

Communication Challenges in Private Finance Initiative Projects at Facilities Management Stage

Kumalasari Kipli*¹, Norazizah Sidek⁴, Fara Diva Mustapa³, Shariffah Zatil Hidayah Syed Jamaluddin⁴ and FavillaZaini⁵

¹FABU, UTM, Johor & Faculty of Architecture, Planning, and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, MALAYSIA.

²FSPU, UiTM Samarahan, Sarawak, MALAYSIA.

³FABU, UTM, Johor Bahru, MALAYSIA.

⁴Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, UiTM Shah Alam, MALAYSIA.

⁵Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, MALAYSIA.

E-mail: *¹ kumalasari@uitm.edu.my

Abstract. 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. Communication is among the factor. This paper will highlight what are the challenges faced during the communication between the client and facilities management managers in UiTM projects and also ways to overcome the challenges. The research is carried out by using the qualitative method. The interviews were done with the engineers and facilities managers. From the interviews, the challenges are the breakdown of communication, human error, lack of understanding, time-consuming, and misunderstanding. deal with 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 sum up, these strategies are being used because to clarify the root cause of the lack of understandings and to get rid of disputes that happen between both parties. To ensure smooth communication when conveying information during the operational and maintenance, 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. To improve communication, the suggestion is the use of the mobile application, integrated system, roles of the concessionaire in understanding the Concession Agreement, minimize human error and improvement of CFMS as well as preferably direct communication using instant messages.

Keyword: Facilities management, communication, Private Finance Initiative

1. 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 that was originally done by architects, landscape architects, interior designers, civil engineering, building surveying, valuation, quantity surveying, etc. Isa, et al [1]. Private Finance Initiative projects were introduced in Malaysia during Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi way



back in the year 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 A. Akintoye, et al [2] K. Kipli, et al [3]. Facilities management is one of the works which include 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 involved a chain of individuals that together form a unique environment. J. Goczol and C. Scoubeau [4] elaborated controlling the composite and time-related restrictions that projects place on their contributors is elemental to their successful development. Therefore, there is always some component that can fail and that has the jeopardy of turning over the required communication networks that the project needs to be successful although the construction industry is a well-known sector in which a sequence of rules has been defined to facilitate communication in it.

However, communication patterns are determined by the communication network that emerges in the group. There are some factors which how members of the group communicate and how managers design it will be affected. Nevertheless, the individuals that make up how the information flows will be determined no matter how the group is configured. As referred to by A. M. and X. Song [5] to understand how project teams work it is vital to understand the communication network that is generated.

2. Problem Statement

A variety of limitations are often faced by the Facility Management department or the facility managers as mentioned by E. Baldwin [6], I.M. Ali, et al [7]. Such limitations include insufficient resources, reducing budgets for maintenance, unfunded mandates, data distribution and disparities of data, priorities of political and stove-piping.

According to M. Mustapha [8], during his analysis, his respondent emphasized the existing performance restrictions related to the communication from the PFI consortium to the FM service provider. Now, there is no direct contractual relationship between the FM service provider and the client in this PFI contract. Trust through the PFI consortium is the only way of communication. However, complications in implementing satisfactory services conveyance to the facilities are caused by delays in the delivery of information by the FM services provider to the Trust.

Besides that, M. Mustapha [8] has discussed the restriction of existing practices in the execution of communication which contributes to a lack of communication between the operational team and managerial level is required by these parties. These have become challenges faced by the management team that requires attention and strategic decision-making. Hence, the operational level should disseminate the content of information and decision made. This is supported by I.M. Ali, et al [7], K. Ismail, et al [9] which one of the main factors for Strategic FM is Communication which means communication is one of the factors for the success of Facilities Management and said barriers that exist for FM success are instance internal dispute, failure in identifying risk, failure in communication.

Thus, the objective of this research is to look at what are 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.

3. Methodology

Selected sampling was used in this research. This type of sampling is beginning 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. The reason why UiTM PFI projects have been chosen is that 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 S. Jamshed [10] C.R.S. Newman, et al [11], points 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 degrees of the relationship. The advantage of this form is the interviewer will have full control over the questions throughout the entire the process of interview. Other advantages are the answer from the interviewee can be more accurate, the response rate is relatively high, and the answer can be explored from the interviewees as mentioned by M. Nachmias, et al [12].

4. Main Findings

4.1 Demographic Background

Table 1: Background of respondents

Respondent	Gender	Employer's Name	Designation	Years on 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	3 ½ 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.

