

## Getting Top Level Commitment

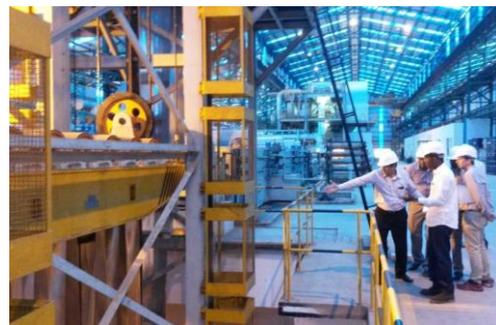
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To make things happen in organisations we all know the importance of top management commitment. But in the realm of energy management and behaviour change projects, how do you secure this commitment? This article is addressed to fellow consultants but Energy Management staff within organisations might also find it helpful.

Here are some key questions to consider:

- Who exactly is 'top management' in a particular organisation?
- How do you access top management?
- What are their goals/priorities?
- How can ISO 50001 help?
- What specific commitment are you seeking?
- Win the war, not every battle.

I have been in energy management for over 40 years and have had to deal with Boards and senior management many times. I was also a Director of a large energy consultancy for ten years and currently act as a non-executive director on company boards so I can see things from both sides. I have had my successes in gaining top level commitment but also had failures. We learn more from failure than success. So, this is my honest attempt to answer the questions I have raised.



### 1. Who exactly is 'top management'?

This might seem such an obvious question that it is not worth asking. Top management are those at the top of the organisational tree. While that is true, we need to consider how different sized organisations work in practice. For example, some large multi-nationals have board members spread around the world and they operate at a strategic level and have relatively little involvement in day-to-day operational activities which are delegated to others. Generally, energy management rests

under environmental/sustainability and is very much related to on-the-ground activities. In these sort of organisations people at senior operational level might be the people you need to influence.

They might not be Board level directors but nevertheless are the key to supporting your initiative. That is why the definition of 'top management' in ISO 50001 is simplistic and somewhat inadequate. "Top Management" is defined in ISO 50001 as "person or group of people who directs and controls an organisation at highest level". While this might be adequate for some organisations, it is not for others. So, the key is to talk to knowledgeable people and look at company structures. Identify key people and who is responsible for what. Sometimes what happens in practice is different to what is down on paper. So, identify who, specifically, the top management teams and individuals you need to engage.

## 2. How do you access top management?

This can be challenging but you could simply ask to see them for 15 minutes to explain the initiative and seek their support. Some people do not get in front of top management because they don't ask to see them! They assume the answer will be 'No'. In hierarchical organisations the expectation is to go via the management tiers. I remember once asking an Energy Manager to introduce me to his CEO. The Energy Manager said he had never met the CEO it was not possible for me to see him. He was wrong. When we got before the CEO I said: "Thanks for seeing us. I would like to introduce you to your Energy Manager, as I understood you have not met".

One advantage of being a consultant is that you are from the outside and not in the hierarchy, so you do not have norms to adapt to. In fact, you are an agent of change and part of your role is to challenge cultural norms. You can take risks that internal staff cannot. You can ask big. They can only say no. Napoleon said, "You honour me with the size of your request".

Also, as an outsider your views are likely to be taken more seriously than those of an insider, even though the insider might be making exactly the same points. "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country". This provides you with a lever and opportunity and as a consultant it is important to take hold of this function and not shrink back from opportunity.

The other ways of accessing top management is by ESOS and ISO 50001. In ESOS the audit reports have to be reviewed and signed off by top management and this often involves a presentation. So, this is ready-made access. Another method is via ISO 50001 as the Energy Policy can only be devised by top management and there has to be a Management Review of the Energy Management System (EnMS) by top management, usually annually. This again is an excellent opportunity to engage top management.



### 3. What are their goals and priorities?

It is important to fully understand top managements' goals and priorities. These will include reducing costs, compliance, health and safety, zero emissions strategy and possibly sustainability. So, any energy management initiative should be framed within their priorities. Then it becomes their priority. It is vital for you as a consultant to think outside the box and link your initiative to their agenda.

