

The evolving role of the Facility and Workplace Manager: Building connections and balancing challenges in the post-pandemic world

Building connections and connecting buildings: Key steps to creating a smarter workplace

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Introduction: Building the smart workplace of the future

In the early spring of 2020, millions of workers around the world had no choice but to start working from home, and a new era of remote working began. Now, as we find ourselves closer to what resembles a post-pandemic world, businesses and organisations must navigate yet another era for the workplace: a hybrid, work-from-anywhere approach. But this time, employees are tired of the old way of doing things, and it's not just the 'location' of where work is done that must be re-evaluated and revitalised. According to [a recent McKinsey report](#), workers now want 'a renewed and revised sense of purpose in their work. They want social and interpersonal connections with their colleagues and managers. And they want to feel a sense of shared identity'.

Following COVID-19, global businesses are seeking pathways to a genuinely better working environment, one driven by a sense of belonging and connection. Business leaders now realise that if they want to hire and retain top talent in this new hybrid-working reality, they must invest in a connected workplace where people feel motivated and properly equipped to do their work. And in this brave new world of work, it is the Facility and Workplace Managers who are expected to deliver on these goals.

But how can the Facility and Corporate Real Estate teams successfully collaborate with HR to define the new purpose and role of the workplace, and what do they need to do to make the workplace stay relevant, compliant and appealing for their organisation and its employees?

Building connections

There are several ways of bringing this new way of working into your organisation. First, look at building connections as a way in which you communicate and build company culture. It's important for this to start at the top from your leadership team. In fact, Facility and Workplace Management leaders of tomorrow should become key supporters of and within the C-suite by helping to make the workplace a draw for talent, as well as meeting corporate strategic goals around sustainability, ESG, finance, employee engagement, health and wellbeing.

Secondly, alongside a culture that is moving towards building connections within your workforce, in recent years there have been rapid developments in smart workplace technology. Transformative software, apps and sensors allow you to manage the workplace more efficiently, providing new ways for team members to connect with each other, and with your business, in this ever-changing work landscape.

Thirdly, connect your buildings. Use smart technology to introduce new and dynamic ways of conducting business into the buildings themselves – creating a working environment that is digitally enabled, future-proof and one that inspires your employees to be actively engaged with their workspace and each other.

To help you build connections across your business, grow your role and prepare your workplace and organisation for the challenges of the future, we believe you should explore these 8 steps:



1. Embrace a changing job role

Gone are the days of the invisible Facility Manager whose only focus was to ensure the cost-effective running of the building and the associated processes.

In the new, culture-first approach to the workplace, the role of the Facility Manager is shifting. The lines with Human Resources are blurring, inviting Facility Managers to play a bigger part as the new 'stewards of corporate culture'. The core goals of Facility Management haven't necessarily changed in this new working age – you are still aiming to deliver incredible workplace experiences and services to your building users, while maintaining safe, compliant, and cost-efficient building portfolios. In this new era, there are just so many novel technologies and opportunities for facilities teams to explore and implement to keep raising the bar and deliver more sustainable, productive, and attractive workplace environments that put safety and wellbeing at the heart of their business.

Moreover, today's Facility Managers must make it a priority to build strong relations with employees and strategic partners, display a sense of empathy, and be culturally aware of the environment in which they operate.


To thrive in this world, Facility Managers must embrace change and balance key responsibilities, such as cost-saving and process optimisation, with a mission to deliver people-centric buildings, digital innovation, and sustainability. Adopt this shift and you can become a hero to your CEO as they look to grow their workplace in the brave new world of flexible and hybrid working models.

2. Make the workplace people-centric

Business leaders now realise that if they want to hire and retain top talent, they must invest in a workplace where people feel happy and motivated. Only by supporting a collaborative, team-friendly environment can organisations leverage skills and harness the greatest potential of talented individuals to solve the problems of the future.

A recent [EY study](#) found that 90% of Generation-Z value the human connection in the workplace above salary when it comes to their at-work communication, while a [Gallup survey](#) highlights the tangible link between having a best friend at work and the level of effort employees expend in their job.

Astute businesses recognise that people are their biggest asset. Facility Managers play a central role in this process helping to build value from the workforce by creating an environment that provides the opportunity and motivation for talent to flourish.



According to a Chartered Management Institute (CMI) study, COVID has permanently affected our working patterns, with 84% of firms adopting a hybrid working model that has led to an uptick in productivity and company results.

