



Why Facility Managers Need To Care About Sustainability

For skeptics who doubt the relevance of environmental diligence some direction is needed.

Paul von Paumgarten

What's the point of all this sustainability stuff? Did the tree huggers finally win when we weren't looking? Actually, C-level executives (CEOs, COOs, and CFOs)—and facility managers, if they're smart—are beginning to understand that everyone wins when it comes to sustainability. They know that it's all about conserving energy, saving money, increasing productivity, and operating more efficiently, and that's good for every company, government, and organization on earth.

What's driving the movement these days isn't warnings about hardship and sacrifices predicted decades ago. What we're talking about is a solid strategy that is having a profound impact on global business. It's called sustainability, and it provides a framework for addressing a multitude of challenges.

Sustainability has no single definition, but it generally contains the idea of progress that respects the importance of the triple bottom line: that is, giving equal value to economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility. Too often, those three items are discussed separately, or the economic bottom line is valued more than the others. The fact is, all three are interrelated, and the way a facility manager understands how they affect his or her organization can lead to a new level of success.

The evidence of growing interest in sustainability is impressive. A survey of 1,000 CEOs from 43 countries by PricewaterhouseCoopers indicated that 79% of these CEOs believe that sustainability is vital to the profitability of any company. The reason for increased interest is clear. Sustainable practices are profitable because they can reduce risk, make business and consumers more efficient, and advance them technologically while reducing environmental and social concerns.

What many companies and their leaders recognize is that sustainability is not a fad; it's here to stay. The reality is that there are pressures on each of the three elements of the triple bottom line. But the good news is that improved technology and processes mean there are ways for facility managers to be a part of the team that addresses it.

Their most powerful tool is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). The U.S. Green Building Council's guide to sustainable buildings and operations provides a roadmap for smart facility managers to help their organizations save money, help the environment, and keep people healthy.

This approach addresses the pressures that companies face and helps their triple bottom line in the following ways:

Economic Issues

Pressure. From state governments dealing with massive budget cuts to manufacturing firms trying to cut expenses and stay competitive, every business and organization continues to look for ways to reduce costs. That's especially true with increasing energy bills.

Sustainable Approach. By taking a comprehensive approach to facilities, LEED addresses C-level concerns and bottom line results. It requires top level leadership and an understanding that all facility aspects (from mechanical to maintenance) can be improved through a stronger environmental approach. In addition, LEED certified buildings have been shown to provide

many economic benefits, including lower construction costs, reduced site preparation and landscaping, lower waste disposal costs, reduced operating costs, reduced maintenance costs, higher building valuation, and lower utility costs. And improved lights, building controls, windows, and other technologies make it easier than ever to achieve savings and increase productivity.

Social Issues

Pressure. A recent report by the World Economic Forum indicated that more than 70 CEOs surveyed believed that mainstream investors will have an increased interest in corporate citizenship issues. People are interested in how companies operate and treat their employees.

Sustainable Approach. Facility managers who operate their buildings sustainably tend to have a healthier, more productive environment, with better tenant and worker attraction/retention and less absenteeism. In addition, working with human resources professionals, facility managers can conduct employee education campaigns that teach employees about the impact they can have on the environment at work, in their communities, and at home.

Environmental Issues

Pressure. Whether it's prompted by the marketplace (a growing interest in emissions trading or a desire to help conserve natural resources) or law (state and federal regulations or even global Kyoto mandates) or a combination of both, companies are paying more attention to the impact of their operations on greenhouse gas emissions.

Sustainable Approach. LEED-EB (for existing buildings) and LEED-CI (commercial interiors) are the most comprehensive way a facility manager can have an impact on the environment. He or she learns about the products and procedures that can reduce a company's environmental footprint. And by tracking energy reductions, facility managers can reduce harmful emissions to meet imposed or voluntary reduction goals.

Facility managers can be part of the team that provides solutions. Whether achieved through market demand or regulatory pressures, sustainability's growing track record of creating superior value and growth assures its widespread acceptance. Ultimately, facility managers need to embrace sustainability for these four reasons:

- Your boss probably has embraced it—or will soon.
- You'll save money for your company or organization.
- You'll provide a more productive and efficient workspace.
- You, your co-workers, and your families will live healthier lives.

Those positive results, and the triple bottom line of enhanced economic, environmental, and societal benefits make sustainability a sound corporate governance practice that has far reaching consequences. And the companies, organizations, and governments that integrate sustainability into their values and vision will reap the benefits for years to come. □

von Paumgarten is director of energy and environmental affairs for Johnson Controls, Inc., providers of building automation and control systems and services to deliver occupant comfort, energy management, and security in non-residential facilities. For more information about Johnson Controls, visit the Web at www.jci.com.

If you'd like to contribute your observations about this subject, send an e-mail to schwartz@groupc.com. For past "Professional Development" columns, visit the Web at www.TodaysFacilityManager.com.