CLIENT AND STAFF PERCEPTION TOWARD FEDERAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE DELIVERY SYSTEM AT WELFARE DEPARTMENT, MINISTRY OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Nor Hayati bt Abdul Shukor

Norraidah bt Abu Hasan

Sharifah Faatihah bt Syed Mohd Fuzi,

Noorie Haryaniee bt Hj. Moulton

Jasmine bt Ahmad.

Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

jasmi661@salam.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Malaysia has made significant strides in reducing poverty by introducing initiatives which are intensive, prioritised and coordinated to achieve the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) target in improving living standard of citizen. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is one of the main agencies responsible to improve the standard of living for low income household. One of the many efforts taken by the Ministry is to improve the Federal Welfare Assistance Delivery System. The main objective of the Federal Welfare Assistance Delivery System is to ensure all recipients receive the financial assistance within a specified time. This paper delves into the client and staff perception toward the implementation of Welfare Assistance Delivery System and the effectiveness of the system in distributing Federal financial welfare assistance on the first day of each month. Interview and survey were done to measure the level of employee awareness and views, as well as client satisfaction to this system. Findings of this research will contribute to the improvement of Welfare Delivery System at Welfare Department and other government agencies.

Keywords: National Key Result Areas (NKRA), Welfare Assistance Delivery System, Customer Satisfaction, Staff Perception, Standard of Living, Low Income Household

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, the role of public service in Malaysia has significantly changed over the years, in line with the country's economic growth and development. Malaysia has followed the global trend of managerialism and consequently introduced major reforms in various spheres of public bureaucracy and its management (Noore Alam Siddiquee, 2006). Its mission, objectives and functions have, in fact, undergone various degrees of reform,

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especially under the explicit and implicit influences of changes in public policies, development strategies and initiatives. These reforms took place in two distinctive phases, namely the period of rapid economic growth in 1960s and 1970s which required development administration and institution building, and the period from 1980 to the present which necessitated the consolidation and qualitative upgrading of the government machinery.

As a continuously efforts to ensure the effectiveness of the public sector delivery system, the Government introduced National Key Results Areas (NKRA) in 2009. By implementing NKRA, effective guide on the implementation of government policies can be provided to government servants as well as to enhance accountability attitude among them. The public also plays an important role in ensuring the accountability and effectiveness of government agencies. In this regard, NRKA also can be used as a platform to the community to evaluate government performance.

There are six areas to improve under NKRA and one of them is to raise the living standard of low income household (LIH) in Malaysia. According to the Household Income Survey (2007), LIH are households that have a total income less than or equal to RM 2,000 per month, which represents 75% of the median income in Malaysia. Among others, initiative has been identified to improve the existing mechanism on Federal financial welfare assistance distribution by distributing the financial assistance on the first day of every month, rather than irregularly as before. This initiative commenced on 1st September 2009 for Peninsular Malaysia and 1st January 2010 for Sabah and Sarawak. Federal financial welfare assistance consists nine categories, namely Children Assistance, Elderly Poor Assistance, Disabled Workers Allowance, Launching Grant, Disabled/Chronic Patient Care Giver Assistance, Victim of Natural Disaster Assistance, Apprentice Assistance, Artificial Limbs and Orthopedic Assistance and Adopted Child Assistance.

Federal financial welfare assistance is a mechanism provided by the Government through Welfare Department, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in order to protect (safety net) the needy and the vulnerable groups particularly the person with disabilities, elderly poor and children as well as to reduce their financial burden until they are financially independent (in line with provision in Federal Constitution, Table 9, List 3). According to the statistic from Welfare Department, by August 2009, there were 228,467,603 Federal financial welfare assistance recipients (productive and unproductive groups) throughout the country. Currently, there are two methods practise by Welfare Department on the disbursement of Federal financial welfare assistance, which is by cash and banking system.

