

An energy conscious workforce: New research looks at how to encourage staff to go green

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As homeowners we are becoming cannier about turning down the thermostat to save our pennies and the planet but are we as energy conscious when we get to work?

A new £1.3m project, being led by researchers at The University of Nottingham, is to look at people's attitudes to [energy consumption](#) in the workplace and how to encourage colleagues to work together in reducing their organisation's [carbon footprint](#).

Drawing on technical expertise at Nottingham's Horizon Digital Economy Research and design skills of experts at The University of Southampton, the five-year study will also aim to deliver new '[energy display](#)' technologies that will allow workers to visualise their [energy use](#) and potentially identify areas where further savings could be made.

Project lead, Dr Alexa Spence said: "Obviously at home there is a financial incentive to save energy as well as what's termed the 'warm glow' environmental and moral imperative. We want to find out whether these incentives still apply when people reach their place of work and to look at which strategies are most successful in encouraging people to engage with their energy use."

The research, funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), will see the academics collaborating with industry

experts including Arup and WilSon Energy, who conduct energy monitoring for companies and provide energy efficiency solutions to reduce companies' costs and their impact on the environment.

The researchers will be given access to some of the consultants' client base which will allow them to find out what workers are already doing to save energy, what would encourage them to be more energy efficient and decide the best way of motivating the workforce to make further savings.

Dr Spence said: "Energy is invisible and we often don't think about it. When we go to work we don't go there with the specific aim of using energy, we are far too busy thinking about doing our job. We are not the bill payer, so there is not much incentive for us to make an effort to be more energy efficient. The challenge is how to incentivise people to want to save energy."

The Nottingham team, which includes sociologists and psychologists, will also be looking at how the workforce might prefer to effect change, either individually or part of a team and, if so, the best ways to encourage people to work together. They will be asking how companies can best inspire staff to take part in energy saving initiatives and how to sustain their enthusiasm and cooperation in the long-term.

Dr Spence added: "Firstly we need to know what workers have the power to change themselves and which things, for example the lighting or the building's heating, might be out of their control. We would like to promote organisational change by motivating the staff to ask constructive questions, for example, why do the lights need to be left on all night?"

The project will lead to the development of a 'toolkit' that they will test among staff at companies that are currently having their energy use

monitored to establish whether it is successful in having an impact. This will encompass guidance on developing workplace initiatives as well as technical advice and design prototypes that can be installed to monitor energy use in new and engaging ways.

The resulting 'toolkit' will be rolled out to other companies with assistance from the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), an independent national charity that aims to help people and organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors to meet the twin challenges of rising energy costs and climate change.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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