

Sustainability in FM: Trends in Policy and FM competence consequences

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Abstract

Sustainability is emerging as a core business strategy and obligation for many organisations. The facilities management (FM) profession is at the forefront of delivering sustainable practices at the operational, tactical and strategic management levels. The profession, however, faces more demands and challenges as the goals of sustainability agendas change over time and must be equipped with new knowledge, tools and competencies to overcome the challenges. An annual sustainability survey was conducted to examine how facilities management (FM) professionals are engaging with sustainability in their business environments over the past 4 years. The objectives are to provide insights to the relevant knowledge, skill sets and best practice that can enhance their professional competencies. It further aims to provide the FM professionals with up to date sustainability toolkits, techniques and information that can enhance their competencies in dealing with the challenges posed by the sustainability agenda. The sustainability survey report provides an insight into the issues and trends influencing the delivery of sustainable policies and practices across different organisations and economic sectors. The analysis provided valuable information on the overall impact of the sustainability agenda on Facilities managers' professional work. Similarly, the findings provided the FM professionals with information that may be used to enhance professional competences of facilities managers in dealing with sustainability management and operation issues, develop sustainability good practice guides and education and training in particular continuous professional development (CPD) modules/courses.

Keywords: Sustainability, facilities management, policy, CPD and competences.

1. Introduction

Benefits of sustainability in the built environment are well known to facilities managers but the practice of sustainable FM is rapidly evolving due to the three Cs of customer demands, competition from competitors and climate change (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 2005; Elmualim *et al.* 2009; Warren 2010). Global, national and local sustainable development agendas continue to demand that organisations develop and implement sustainability policy that respond to the challenges. However, identifying the most appropriate approach is a major test for most organisations especially facilities managers who are often tasked to deliver sustainability goals and objectives with financial prudence (Elmualim *et al.* 2010). Although, this is an opportunity for FM professionals to

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make a real and measurable difference in improving businesses they seem not to have easy access to the specialist knowledge, tools and case study material necessary to make this a reality (Loch 2000; Shah 2007). As a leader in advancing the FM profession, the BIFM seeks the relevant knowledge, information and skill sets that will enhance FM professionals' competencies in dealing with the demand, challenges and opportunities of delivering sustainability in business environments.

The Sustainability in FM research programme aims to provide the FM profession with sustainability toolkits, techniques and information to ensure FM organisations or managers become more reactive or proactive towards sustainability challenges. The project objectives are to develop tools and information on sustainable FM; help FM professionals respond to the increasing importance and challenges of climate change and meet their environmental responsibilities. A key component of the Sustainability in Facilities Management programme (SFM) is the annual sustainability survey. The annual survey aims to investigate how FM professionals are engaging with sustainability in their business environments. The objectives are to provide insights to the relevant knowledge, skill sets and best practice that enhance professional competencies in delivering sustainability developments and practices. The survey identifies the most relevant issues and emerging trends being emphasised by facilities managers. The 2010 survey builds upon previous studies. Previous annual sustainability surveys were conducted in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The insights gained set the objectives of future sustainability surveys enabling any changes in the data collected to be measured.

Importance of FM in driving sustainability

Sustainability is now a major obligation and expectation across many businesses (Stern 2006). Pressure from key stakeholders, governments and competitors are driving organisations to implement the sustainability agenda in business activities (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 2005; Nousiainen and Junnila 2008). For example, economic, social and environmental factors like climate change and limitation of energy resources point toward FM professionals being challenged to do more for their organisations. As most business activities occur in built environments, the quality of the built environment can be a noticeable manifestation of an organisation's sustainability credentials. Walker *et al* (2007) suggest that "the only credible route an organisation has to achieve for appropriate environmental management is to take a systematic approach to promote a sustained, continuous improvement in performance." Though final organisational responsibility for committing sustainability rests on the highest level of management, FM professionals are at the forefront of integrating sustainable practices to their operational and management activities (Shah 2007; Elmualim *et al.* 2009).

