


The Highs and Lows of Being an Energy Manager

The role of an Energy Manager is varied and requires many skills. You can be office based one day and visiting a plant room the next; every day can bring its challenges and victories. We have asked the Members of the EMA Board of Directors about their ups and downs of working in energy management.

Scott Armstrong – Group Head of Energy and Sustainability, Bourne Leisure



 My career in energy management has allowed me to gain great operational insight into all areas of an organisation. Whether this is in a services business, an industrial process business, a private sector or a public sector organisation, energy use is the common thread.


As an energy manager you are exposed to engineers, finance professionals, facilities teams, project managers, construction teams and sustainability professionals. As such, we wear a multitude of hats and have to quickly develop interpersonal skills and understand the drivers and motivations of other business functions. These skills are highly transferable and great for professional development.

Whilst historically energy management has not been high on many organisations' priorities, the past decade has seen this change with the double hit of poorer economic conditions and increasing utility costs. Today, operational excellence and cost management are high on all Board agendas and this has strengthened the position of energy managers who drive real financial benefit.


Team engagement is a key passion of mine, training teams from all of our sites at our annual Utilities conference is a highlight of my year.

What I have always found very important is to keep abreast of technological developments, ensuring that I bring a solution-based approach to what I do. This means that every day in energy management is a school day where learning is paramount to success.

Energy management is a profession that will continue to gain importance in the coming decade as businesses focus on net zero energy strategies and continued cost management.

 Overnight audits in the winter months!

Wendi Wheeler – Energy & Carbon Strategy Manager, Network Rail

 My work as an energy manager has always been a really varied workload, which means that I'm never bored! There's a real mix of detailed analysis work, site visits, project development, strategic thinking, innovation, business engagement and much more besides.



And every day is a school day, learning something new. In addition, it's great to be able to measure the difference that my actions are taking and to be able to demonstrate the benefits to my business in a number of different ways.



It is a constant struggle to change attitudes and behaviours to a more sustainable modus operandi, and often you can feel like a lone voice in the wilderness. However, when you do break through those boundaries and make good progress it's really gratifying.

**Julia Blackwell – Energy Officer,
Huntingdonshire District Council**



It's never boring and no two days are ever the same. I have been very lucky that over the last couple of years I have been able to invest significantly in equipment and technology to reduce energy use, so it has been a steep learning curve not just on the measures themselves, but also the logistics,

planning and H+S legislation required to manage a large scale investment project.

I've also had a few adventures; climbing up 50ft of scaffolding to get onto a sport's hall roof to check out the latest PV installation gives you an amazing view of the Cambridgeshire countryside as well as a healthy appreciation for the requirements for edge protection! And sometimes I get to do something really different – this autumn, because I have a thermal imaging camera, I had to help identify where bats were roosting, in order to ensure they wouldn't be disturbed by some renovation work on one of our Countryside Education Centres.



Local authority resources are always being cut back, so I find that I am not able to spend as much time as I would like tackling issues.

It is often hard to engage staff in energy saving, seeing new lighting or PV systems being installed goes down well, but more subtle measures such as ensuring Building Energy Management Systems are kept up to date to reflect current building use (important in leisure facilities when class times can change) can be hard work.

I think my pet peeve is seeing all the insulation, recently installed around pipework and valves, lying on the floor in the plant room after maintenance contractors have been in. Energy management is a profession that will continue to gain importance in the coming decade as businesses focus on net zero energy strategies and continued cost management.

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Ben Burggraaf – Head of Energy Optimisation, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water



I love the diverse nature of the profession; no day is the same when working as an energy manager. One day you can be undertaking energy audits or encouraging operators to use less energy and the other day you are evaluating Power Purchase Agreements or presenting an energy strategy update to the executive team of the company.



Due to the diverse nature of the profession, energy managers are generally very influential in an organisation and have the ability to make a real and lasting impact on its financial & environmental sustainability. You work with front line staff who operate plant and machinery, accountants who assist in developing budgets or business cases, engineers who design new energy efficient processes or hydro generation plants, auditors who assess the effectiveness and accuracy of your processes and data, etc.

All these touch points with other professions in an organisation provide you with a continuous opportunity to learn and to transfer some of your knowledge that will empower them to make better decisions regarding energy costs or carbon in the future. The challenge of this all that makes me enjoy the job, is that you have to understand what drives their day to day decision making (company targets, personal values and beliefs, etc.) and adapt your style to have the biggest impact.



My least favourite part of the profession is that in an energy intensive organisation most of the work done to implement energy consumption and cost savings generally results in energy cost stagnating at best, rather than improving. The latter is mainly due to energy unit cost rising more quickly than you are able to implement energy cost savings.

Another reason is that investment to improve product quality or production capacity, generally means more energy is being used to meet customer demand / expectations or more stringent regulatory requirements. Not seeing the improvement in energy cost and/or consumption can be a bit demoralising on the team and yourself but can also harm the wider organisation's interest in saving energy and carbon.

In my experience, the best way to keep everybody interested and motivated is to regularly assess what the organisation's energy bill and carbon footprint would have been, if you had not implemented the energy savings. To enable this piece of analysis in a credible way,

it is vital that as an energy manager you properly baseline the organisation's energy consumption and cost, prior to implementing the energy saving measure and review the energy performance once the measure has been implemented. Spending time to accurately review each individual project is often overlooked, but in my opinion, it is vital to ensure that the organisation retains trust that the money and other resources invested to save energy and carbon are delivering a real business impact.

Gillian Brown – Energy Manager, Estates and Commercial Services, University of Glasgow



Easily the best part of being an Energy Manager is the variety. No two days are ever the same. No matter what size of organisation you work in from a small set of shops to large complex hospital estates, the variety of work which has to be undertaken will always be there. The only change from one organisation to another is the volume of data which feeds into each work area. We as energy managers are required to cover a huge number of areas; from legislation to data management to energy reduction projects, these are some of the exciting areas which we all get involved in on a daily basis.



To make things even more interesting the variety of areas vary even more with changes within each sector. There are always new and exciting developments in technology which can be utilised to achieve energy/carbon reductions, you only have to look at the developing area of 'smart technologies' to understand how nearly everything we do can be changed to be smarter and more connected. Legislation changes frequently bring in new areas to be included for reporting and in this time of political flux there is even more to be considered.



My least favourite part of being an Energy Manager is probably volume of work. With legislative reporting, budgetary planning and traditional project implementation throughout the year, there never seems to be enough time to get involved in the exciting new developments or new technologies to achieve the targeted reductions set. Within my own organisation there is a lot happening; new buildings, large refurbishment projects and responsibility changes which means there are a lot of new areas to cover over and above the management of energy in our already large building portfolio. There are so many exciting developments which take place in our industry all the time and we would all like to trial them throughout our own portfolios, but the volume of current work never subsides and therefore it is difficult to find the time to implement new ideas.