



Meeting energy efficiency goals requires compliance, monitoring and evaluation from everyone

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The universe of all things "eco" has expanded as a galaxy is born. So rapid is the rate of new "green" product introductions that it makes one marvel at the ingenuity of humankind and simultaneously questions if all these products can really live up to their promise.

Complicating the assessment as to the authenticity of the "green" in any green product is that for "eco" products to work effectively, they must emulate nature as a true "ecosystem," i.e., work in synergy with one another and be utilized by building occupants as intended. Quality product selection and integration alone cannot achieve the full energy savings potential in buildings.

The dynamic of noncohesion between building owner and tenant, which predominantly characterized that type of relationship over the last century, is mandated to be replaced by the dynamic of a "building-ecosystem" which not only brings together those two entities in a more cooperative way - primarily due to the significant investments needed to satisfy even the most basic of sustainability initiatives - but now further extends to include tenant stakeholders. More people need to be enrolled in the necessary behavioral changes in order to maximize the benefit of sustainable energy technologies, otherwise, the ROI of green initiatives at a purely economic level will be significantly and negatively impacted, and the necessity to measure and enforce tenant stakeholder lifestyle change will become yet another diminishing factor. Meeting energy efficiency goals requires developing a complete process around compliance, monitoring and evaluation.

Additionally, it is essential that "green" results are communicated in measurements to which tenant stakeholders can relate. Query: whether defined in terms of zero carbon footprint or greenhouse gas emissions, are the units of measure equivalent and is that different from "trees saved?" What is the difference in energy consumption between a building being a net zero energy consumer or net zero carbon dioxide emitter? The particular factors that go into the "net" number brings us right back to the concept of evaluating green initiatives on the basis of each particular building's "ecosystem."

A most telling example of this shift towards "building-ecosystem" dynamics is the fact that the #1 priority for real estate managers and building owners is "workplace design," as reported by a local member of CoreNet, an authoritative real estate professionals organization. "Sustainability issues," which are more "building-centric," were rated a close #2.

This shift is of great significance for manufacturers of furniture, paint, carpet and lighting, enabling them to dialog directly with real estate directors and building owners. The conversation covers such topics as low-VOC products geared towards reducing employee sick time, and carpet "buy back" programs that speak directly to sustainability issues while driving down operational building costs. As this kind of conversation moves forward, landlords are seeking to include in their leases minimum sustainability criteria tenants must meet. These conversations begin to more closely mirror green concepts that govern product life cycle, such as the "cradle to cradle" standards developed by

McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry (MBDC) whose mission it is to not only reduce costs, but to grow strategic opportunities. As the website of MBDC states, "Eco-effective regenerative design strategies create environmental health and abundance. The paradigm also leads to design for social and intergenerational justice and prosperity."

It is worth noting that a Google search using the key words "sustainability for buildings" which is "building-centric" yielded 517,000 results in 0.19 seconds, and the results for "building-ecosystem" (as defined in this article) yielded zero results. It appears that it's time to expand our vocabulary to include this change in relationship dynamics, as it is already underfoot.

Towards that end, consider yourself invited to participate in a day-long seminar on "Sustainability and Energy Efficiency: Bridging The Gap from Design to Operations" on May 6th at the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Customs House in partnership with: USGBC, IFMAGNY, BOMA and the GSA. The seminar will explore the intent of policies/procedures for improving energy efficiency and the gap between expectations of what such policies/procedures will achieve and their actual impacts. This gap represents a substantial lost opportunity to maximize saved energy, reduce the cost of energy services and enhance energy security. For further information and attendance fees email: nadine@tygabox.com.

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