

Sustainability in the Workplace

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As we see the rise of formal Sustainability Charters, we are seeking to address the key themes affecting soft facilities services companies and looking for ways that we can work more closely with our customers on these issues.

We also seek to identify those areas where challenge persists and the potential ramifications for the industry.

Sustainable Employment

Employment is a perennial problem for the higher density, lower rewarded roles within soft services, which has attracted the attention of a range of support groups from the Equality and Human Rights Commission to Citizens UK, primarily through the Living Wage Foundation driving sustainable pay rates.

As a proud supporter of, and contributor to, the Living Wage Foundation's Service Provider Leadership Group, we are reminded daily of the benefits of the programme.

Moreover, as we approach the threshold of full employment we must recognise that the remaining pool of talent is represented by those who are furthest from the jobs market, including those facing first employment often unsupported by academic achievement, long term unemployed and those coming through rehabilitation programmes. All these groups face transition challenges that remain unfunded within current commercial models, and we recognise that programmes supporting some of these categories may represent wishful thinking for some customer organisations.

NJC is committed to accessing this resource pool and as an example, we are working with a social enterprise to bring ex-offenders into mainstream employment, with an academy set up within a category C prison.

As we near the advent of the practical impact of Brexit, should there be any significant self-repatriation or imposed restriction on labour supply, we may have to challenge whether our current service delivery models, or their inherent shift structures, could prove unsustainable, irrespective of pay rates. We must also consider whether the mix of part or full-time employment is sustainable.

It is clear that allowing the industry to continue to develop employment opportunities, supported by well-trained and enthusiastic managers, with sustainable working patterns and incomes, and offering role diversity, will require a more enlightened customer approach to value. Focusing locally, the London Living Wage now has a mature and substantive marketplace, yet despite making modest gains, this has failed to materially impact on attrition rates. There are clearly other factors affecting employee retention, which can only be affected on a sustainable basis by a partnership approach. Areas which would positively benefit retention and provide much needed staff motivation, such as enhanced managerial skills, improved employment benefits, diversity of workforce and task, and incentives and rewards are often the victims of the merciless pursuit of cost programmes.

We must consider whether the current commercial structures, and the contractual arrangements under which we operate, offer the best chance of meeting the strategic, tactical and incremental customer service challenges we face on a sustainable footing.

Efficient Resource Use

The sustainable use of resources has long been an industry driver, traditionally, anecdotally evidenced. However, with the advent of compulsory reporting and science based targeting we are creating the environment for structured, continuous improvement. Whilst legislation will inevitably force behavioural change, those organisations that are agile to the opportunities of early adoption will reap significant benefits.

Greenhouse gas emissions are one of the sustainability performance indicators that are most requested by stakeholders, within the three categories of emissions. Scope 1 and 2 are the low lying fruit of carbon reduction initiatives, and the investment that is ploughing in to electric vehicle use will shortly ensure mainstream adoption and positively affect scope 1 and to an extent scope 3. The improvements in building materials, processes and supporting mechanical and electrical systems, are already having an impact on scope 2 and we are seeing investment decisions being made on higher environmentally performing assets.

However, soft service partner input at the design stage, is perhaps as rare as Conservative majorities and to genuinely increase long term asset value in a multi-occupant world may require more fundamental participation in the initial stages.

It is arguably in scope 3 that we can have the greatest success. Factor in the clear impact that the Internet of Things will have on all demand based services, and the increasing inert nature of products that we are using, and we are creating a scenario that lends itself to a drastic reduction in scope 3 contributions. We are now regularly deploying water ionisation plant, reducing chemical use, simplifying CoSHH assessment processes, and reducing transport costs, with resultant reductions in carbon footprint.

We are investing in the acumen to ensure we have the capability to develop detailed and robust business cases for the wealth of investment decisions necessary to deliver the benefits. But these decisions are not for the supply side alone. We cannot solely rely on the manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors of web enabled dispensing and waste management systems to meet our collective needs. Indeed their vested interests may not present the optimum investment model, when we take into account the wider industry pressures. Innovations of this nature whilst exciting to work on and undoubtedly beneficial, contain a myriad of challenges.