In the past FM professionals were responsible for managing the non-core business activities that support the core business strategies. Increasingly facilities managers are at the forefront making valuable strategic contributions toward their organisation's sustainable business as sustainability and CSR become a core business in many organisations (Loch 2000; van Ree 2007). Hence, the FM profession has an opportunity to drive sustainability policies within business environment by addressing core business strategies (Brandon and

Bentivegna 1997; Tay and Ooi 2001; van Ree 2007). In addition to their technical and operational skills, FM professionals have a great opportunity to expand their activities into boardrooms as they provide managerial skills in support of core business strategies for organisations as a whole. As a result facilities managers need to understand how the growing emphasis on sustainability is affecting the way they discharge their duties. FM professionals must become professionally competent and knowledgeable about sustainability issues that will impact on their business environments both operationally and strategically (Cooper 1996; Puddy *et al.* 2001; Warren 2010). By examining the emerging trends and issues influencing FM professionals' engagement with sustainable practices across different sized organisations and economic sectors, the new knowledge gained will help develop FM professionals' understanding of the issues underpinning effective sustainability management. In addition, the new knowledge can be used to support trade organisations interested in sustainability to develop more effective approaches to interact with FM audience.

2. Survey Method

As in the previous surveys, the questionnaire was primarily distributed and administered by BIFM to its members and other interested stakeholders as an online survey. The questionnaire instrument involved 20 closed questions and 5 open questions. Compared to 251 respondents in 2007, 168 in 2008, and 222 in 2009, a total of 268 respondents completed this year's survey online. The data was transferred into spread sheet for analysis (See Appendix for a copy of the questionnaires). To draw out new knowledge, similarities and differences in trends and shifts a simple comparison of the perceptions of respondents conducted for each question. The new results are then compared to previous years' results. As with previous survey data and reports, the analysis of the current data is based on the following format:

- Demographics of respondents. This provides information on the background of the respondents and organisations completing the survey.
- Trends on Sustainability/CSR Policy development, implementation and management issues especially areas of concern to facilities managers.

As respondents were self-selected, the results of the survey should be taken as only an indication of the perceptions and observations of facilities managers in general. They represent the views of facilities managers interested in sustainable FM. Furthermore, as respondents were not asked to specify their position within their organisations, perceptions and observations reported here may not necessarily represent the views of specific organisations and professionals – however the BIFM status of respondents allows for a high proportion to be practicing FMs.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographics of respondents

This section provides demographic information about the background of the respondents and the organisations they work in. The respondents were asked questions about their current BIFM membership status, academic qualifications gained, type of organisation and its economic sector, the level of annual turnover and the size of the organisations in terms of employee numbers. These data will be analysed for changing trends in surveyed professionals. A total of 268 people responded to the 2010 annual sustainability survey. The data collected were as reliable as the survey will allow.

over 90% of the respondents are either associate, corporate, certified, student or full members of the BIFM. Over 63% of the respondents are identified as full member of BIFM meaning they have at least five years of management experience and over three years of FM experience. over 50% of respondents worked FM departments in End-user organisations (in-house departments). A further 16% worked in FM companies that have been out-sourced as FM service providers. Other FM organisation where respondents worked were Independent FM Consultancies (11%), FM service providers (9%) and FM product suppliers (1%). 10% of respondents, however, indicated "other" type of FM organisation. over the last four years, over 50% of respondents worked as facilities managers in in-house FM departments (End-users organisation) even though the proportion of respondents from the End-user organisational category has decreased by 10% since 2007. The proportion of respondents from out sourced FM organisations and consultancies has remained fairly constant over the years. The only exception is that respondents from full FM service provider organisations have increased by 7% since 2007. As a whole, the result reveals that overall, 68% of the respondents worked in large organisations employing more than 250 people while the remaining worked in SMEs (organisations employing less than 250 people).

3.2 Development and management of sustainable FM

This section of the paper focuses on respondents' perception of the levels of sustainability policy and the effectiveness of sustainability management within their organisations. The results showed that in 2010, as shown in Figure 1, 72% of respondents indicated that their employers had a sustainability policy in place. 6% did not know whether their employers had one or not. The remaining 22% indicated that their employers did not have a sustainability/CSR policy. Clearly, a majority of the respondents believe that their organisations do have sustainability/CSR policies in place.

Figure 1 also indicates the proportion of respondents indicating that their organisations do have a sustainability/CSR policy rose steadily from 65% in 2007 to 84% in 2009 but dropped significantly by 12% in 2010. The proportion of respondents who indicated their organisation had no sustainability/CSR policy, however increased by 6% (Figure 1). Also a sizeable amount of respondents do not know whether their organisations do have a sustainability/CSR policy. The results are worrying given that sustainability is growing in importance as a core business strategy and the FM profession has a great opportunity to

add value to their organisation’s sustainability agenda. Although there might be reasons for the sharp drop and the increase of respondents who don’t know, there is an urgent need to encourage FM professionals to develop and manage sustainability policies and activities in their organisations.

