

Communication Challenges in Private Finance Initiative Projects at the Facilities Management Stage

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ABSTRACT

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Facilities management is one of the scopes of work under the Private Finance Initiative Projects. The success of the facilities management work depends on various factors and communication is among the major factors. This paper will highlight the challenges faced during the communication between the client and facilities management managers in UiTM projects', and ways to overcome the challenges. The research was carried out using the qualitative method. The interviews were done with the engineers and facilities managers. The interviews identified the challenges as communication breakdown, human error, lack of understanding, time-consuming, and misunderstanding. These strategies are being used to clarify the root cause of the lack of understanding and resolve disputes. The following item suggested being done by the respondents; verification from the end-user, conducting a technical meeting, following the procedure in executing works and having a good relationship between both parties. Besides, to ensure smooth communication when conveying information during the operational and maintenance were suggested to use the mobile application, integrated system, roles of the concessionaire in understanding the Concession Agreement, minimize human error and improvement of CFMS, and preferably direct communication using instant messages.

Keywords: Facilities management, communication, Private Finance Initiative

INTRODUCTION

Facilities management can be described as managing the physical and non-physical facilities and unpredictable business requirements. It is required by all professionals who undertake the management to achieve business goals. From a technical standpoint, facilities management and responsibilities include work initially done by architects, landscape architects, interior designers, civil engineering, building surveying, valuation, quantity surveying, etc. (Isa et al,2016). Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi introduced Private Finance Initiative projects in Malaysia way back in 2006. Mainly this procurement was selected because of its achievement in terms of the best value in the form of its procedures, obstacles, value for money, risk management processes, and the perceptions of parties involved in the delivery of PFI projects (Akintoye et al.,2003; Kipli et al.,2016). Facilities management is one of the works which includes this long-term relationship between the client and the concessionary.

Every project has its uniqueness that is infrequently repetitive. Also, each project has a specific meaning that involves a chain of individuals together to form a unique environment. Goczol & Scoubeau (2003) elaborated that controlling the composite and time-related restrictions is elemental to their successful development. Therefore, some components can always fail and jeopardize turning over the required communication networks. The project needs to be successful, although the construction industry is a well-known sector in which a sequence of rules is defined to facilitate communication in it.

However, communication patterns are determined by the communication network that emerges in the group. Some factors affect how members of the group communicate and how managers design it. Nevertheless, the individuals who make up the information flows will be determined no matter how the group is configured. As referred to A. M. & Song (2014) to understand how project teams work, it is vital to understand the communication network that is generated.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Facility Management department or the facility managers often face a variety of limitations, as mentioned by Baldwin (2014); Ali et al. (2019). Such limitations include insufficient resources, reducing budgets for maintenance, unfunded mandates, data distribution and disparities of data, and priorities of political and stove-piping.

According to Mustapha (2013), during his analysis, his respondent emphasized the existing performance restrictions related to the communication from the PFI consortium to the FM service provider. This PFI contract has no direct contractual relationship between the FM service provider and the client. However, complications in implementing satisfactory services conveyance to the facilities are caused by delays delivering of information by the FM services provider to the Trust.

Besides that, Mustapha (2013), discusses that the restriction of existing practices in the execution of communication will contribute to a lack of communication between the operational team and the managerial level required by these parties. These have become challenges the management team faces that requires attention and strategic decision-making. Hence, the operational level should disseminate the content of information and decision made. Ali et al. (2019) & Ismail et al. (2018) support the main factors for the success of Strategic FM is communication and said barriers that exist for FM success are internal dispute, failure in identifying risk, failure in communication.

Thus, this research aims to look at the challenges in effective communication strategies to improve communication during the stage of operational and maintenance in PFI projects faced by personnel in charge of facilities management.

METHODOLOGY

Selected sampling was used in this research. This type of sampling begins with identifying a person in charge of the facility department, specifically at the operational and maintenance stage for both campuses in UiTM Sarawak and concessionaire sides. UiTM PFI projects have been chosen because 18 projects out of 151 Public-Private Partnership (UKAS) projects in Malaysia, as listed on the website, are projects under UiTM. Therefore, for this research, UiTM projects were selected. In this research, semi-structured interview questions were used to obtain the data. According to Jamshed (2014) & Newman (1998) point out that any face-to-face interview is also an observation. The expert interviewer is delicate to non-verbal messages effects of the setting on the interview, and the degrees of the relationship. The advantage of this form is that the interviewer will have complete control over the questions throughout the entire process of the interview. Other advantages are that the answer from the interviewee can be more accurate, the response rate is relatively high, and the answer can be explored by the interviewees, as mentioned by Nachmias et al. (1996).

