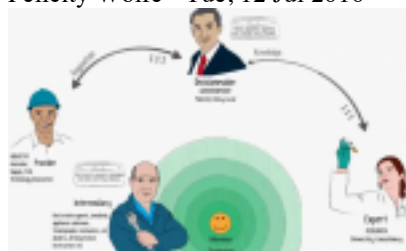


Energy projects need to centre on end-users

Felicity Wolfe - Tue, 12 Jul 2016



Energy initiatives need to engage with end-users from the beginning, particularly if they are seeking to change customers' behaviour, an energy efficiency expert says.

Dr Sea Rotmann says too often energy projects or initiatives are designed without considering the people who will use them. At other times industry relies on marketing-based analyses of people's attitudes, "rather than inviting them to be a part of co-designing it".

Rotmann is the New Zealand operating agent for an International Energy Agency demand-side management programme. She says using memorable, easily understood language which uses "universal themes" rather than industry jargon is also important to get people engaged with initiatives.

"If you are too engineering-focused, too policy-focused, too economics-focused, you usually lose half the people in the room."

Looking at the end-user's "story" and placing that at the heart of the project has better outcomes in terms of uptake, she says.

An example is the ongoing government-funded Warm-up New Zealand campaign, which made it easier for people on lower incomes to get home efficiency assessments and access funding for insulation.

She compared it with the similar, but disastrous programme rolled out by the Australian government in 2009. That programme relied on a hastily recruited and trained installation industry to drive uptake. It was scrapped in 2010 following the deaths of four installers and [revelations](#) of fraud.

Demand management task

The IEA's Task 24 energy efficiency [behaviour change programme](#) was established to identify ways to encourage energy-use behaviour change on a scale that is large enough to reduce demand.

It is estimated that about 30 per cent of potential energy efficiencies is locked into behaviours and consumer choices. The "behaviour changers" framework being developed under Task 24 aims to improve collaboration between stakeholders, better engage end-users and identify where and how people need additional encouragement to increase their energy efficiency.

Rotmann, who created the initial proposal for Task 24 in 2011, says it seeks to provide a "global, helicopter view" of models used to understand behaviour. The theories and methods which have been used, successfully or unsuccessfully by behaviour changers, will then be refined down to a "toolbox" of the most successful approaches by the end of the task in 2018.

Powerco has adopted this toolbox to develop a pilot study of communities sharing solar generation, Rotmann says.

"The framework has been used to develop it and will be used to roll-out the pilot as well."

Rotmann hopes more energy organisations and firms will consider trying out these approaches. Having more examples of how the techniques work in developing and delivering projects will add to the learning.

"I think there is a lot of really important work which needs to be done in the transport sector."

Workshop

Last week Rotmann hosted a workshop to demonstrate the framework to representatives from five key sectors - government and decision-makers, industry, research and consultants, retailers and salespeople, and conscience groups.

“They all have different tools in the toolbox necessary to design an intervention that can connect the bottom-up and the top-down.”

As an exercise, the 30 participants discussed how staff at Wellington Zoo could be encouraged to use the site’s HVAC systems more efficiently.

The possibilities raised ranged from the technical – installing energy management systems which bypass human input - through to encouraging efficient behaviour by increasing staff awareness and developing leaders who champion energy efficiency in the workplace.

Magic carpet

The workshop used a “magic carpet” framework to build a visual map of the key information and relationships between sectors, the issues, solutions and the potential conflicts.

Rotmann says it gets participants to work together at the start of the design process by creating a “neutral platform where there is no hierarchy between the different players”.

That helps identify potential conflicts and also shows that this is “perfectly fine” in a systemic approach.

“Which is different to when you are, say, a policymaker and you think you need to design a policy in isolation, from the top-down.”

Similar workshops are being carried out in each of the Task 24 participating countries, with an international workshop planned for September’s [Behave 2016](#) energy efficiency and behaviour conference in Portugal.

Rotmann says the workshops, which are usually limited to about 10 to 15 people, generally get good feedback with attendees saying they learned new ways to approach issues and projects.

“I am learning as much as the participants. It’s research in action”.

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