Regardless of the levels of uptake, the issue of “effective implementation” is not addressed in this question; therefore one should not assume that the “development” of a policy framework implies appropriate management of the policy. The management of the policy is a much broader concept that considers the core project cycle stages (Identification, formulation, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). shows that approximately 40% of the respondents’ revealed that their organisations have had either a sustainability or CSR policy for a period of 2 years or less. 30% of respondents indicated their employers have had a sustainability or CSR policy for 2-4 years. A further 30% indicated that their organisations have had a sustainability or CSR policy for more than four years. Clearly, majority of the respondents believe that their employers have had a sustainability/CSR policy in place in the last four years or more.

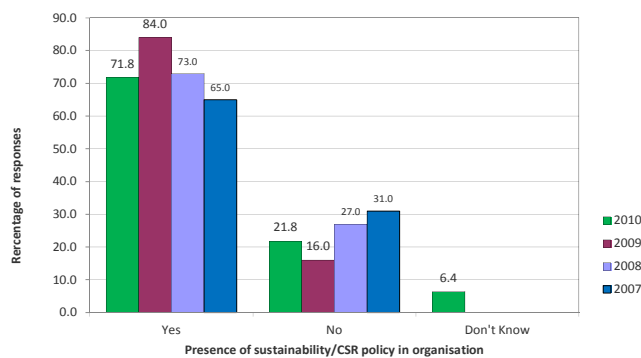


Figure 1: Organisations with a Sustainability/CSR policy

The survey shows nearly 40% of respondents rated their organisation’s effectiveness in implementing and managing sustainability responsibilities as adequate. An additional 25% of respondents rated their organisation’s effectiveness as very good to excellent, while 24% of respondents ranked their organisation’s effectiveness as inconsistent. 11% of respondents however, rated their organisation’s effectiveness as poor. Clearly nearly two-thirds of Facilities managers rank their organisations’ effectiveness in implementing and managing sustainability/CSR policy as ranging from adequate to excellent. However, the remaining third view their organisations’ effectiveness as ranging between poor and inconsistent. Comparing the present result with previous findings as shown in Figure 2, a majority of respondents have consistently ranked their organisation’s effectiveness as adequate (nearly 40%). On the other hand, the proportion of respondents ranking their organisation’s effectiveness as poor has consistently decreased since 2008 (overall by 13%). Similarly, the percentage of respondents ranking their organisation’s effectiveness as

“very good” has decreased by 10% (31% in 2009 and 21% in 2010). Presently, nearly 66% of all respondents rank that their organisation (s effectiveness as ranging from adequate to excellent compared to 72% in 2009. The overall decrease may be attributed to fewer respondents ranking their organisations effectiveness as excellent or very good.

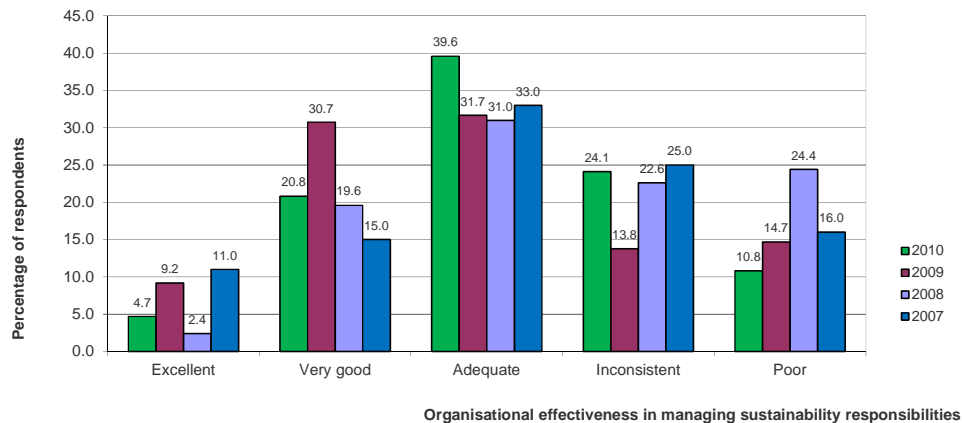


Figure 2: Organisational effectiveness of implementing and managing Sustainability/CSR responsibilities over last four years