ISO 50001 can also help here. We are currently part way through the transition process from ISO 50001:2011 to the new version ISO 50001:2018. Many organisations have begun or completed the transition to ISO 50001:2018. The three-year transition process ends in August 2021. Two of the new elements of ISO 50001:2018 has direct relevance to our subject:

Clause 4.1 Understanding the organisation and context

Clause 4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties

The purpose of this is to put energy management in the context of the organisation. In other words, energy management should be integrated into the culture, systems and people in the organisation rather than be a stand-alone, isolated function focused around the Energy Manager – if there is one. So even if the organisation is not interested in ISO 50001, then you as a consultant, can apply these clauses and principles in your project.

### 4. How can ISO 50001 help?

I am an advocate of ISO 50001 because it addresses top management and is a catalyst for effective and ongoing behaviour change. Key elements in ISO 50001 are competence, training, awareness and communication across the organisation

Historically, one of the potential downfalls of a behaviour change programme is keeping momentum. ISO 50001 as a system helps to embed an Energy Conscious Organisation and make it sustainable as the system gets audited annually and as such systems, approaches and resources are highly likely to be maintained in the longer term.

***ISO 50001 is a standard that drives results directly to the bottom line. ISO 50001 systematically drives down energy costs and improves competitiveness through the assignment of responsibilities and raising the visibility of energy management within the organisation.***

**Andrew Hejnar, Energy Manager, 3M Canada**



*Ibstock's motivation for implementing ISO 50001 was to make better use of the energy we consume and achieve consistency in production processes through our people.*

*We are extremely proud of what the ISO 50001 process has achieved as it has given us a clear road map, effective communication tools, supportive external partnerships and, above all, employee involvement at all levels.*

**Michael McGowan**  
**Quality, Environmental and Energy Manager**  
**Ibstock Brick**



## **5. What specific commitment are you seeking?**

Around 30 years ago when I was embarking on behaviour change programmes, I was designing an energy awareness initiative in an NHS Trust. I asked to see the CEO and Board and was given a 15 minute slot. The CEO introduced me to those present and asked: "What specifically are you asking of us as a Board?" At that point I froze. I did not have an answer. I knew we needed top level commitment, but I had no idea what it actually was. I had no specific requests to make. I was unprepared.

So, it is important to define what top level commitment means and specifically what you want people to do. Because senior management are busy people, your requests of them should be framed by:

- Actions with a high visibility and impact
- Actions which take little time
- Actions which tie into business goals/priorities

## **6. Win the war not every battle**

The Allies won the Second World War but there were defeats on the road such as Dunkirk and the fall of Singapore. When dealing with top management it is possible to lose a battle but win the war.

I once was asked by a multi-national company to design a behaviour campaign. In my report I included the broader energy management context and made some suggested changes. In the board meeting, after my presentation, one of the Board said that 25 years previously he had been an Energy Manager in the same company. He criticised my report in saying suggested principles were known many years ago. And he said "What's new. I know all this stuff". I replied "It is one thing to know something. It is another to actually do it. The reason I have made these suggestions is that your company is not actually applying some basic energy management principles". The Board member got angry and was hostile for the rest of the meeting. After I left the meeting I was not asked back.

So, I won that battle morally but I lost the war and the business. It is important to speak truth to power but there are certain ways to do so. That means circumnavigating round problems and problem people. I clearly failed. They did actually implement the behaviour programme but without my help. But behaviour change takes place in a broader energy management context and if the company did not address the issues I raised the behaviour change initiative would have been severely hampered.

This company would have benefited from ISO 50001 because their energy management activities could have been compared to an objective outside standard and be assessed by an external auditor. This removes the emotion and subjectivity of a flawed Board Member of the type I encountered. I actually found it ironic that an ex Energy Manager was on the Board of a global multi-national company and failed to support a sound energy management initiative.

Max du Prée said “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality” If you do not know where you are now, then you don’t know where you are going.

## **7. Conclusion**

Two questions which informed Boards often ask me are:

- “How does our company compare in our energy performance and practices with others in our sector?”
- As an outsider, what would you say our top priorities should be to improve our energy management?”

Make sure you are prepared so you can provide concise answers.

Top management support matters in energy management and in behaviour change projects because they cannot be done in a corner or in isolation. They tend to involve culture change and that can only be achieved with the backing of top management. So, think creatively of how to engage the right people with the right messages. Your approaches will involve success and failure, like my efforts, but it has to be done.

Good luck!