

Smarter buildings need smarter minds: The real role of AI in facilities management

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Just as the invention of the steam engine sparked the first Industrial Revolution, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to transform the way modern businesses operate. The facilities management sector is no exception, as it begins adopting AI and collecting vast amounts of data, but to what end?

Gary Seaton, Sales and Marketing Director (*pictured*), and John Norris, Head of Innovation at cleaning and security provider [Samsic UK](#), argue that the industry risks falling into the trap of collecting data for its own sake. Without skilled people to interpret the numbers and apply the insights effectively, AI may fall short of its potential.

“Many organisations are sitting on a goldmine of data,” believes John Norris. “The difference lies in how you interpret that data to deliver something meaningful – be it smarter task deployment, reduced carbon output, or simply a better employee experience.”

Gary added: “AI isn’t about replacing people – it’s about equipping them with better insights.

That’s how you achieve both compliance and comfort in today’s built environments.”

Here, they explore how businesses are evolving to help the human mind work alongside technology and drive meaningful change, so that AI data is translated into smarter resourcing, better hygiene and energy savings.

AI has seeped into the culture of building management over the past few years, with companies coming

under intense pressure to install monitors and sensors to capture more and more data.

In fact, putting an emphasis on information gathering now seems the norm, but do we really understand the purpose of it? AI can unlock powerful insights, but it is the human application of those insights that drives real change.

We strongly believe that by combining data and expertise you can solve facilities management challenges and address underused labour, wasted materials, slow service response and compliance risk, while helping clients build more sustainable, people-centric workplaces.

One of the first challenges we need to overcome is how to collect robust, ethical data and interpret it correctly. As we know, AI can only go so far into understanding the nuances of human emotion and behaviour.

For example, the use of smiley or sad face buttons in offices to gauge workers' happiness. Human understanding of context is needed to ensure the data is robust, because, as we all know, some people like to press the unhappy face just for a laugh, which in turn skews the results.

Therefore, there is a need to provide strong data, making ethical data collection a huge issue. It means we need people who understand what good, ethical data looks like, so that we can talk to the customer about what the data is telling us. It is not the norm yet to go into a meeting saying 'we have a lot of data to talk about', but it needs to be.

As a business, we saw the potential of AI early on, but now we are progressing. The focus is shifting to how data analytics and AI-driven insights can support better service delivery.

The real benefit for clients lies in data insights that help optimise building management, predictive maintenance, and operational efficiency. AI-driven people flow analysis, workspace optimisation, and automation in FM services are also becoming increasingly relevant.

AI has a major part to play in smart buildings, especially in supporting the trend for 'destination offices'; workspaces that employees are drawn to and want to work in.

Hygiene is the first step in providing a comfortable, attractive office space and AI can help provide predictive / on-demand cleaning, as well as workforce optimisation through smart scheduling.

However, to achieve this, people are needed who truly understand the data and how it can be interpreted for technical and practical applications. Yet there is a massive shortage in the UK of people who have the 'soft skills' that technology can't replace, such as critical thinking.

Companies need data analysts who understand facilities management, what the job entails and what real time data can mean in real life. This is where the future needs to be and it is revealing a real skills gap, despite Britain being the third largest AI market in the world.

It is good to see the Government launch its AI Opportunities Action Plan¹, with Skills England working to ensure people are prepared for jobs in the AI-powered industries of tomorrow. However, today, our industry does not have enough people trained or reserved for data analysis to interpret the findings in a better way and effectively share with the customer what it means.

It is why Samsic UK is launching in-depth training and updating its Learning Management System (LMS) to make sure its people can access the right information and develop the right skills set to support the use of data, understand compliance, interpret the data and get value out of it.

We are also investigating ways that AI can help our recruitment processes, from advertising new roles to shortlisting and interviewing candidates. Used sensibly, AI can yield significant benefits for organisational efficiency and efficacy.

Going down this route means we can go back to a client, with the data interpreted in a way that can promote change and efficiencies that will truly benefit their workspace, enhance their systems, ensure people are deployed in the right place to give maximum value, and improve employee wellbeing.

Samsic is currently trialling a tech-led platform that uses occupancy data, user feedback and cleaning demand signals to create dynamic task lists for operatives. This ensures resources are deployed exactly where needed, reducing product use, increasing visibility of service, and streamlining operations.

We are refining how we value data so that we can improve the customer, guest and building experience and provide a more robust service. As the market becomes tighter, we need to do things more efficiently and it is the data that will guide that path, whether it is using predictive replenishment to ensure essentials, such as washroom products, are always available, or analysis of a washroom's busy and quiet periods.

Samsic has already implemented sensor-based cleaning in an educational environment which can trigger cleaning based on building usage and footfall patterns. Such knowledge eliminates wasted time and reduces consumables, supporting both labour efficiency and ESG goals.

AI now informs every aspect of facilities management – from people flow to procurement – requiring professionals who can anticipate, not just react. We need people who can run with the data to predict future patterns and trends. It will no doubt prompt some job losses, but jobs will also be created in other fields, and there will be the opportunity to switch careers and grow.

As we look at the wider implications of AI it is clear it can have a major impact on real-time reporting for compliance and efficiency. At multiple sites, Samsic has used a platform to digitise task management, attendance, and service verification. Facilities teams now have live dashboards to track Service Level Agreement delivery, respond faster to issues and reduce audit burdens.

If a customer has its own AI, joined-up thinking is also needed to make sure these different AIs can help us achieve our goals so that we can work collaboratively to solve 'pain points'.

As an industry, we are on a journey. AI is here and we are not stopping it. Customers need to view data as interesting and understand how it can guide what we can do for them with tangible results.

We need to improve people's skill sets so that meaningful conversations can be had, and effective change can be implemented to drive labour and energy efficiencies, improve building user experience, support a customer's own ESG targets, understand workforce trends, meet client needs and improve response times.

The revolution is here – we just need the human mind to harness it properly and use its data effectively.