4.2 Challenges of Effective Communication at The Operational and Maintenance Stage in PFI Projects

The literature review has been listed common challenges of effective communication that may be faced by the facility managers which are lack of understanding JC William [13]; N Ng [14], a problem in the transmission of information, and cognitive dissonance. From the findings in Table 2, the interviewees stated few challenges that they have been experienced in managing these PFI projects. The challenges are the breakdown of communication K. Ismail, et al [9], human error, lack of understanding, time-consuming, and misunderstanding. Therefore, all these challenges have occurred in a real situation faced by these facility managers in which they become a barrier for them to communicate between them.

Table 2: Challenges in Managing PFI project

Question	Feedback	Code
What are the challenges do you experienced or anticipated in managing this PFI project? – ways to communicate, how the information being transfer	The biggest challenge that he faced is the understanding of the Concession Agreement (CA). This agreement sometimes made both parties difficult in communicating because this agreement is too general in explanation of clauses meanwhile if anything happens on-site, it will be difficult to relate with the agreement because on site work is more detailed and technical compared with the explanation in the agreement. This will make both parties misunderstanding and misinterpretation the clauses to execute the works. Despite that, it is the implementation of site works. It is a bit challenging for him to make the concessionaire understand on site 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 whereby it affects the concession to perform their work and automatically also will affect the client.	E2

Question	Feedback	Code
	Breakdown of communication between higher level with their subordinates and misinterpretation as well as lack of understanding between both parties.	C1
	If there are major cases happen on campus whereby it needs approval from top management, for example, PFI's Policy and Operational Department, so, it will be time-consuming for them to get the feedbacks by the process of lettering or electronic mail (e-mail).	C2

4.3 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 lack of understanding that occurs when conveying information?	When there is 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 occur. Besides that, there will be a meeting or discussion , or workshop held for them to discuss the issues arising for more clarification.	E1
	It depends on the issue occur either major or minor issues. If major issues happen, they will have a site visit and come out with a letter together with some shreds of evidence like photos.	E2
	If there is a lack of understanding occur between the client and concession company, usually they will conduct a briefing for them to clarify and verify issues that is uncertain. Inspect the real problem or root cause of the lack of communication between both sides and deal with it in a proper way 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 of 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 that have been 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 meeting or discussion, inspecting the real problem, and issuing a letter or reminder. To sum up, these strategies are being used because to clarify the root cause of the lack of understandings and to get rid of disputes that happen between both parties PM Carillo, et al [15]; F. Authors [16]; H. Timonen and J. Ylitalo [17].

4.4 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 in 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, these ways are having been practicing by them in their daily communication activities. These strategies have been supported by G. Guni [18] stating that to understand communication works within the firm, it is important 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 occur when conveying information?	It will be based on the result or output given by people involved in that particular works. As a result, or output is the same as expectation, then there is effectiveness in communication between UiTM and the concessionaire. Despite that, verification from the end-user regarding the complaint made also ensures there is smooth communication because if the end-user is satisfied with the output made by the concessionaire, the client also will satisfy with the performance of the concessionaire.	E1
	The technical meeting usually will be conducted between UiTM and the concession company if there is a major issue happen.	E2
	Make sure that the procedure in executing works is followed and the result is excellent with the good quality will determine either the communication is effective or not.	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

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

Feedback by respondents in *Table 5* suggesting 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 F Authors [19]. The suggestions are more on the technology part and the traditional ways in which it relates that this will help them more in improving their communication.

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 to enhance the communication between both parties in performing their works so that there are no gaps. About the Industrial Revolution 4.0, there should be an application that is specifically for the facility department to directly connect between both parties. Besides that, an integration system is also good to be implemented to make sure effective communication between the concession and the client.	E1
	To ensure there is an improvement in delivering information for this PFI project, it is the concessionaire's role in understanding it well and carry out their works diligently regarding the Concession Agreement (CA) so that there is no issue happen which may affect the client especially in communication between both sides.	E2
	Try to minimize human error because although there is a	C1

Question	Feedback	Code
	bunch of this PFI project, it is the concessionaire's role in understanding technologies and software or digital application exist to make works easier, but if the human error cannot be minimized, it will affect the communication among the parties involved	
	Software that has been used by them which is 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, for direct communication and connection, applications like WhatsApp and electronic mail (e-mail) are more effective for instant purposes.	C2

5.0 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 lack understanding, it is best to deal with it through meeting or discussion, inspecting the real problem, and issuing a letter or reminder. To summarize, these tactics are used to clarify the fundamental cause of misunderstandings and to resolve disagreements that arise between the two parties. To ensure easy 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, and improving the CFMS, as well as preferable direct communication via instant messages, are all suggested as ways to improve communication.

6.0 References

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