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Objectives of the Study

To study the perception among the Welfare Department officers and recipients towards Government initiative to distribute Federal financial welfare assistance on the first day of every month; and

To study the effectiveness of the Government initiative in distributing Federal financial welfare assistance on the first day of every month.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary objective of most public sector organisations is to provide a social benefit within a limited budget and reduce costs that are contradiction to private sector organisations, whose primary focus is on increasing profits. The slow uptake of service quality practices in public sector organisations is further exacerbated by difficulties in measuring outcomes, greater scrutiny from the public and press, a lack of freedom to act in an arbitrary fashion, and a requirement for decisions to be based in law. Due to these difficulties, however, public sector organisations have come under increasing pressure to deliver quality services, improve efficiencies, and respond to government legislation (Agus, Barker & Kandampully, 2007).

There are two perspectives of service quality; which are from service organization and from customer. From the perspective of the service organisation, there is a desire to survive and compete in a global environment. From the perspective of the customer, there is a desire for better quality services. Nowadays, public sector management has concerned about service quality as emphasized on the importance of customer expectations, an increased focus on revenue, and growing competition between public and private sector organisations who offer some related services (Agus, Barker & Kandampully, 2007).

Majority of researchers suggest that customer value is determined by customers' perception (in the market place) not by suppliers' assumptions or intentions. Most of customer values include high quality, faster response or delivery, and lower cost/price but it totally depends on the customers themselves to judge whether a product or service is valuable or not (Setijono & Dalghard, 2007).

Furthermore, in response to the need for new performance measurement approaches many researchers have argued that time is the new strategic performance measure that should be used for improvement. Yet, systems solely based on time based performance measurement have the limitation of over-emphasizing the role of time and not considering the impact of other operational performance measures with respect to time. In order to improve time performance all operational performance measures should be measured, controlled and improved. The main time based metrics that companies could use into four different areas:

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developing new products, decision making, processing and production, and customer service; when customer service should pay attention to the response time; quoted lead time; percentage deliveries of time; and time from customer's recognition of need to delivery (Ghayalini & Noble, 1996).

Many countries have spent billions of dollars in order to provide service automation and computerization in order to have efficient and effective service delivery to its publics (Mohamad, 2009). Same goes with Malaysia in transforming to well-developed nation through exploring in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by implementing public information system almost at all ministries and agencies. By having Public Information System (PIS), the civil service feel less burdened; workloads have become reduced and have substituted by computerized information systems (Mohamad, 2009).

According to Lee (1999), metropolitan areas grow as size and function become larger in the country, service delivery of wide area will become larger due to new construction of facilities to meet the demand. The expansion of service delivery area leads to administrative inconsistencies between production sites and region which benefits from these public services. The new management system at Seoul Metropolitan Area insures efficient, effective and equitable delivery at wide area services requires flexible and cooperative relationship between government and citizen participation.

The public sector has long been subjected to criticisms for, among others, inefficiency, red tape, lack of flexibility, ineffective accountability and poor performance. Such criticisms have paved the way for administrative reforms and reorganizations seeking to address various administrative ailments and enhance the efficiency and performance of public bureaucracies (Noore Alam Siddiquee, 2006).

While the government of Malaysia has already committed itself to provide improved services to its clients, with the advent of globalization it became apparent that a fundamental rethink and redesign of the governmental processes was essential in order to achieve dramatic improvements in service delivery. Two important studies initiated by the government in the early 1990s led to the introduction of major revision in procedural matters of the business of the government. Public agencies in general have been asked to review the existing ways of doing things in order to reduce red-tape and expedite the delivery of services and to take appropriate actions to ease regulations and procedures for the benefit of their clients (Sarji, 1996). The emphasis was on efforts to reduce administration of bureaucratic practices and speed up approval process for applications related to issuance of permits, licenses, and land administration as well as economic, investment and other matters. This eventually has led to the introduction of new application forms, merger of several forms into a composite application form, reduction of time taken for processing of applications, extension of validity of licenses, and the establishment of licensing centres especially at the local level. Some of

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the prevailing systems have been abolished and the correspondence procedure has been streamlined.

Service quality is known as a one of the important element to survive and compete in a global environment. From the perspective of client, there is a desire for a better quality services. From the perspective of the service provider, there is a need to continuously improve their service to make sure their existence relevant and important. The Government Chief Secretary, Y.Bhg. Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan noted at the opening Malaysian Source Software Conference (MY GOSSCORN), 6 December 2007:

"Today, customers have very high expectations of the Government delivery system. They want fast, efficient and quality service in a conducive environment when dealing with the Government, regardless of time or place. Effective and optimum use of information and communication technology (ICT) is the best means to boost the quality of the public service delivery system."

