

SERVICE CONSISTENCY IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT SERVICE PROVIDING ORGANISATIONS IN SRI LANKA

A.G.T.L. Herath¹, Harshini Mallawaarachchi² and R.M.D.I.M. Rathnayake³

ABSTRACT

Service consistency acts as a key media to achieve sameness and fairness in service delivery. Service consistency is vital to attraction of new customers, enhanced corporate image, reduced costs, and increased business performance. Nonetheless, struggle in developing and applying measurements for service quality can be commonly identified with service consistency failure situations. Hence, to better manage changes as well as to overcome such issues, organization should adopt a proper methodology to improve service consistency for Facilities Management (FM). Thus, this study aims to improve the service consistency of FM service providing organizations in Sri Lanka. Case study method was adopted in qualitative phenomenon. Under the case study method, three cases (FM service providing organisations) were studied. Twelve (12) semi-structured interviews were conducted among the FM related professionals in the selected cases to collect the data. Case study data were analysed by using the content analysis and cross-case analysis techniques. Direct interaction with customers, complain handling procedures, conduct skill development programmes, collect customers feedback and recruit experienced professionals were identified as some of the existing strategies used for service consistency. Different customer expectations, employee turnover, communication errors and lack of customer experience about FM services were revealed as major issues for service consistency. Accordingly, the suggestions, including sharing information with each employee, improving decision making skills, developing customer care strategies and implementing better recruitment system, were proposed to overcome the identified issues of service consistency in FM service providing organisations in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Facilities Management; Service Consistency; Service Provider; Strategies; Sri Lanka.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Facilities Management (FM) is the practice of sustaining quality working environment and providing delivering and quality support service to meet core objectives of the organization at best cost (Amaratunga *et al.*, 2000). Domingo (2003), stated, service consistency implies achieving sameness, uniformity and fairness in delivery of all the service regarding the correct place, occasion, time and service providers. However, there

¹ Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

² Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, hmallawarachchi@gmail.com

³ Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, dulinirathnayake@gmail.com

was an argument that FM is an all-encompassing non-core activity, which needs to be changed in the face of sourcing decisions. There is a clear gap in the literature that mainly considered FM as non-core and focused mainly on cost and efficiency drivers of sourcing decisions (Natukunda *et al.*, 2013). Hence, considering the consistency of the service provided by those FM organizations is unseen (Hui *et al.*, 2013). Even though FM had been increasingly accepted in the boardrooms of these commercial organizations, little has been studied the service consistency (Hui *et al.*, 2013). Service recovery is the strategy for enhancing service consistency of FM services in order to implement customer satisfaction and customer perceptions of service quality. Han *et al.* (2007) mentioned that there are different standards for ensuring service quality of FM services (Han *et al.*, 2007) however a little consideration has been given yet on service consistency. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, no guidelines for FM service consistency have been introduced (Weerasiri, 2015). Hence, the aim of this research is to improve the service consistency of FM service providing organizations through 3 key objectives; (1) To identify existing guidelines available for FM service consistency, (2) To investigate the service consistency issues in existing practice and (3) To propose strategies to enhance the service consistency of FM service providing organisations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE CONSISTENCY FOR FM

Service consistency in business is a key performance indicator in customer experience, which is not well known but important (Watier, 2018). Service consistency is achieving sameness, uniformity and fairness in the delivery or execution of all the service attributes, regardless of time, place, occasion, and service provider (Domingo, 2003). Service quality and service consistency has become a significant differentiator and the most powerful competitive weapon which many leading service providing organizations (Wong and Sohal, 2003). Similarly, FM service providers are concerned with managing the multi-disciplinary activities to optimize their impact on people and the workplace and giving its customers value for money (Goyal and Michael, 2007). FM should be strategically planned, aligned to business needs and demonstrate contribution to achieving business objectives (Kaya *et al.*, 2004).