3. Adapt to a new hybrid, resilient work model

Ensuring the work environment delivers everything that a growing flexible workforce needs has added another layer of complication to the Facility Manager role. They must now balance the need for outsourced service provisions such as maintenance, utilities, cleaning, catering, security, waste management and front-of-house, with an ever-changing work pattern.

In response to the pandemic, there is now an increased demand for occupancy analytics, space utilisation, indoor air quality monitoring, hygiene standards, and hybrid workplace protection. But how can you ensure you are on top of them all?

Facility Managers who understand the value of implementing the right smart technologies within their buildings can achieve an elevated level of automated control across a building. For example, equipped with the right technologies Facility Managers can optimise, and often automate their control of a building's lighting, electrical and security systems. The benefits of which include reduced operational costs and increased energy efficiency, all of which can help Facility Managers support their organisation's overall business and sustainability goals.

Smart devices and mobile technologies also give employees a higher degree of autonomy and flexibility over their working environment, helping to create a more personalised, connected workspace experience that inspires a sense of wellbeing.

COVID-19 has already shown how integral Facility Management professionals are to core functions like risk management, business continuity, and employee welfare. As we emerge into a post-pandemic world, preparedness, resilience, and agility are crucial as Facility Managers continue to implement the necessary health and wellbeing measures to allow the workplace to remain safe, connected, and productive.

In 2020, organisations shifted their staff to home working and networking in a disjointed, urgent process. Today, they must have a plan B in their back pocket – or in their building management plan – in case rapid changes are needed at a local, or regional level. Technology is crucial to ensure all these plans are in one place, monitoring the latest situation in real time.

4. Make sustainability a top priority

According to EY's 2021 [CEO Imperative Study](#), 80% of CEOs believe companies will take significant steps to take responsibility for sustainability in their operations over the next five years.

Sustainable buildings are shown to improve employee engagement and morale. A report by the [World Green Building Council](#) found simple steps such as improving air quality, increasing natural light, and introducing biophilia can improve productivity and wellbeing whilst also reducing the energy consumption of a building.

Another survey suggests that sustainable companies that care about employee wellbeing and the planet are more likely to attract and [hire talented and committed workers](#). And this is likely to become more prevalent as sustainability and an established green culture become a core aspect of the future of business.

But to do this, you need to know how sustainable, or not, your buildings already are. A workplace management system with an integrated sustainability solution allows you to measure and monitor all energy consumption, carbon emissions, and building and department costs in a structured and standardised way. This ensures your foundation of data and starting points are accurate, and reporting on how your sustainability performance is changing over time is no longer out of reach.

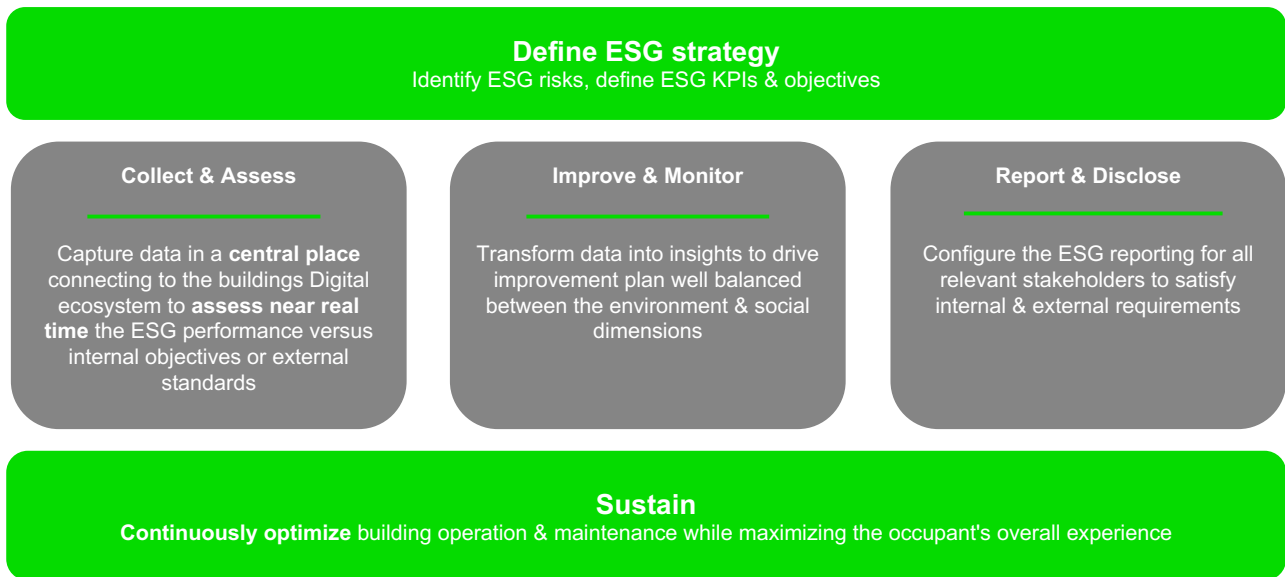


Illustration: The Building's ESG Journey (Planon)

