

Building support

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Stephen Shallcroft underlines the importance of forming positive relationships across a business in becoming a more strategic facilities manager

Facilities management (FM) functions tend to be fairly inward focused. But in creating a fit within the business, 'best in class' facilities managers understand the need to work with other parts of the organisation to gain a holistic view of 'what, how and when' FM needs to deliver. This is where relationships are key to success.

Step out of the silo

One difficulty that FM staff promoted from the 'shop floor' may have is talking confidently with senior business managers. In addition, while FM qualifications teach people how to tackle the technical aspects of the job, they do not teach them how to converse in the 'language of business'.

Establishing the baseline for what the business needs will come from building the right relationship and dialogue with board-level directors or those reporting to them. By understanding the business vision and plan, these can be translated into FM language and delivered.

Stakeholder mapping helps to identify everyone who has an impact on the business and the head of FM needs the ability to influence them all, albeit to different degrees. As well as HR, IT, procurement, finance and marketing, there will be others such as unions and health and safety. And do not forget any special functions such as document management.

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This will define how relationships and the organisation's culture should be built throughout the team. Relationships will change over time but they must be two way.

For example, if your project team is involved in introducing new ways of working such as desk sharing, HR needs to assess necessary changes to staff policies. Simultaneously, creating relationships with key influencers and change champions is essential in order to gain wide acceptance to new proposals. Bring them on board and others are more likely to accept a change.

Without strong internal relationships it will be more difficult to make a change or understand its impact. You need to listen to all levels of the organisation ? try engagement methods such as workshops or 'town hall' meetings to gather feedback.

Building better relationships

Learn from your professional organisation, for example [RICS](#) or the [British Institute of Facilities Management](#) , but also listen to others, such as the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) and the [Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply](#) , to see what is coming around the corner or what is happening elsewhere in the world.

For example, the past 10 to 15 years has seen a drive to reduce the number of workstations and increase desk sharing ? but I know through my external relationships that some US organisations are now pushing against this trend, instead focusing on providing effective worksettings. I am already thinking about whether and how this might impact my FM regime.

Do you have adversarial, contract-driven relationships or do they focus on finding solutions to problems? A learning relationship allows you to look out for what is best for your internal or external client. Most FMs want to be ahead of their clients in innovative thinking ? if ideas are fed to you by your client then you are on the back foot.

If there are financial pressures inside the business, you need to understand the impact on your FM budget. Do you have the right relationship with your board? Without it you will be reactive not proactive, which means that you cannot bring best value to your client.

For example, it is better to pre-empt or be involved in the decision to fit another 100 people into an office rather than just being told to do it. With proper demand planning, rather than a crisis you are more likely to find a better solution or be able to manage expectations.

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Further information

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