MAIN FINDINGS

Demographic Background

Table 1: Background of respondents

Respondent	Gender	Employer's Name	Designation	Years of PFI project
E1	Male	UiTM Mukah	Engineer	5 years
E2	Male	UiTM Samarahan 2	Assistant Engineer	3 ½ years
C1	Male	SPV Company	Head of Department for Civil & Structure	5 years
C2	Male	Facilities Management Company	Engineer	3½ years

The respondents interviewed are listed in Table 1 above, which are from the client and Special Purpose Vehicle Company. The designation of the person interviewed is the person in charge of the facilities management during the usage stage of the project. In UiTM Mukah or Kota Samarahan 2, there is no exact designation for facilities management manager or officer. The engineer and assistant engineer are the ones who deal with the SPV company. As for the SPV and Facilities Management Company, the engineer plays their role in the facilities management task.

Challenges of Effective Communication at the Operational and Maintenance Stage in PFI Projects.

The literature review has listed common challenges of effective communication that may be faced by the facility managers, which are lack of understanding (William,1998) & Wantanakorn, et al., 1999), a problem in the transmission of information, and cognitive dissonance. From the findings in Table 2, the interviewees stated a few challenges that they have experienced in managing these PFI projects. The challenges are the breakdown of communication (Ismail et al.,2018), human error, lack of understanding, time-consuming, and misunderstanding. Therefore, all these challenges have occurred in an actual situation these facility managers face and lead to barriers to communication between them.

Table 2: Challenges in Managing the PFI project

Question	Feedback	Code
What challenges did you experience or anticipate in managing this PFI project? – ways to communicate, how the information is transferred	The biggest challenge that he faced was understanding the Concession Agreement (CA). This agreement creates challenges in communicating between both parties because it is too general to explain clauses. Meanwhile, if anything happens on-site, it will not be easy to relate to the agreement because on-site work is more detailed and technical than the explanation in the agreement. This will make both parties misunderstand and misinterpret the clauses to execute the works. Despite that, it is the implementation of site works. It is challenging for him to make the concessionaire understand onsite work that has a different level of position from the head of the department to the technician.	E1
	The challenges that usually occur are miscommunication and human error . These challenges come from the user, which affects the concession to perform their work and automatically affects the client.	E2
	The communication breakdown between higher levels with their subordinates, and lack of understanding between both parties.	C1
	If major cases happen on campus, it needs approval from top management, such as PFI's Policy and Operational Department. It will be time-consuming for them to get the feedback by the process of lettering or electronic mail (e-mail).	C2

Ways to Deal with Lack of Understanding

Table 3: Ways to Deal with Lack of Understanding

Question	Feedback	Code
How did you deal with when there is a lack of understanding during conveying information?	When any lack of understanding occurs while delivering information or instruction, a reminder or letter will be given for further explanation or understanding regarding the issue. Besides that, there will be a meeting, discussion, or workshop to discuss the issues arising for more clarification.	E1
	It depends on the issue that occurs, either major or minor issues. If major issues happen, they will have a site visit and come out with a letter and some shreds of evidence like photos.	E2
	If there is a lack of understanding between the client and concession company, they will usually conduct a briefing for them to clarify and verify uncertain issues. Inspect the real problem or root cause of the lack of communication between both sides and deal with it properly to solve the problem.	C1
	He mentioned that all the documents, like letters, should be in a record and clear with the verification of receiving the documents. It is also the same as electronic mail (e-mail). Minute meetings also must be verified by both parties so that there will be no misunderstanding occur and there are shreds of evidence for the matters discussed.	C2

As mentioned, by the interviewees in *Table 3*, to deal with a lack of understanding, it is best to deal with it through a meeting or discussion, inspecting the real problem, and issuing a letter or reminder. To sum up, these strategies are being used to clarify the root cause of the lack of understanding and to get rid of disputes that happen between both part (Carillo, et al. 2006; Kumaraswamy & Chitale, 2012; Timonen & Ylitalo).

