

The move towards the use of technologies in the FM sector has been the subject of much discussion recently. The recent industry survey found that many FM organisations are not making effective use of data and intelligence tools. The report went on to say that insufficient collaboration and lack of communication adds to the challenge of information sharing and can also compromise the effectiveness of workplace relationships.

Traditionally known as a 'people based' environment, the FM community is now embracing technologies with the aim of building stronger client and service provider relationships. The central issue for the sector is the (historic) tendency to work in silos making cross-site and inter-team data sharing and communication even more important, although this is often inadequate.

Part of the strategy for building effective working relationships surrounds transparent communication and the sharing of 'real time' information; this is where technology comes in. Sharing and disseminating important information, producing management reports and business intelligence and making it available to key stakeholders in real time, is key. But this is not the whole story.

There is no doubt that the communication of information is a vital component in maintaining efficient business function. However, no matter how good the technology is or how effectively it is integrated into management processes, its value lies in the processing of empirical data, it is not able to adequately measure so called 'soft data.' But what is soft data and why does it matter?

Soft data refers to information that is difficult to measure such as opinions and feelings. Behaviours values and beliefs also have a part to play if an organisation is to improve performance, build strong relationships and achieve its goals because employee behaviours impact outcomes.

It is particularly important in the FM sector that onsite teams, clients and service providers adopt a collaborative approach, this requires opening lines of communication and involving all parties in the dialogue. However, this is easier said than done when FM businesses often manage multiple sites and operate complex team structures. Ineffective communication is just one of the barriers that facilities managers must tackle if they are to leverage maximum benefit from new technologies.

Training organisations have long been mindful of the fact that middle managers do not always receive the requisite skills training to manage, develop and maintain the multi-tiered relationships that are commonplace in the FM sector. In addition, if protocols are not in place prompting senior managers to "listen to the people on the ground", communication stalls.

So, although technology is a useful tool in terms of sharing information, it is not a panacea. Technology can help support information management objectives but of equal importance is effective communication and collaboration between colleagues. This provides the 'oil to the machine'.

Training based on experiential learning techniques represents a useful adjunct to technology and our clients tell us that it is highly effective in changing behaviours and leads to improved engagement, collaboration, and communication.

Both the use of technology for the sharing of 'real time' data and the implementation of training programmes surrounding workplace collaboration will lead to improvements in client relationships and working environment.