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PERSPECTIVES



1 Competitive credibility

CHRIS HALL is commercial development officer at Siderise

Recent events have brought into sharp focus the issue of building regulations, which some say are falling behind the scale and scope of goings-on in the built environment.

The regulatory system can be a source of confusion. Many in the industry lack understanding of what materials should go where and how they should be tested. What does this mean for product manufacturers in terms of credibility? And how can specifiers compare one tested and approved product with another?

The failure to adopt EN standards and adherence to old BS standards has created two systems: one follows the latest thinking; the other harks back to rules of the 1960s.

The building materials we use have also changed drastically in the past decades. Glass and aluminium are prevalent, presenting acoustics and fire challenges.

When it comes to competitive credibility, a company with cutting-edge test data might be up against another with a test certificate in line with outdated building regulations. The customer will think they are equally compliant because

the regulations allow this. The company without the latest test data has the same access to the market, but without the incumbent costs.

Regulations need to be more descriptive and prescriptive. There is a lack of training and education in fire risks. There will be an architect, fire engineer and possibly façade engineer

“REGULATIONS NEED TO BE MORE DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE”

with grey areas of who will sign off what.

Firms can create products and, because of poorly understood regulations or clever marketing, they can be completely acceptable and legal, but unfit for purpose.

Specifiers need an explanation of data so that they come to the right conclusions. Do they want it for the sake of compliance, only to file away, or to learn something about what they are using? Only when specifiers look beyond a simple checklist will they be able to specify products that are fit for purpose.



2 MoT: Compliance made easy

HARRISON BRIGGS is operations manager at Churchill Complete Compliance

Compliance is difficult to define and manage effectively, and never more so than in the built environment. At a recent BIFM Leaders Forum on hard FM compliance, sponsored by Churchill Service Solutions, several definitions were proposed – clearly, this is an issue that warrants discussion.

Looking at other sectors for inspiration, we realised that the heavily regulated car industry has an easy answer to what is an equally complex problem: the MoT.

Everyone knows they need a MoT if they drive a car on the road. There's a system to check if you're compliant. Some people deliberately choose not to be compliant and drive for a few days

“THERE IS NO MOT TICK-SHEET FOR A BUILDING OWNER OR OCCUPIER”

without an MoT but only 2 per cent have driven their vehicle for more than six months after the MoT expired. We are generally compliant when it comes to getting our MoT as the risks are clear: a £1,000

fine, invalid car insurance, six to eight penalty points and being liable for any costs in an accident. Section 47 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 is well communicated to motorists. MoTs cost a maximum of £54.85 (unless remedial work is required) making them accessible to everyone.

But there's no MoT for a building. There are even more rules to ensure a building is legally compliant compared with a car, but there is no MoT tick-sheet for an owner or occupier to be confident that they are legally compliant.

Many drivers don't know what goes on under a car's bonnet. But the mechanic knows and the driver trusts them to know. Yet when it comes to buildings, we expect clients to know what they should be tendering for when it comes to building compliance. You'd never expect a driver to ask the mechanic to ensure that the fuel system is free from leaks and the exhaust emissions are within guidelines.

So why do we ask a building owner/occupier for their definition of compliance?

A transparent solution for managing building compliance is needed while the sector grapples with standardising its approach.



3 Embrace a changing work environment

DANIELLE ROSENWEIN is HR adviser at global software provider Planon North America

Traditional offices as depicted in older US films, such as *Office Space* and TV shows such as *Mad Men* always have cubicles where employees sit behind colourless desks, afraid of the boss, who only comes out of his private office when something goes wrong.

But in modern US workplaces most employees prefer an open, flexible setting. People want to feel involved in decision-making and shared conversation, rather than simply taking part in the daily routine.

Workplaces that were notorious for their lack of diversity became open to inclusion and embraced people from different cultures, backgrounds and ethnicities. This change was partly due to HR hiring quotas, but mostly because firms recognise the value of ideas that come from disparate staff bringing in their expertise and outlook.

Rather than workers taking directions from bosses, two-way communication is encouraged. Upper management is open to employee feedback and 'junior' employees provide innovative insights for more experienced colleagues.

We in the US work long hours, but feel that we have the flexibility to do the work when and where we want. It is common to never shut down completely or to turn off our electronic devices. It's not that we don't value a work/life balance, but we may

“PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING AND SHARED CONVERSATION”

not focus on it as much as other countries.

Organisations embrace new technologies because they understand what employees want, and how to attract talent and be competitive in the market.

Some firms experiment with flexible time off. Studies have proved that it can be productive in certain jobs.

FMs have the chance to create an environment that allows collaboration, combining different cultures, religions and generations. It can be a challenge, but diversity does not restrict us – it enables us to benefit from new ideas for a better future.



4 Let's just do it

STEVE BREWER is partner at workplace design consultancy Burt Jones & Brewer

Adam Leach makes some excellent points in his piece about ergonomics and agile working (*FM World* December), but he may be overthinking the problem. What is the point of FM? To manage, maintain, shape and form effective workplaces (of all kinds, not just commercial office spaces). So surely what FMs need to do when faced with any challenge that may or may not involve adapting to DSE regulations or the requirements to allow agile working to flourish is this: just do it.

“FMS MUST BE PREPARED TO ASK DIFFICULT QUESTIONS”

As workplace designers, we often partner with FMs (we recently completed a scheme with Incentive FM). They are an underrated bunch (that's you, dear reader), but their consistent strengths are adaptability, flexibility and creativity. While they might be criticised by pundits for not being innovative, what they do is respond fantastically to changing situations.

If FMs have a problem to face as workplace matures and evolves faster as a discipline, it is to keep pace with changes. For example, commercial real estate teams will increasingly experiment with co-working principles as they seek to maximise capital revenue from their property portfolios. This will lead to an impact on the shape of those spaces.

FMs must be prepared to ask difficult questions of the client and the client's team of designers and strategists. Often it is the FM's guidance keeping the overall approach practical. There's always room for creativity, but form cannot overrule function. Set-up and specification about things like furniture should be a given, whether it is the responsibility of the design team or the FMs or determined in collaboration. The questions asked by FMs and answered by designers and the client should focus on the organisation's culture, the requirements of the users, and the nature of the brands being represented in the space being created to be managed by the FM team.

So FMs need to get on with being FM, and workplace professionals need to get on with the design, analysis and research. Let's just do it.