Ways to Ensure Smooth Communication When Conveying Information

The interviewees have listed out (Table 4) ways to ensure smooth communication when conveying information during the operational and maintenance stage of PFI projects. These are the verification from the end-user, conducting a technical meeting, following the procedure in executing works, and having a good relationship between both parties. Indeed, they have practiced these ways in their daily communication activities. These strategies have been supported by Guni (2007) stating that it is essential to understand a company's culture and the relationship between organizational positions or roles.

Table 4: Ensuring Smooth Communication

Question	Feedback	Code
How do you ensure there is smooth communication occurs when conveying information?	It will be based on the result or output of people involved in that work. As a result, if the output is the same as expected, there is effective communication between UiTM and the concessionaire. Despite that, verification from the end-user regarding the complaint made also ensures smooth communication. The client will satisfy the concessionaire's performance if the end-user is satisfied with the concessionaire's output.	E1
	The technical meeting will usually be conducted between UiTM and the concession company if a major issue happens.	E2
	Ensure that all the procedures have been followed so that the result is achieved as expected. Besides that, having a good relationship with the UiTM staff so that they can easily communicate without any barriers related to personal matters if any issues arise.	C1
	Make sure that all the procedures have been followed so that the result is achieved as expected. Besides that, having a good relationship with the UiTM staff so that if any issues arise, they can easily communicate without any barriers related to personal matters.	C2

Ways that can be taken to improve ways of communication in delivering information during the operational and maintenance stage in PFI projects.

Table 5: Ways to Improve Communication

Question	Feedback	Code
Are there any ways that can be taken to improve ways of communication in delivering information during the operational and maintenance stage in this PFI project?	He suggests that there should be a gadget or mobile application that could help the facility management enhance communication between both parties in performing their work so that there are no gaps. About the Industrial Revolution 4.0, there should be an application specifically for the facility department to directly connect both parties. Besides that, an integration system is also good to implement to ensure effective communication between the concession and the client.	E1
	Ensure there is an improvement in delivering information for this PFI project. The concessionaire's role is to understand it well and carry out their work diligently regarding the Concession Agreement (CA) so that no issue may affect the client, especially in communication between both sides.	E2
	Try to minimize human error because although there are many technologies and software or digital applications that exist to make work easier, if the human error cannot be minimized, it will affect the communication among the parties involved.	C1
	The software they have used, Computerized Facility Management System (CFMS), is good enough for both parties to exchange their data for the operational parts and can be improved from time to time. However, applications like WhatsApp and electronic mail (e-mail) are more effective for instant purposes for direct communication and connection.	C2

Feedback by respondents in *Table 5* suggests a mobile application, integrated system, roles of the concessionaire to understand the Concession Agreement, minimize human error, and improvement of

CFMS as well as preferably direct communication using instant messages (Ismail, 2013). The suggestions are more on the technology part and the traditional ways in which it relates that this will help them improve their communication.

CONCLUSION

Communication is one of the important aspects during the facilities management stage, whereby a successful work during the operational and maintenance work depends on how efficient communication between both parties is. Challenges face by the parties are the breakdown of communication, human error, lack of understanding, time-consuming, and misunderstanding. To deal with a lack of understanding, it is best to deal with it through meeting or discussion, inspecting the real problem, and issuing a letter or reminder. To summarise, these tactics are used to clarify the fundamental cause of misunderstandings and resolve disagreements between the two parties. To ensure accessible communication when transferring information during operating and maintenance, end-user verification, holding a technical meeting, following procedure when performing work, and having a good relationship. The use of a mobile application, an integrated system, the concessionaire's role in comprehending the Concession Agreement, minimizing human error, improving the CFMS, and preferable direct communication via instant messages are all suggested to improve communication.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS & CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Credit authorship contribution statement

Kumalasari Kipli:	Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition.
Nor Azizah Sidek:	Data collection and data analysis and writing.
Favilla Zaini:	Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – review & editing, Project administration.
Fara Diva:	Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration
Shariffah Zatil:	Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing, Project administration.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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