Customers judge quality by comparing their expectations with their perceptions of what they receive (service experience), i.e., it is a customer- oriented phenomenon; it is defined, judged and deduced by customer based on his experience, expertise, service process, environment, etc. User evaluation is affected by service process, physical evidence & quality of service personnel.

Customer satisfaction defined as a result of cognitive and affective evolution, where some comparison standard is compared to the actually perceived performance. Customer satisfaction entails the full meeting of customer expectation of the products and services. If the perceived performance matches or even exceeds customers' expectations of services, they are satisfied. If it does not, they are dissatisfied. Relationship between satisfaction and service quality is a key to measure user satisfaction (Dehghan, 2006).

According to Levesque and McDougall (1996), satisfaction is conceptualized as an overall, customer attitude towards a service provider. Customer satisfaction is also related to the service offering. With retail banking, the convenience and competitiveness of the provider's offerings can be expected to affect a customer's overall satisfaction and ongoing patronage. There is distinction between customer satisfaction as related to tangible products and as related to service experiences. This distinction is due to the inherent intangibility and perishability of services, as well as the inability to separate production and consumption. Hence, customer satisfaction with services is more difficult to achieve than goods (Sridhar, 2002).

Measuring service quality and satisfaction traditionally involves asking customers for subjective attitudinal evaluations, that is, asking if they personally felt the service they received was satisfactory. While this attitudinal measurement approach sounds intuitively sensible, it is actually fraught with problems. It does not focus on service provision or buyer

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behaviour. Instead it measures customer attitudes and makes inferences from these both to service delivery and to buyer behaviour. Indeed, the purpose of service quality market research is not to determine whether or not customers give positive or negative evaluations, but what really needs to be discovered is what sort of service is the company really delivering, and how does this impact on real customer behaviour, that is, what aspects of the service really affect behaviour - either positively and negatively. The important things are to measure the actual service provision experienced and the subsequent behaviour (Sharp, Page & Dawes, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for this survey was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the staff responsible in distributing Federal Welfare Assistance and to the clients whoever received the Federal Welfare Assistance. There are about 30 respondents for the staffs and 20 respondents for the client. The survey was conducted at the Welfare Department in Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya and Batu Caves branch.

The questionnaire has two sections, Section A consists of background of respondents and Section B consists of main objectives of this study. The awareness, understanding and perception of staff and clients towards the implementation of the initiative as well as the obstacles faced by staff and clients during the implementation of this system have been analysed. Questionnaires were developed using five Likert Scale with 5 meaning strongly disagree to one meaning strongly agree. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) package was used to analyse the data set. A frequency distribution was used to describe the sample. The mean and standard deviations of the attributes were also computed.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The respondents are divided into two; staff and client. The sample of staff consisted of females (66.7 percent) than males (33.3 percent). From the table, 56.7 percent of staff is in the age of 25 to 32 years old. More than 50 percent of the respondents have working in welfare department for 1 to 3 years. 90 percent of these respondents are supporting staff and the remaining 10 percent are officers. For client, the sample consists of 20 percent male respondent and another 80 percent is female respondent. Majority of the client are within the age of 46 years old and above.

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Table 1: Demographic Profile

Attributes	Staff (%)	Clients (%)
Sex: Male	66.7	20.0
Female	33.3	80.0
Age: 18 –24 years	20.0	0.0
25 – 32 years	56.7	0.0
33 – 45 years	23.3	25.0
46 years and above	0.0	75.0
Years of Service: 1 – 3 years	76.7	NIL
4 – 7 years	13.3	NIL
8 years and above	10.0	NIL
		NIL
Position: Officer	10.0	
Supporting staff	90.0	NIL

The purpose of analysing staff and client's perception in this study was to confirm the degree of awareness and understanding among them toward the disbursement of Federal financial welfare assistance on the first day of each month. The table showed that the mean for overall client's awareness was 3.56, and the level of staff awareness is 2.65. From the mean, these two groups perceived that their awareness is still low regarding the government initiative to disburse Federal financial welfare assistance on 1st day of each month, especially among the staff involved in this study. While, level of client and staff understanding on this government initiative were 3.56 and 3.90 respectively. These indicated that client and staff perceived they were slightly understood with the initiative, consistently with the level of their awareness.

