

Open all hours

13 August 2019

As globalisation and flexible working push up workplace operating hours, facilities managers will need to pay even greater attention to costs and operational priorities

The demand for office space in the UK remains high ? but the way this space is being used has changed dramatically in recent years. Traditionally, we ran our offices on a 9-to-5 basis 5 days a week, but over the past decade many companies have decided to extend operations to provide services 24/7. What is behind this trend? And what might the impact on facilities management and maintenance operations be?

Globalisation has opened opportunities for organisations to operate in a worldwide economy. Many companies now have an international presence, and this means working across numerous time zones to provide goods and services to clients. As a result, some companies are providing a physical presence in offices as much as 24 hours a day. In addition to this, there is an increasing demand from employees for flexible working. Workforces are more diverse than ever, with a growing variety of reasons for individuals to request the ability to work outside traditional office hours.

For companies to remain competitive and attractive to global clients and diverse workforces alike, traditional hours are being extended. While this has enabled organisations to make market gains, there are of course significant management impacts and costs. These affect both the organisation?s bottom line and the people and assets required to support the working environment.

Costs and consumption

Operating buildings during traditional working hours means that assets work at full loading for only a core period. For instance, the 9-to-5 regime, coupled with the UK?s mild climate, means that heating and cooling assets operate at full load for a relatively limited time, so air conditioning has enjoyed a relatively long 20?30-year service life. As asset operating time increases with office opening hours, however, this lifetime will inevitably decrease.

To manage asset life and reduce risk of failure through higher levels of wear and tear, maintenance requirements must be reconsidered. Stepping up maintenance to align with loading can also improve asset performance, extend its life, and reduce reliance on reactive maintenance. However, this will of course increase maintenance costs.

Comfortable and productive office environments rely not only on air conditioning but on IT, lighting, office equipment and services such as catering. Office energy consumption therefore depends on factors including hours of occupancy and corresponding specification of standards, as well as the volume of unoccupied space, intensity of asset use and provision of support services. Extending office hours beyond the 9-to-5 increases energy consumption and cost for the organisation, and a round-the-clock office can use more than twice the energy of

one operating within traditional hours.

Likewise, what was previously regarded as down time in the evenings and at weekends meant limited staff presence and enabled maintenance of the core assets that effective running of a building requires, without disruption to other staff going about their working day. Finding opportunities for work and scheduling maintenance in a 24-hour office can in comparison be tough, not only because the assets are in constant use but also because extended office hours can result in even more unsociable hours than maintenance operatives already experience.

A reactive response is required when an asset fails, and the speed of such a response is determined by factors including the impact of a failure on business operations. Traditionally, if a critical piece of equipment failed out of hours the fault could be rectified before the start of operations the following day. In a 24-hour office environment, however, reactive repairs to such assets must be escalated if the impact on operations is immediate, regardless of the time of day. For the facilities manager, this entails having a team available to respond at short notice, while for the organisation it means potentially greater costs.

Fresh approaches

With extended operating hours placing increased demand on assets, organisations will increasingly move away from traditional planned preventative maintenance towards a more progressive and tech-led approach, considering factors such as asset condition and business criticality. Maintenance that is predictive, or which is based on condition, risk or reliability will become more commonplace. Such regimes enable activities to be customised to take account of the diversity of plant, operational circumstances and their criticality for the spaces they serve.

Advances in technology, in terms of both its application and cost efficiency, will provide new opportunities to monitor and control plant and equipment operation. Sensor technology is increasingly being used to monitor more than desk use, allowing greater insight into the way buildings are used, by whom, and at what times or frequencies. Coupled with greater flexibility for zoning services throughout the building ? enabling sections of the building to be split and managed separately with, for instance, lighting activation by area ? smart buildings will be able to track and in some cases predict demand for services, enabling their provision when and where they are required.

Many companies now have an international presence, and this means working across numerous time zones

As buildings become occupied over longer periods and core services operate with less and less down time, the traditional approach of undertaking disruptive maintenance outside core working hours is becoming increasingly challenging. Greater emphasis must therefore be placed on scheduling maintenance activities to avoid disruption to business and users. With increasing use of alternative maintenance regimes and smart building technology, new sources of data will become integral to such scheduling: not only will there be more impetus for customising maintenance activities, there will also be greater insight into when buildings and services are not in use, enabling a customised approach to maintenance.

Alongside such improvements in maintenance scheduling comes a need for greater communication with business and users. Increasing certainty about the timing and duration of maintenance activities will be required, with these being agreed and communicated promptly to those affected so as to mitigate the impact of any disruption.

Changes in the occupancy and servicing of buildings bring with them a need to change the culture of service provision. Specifications, service-level agreements and key performance indicators can create a culture focused on attaining targets, but such rigid requirements are at risk of stifling flexibility and innovation. More contemporary specifications and performance measures will be essential to foster a culture where service provision is less regimented and more closely responds to business needs.

Sarah Cranke is an associate director and David Green is regional director at [Faithful+Gould](#)

Further information

- Related competencies include: [Asset management](#) , [Property management](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS [Property Journal](#) (July/August 2019)
- Related categories: [Service charges in commercial property](#)