3.3 What aspects of sustainable development are covered by the sustainability Policy

Figure 3 shows that 90%, 89% and 81% of the respondents reported that waste management and recycling, energy management and carbon footprint respectively, are the key aspects covered by their sustainability policy. Also highlighted were Health and safety (69%), and sustainable travel (66%). Other aspects covered by the sustainability policies are targets, measurement and reporting, ethical purchasing and community engagement, specification of sustainable products and services. Only 35%, 30% and 26% reported that building disposal, biodiversity and staff productivity has coverage in their policies. Clearly, the surveyed facilities managers consider waste management and recycling, energy management and carbon footprint as the aspects of sustainability mostly covered by their policies. However, there could be a danger of these areas being the easiest to implement hence their presence in sustainability policies. Hence there is a need to develop professional competencies and knowledge in all aspects so that only the relevant issues and activities are included in the policies. Although the least covered aspects are biodiversity and staff productivity, there is also a need to develop competencies in all aspects of sustainability.

Comparing similar results from previous studies (Figure 3); there are significant similarities as well as differences over the years. For example, the 2007, 2008 and 2009 surveys indicated that the three key issues covered by sustainability policies were waste management and recycling, energy management, and health and safety (Figure 3). Carbon footprint was not significantly covered then. However since 2009, there has been steady rise of carbon footprint coverage by sustainability policies. A reason is the increase in tighter legislation and higher taxes on carbon emissions and the efforts made by organisations to

gain financial savings on the carbon-end. In addition, Carbon footprint is intrinsically linked to other aspects such as Energy, Waste and Sustainable Transport management issues, hence leading to wider coverage.

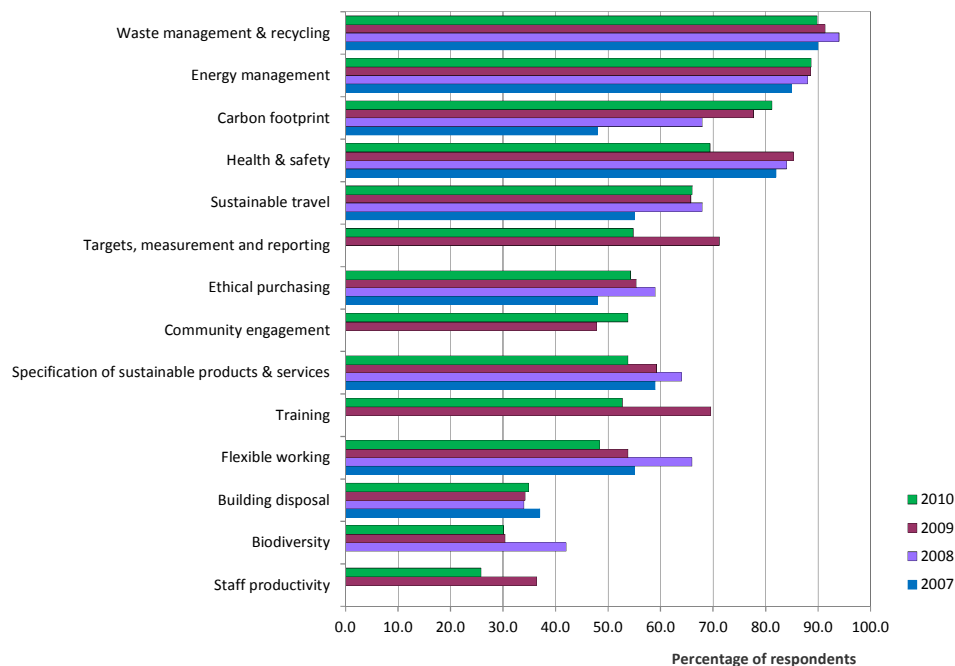


Figure 3: Aspects covered by sustainability policies over last four years

As shown in Figure 3, coverage for Health and Safety issues has declined. A reason may be these issues are highly regulated by legislation anyway and therefore addressed outside the sustainability frameworks. An important distinction is continued coverage of issues such as training, staff productivity biodiversity and an increased coverage community engagement. This is a reflection of increased awareness by policy developers of the value of sound sustainability frameworks that address environmental, economic and societal issues through more balanced approaches. Clearly Waste management and recycling and energy management continue to dominate issues covered by sustainability policies. However, carbon footprint issues are seen as highly relevant and thus covered by the policies. Other aspects of sustainability issues covered are health and safety, flexible working, ethical purchasing, staff productivity and biodiversity.