2.2 STRATEGIES AND GUIDELINES AVAILABLE FOR IMPROVING SERVICE CONSISTENCY OF FM

As Han *et al.* (2007) mentioned, there are different standards such as International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9000, ISO 9001, ISO 9003, ISO 9004, ISO 41000 and ISO 41001 for ensuring service quality of FM services. ISO 9001 and ISO 9004 form a consistent pair of standards on quality management. ISO 9001 aims to give quality assurance of product to enhance customer satisfaction while ISO 9004 is for a broader perspective of quality management system to give guidance for performance improvement in local organizations (Fonseca, 2014). Examining the key literature reveals the choice of service consistence improvement can be reflected in four primary themes, such as culture-based, design-based, variation-based, and failure-based improvement (Hartline *et al.*, 2000). Cultural-based improvement is improving service culture through a focus on individual and group psychology (Schneider, 1986). Design-based Improvement is derived a service concept, a strategy for delivering on the key points of this strategy is developed, and the strategy ultimately dictates the design of the service

delivery system. Further, variation-based improvement builds on the success of statistical process control (SPC) in manufacturing, as people attempted to apply SPC to services. Where meaningful numerical data can be obtained, the approach has shown its expected success. Krehbiel (1994) applied SPC, which track service quality issues to a service setting evaluating two process designs to determine which provides the more consistent service in terms of time spent in the system. Failure-based Improvement could be identified as a service quality improvement tool; a service guarantee is best seen as a means of generating reliable data about important service failures (La and Kandampully, 2004).

2.3 SERVICE CONSISTENCY OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has been recognized as one of the service sectors driven economies in the region. As per the statistics published in the Press Note of Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka in 2015, service sector has contributed to highest share of 56.3% to the Gross Domestic Product (Dissanayake and Ismail, 2012). Hence, drawing attention to service sector in Sri Lanka is very important. Among the other industries, FM has gaining recognition in managing the building facilities (Weerasiri, 2015). Further, FM service consistency is the main focused strategy for implementing ISO 41001 for FM service providing organizations in Sri Lanka. Thus, it is important to explore the current setting of service quality of FM service providers in order to introduce an effective service consistency guideline under the ISO 41001. Thus, this research investigates the existing service consistency related strategies, issues of FM and strategies to overcome the identified issues under four key headings: cultural- based, design-based, failure-based and variation-based improvements. The next section explains the research methodology adopted to ascertain the research outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was designed to achieve objectives mentioned at section 1. Literature review was conducted on the major areas of FM, service consistency, quality and related strategies. Case study method was adopted in qualitative phenomenon because the research problem requires an in-depth investigation. Under the case study method, three cases were studied by adopting the multiple cases study design. Three FM service providing organisations in Sri Lanka were selected as the suitable cases (refer Table 1). The unit of analysis of this research is FM service providing organisation. According to Dawson (2002), semi-structured interview is the most common type of interview used in qualitative researches. Thus, altogether twelve (12) semi-structured interviews were conducted among the FM service related professionals in the selected cases (see Table 1). Case study data were analysed by using the content analysis technique. Since this is a multiple case study research design, cross-case analysis was conducted to identify interrelationships and differences between each case.

Table 1: The profile of interviewees

Case	Description	Respondent	Designation	Years of Experience
Case A	Cleaning and janitorial services, landscaping services, building	A1	Facility Executive	10 years
		A2	General Manager	5 years
		A3	Facility Executive	7 years

Case	Description	Respondent	Designation	Years of Experience
	maintenance services, pest control services and hygiene management services	A4	Administrative Officer	8 years
Case B	Mechanical, electrical, plumbing, civil services and FM consultancy services	B1	Operation and Facilities Manager	6 years
		B2	Operation Executive	11 years
		B3	Managing Director	9 years
		B4	General Manager	6 years
Case C	Buying and selling property and property management	C1	Facilities Manager	4 years
		C2	General Manager	10 years
		C3	Facilities Manager	4 years
		C4	Mechanical Engineer	9 years

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

As this research aimed, the existing strategies and related issues of FM service providing organisations are presented relating to four (04) broader headings, such as culture-based, design-based, variation-based, and failure-based improvement. Moreover, the probable strategies were proposed to enhance the service consistency of FM in Sri Lanka.

