



ABM *Perspectives*

How a self-performing workforce model powers the future of facilities

By Angela Johnson Culver and Natalie Rawlings





Across the industry, three pressures are converging at once: an aging workforce, a shortage of skilled trades, and the rapid adoption of building technology.

Facility management professionals are retiring faster than the talent pipeline can replace them. The buildings they leave behind are more complex than the ones they started with.

At the same time, the systems inside those buildings are changing what the work requires. Connected sensors, automation platforms, and analytics tools are no longer emerging features. They are baseline expectations in site management, and they demand a hybrid mechanical-digital skill set that conventional training was never designed to produce.

Facing these pressures, many building owners turn to subcontracting. Outsourcing individual services provides access to specialists, but it also creates a fragmented web of contracts, service standards, and points of contact. Owners have limited visibility into who shows up, how they are trained, or whether they can operate in a technology-forward environment. Managing that complexity takes time and introduces inconsistency across a portfolio.

The self-performing workforce model offers a different approach: a unified, directly employed, and continuously trained team at the center of operations, accountable for everything from skilled trades to technology-driven building systems.

Why the self-performing model matters

In an integrated facility services model, a single provider performs maintenance, cleaning, and technical systems with its own staff of mechanics and technicians. Work is only outsourced where industry standards require third-party licensing, such as fire and life safety systems, elevators, or pest control.

This structure changes how teams are built. Because the provider directly employs its workforce, it controls hiring, training, and standards across every role on site.

Direct employment also allows facility teams to evolve alongside the organizations they serve. When a client's technology or operations change, an embedded team can adapt in step, without the delays and handoffs that come with coordinating multiple subcontractors.

Defining the skills of the future

Facility operations has always relied on skilled hands and institutional knowledge. Today, both are in shorter supply. Filling the gap requires something frontline workers historically have not needed: digital literacy. Predictive maintenance platforms, sensor networks, and data-driven workflows are now part of the daily operating environment.

The answer, however, is not to search for individuals who can lead a team, diagnose a mechanical failure, and interpret a data dashboard all at once. Candidates with that full combination are rare, and hiring strategies built around finding them do not scale.

A more sustainable approach pairs strong operational leaders with deep technical talent. Leaders who came up through operations already know how to motivate people and drive performance, skills that are difficult to teach. Rather than retraining them on building systems, organizations can bring the right technical depth in alongside them and equip those leaders to elevate that expertise. The result is a team where each member does what they do best.



Developing today's workforce

Workforce development works best as a core operating strategy rather than an isolated initiative. In practice, that means combining several elements:

- **Ongoing, role-specific training.** Effective programs blend on-the-job coaching from experienced mentors, self-paced online coursework, and in-person workshops focused on leadership and communication, tailored to specific client environments.
- **Structured mentorship.** Pairing technicians with mentors and subject matter experts gives frontline staff a reliable path to answers when they encounter unfamiliar problems, and gives organizations a way to transfer knowledge before it walks out the door.
- **Visible career pathways.** Advancement should be achievable from day one, including across service lines that have historically been siloed. A technician who starts in janitorial work should be able to see a route into HVAC, building engineering, controls and automation, or the electrical trades, a bridge the industry has long been missing.
- **Succession planning.** Identifying high performers, assessing their trajectory, and connecting them with targeted development programs ensures that critical capabilities are retained as experienced professionals retire. That framework applies from frontline staff through senior leadership.

The business case for better training

Training is not only about ensuring facilities are properly cared for. It also plays a central role in retention, in an industry where turnover is persistently high and the workforce is aging.

Organizations that invest in training and development see the benefits compound over time. Lower turnover means the technician who completed advanced building automation training this year is still on site next year, putting that knowledge to work. It means faster adoption of new protocols, because teams build on a foundation of expertise rather than starting over. And, it means a workforce that does not just respond to problems, but anticipates them using the data and tools at its disposal.

That kind of proactive, systems-driven capability takes time to develop. Losing it is costly. Retaining it is a competitive advantage.

Preparing for human-machine collaboration

As automation, robotics, and AI become standard features of facility management, the roles within facility teams will not disappear. They will evolve. A directly employed, continuously trained workforce is positioned to evolve with them, learning each facility over time, adapting as it changes, and capturing the full value of every technology investment.

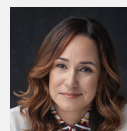
Ultimately, technology performs only as well as the people operating it. The facility teams best positioned for what comes next are not the ones with the most sophisticated systems. They are the ones with people who know how to use them.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Natalie Rawlings is Director of Operations at ABM Industries where she leads the development of an innovative workforce upskilling program that creates career pathways while generating new business growth. With more than 18 years of experience driving operational excellence, strategic initiatives, and large-scale facilities programs across Fortune 500 organizations, including Amazon, Target, and Randstad, she specializes in complex transformation projects, delivering measurable improvements in operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and cost savings. Rawlings combines strategic vision with hands-on execution to deliver sustainable results and exceptional customer experiences.