With regard to stakeholders that are recipients of sustainable development reports. 53% of respondents indicated that they reported their sustainability to Clients/customers. A further 46% reported to employees, 42% to Government and 40% to Shareholders. Only 22% of the respondents reported their sustainability activities to the local community. Perhaps indicating that either the benefits from actively engaging with local communities are not fully known, or knowledge regarding effective methods for achieving this is not well known. At 10%, Donors/Sponsors remain the least reported to. Often the donors and sponsors who require sustainability activity reports are the Charitable and Not-for-profit organisations. However, it is important to notice that a small yet significant percentage of respondents (7%) have selected not to report to any group of stakeholders. Although reporting may be seen

as a complex activity by some organisations, learning and understanding the issues involved in reporting appropriately should be part of any organisation's agenda in its pursuit to trigger a wider range of benefits from its sustainability policy.

The showed that over the last three years, Employees, Client/customers, Shareholders and the Government remain as the top four most popular stakeholders for whom sustainability reports are produced. Although most respondents identified Employees as the top stakeholders to whom sustainability reports were prepared for in 2009, in 2010 as in 2008, most organisations are now reporting to their clients/customers. A reason may be that either clients/customers are now demanding such reports or organisations are reporting the benefits from its sustainability policy to its customers/clients instead of employees. The findings indicate that clients/customers, Employees, Governments and Shareholders are the main stakeholder organisations for whom sustainable reports are produced.

3.4 What aspects of sustainability does your organisation report on?

As shown in Figure 4, Majority of respondents identified Energy Management (79%), Waste management and Recycling (76%) and Health and Safety (68%) as the top three aspects of sustainability most organisations reported upon. A further 67% of respondents identified Carbon footprint as a key aspect that organisation reported on. 44% identified Sustainable Travel an aspect closely related to managing carbon emissions. Other topics include Training (39%), Community engagement (35%) and Specification of Sustainable Products (33%). The aspect least reported upon is biodiversity (18%), building disposal (21%) and ethical purchasing (23%). Biodiversity may be least reported as a result of organisations not engaging with the wider community and/or specialist organisations in the field. Overall, the results highlight aspects of sustainability seen as intrinsic parts of the process for implementing an effective sustainability policy. Although much effort is placed on reporting on issues such as Energy Management, Waste management and Recycling, Health and Safety and Carbon footprint, other aspects of sustainability should be encouraged and reported upon. Such a report may be seen as a collective effort seeking to drive forward wider sustainability goals. The findings indicate Energy Management, Waste management and Recycling, Health and Safety and Carbon footprint as the main aspects of sustainability most organisations report on. The least is biodiversity.

Figure 4 showed that the most popular aspects of sustainability reported upon over the past three years are Energy management and Waste and recycling, and Health and Safety. However, Carbon footprint is increasingly becoming a popular topic in sustainability reports. Its continuous rise probably exacerbated by the introduction of new carbon related legislation such as the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) (Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) 2010). This also confirms the weight that legislative drivers place over the implementation of sustainability policies. Interesting, respondents who identified the Targets, measurement and reporting, and Ethical purchasing aspects has declined by a massive 30% (Figure 4). A reason may be that organisations are responding to the needs and requirements of their clients/customers and stakeholders rather than the organisation itself (Loch 2000; Nousiainen and Junnila 2008). On the other hand, Biodiversity, Building

disposal and Ethical purchasing continue to be the least popular topics reported upon during the last three years.