5. Prepare for ESG regulation

As [Deloitte](#) recently cited, the latest Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards (ESG) regulation isn't just about ticking boxes. ESG-worthy organisations see improved financial performance, maintain good corporate reputations and attract and retain more top talent.

The burgeoning interest in companies' ESG performance has resulted in a proliferation of reports, rankings, requests from investors and analysts, and other mechanisms for transparency. Much of the performance data needed for these new types of reports is held by the Facilities team. And now, with the spotlight on this data Facility Managers must ensure their data is accurate, so they can comply with new legislation to meet net-zero targets and reduce their company's carbon footprint.

This has made the role of Facility Manager more complex as businesses face pressure from all directions to align their strategy with ESG. The financial impact of ESG programmes is also likely to increase as expectations and scrutiny from investors, consumers, employees, and other stakeholders continue to grow.

Indeed, the latest [Verdantix research forecasts](#) that 2022 and 2023 will bring greater expectations for more accurate, ESG and sustainability figures. Therefore, today is the time to get ahead of the game and ensure that you are transitioning to investor-grade ESG data and decision-making in your processes, so that you are prepared for the future.

The good news is that what was once a paper-based, long-drawn out, costly, and labour-intensive process can now be simpler, more accurate and more efficient with smart building management technology.

6. Introduce smart building technology to your workplace

The internet of things (IoT) is already at the forefront of business conversations, but how exactly can you utilise it in your facilities team?

Here, the 'things' in IoT, comprise smart sensors, intelligent meters, building systems and devices, which can be used to monitor performance, measure behaviours, and communicate and interact with other systems – reducing the need for human control functions.

The potential use of IoT is monumental. Users will no longer need to reactively ask for things to be fixed, or experience failing facilities, as IoT will catch this in advance. Building systems can be automatically adjusted to meet the needs of occupants. You can track working space, not only to provide availability data to your workforce, but also to see which facilities are used (and when). And you can monitor consumption and mechanical/electrical changes to see where waste occurs and to identify maintenance issues early, and fix these before they cause any issues.

Increased smart, connected technology in buildings will provide Facility Managers with an elevated level of automated control across a building. For example, smart building automation uses technology to optimise and control a building's lighting, electrical and security systems, the benefits of which include reduced operational costs and increased energy efficiency, all of which can help Facility Managers successfully manage their facilities.

Combining smart IoT sensors with automation workflows gives you total process control, with technology monitoring a process on your behalf and alerting you to any issues or inconsistencies. For example, sensors can track liquid volume and CO2 levels, temperatures, changes in pressure, movement and proximity, amongst other things.

