

## The missing link

### Community development, facility management and your brand

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International schools invest millions of dollars to keep their facilities up to date in order to meet the expectations of their clients, the pace of the ever changing business and education environments and increasing market demands. Can this investment be better utilized to improve the safety of those that use the schools and extend the useful life of the school buildings?

In this article, the first of four dealing with facility management and work health and safety (WHS) in international schools, I propose that it is equally important to invest in schools' support staff resources as it is faculty resources. In most international schools, the vast majority of resources and professional development are allocated to the academic staff, and rightly so. However, it is the operation and support staff that form the back-bone of the organization, yet they receive little if any attention in this regard. In most cases the reasons are subject to the availability of those resources in the host country.

Many international schools debate their contribution to the community and environment they live in. They host an admirable array of charitable events and activities that enhance awareness of and provide financial support to host country orphanages, NGO's, local schools etc. As international educators, we agonize over how to save the world and how to improve the lives of those around us. Often times, however, we miss opportunities available right under our noses--our support staff. Our schools' most significant contribution to the local community is through our core business of education. Educating our host nation school support staff to international standards in operations, maintenance, supervision, health, safety, first aid etc. will not only improve their lives, but also the lives of their loved ones. Investing in the education and skill development of our support staff will result in a lifetime dividends.

Many international schools, lack expert knowledge of what constitutes a safe facility and operational environment or have inadequate policies and procedures, to achieve optimum outcomes. Under such conditions, it is critical to find and to continue to develop individuals who have the ability and capability to maintain and manage an effective operation/maintenance department. It requires skilled personnel with thorough understanding of sound facility management practices and work, health, and safety regulations and standards. Currently there is much knowledge and many tools and techniques to help build educational facilities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the awareness and resources available to optimize the safety, efficiency, and life expectancy of school facilities is limited.

The operation/facility manager's role in an international school is different, but no less important than that of a Principal. There are three primary objectives of the manager's role;

- To ensure there are excellent facilities with high standards in place.
- To ensure that the best possible professionals and best practices are used and adopted.
- To monitor facilities and work/health/safety risks regularly and with rigor.

The achievement of these three primary objectives has a direct impact on a school's operation, brand, and reputation. One of the best contributors to attracting and retaining high caliber professionals is to ensure that their work environment is of the highest standard possible.

The importance of investing in professional development and best practices for support staff is as important as investing in the school's curriculum, assessment, and faculty professional development. If our school facilities are not up to date, well maintained, and managed properly, our teachers, our customers, and our budgets will suffer.

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