4.1 CULTURE-BASED IMPROVEMENTS

4.1.1 Existing Strategies

As the existing strategies for enhancing service consistency, ‘continuing a customer-based service culture’ and ‘fulfilling client’s requirements correctly’ were identified. Facility Executive of case A stated that, “*there is a customer-based service culture and the organization always tries to satisfy the customers*”. As further verified by Operation Executive of case B, “*motivating the employees in the organization to take customer-centric approach to satisfy customers while performing their regular duties and activities*” was identified as another strategy. Facilities Manager of case C stated that, “*there is a strong customer focused service culture and the employees are focused on listening, serving and satisfying customer*”. Accordingly, continuing customer-based service culture’, having a direct communication with customers, complain handling, conducting awareness programs and conferences and fulfilling client’s requirements correctly are the key existing strategies to improve service consistency of FM service providing organizations.

4.1.2 Issues

Majority the respondents have specified that ‘the different working environments’ as a main issue under culture-based improvement. Further, ‘failure in customer relationships’ is another major issue for the enhancement of service consistency. This was confirmed by Administrative Officer of case A as “*failures in customer relationships can be happened and poor customer relationships will result in devastating outcomes including customer loss and company misdirection*”. Further, General Manager of case B emphasized that, “*need a proper management to handle customers considering their*

expectation". Mechanical Engineer of case C explained that, "*faults in managing customer relationships is the common issue for every service provider in the industry*". Accordingly, different working environment, different customer expectations, different behaviour of employees and failures in customer relationships are the key issues recognised.

4.1.3 Proposed Strategies

Majority of the respondents have agreed that 'educating employees' as a main strategy for cultural-based improvement. Administrative Officer of case A stated that, "*need to employ new personnel that fit to the service culture and training and education are vital to developing a superior service culture*". On the other hand, 'conducting the training and development programs' is identified as the second most relevant strategy for cultural-based improvement with the aim of making modifications to the service consistency of FM service. Operation and Facilities Manager of case B suggested that, "*training and development is the best method to resolve those issues*". Hence, educating the employees and conducting training and development programs are the key strategies proposed for improving the service consistency.

The summary of the cross-case analysis findings for cultural-based improvements is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: The summary of key findings for culture-based improvements

Culture-based Improvements		
Existing strategies	Issues	Proposed strategies
Continuing customer-based service culture	Different customer expectations	Conducting the training and development programs
Directing communication with customers	Different working environment	Educating the employees
Fulfilling client's requirements correctly	Different behaviour of employees	
Complain handling	Failures in customer relationships	
Conducting awareness programs and conferences		

4.2 DESIGN-BASED IMPROVEMENTS

4.2.1 Existing Strategies

'Expand team work activities', 'conduct training programs' and 'better supervision' are the existing strategies, which were mainly identified in design-based improvement. 'Better supervision' has been mentioned as a trigger for existing strategy by majority of the respondents. For instance, General Manager of case B stated that, "*awareness programs are conducted to identify customers' expectations and direct communication with the customers is very essential to build better customers relationship*". Hence, better supervision, understanding the service delivery objectives clearly, continuing team work activities, conducting workshops and conferences, providing customer focused service, managing employee behaviour and resources and conducting training programs are identified as the existing strategies.

4.2.2 Issues

Majority the respondents have highlighted that ‘employee turnover’ could highly affect the design-based improvement. Accordingly, this issue was highlighted by 5 out of the 12 respondents. Interviewee C1 supported to the fact by stating “*More absenteeism and high levels of turnover can happen due to low morale of the employees. These issues are costly for the company*”. ‘Different customer expectations’ and ‘employee faults’ were insisted by majority of the respondents. General Manager of case B stated that, “*poor planning causes delays in service delivery and different customers’ expectations and their expectations are higher than the service that the company is provided*”. Further, Mechanical Engineer of case C highlighted that, “*different customer expectations and need for fully understanding the expected service*”, as another issue in the existing practice. Accordingly, employee turnover, different customer expectations and employee faults are the key issues under this category.

