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## Making the world run smoothly

David Adams  
July 12, 2006

THEY'RE the people who keep our world running, whether in the office, the shopping mall or the sports stadium - and if all is going well, we may not even be aware of their presence.

They're the facility managers, a growing group of people who look after everything from maintaining office lifts to making sure the air-conditioning at the local bank is running efficiently and the cleaners at a nearby food court are doing their job properly.

Karen Hill, chief executive of the Facility Management Association of Australia, says Australia has about 172,000 full-time facility or asset management people in places ranging from universities and airports to museums, historic buildings and hospitals.

Facility managers are responsible for all the logistics of running a building, from minimising energy use and maintaining safety to designing office layouts that encourage interaction between staff.

It is important that people in such jobs are able to work well with people and have good negotiation and organisational skills.

Ms Hill says facilities management attracts people from a wide range of backgrounds, such as architecture, quantity surveying and engineering, but the introduction of undergraduate courses in the profession could lead to a more direct path into such jobs.

Ms Hill says there are already postgraduate courses in facilities management and an accreditation scheme run by the association, but Deakin University will be launching the country's first undergraduate course in facilities management next year. "We're wanting to get more undergraduate courses because in actual fact there's a huge shortage of people in this area," she says. "It's an absolute boom time for anyone in facilities management."

Matthew Clugston works as operations manager at Mowlem Support Services, in Sydney, overseeing supply chain management for commercial and industrial sites for property giant Stockland.

Mr Clugston, 30, was recently the inaugural winner of the association's national Young Achiever of the Year Award. He says a facilities manager is essentially a co-ordinator, "facilitating the gap between, in my case, what my client requires to maintain his buildings, through to managing the people that are undertaking the service".

With a background in urban planning, Mr Clugston says most people he speaks with don't understand what his job involves, which is "probably a little bit ironic", he says, "given that anybody who works in any sort of building or who goes into any sort of building is directly interacting with facilities management daily".

Lindee Warren is the facilities and services manager at public broadcaster SBS, in Melbourne. She has worked in facilities management for more than 15 years, and started the SBS job about three months ago after moving from Sydney.

She says the work involves ensuring the organisation can keep running seamlessly and involves a lot of troubleshooting. After the events of 9/11, the past five years have brought much greater focus on risk management, she says.

Facilities managers need an eye for detail and strong organisational abilities, and people skills are also important. "There is no doubt that the people issue is huge," Ms Warren says.

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