



Behaviour Change – it is not all about turning off the lights

Behaviour change has long been a buzzword in energy management circles, but it is too often interpreted as licence to print posters and hand out leaflets. Behaviour change actually requires a more intrinsic understanding of human motivation and change management theory.

As Energy Manager for University College London (UCL), my role is to identify and support reductions in the carbon emissions that result from educating 38,000 students and conducting ground-breaking research. Like most higher education institutions, decision-making at UCL is highly devolved; and so if we are to meet our stretching carbon targets we have to influence the decision-making process of staff and students across the institution.

Before joining UCL, I worked as a consultant advising FTSE 100 companies about energy management. During that time, I thought the reason for so much energy wastage was a lack of funding and a poor understanding of energy efficiency. The solution: a clear investment case and a good feasibility study. After joining UCL and being responsible for implementing change from within an organisation, I realised my inexperience. While these two things are clearly important, there are three other barriers much more likely to block energy savings.

Lack of time – Everyone feels they are time poor. They may know energy saving is important and, in principle, they may think it's a good idea. However, it's not a priority.

Resistance to change – We are creatures of habit and see change as a threat. If I had a pound for every time I've been told "but we've always done it like that" as a reason for inaction then I could have bought a new CHP engine.

Split financial incentives – Often those who have the biggest effect on energy use are not incentivised to save energy (students, maintenance staff and heads of department).

None of these barriers can be overcome by posters, roadshows or encouraging emails. However, using a period of organisational change at UCL we have started to overcome these through systemically embedding energy saving in our daily practices. In the rest of this article, I outline some key lessons we've learnt.

“ WE'VE MADE ENERGY SAVING AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR BUSINESS PROCESSES. ”

Make it a priority

If people are time poor, you need to make energy saving a priority. Every organisation has processes for decision-making, so get them to work for you. UCL is undertaking a £1.2 billion construction and refurbishment programme over the next decade; a once in a generation opportunity to embed sustainability into the estate. However, our existing business processes weren't going to make that happen. The revised approach we have taken with our Transforming UCL programme is one example of how we've made energy saving an integral part of our business processes.

Integrate energy efficiency in the decision-making process

UCL established a Programme Management Office to oversee delivery of this transformation programme with clear sign-off points throughout the project lifecycle.

Sustainability is now a key element of those sign-off gateways. This means we can identify the big energy saving wins at the concept development stage, ensure they are translated into requirements for contractors and require the contractor and design team to deliver a sustainable end product. Staff who are managing our construction projects know they will not achieve sign-off to proceed to the next stage if they haven't properly considered sustainability. So it becomes a priority.

Staff are provided with the support they need to achieve these sign-off requirements, including: a UCL-specific sustainability specification which forms part of our employer's requirements, access to training from the sustainability team, and detailed checklists for handovers.

However, even with these measures, for some people it still isn't a priority, so we have introduced monthly reporting at board level on sustainability progress. If projects aren't achieving the required standards, this is followed up at a more senior level – again prompting energy saving to be taken seriously.

Give a reason for change

We know that any organisational change is often unwelcome. There are lots of change management theories available, but they generally distil into:

- Giving a reason to change
- Consistency from senior leadership
- Providing the training or resources to do things differently
- Providing feedback and reward for good performance.

I would add a few small but important additions to this list:

Involve your community in making any plans – they will then be more likely to deliver them.

With this in mind, when developing our new carbon management plan, we undertook extensive consultation with the UCL community through a variety of formats; from workshops, attending department meetings to developing an online tool, www.degreesofchange.co.uk. The tool helps our community to understand the trade-off involved in saving energy at UCL. We engaged over 3,000 people in this process, ensuring that they support our approach and that they have a stake in delivering it. At a more local level, we are using working groups with people from across the organisation to identify and implement energy saving opportunities.

Don't provide an excuse for inaction

A key lesson from our consultation was the importance of consistency. Where staff or students saw activity that was inconsistent with our carbon saving message, for example a lack of cycling facilities in their building or a senior manager who didn't recycle, they felt less inclined to take action themselves. We are therefore working to ensure the visible sustainability aspects are there for all to see in each of our buildings: recycling and cycling facilities and keeping rooms at a comfortable temperature.

Use consistency to your advantage

The expectation of consistency can help us too, if someone has made one public sustainable action they are more likely to do another one; they want to appear consistent. We asked staff to make small public pledges, such as turning off their computers during the Christmas break, before building up to bigger challenges, such as a request to be a Green Champion.

Create a social norm

If we are creatures of habit, we are also creatures of the pack; we want to be like our colleagues. Competition is a good way to heighten the idea of social norms. We have run a number of competitions, the most successful of these was developing an energy

efficiency league table for all our buildings. Large numbers denoting the building's league position were placed on the buildings. Some people loved it, some people hated it, but I was inundated with emails from the poor performing buildings asking what they could do about it – they didn't want to be left behind.

Devolve responsibility

A key challenge for energy management is that energy bills are usually paid centrally but staff across



an organisation has a huge effect on the size of those bills. Devolved energy budgets for departments would be the most obvious way to resolve this, but where this isn't possible (due to insufficient metering) there are other ways to transfer responsibility.

Clearly define accountability

We have included sustainability objectives in the job descriptions for our senior staff, and are starting to implement KPI reporting for carbon reduction from our departments. The next step in devolving responsibility is to provide departments with a financial incentive for energy saving – we are starting this process with an online platform showing each building's live energy use.

Hold your contractors accountable

We have included energy-based Key Performance Indicators for our maintenance contracts to keep track of any counter-productive behaviours, such as leaving equipment in-hand. We are also now starting to set in-use energy targets

for our new buildings, which will be written into construction contracts, and monitored to track in-use energy performance vs. the designed energy performance.

Ensure the right people are making the decisions

As we all know, energy efficient options often are more expensive upfront, but deliver long-term cost savings. We have developed a carbon appraisal tool to highlight the life cycle costs for different options in our construction and refurbishment projects. This information is presented as part of the business case for approval of any project. As you can imagine, when senior management sees the long-term cost benefit, the more energy efficient option is often chosen.

I'm not going to pretend that we have got things perfect at UCL – we are learning as we go. But I do know that we need to work effectively with our entire community to achieve our energy ambitions. Embedding behaviour change to

achieve this goes beyond the soft side of engagement to include some hard-edged levers that ensure change is not just encouraged but is mandated. I hope this article has given you some ideas of how to achieve that and the belief that it is possible!

Author's profile

Joanna Marshall-Cook is the Energy Manager at University College London; ranked 7th in world by the QS World University Rankings. UCL occupies over 250 buildings, has over 40,000 staff and students and is currently undertaking a £1.2 billion investment in its Bloomsbury Estate. Over her three years at UCL she has streamlined processes and engaged the UCL community to take ownership of the energy saving agenda. She is currently working on a long term strategy for the university's district energy network and embedding carbon reduction into the Estates Transformation programme.

*Photo credit to Alex Green