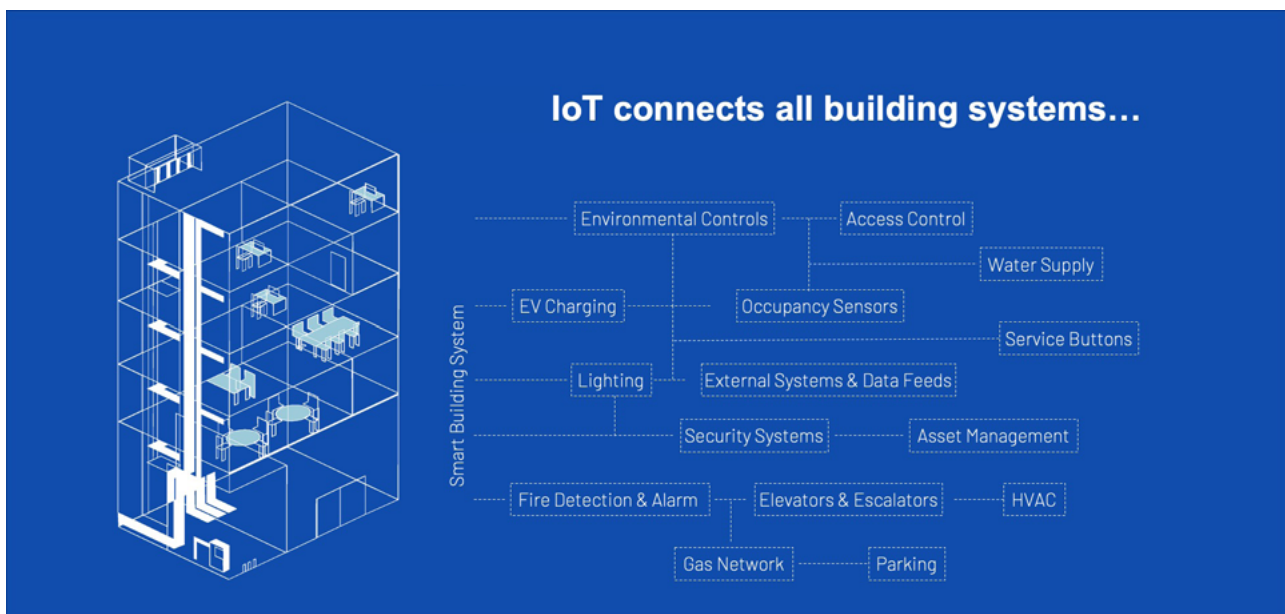


Illustration: Scalable IoT Connectivity for Smart Buildings (Planon)

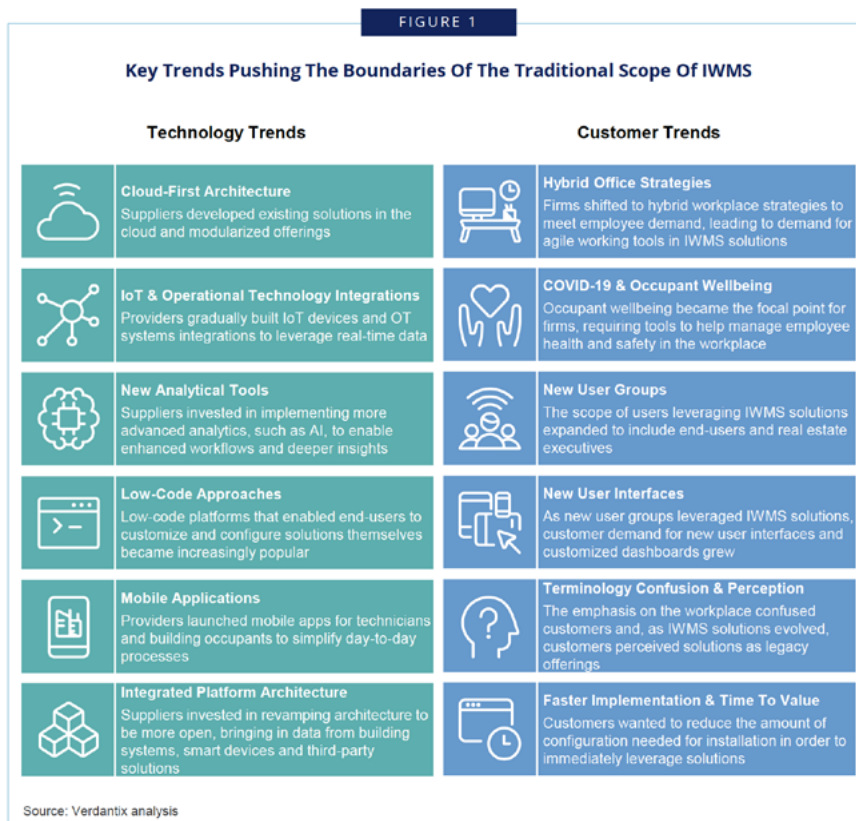
7. Keep everything in check with the right systems platform

As technology and digitalisation, in addition to stakeholder and compliance requirements continue to develop, it's important to be able to efficiently manage every one of your organisation's physical assets as well as any connected device.

This calls for the creation of an ecosystem that combines operational technology (OT) with information technology (IT). An ecosystem that is open, IoT-enabled, equipped to handle endless additions and plug-and-play functionalities, and contains an interoperable and intelligent information architecture for smart buildings. It will allow you to unlock innovation at every level - from connected products and apps to edge control, and analytics and services. Providing full transparency and being able to track and trace data is critical to help you monitor, measure and optimise the full life cycle of your assets. You can standardise, integrate and continue to optimise any asset-related processes. Operate and maintain assets at lower cost. Increase continuity, reliability and security and achieve a more flexible and effective utilisation of your assets. Replace any physical assets that aren't performing and reduce and report on your environmental impact.