It is in the management of waste that we foresee the greatest benefits. Whilst long lauded, the actual use of a waste strategy, which incorporates, or utopianly is owned by, the cleaning provider offers significant short, medium and long term benefits. This is particularly true where collected and collated data is used to drive the engagement, communication and education that brings about behavioural change and cost reduction. As we see legislation force structural change, the utilisation of data from the level offering best value, which we would suggest as a minimum is departmental, will provide waste stream management benefits whilst creating genuine commodity income opportunities.

NJC has developed the Waste Monitor system and website to curate, collate and manipulate data with the view to fundamentally driving an integrated waste management strategy within which the cleaning partner plays a leading role in the internal consumer's behavioural change. We look forward to the day when organisations such as the Legal Sustainability Alliance collaborate on platform and partner selection, to mitigate legislative impact, maximise benefits and continually improve the industry.

Wellbeing

Almost every day there seems to be a new research report, opinion piece or white paper discussing employee wellbeing, which affects both the consumer of the service and the support partner colleagues who deliver it. Both mental and physical health are now firmly embedded within employee plans and the advent of ISO 45001 formalises the need for Occupational Health support within wider HSEQ processes.

NJC are committed to harm-free environments and we are putting the Health back into Health & Safety with our approach that goes far beyond legislative compliance.

However, it is often taken for granted that the supply chain can not only meet sustainability objectives in terms of wellbeing but move beyond them. We now regularly see the requirement to 'provide support and assistance to employees for stress and mental health, and avoid long working hours'. The drive to support workplace physical and mental wellbeing, within a range of complementary business initiatives which balance work and life, is not always welcomed as our frontline colleagues' main aim is often to optimise their transport costs with the maximum working day. In those instances where we restrict working hours, we will often see colleagues take roles with other providers to achieve their aim.

With stress accounting for a majority of mental health challenges, are we as an industry prepared to address the current structure of support service shift patterns that can help improve this? There have already been a number of false dawns for day-time cleaning. Full employment, Brexit pressures, equipment improvements and enhanced support demands may have conspired to present a challenge to traditional cleaning shifts, and whilst day-time may not be optimal, robust sustainable alternatives based upon full-time employment are.

As an industry, we continue to be affected by a number of physical safety issues in terms of environmental and procedural risk and NJC has developed a range of initiatives to move compliance beyond legality.

Within our window cleaning business, all operatives carrying out high risk activities must wear GoPro cameras. Footage has provided high levels of governance and is used for training and induction purposes. We are also carrying out a muscular skeletal research programme on Reach and Wash window cleaning systems. As these systems have evolved to permit ever higher access, the actual impact on the body has not been established and NJC will shortly co-author a white paper on the study outcome.

Waste is an increasingly important part of our activities and we have established robust manual handling procedures. However, these services are often carried out in loading bay and underground areas and in the case of shredding, ad-hoc environments, often in space that has an alternative use to design intent. We have therefore introduced particulate monitoring to identify potential airborne contaminants and monitor wellbeing.

NJC is fortunate to have been in the vanguard of the development of cleaning methodologies across standards such as the WELL Building Institute™ framework. The increase in agile working environments can present an increased risk for contamination, particularly in high footfall areas. Successful cleaning regimes must carefully balance the need to deliver clean work environments for building users, whilst doing so in a manner that is not affecting workplace air quality or causing worksurface over treatment. The revised methodology delivers a cleaning regimen typically using non-toxic, hypoallergenic cleaners, helping to reduce bioloads, pests, environmental allergens and unpleasant odours, without introducing chemicals that might adversely impact indoor air quality.

These initiatives are all part of our drive to improve sustainability and to take compliance beyond legality. However, there remain affordability challenges and our successes to date have been founded upon greater customer/supplier collaboration. We look forward to using our expertise and knowledge to partner and support other organisations in the future.



About NJC

NJC supports positive business outcomes and helps to protect brands. With a progressive, aspirational position, NJC aims to bring customer service focus, attentiveness, passion and commitment to all the cleaning and support services it provides. The NJC DNA is at the heart of everything – the insatiable desire to go the extra mile for customers.

- Office Cleaning
- Public Realm Cleaning
- Window Cleaning
- Specialist Cleaning
- Waste Management
- Support Services

Please visit www.njcdna.com or call us on **0118 944 8111**

This white paper is from a talk given by NJC at the May 2018 Legal Sustainability Alliance event at King's Cross, London.