

TWELVE REASONS WHY ENERGY SAVING CAMPAIGNS FAIL

John Mulholland of NIFES outlines a number of areas where energy awareness campaigns succeed or fail. Avoiding the errors he discusses will not guarantee success, but will minimise risk.

Despite widespread coverage of the benefits - both economic and environmental - to be gained from energy efficiency, many campaigns do not reach the targets they were set up to achieve. There can be many reasons for this, but a number of the more common ones can be isolated. They include:

Senior Commitment

Senior managers need to give their full support to the campaign. This does not mean they have to devote a lot of time to the issue. However, it will involve visible commitment, e.g. signing the Making a Corporate Commitment campaign, releasing staff for training, ensuring that energy management is on the agenda at board meetings and releasing funds.

Funding

Most campaigns which fail usually have one thing in common: they are attempted on a shoestring budget. No strategic plan has been developed and nothing has been costed. To run an effective campaign the investment level needs to be between 1% and 2% of the total annual utility bill. So a figure of £20,000 should be considered for an annual utility bill of £1 million.

This is serious money. Often people budgeting for such campaigns allow for figures between £500 and £2,000. To reach a critical momentum these sums are simply not enough. In fact such investment is wasted. It would be wiser to do nothing if less than 1% of the annual energy budget is available.

Technical people find it much easier to invest in hardware solutions (e.g. CHP plant or controls) rather than 'soft' solutions such as 'people'.

However, hard facts show there is enormous potential in saving energy through people if the strategy is right. One example is Iceland Frozen Foods plc. They designed their own campaign. For an investment of £20,000 they saved £200,000 in reduced electricity bills in less than 12 months. This sort of return is not untypical and compares very favourably with any hardware investment.

Response Resources

It is one thing to raise staff expectations and awareness but it is another to respond to the number of ideas, suggestions and questions generated by the campaign. It is important to allocate staff time to deal with the response which the campaign will generate. If people do not get a response they may get the feeling that the response mechanism is a 'black hole' and loose interest.

Energy Staff Involvement

Energy management staff must be personally involved in the campaign. It is not possible to simply delegate a campaign to a consultant or a junior member of staff. It is a partnership between the ongoing energy management function and the campaign facilitator.

An example of this is at Southmead Hospital, Bristol. During their campaign a total of 30 key managers and 100 energy monitors were trained in groups of 15 people. At each training session the energy manager was present alongside the energy training consultant. The energy manager was able to note issues raised and answer specific local questions from delegates. This gave valuable information to the energy manager and also provided an opportunity for the key players in the campaign to have personal contact with him.

Co-ordinated Strategy

Some people complain "we tried a campaign but it was fruitless". When asked what the campaign consisted of the response often is: "we put up some posters and stickers and had an article in the company newspaper".

This is not an energy campaign. If you think a campaign equals a few posters and stickers - think again. On their own these things are not effective. However, if they are one of 20 other initiatives which are part of a co-ordinated strategy, they can be useful reminders. It is also important to design a campaign appropriate to corporate culture. Every culture is different so 'off the shelf' campaigns are not very effective. Each campaign must be carefully crafted and tailored for maximum impact.

Targeting

A question often asked about campaigns is "Where do we target our effort?" One extreme is to target every energy end-user. Sometimes this can be like spreading butter thinly over a football pitch. The other extreme is to focus on a small group of people e.g. boiler or plant operators.

In most organisations it is not an "either...or" scenario but a "both...and". The Pareto principle can be helpful in deciding where to target resources. This 80/20 rule suggested that 20% of staff control 80% of the energy and 80% of staff control the remaining 20% of the energy. In your organisation it may be 90/10 or 60/40.

Whatever the ratio it is important to identify who are key people and focus resources on them. In order to create energy saving as a cultural value and norm, it is worth applying mass publicity to raise awareness of the remainder. But the balance between the key players and others must be carefully struck.

Looking Beyond

Any campaign has a limited life. To maintain momentum beyond the initial thrust it is important to think about integrating energy efficiency as a topic in induction/update training, as part of staff appraisals, annual energy week, energy calendars, etc. A key to maintaining momentum is to analyse existing culture and communication systems and build energy into existing mechanisms.

Feedback Mechanisms

Once expectations are raised, most staff will make some effort. The next question is: "How are we doing?" Without an adequate monitoring system it will be impossible to answer this important question. 'Success breeds success' - but if success cannot be measured then everyone is in the dark. Not only will staff not know how they are doing, but it will be impossible to relay back to those funding the campaign any progress towards achieving the set energy/money target savings.

Appropriate Timing

An energy campaign is a *change* programme: motivating people to become energy savers and not energy wasters. But energy campaigns do not happen in isolation.

Staff may have a number of other initiatives on their agenda e.g. organisation restructuring, health and safety training, fire safety, COSHH, customer care, etc.

If staff are hit with everything at once they may respond negatively. Much of it depends on their capacity and attitude. It is important to co-ordinate the timing of an energy campaign so that it gets the recognition it deserves.

There is never an ideal time to run a campaign but there may be a good 'window of opportunity' which minimises the risk of staff being overwhelmed.

Sensitivity About Morale

Another factor affecting campaigns is overall staff morale. For example, it is not a good idea to launch an energy saving campaign the same week that redundancies are announced. Saving energy requires staff co-operation. If staff feel grieved about a corporate issue they usually hit back at easy targets such as energy campaigns. A typical reaction can be "If they are trying to save energy why are they producing booklets and putting up posters?"

Critical reactions to energy campaigns are usually symptomatic of ill feeling by employees towards the organisation. After all, who can logically argue against the case for energy efficiency? Even political parties of every persuasion agree that energy efficiency makes sense.

Investment and Maintenance

In any energy management strategy it is important to invest in energy efficient plant, controls and buildings. It is also important to avoid waste in existing equipment. Some people invest to the point where they can go no further with technical solutions. they then turn to people solutions, partly because there is nowhere else to go and partly because any potential savings from investment can easily be wasted by end-users of energy if they are not sufficiently aware and motivated.

Sometimes people solutions are approached from another direction: there is not much capital available and because people solutions are low risk and relatively low cost, energy awareness is logical focus. However, one of the problems with this approach is that en-users can have the attitude: "It's all very well you telling us to switch off lights and equipment - but what about all those draughts in our office and leaking taps that never get fixed when we report them? And what about some investment in a decent heating system?"

Energy is there to serve staff and enable them to reach their goals. The aim of energy management is to achieve this at minimum cost. But if the energy provided is not delivering the required comfort conditions, then how realistic is it to expect staff to be positive about reducing consumption?

So energy campaigns must not be an excuse to dodge the maintenance or investment elements of sound energy management strategy.

The ideal situation is to run an energy campaign in parallel with an on-going capital programme. This communicates with end-users that it is not a one-way street. Also in parallel it is important to have an effective maintenance function which responds rapidly to users' needs.

Motivation

Senior managers and budget holders will rightly judge the success of an energy campaign by how much money it saves. Their prime motivator is cost reduction. But if the truth is known the end-users of energy in most organisations are not particularly interested in saving energy to save their organisation money - particularly if they see money wasted elsewhere.

Therefore it is vital to give clear positive messages to employees why it is important to save energy. These reasons have got to go beyond cost savings, e.g. energy use in their own homes and the environmental impact of energy use. The key to getting people on board is to relate energy efficiency to their own personal value systems.

These twelve areas are where campaigns succeed or fail. It is tempting to think that by avoiding the errors success is guaranteed. Certainly it will take you out of reverse into neutral. But to get into overdrive you need to know your people and think creatively of what will work for them.

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