisure and meeting places. The seven areas all have different themes and facilities. A portion of the furniture budget was also allocated to staff, and they designed their own 'break-out' areas to complement the workspaces by providing relaxation areas or active leisure spaces, each with its own distinct theme. These include a Zen Garden, a Fifties American Diner and a Games Room.

The Mailbox, Birmingham
where the BBC invited its staff to
create their own breakout areas
 Photograph copyright © BBC





The ever increasing remit of the facility manager has been further extended by a wide range of new services being provided as the workplace develops as a weapon in the battle for talent. Concierge services, dentists, gyms and crèches are all being deployed by those organisations that understand the benefits to be gained from a contented workforce. Where these are most effective they can actually deter staff from moving on. As one senior manager from a pharmaceutical company says "People in this sector are always in demand and can move for just a few extra dollars, but you think twice if it means leaving behind free world class dental care"

In America's Silicon Valley this approach has been taken to extremes by some organisations. When your childcare, social life, family finances and children's further education is all being provided by the company, changing jobs becomes a major obstacle course. Some technology businesses provide free beer, popcorn and giant TVs on site when big sporting events are being televised. Officially this is to foster team spirit which it surely does but it also keeps people away from the sports bars in San Jose which are notorious hunting grounds for talent poachers.

An increasingly significant factor in attracting new staff is an organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) track record and programme. Younger graduates in particular are

much more likely to choose an employer that they consider to have an ethical standpoint. In a survey carried out by graduate recruitment specialists, Milkround, 61 per cent of respondents said that a firm's social track record was more important than the firm's position in their industry; 42 per cent said that they would be willing to sacrifice pension and healthcare benefits to work for a more responsible employer and an amazing 37 per cent said that they would take a cut in salary to work for a firm with a better record on environmental or employment matters.

Given the amount of the CSR agenda that is affected by FM this is a key area of opportunity. Issues like waste, recycling, energy, work life balance and supply chain management are all of immediate importance. A tripartite approach with those responsible for HR and Corporate Social Policies could generate material that can be used to effect a positive impact upon recruitment performance.

First impressions

Impressing people at the interview stage can be critical too. Canny personnel managers are careful about choosing the right location for the interview and even the route that they take from reception to the interview room. First impressions count and the look and feel of the working environment can be very influential. By



developing a close relationship with the recruitment personnel an informed FM will know when key interviews are taking place and can implement their prepared plan to make sure that reception, receptionist and all aspects of the visit project the desired image.

Probably one of the most powerful strategies that a FM can employ to help attract and retain key staff is the home or mobile working initiative. Often criticised as little more than a cost cutting tactic, flexible working has a great deal to offer the organisation challenged by recruitment and retention issues. If workers are able to adapt their working hours and location to suit their own lifestyle they will be much less likely to seek employment elsewhere. All else being equal some people will move for remarkably modest salary increases. However, if you are struggling with the cost and logistics of childcare or trying to complete educational studies in your own time then an employer that focuses on your output rather than insisting on fixed hours is incredibly valuable.

In addition the organisation that insists on daily attendance at the base office is massively restricting the pool of resource available to them. An effective remote working programme gives the ability to recruit star performers from almost anywhere without condemning them to a motivation sapping commute.

While IT and HR professionals are essential players in a project of this nature, it is the FM

who can both finance and take the lead role in the execution of flexible working. The release of under-utilised space or the avoidance of incremental real estate is usually the source of finance for flexible working programmes.

Workstation utilisation studies consistently reveal 40–60 per cent of workstations as being empty at any given hour in the working day. If only a small percentage of this potential can be realised then an adequate budget can be created to fund workplace modifications, home working facilities, training and additional IT requirements.

Of course, the workplace team can only deliver the infrastructure necessary to create a flexible working programme. Ultimate success depends upon an organisation's ability to adapt management styles towards management by objectives and away from 'presenteeism'. However these changes also address the need for autonomy that is required and the upper levels of Maslows hierarchy and should be encouraged.

All of these issues and opportunities should be carefully considered by FMs who are seeking to make a strategic contribution in organisations that are faced with recruitment and retention issues. Facilities management strategies should be designed to deliver against corporate objectives not just run buildings. This is the only effective route to professional credibility and its acceptance of FM as essential to the organisational landscape.

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Next month
Compliance
Then...
Efficiency
Reputation
Risk
Productivity

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