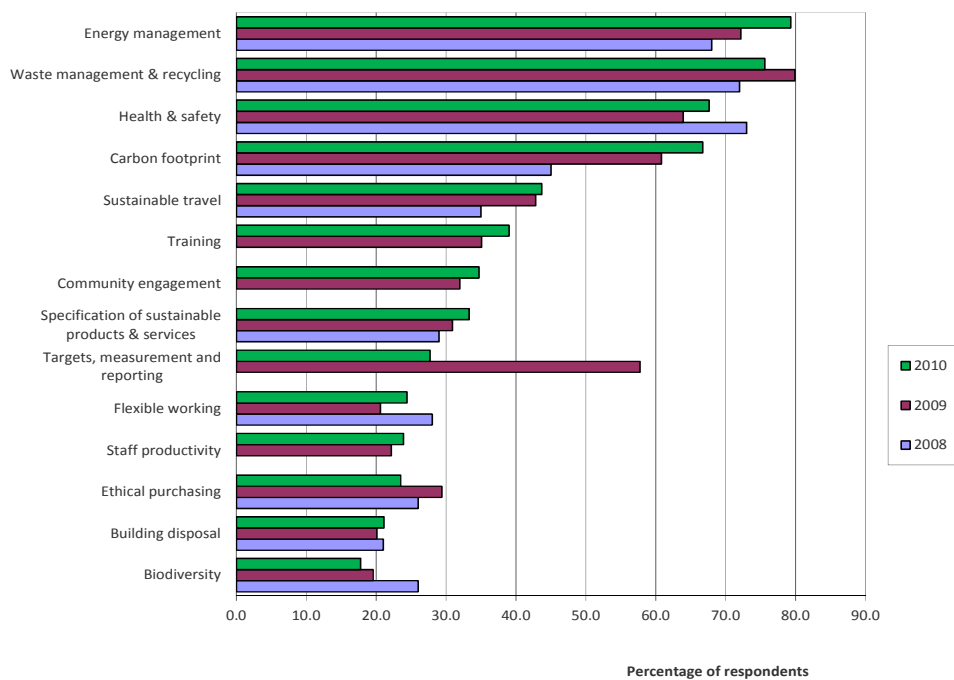


Figure 4: Aspects covered in sustainability reports over the last three years.

3.5 What methods of reporting are used in communicating sustainability aspects?

Figure 5 indicates that 52%, 50% and 36% of respondents identified Separate reports, Annual reports and Intranet are the most preferred methods of communicating sustainability issues respectively. Separate reports are excellent methods for reporting on sustainability as the criteria (e.g. time and audience) are defined according to the specific needs of the organisation. The use of Intranet is also effective as it presents an easy and direct way for organisations to engage with their employees. However, it may restrict any other organisational efforts to communicate their performance. Other methods of communicating aspects of sustainability identified use of websites and other forms of reporting mechanisms. Other forms of reporting include monthly reports, notice boards, community newspapers, emails, weekly toolbox talks, Case studies and regular meetings. A reason for using other forms is that different people have different preferred methods for learning. The best approach is to provide a balanced approach.

As shown in Figure 5, for the fourth year in a row, a steady decline has been observed concerning the use of Annual Reports as a mechanism for sustainability reporting (71% in 2007 and 50% in 2010) while the use of separate reports has remain essentially the same. Interesting, the use of intranet is identified as the recent survey (36%) while it had not been selected in earlier surveys. However the use of websites is in decline while other forms have remained the same. Clearly, Separate reporting, annual reports and intranets are now the preferred method for reporting on sustainability.