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Table 2: Staff and Clients Perception on Disbursement of Federal Welfare Aid (FWA) on 1st Day of Each Month

Attributes	Staff		Clients	
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev
I) Awareness and Understanding on the Initiative				
1. I aware on the initiative of disbursement of FWA by 1st day of each month	3.57	1.14	2.65	1.73
2. I fully understand with the government initiative in disbursement of FWA by 1st day of each month	3.57	1.04	3.90	1.25
II) Time Factor 1. Client received payment on 1st day of each month	3.10	1.37	1.40	0.75
III) Improvement of Delivery System 1. The implementation of this initiative contributes to the improvement of disbursement welfare system provided by JKM	3.23	1.30	4.30	0.57
2. The initiatives of payment disbursement on 1st day of each month make the system more effective	3.43	1.19	4.40	0.50
IV) Acceptance of Staff/Client 1. I believe the implementation of disbursement system is a good idea	3.33	1.24	4.75	0.44
2. I agree the initiative of disbursement system	3.30	1.24	4.75	0.44
3. I support the initiative of disbursement system	3.40	1.22	4.75	0.44

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The result for time factor indicated that, the mean for staff was 3.1, whereas client was 1.4. This showed that there are significant differences on perception towards the implementation of the initiative between these two groups. The client strongly disagree that they have received payment within the specified time, whereas staff tend to be neutral on this issue. This is due to Welfare Department current practices of payment was made by two methods either by hand or deposit into a recipient's bank account. Since, there are a lot of recipients prefer to receive payment by hand, Welfare Department will distribute the payment by hand before 1st day of each month. Meanwhile, for the disbursement of Federal financial welfare assistance made through banking system, the payment usually received by recipients on the 1st day of each month.

From the mean value, it indicated that client perceived that the implementation of this initiative contributes to the improvement of disbursement welfare system provided by Welfare Department and it makes the system more efficient. Client also indicated that they were strongly agreed and support on the disbursement of Federal financial welfare assistance on the first day of each month. However, similar with time factor above, staff perceived differently on this issue. They tend to be neutral because this initiative is a new task for them and it may increase their work load as well as their work-life conflict.

Table 3: Staff Perception towards Facilities in ICT/Transport/Training

No.	Attributes	Mean	Std Dev
1.	JKM provided enough facilities such as ICT that accommodate staff in executing their work	2.73	1.23
2.	The top management gives cooperation and support to the staff in implementation of this system	2.47	1.01
3.		3.17	1.02
4.	JKM provide training for staff to enhance competencies	2.87	1.04
	JKM provided enough facilities such as transportation that accommodate staff in executing their work		

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From the staff perception towards the ICT and transportation facilities provided by Welfare Department, the mean were 2.73 and 2.87 respectively. These show that staff perceived the facilities; including ICT and transportation is still insufficient in facilitating them to disburse the Federal financial welfare assistance to the client efficiently and effectively.

Welfare Department also disburse Federal financial welfare assistance to the disabled recipients by sending their officer to the recipients' home. Therefore, having lack of transportation provided by Welfare Department make them face difficulty to disburse the payment on required time. Furthermore, staff also perceived that they received lack of training programme and top management support in order to facilitate them in disbursement of Welfare Department on the 1st day of each month.

CONCLUSION

Federal Welfare Delivery system initiative on the disbursement of payment on 1st day of each month contributes the satisfaction of lower level income household. However, there are some limitations on the implementation of the initiative. Therefore, the government shall look to the ways of improvement of the system such as ICT, transportation facilities, and the information dissemination to the public and staff to ensure information is well communicated to them.

Effort to standardize the disbursement of delivery system should be taken into consideration for the betterment of delivery system. Besides, in order to reduce the workload and work life conflict among staff, the government shall increase the numbers of staff involve in the system. Currently, there are many recipients of Federal Welfare Assistance in one area that are more prefer to take payment by cash, instead of through bank. Thus, by having enough workforces, the disbursement of Federal Welfare Assistance might be delivered within the standard deadline. Furthermore, the top management shall give support to their staff to ensure the effectiveness of the delivery system.

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