OT software solutions are labeled differently within the industry. The most similar label to an enterprise asset management system would be an integrated workplace management system (IWMS) or computer aided facility management (CAFM). IWMS, or –if fully integrated with IoT– [smart building management software](#), supports the lifecycle of all business support assets, including real estate, infrastructure, technical installations, space, workspaces, fleet, vending machines, meeting rooms, and facilities.

By eliminating data silos and aligning solutions into one platform that gives you the ability to monitor everything in one place, this type of innovative technology provides all building stakeholders with the actionable and meaningful insights they need to transform the future of the workplace and build better connections.



Market Insight: The Transformation of IWMS to Connected Portfolio Intelligence Platforms (CPIP)
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8. Trial changes with a digital twin

Introducing the technology approaches above may seem overwhelming. Making any changes to the daily workings of your building can be a risky procedure, as it's often hard to guess what effect the changes will have, without making the physical change first. This is where a digital twin can help, as it provides you with the opportunity to test, monitor and accurately predict performance without the need to experiment in the 'real' world.

A digital twin provides a digital representation of your physical asset – anything from an individual pump or ventilator system to an entire floor or a whole building. Every 'twin' has a counterpart, a real 'thing' in the physical world that it is replicating.

The 'twin' provides an accurate representation of its physical equivalent, which grants us an incredible opportunity to test changes without having a real-world impact. This can be used to operate and monitor your facilities, to plan and improve systems, and rethink your workplace design and build before physical prototypes are created. Digital Twin technology will help change the game forever for Facility Management teams who embrace it and set out to actively discover new ways they can utilise it to improve building performance and maintenance.

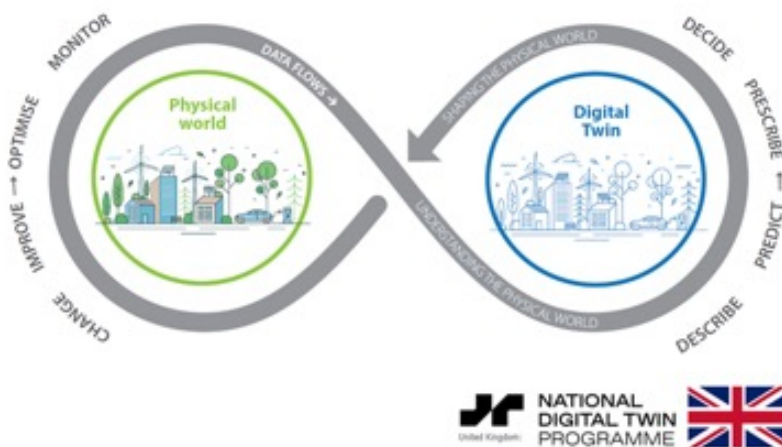
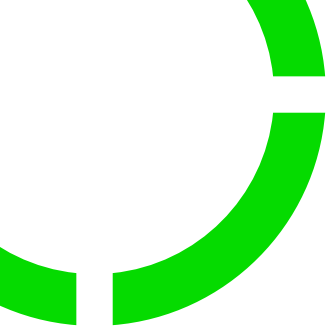


Figure: The principles of the Digital Twin, depicted by the UK National Digital Twin Programme

Conclusion

Creating the smart workplace of the future will not happen overnight. But by building connections between people, workspaces and processes through thoughtful and balanced investment in personal skills, technology and automation, facility managers can create engaging, safe, healthy and resilient places for people to work, learn, live and play.

Smart, sustainable building management software is essential to provide flexibility and contingency readiness as you ensure the safety and resilience of your building. Transform your workplace today and start building connections and an environment where people want to meet, connect and grow in a post-pandemic future.



About Planon

Planon is the leading global provider of Smart Sustainable Building Management software that connects buildings, people and processes. By eliminating data silos and aligning solutions into one shared information platform, Planon provides all building stakeholders with actionable and meaningful insights. Independent market research and consulting firms have consistently rated Planon as a global leader in the market. Planon has implemented its comprehensive solutions for a multitude of local and global clients, supported by offices and partners around the world.

Find out how to build connections

Get in touch with one of our expert teams to understand how Planon's smart building management software can help you deliver the workplace of the future.

[Contact us](#)