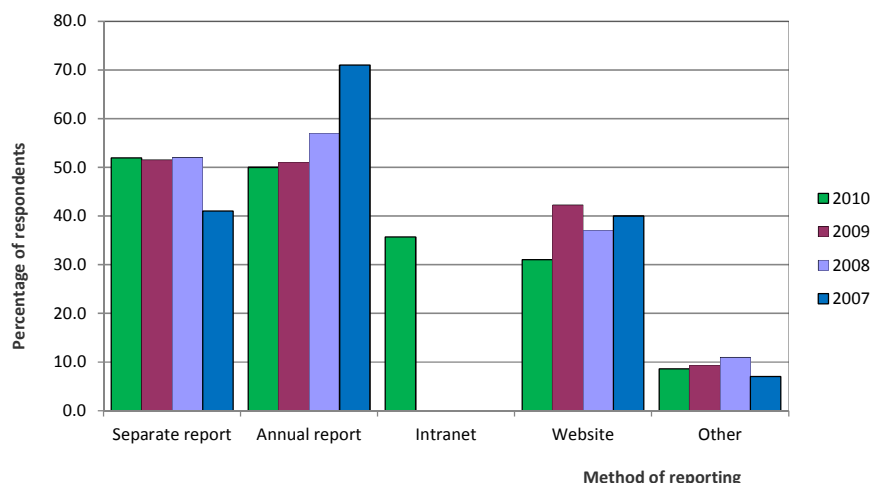


Figure 5: Methods used in reporting on sustainability over the last four years

3.6 FM responsibility on sustainability issues

The study findings revealed that more than 80% of the respondents identified waste management and recycling, energy management and carbon footprint as the key issues covered in organisations' sustainability policies. The trend is correlated in sustainability aspects covered in sustainability reports, with energy management, waste management and recycling, health and safety, and carbon footprint rated as the key issues reported upon. Similarly the trend is correlated with the management responsibilities of Facilities managers. Survey findings indicate that Facilities Managers are increasingly being put forward by organisations to manage their sustainability activities. Nine out of every ten of the respondents are in charge, formally or informally implementing and managing activities that support the organisations' wider sustainability strategy.

Accordingly, majority of Facilities managers have responsibility for energy management, waste management and recycling health and safety, carbon footprint management and targets, measurement and reporting. However these issues have been part of FM professional agenda long before the sustainable development (Alexander 1996; Pitt and Hinks 2001; Tay and Ooi 2001). Carbon footprint, however, is quickly climbing up the responsibilities list. The ever tightening legislation around the carbon market like the carbon reduction commitment (CRC) legislation and carbon emission related issues means that facilities managers are expected to increasingly take ownership over activities flagged under the carbon emissions or energy management arena. The findings indicate that the issues covered within sustainability policies are ultimately reflected in sustainability reports. The issues then become an intrinsic part of the process for implementing sustainability policy. Such an approach can overshadow equally important sustainability issues like biodiversity and staff productivity in FM organisations, and limiting knowledge, expertise and competence in such issues. Ultimately such diverse issues should be encouraged as a collective effort to drive forward a wider sustainability agenda that protects the environment and sustains development (Cooper 1996). Professional institutions like the BIFM can improve its members understanding of sustainability by providing relevant information,

knowledge and guidance materials that are up to date especially where it is less emphasised. Awareness and understanding sustainability issues can be aligned with the core competence requirements of members.

3.7 Uptake of sustainability policy, management effectiveness and associated barriers to implementation

The findings indicate that 72% of respondents believe that their organisations have sustainability/CSR policies in place. Similarly, 70% of the respondents indicated that their organisations have had a sustainability/CSR in place for less than four years. Worryingly, a significant 22% of respondents also suggested that their organisation do not have any policy on sustainability/CSR and 12% less respondents believed their organisation had a sustainability/CSR policy. Clearly, there is a need to encourage facilities managers to become competent and knowledgeable in sustainability issues as new demands, challenges and opportunities arise in their organisation. Institutions like the BIFM can provide relevant information and knowledge resources by raising members' awareness through the education and training services it offers. Two-thirds of the respondents suggest that their organisations are performing at either an adequate to excellent level, a noticeable improvement regarding 2009 results. However findings also indicate that FM organisations' effective in implementing and managing policies sustainability/CSR policies were rated as only 'adequate' and 'poor' by a significant 40% and 35% of respondents, respectively. It is evident that the importance and relevance of sustainability in FM continues to grow as a primary requirement and expectation. Therefore there is a need to encourage all FM professionals to improve their competencies and skills in sustainability and CSR issues.

4. Conclusion

A longitudinal survey was conducted over the past four year to investigate trends in sustainability policy within FM industry. The survey results have revealed trends in how facilities managers and organisations are engaging with the sustainability agenda within the built environments over the last four years. Sustainability is emerging as a core business strategy and FM professionals are at the forefront of implementing and managing it in the workplace. However, it is necessary that facilities managers enhance their understanding of sustainability and sustainable development as challenges and opportunities arise. FM professionals need to develop their understanding of the key issues of sustainability. One way of achieving this is by commissioning and conducting research on the trends in sustainability and sustainable development. There is evidence of a gap in the coverage of environmental and social components of sustainability agenda which are most appropriate for the built environment. Thus recommendations for more studies will include investigating how Facilities managers are engaging with the commitment, understanding, development, implementation and management, responding, controlling, monitoring and reviewing environmental, social and economic sustainability issues and responsibilities. Findings of such surveys will enable professional institutions like the BIFM to tailor and provide relevant information, training, education, guidance and leadership to enhance the competencies of Facilities managers in the areas of sustainability and efficient energy use.

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