4.2.3 Proposed Strategies

Majority of the respondents have proposed that ‘introducing a schedule to recruit new employees’ and ‘implementing quality framework for new recruitment system’ as the new suggestions. As they further stated, the company team should be actively involved in the new process to resolve new employee issues time to time. Facilities Manager of case C suggested that, “*proper planning to recruit employees to the company and motivate and encourage the employees by rewarding them*”. Conversely, ‘developing proper plans for service delivery’ and ‘enhancing communication skills’ were recognised as the other suggestions. Accordingly, ‘implementing and scheduling quality recruitment system’, ‘developing proper plans for service delivery’ and ‘enhancing communication skills’ are suggested as new strategies for enhancing service consistency. The summary of the cross-case analysis findings for design-based improvement is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: The summary of key findings for design-based improvements

Design-based Improvements		
Existing strategies	Issues	Proposed strategies
Understanding service delivery objectives clearly	Different customer expectations	Implementing and scheduling quality recruitment system
Continuing team work activities	Employee turnover	Developing proper plans for service delivery
Conducting training programs	Employee faults	Enhancing the quality of training
Conducting workshops and conferences		
Providing customer focused service		
Better supervision		
Managing employee behavior and resources		

4.3 VARIATION-BASED IMPROVEMENTS

4.3.1 Existing Strategies

From the case study findings, 'conducting training and development programs' was identified as one of strategies existed. Facilities Manager of case C mentioned that, *"leadership of the company must keep employees in alignment with the vision as individuals and as teams and training and development programs are the best therapy to change behaviour of the employees"*. 'Adopting experience of the professionals' is another strategy for variation-based improvement. General Manager of case C stated that, *"it is good to recognize the need for a service culture change. But the collaborators should not expect immediate results. It takes long period to generate results on current changes. The company might be able to move through the changed process few years later"*. Accordingly, 'conducting training and development programs', 'implement quality of the service delivery', 'conduct skill development programs' and 'adopt experience of the professionals' are the key suggestions for the improvement of service consistency.

4.3.2 Issues

From the case study findings, altogether eight related issues were identified in variation-based improvement. The main issue encountered by variation-based improvement is 'lack of experienced employees. Further, Facilities Manager of case C stated that, *"lack of understanding about customer satisfaction" as one of the issues"*. 'Need more time to train employees' and 'lack of strong relationship with clients' were other issues, which hinder the variation-based improvement. Further, Operation and Facilities Manager of case B stated that, *"trained employees can perform the activities well, but the problem is that the training and development programs take more time to train the employees. This issue directly affects consistency of FM services"*. Accordingly, 'lack of experienced employees', 'need more time to train employees' and 'lack of strong relationship with clients' are the key issues which affect for the improvement of service consistency.

4.3.3 Proposed Strategies

'Enhance communications skills' is identified as an important strategy for variation-based improvement. This was further confirmed by Interviewee A1, *"Encourage employees to enhance communication skills and share information with each employee can improve the experience of the employees"*. Further, 'share information with each employee' and 'educate the employees' are the second most suggested strategies for variation-based improvement. 'Educating the employee' was further confirmed by Managing Director of case B by stating *"appropriate training plans should be developed by the management and educate the employees by selecting the best training method"*. Accordingly, 'enhance communications skills', 'share information with each employee', 'improve decision making skills' and 'educate the employees' are the key suggested strategies for enhancement of service consistency.

The summary of the cross-case analysis findings for variation-based improvement is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: The summary of key findings for variation-based improvements

Variation-based Improvements		
Existing strategies	Issues	Proposed strategies
Conduct training and development programs	Lack of experienced employees	Enhance communication skills
Adopt experience of the professionals	Need more time to train employees	Share information with each employee
Implement quality of the service delivery	Lack of strong relationship with clients	Educate the employees
Conduct skill development programs		Improve decision making skills

4.4 FAILURE-BASED IMPROVEMENTS

4.4.1 Existing Strategies

‘Better customer interaction’ is one of existing strategies, which was identified in failure-based improvement. Facility Executive of case A stated that, “*the organization can change the service according to the customer requirements and better customer interaction can provide better communication*”. Further, ‘direct interaction with the customer’ and ‘providing customer focused service’ are another strategy for service consistency under failure-based improvement. Hence, better customer interaction, direct interaction with the customer, providing branded service to the customers, collecting customer feedbacks and ‘providing customer focused service are the existing strategies.

4.4.2 Issues

Among the issues identified under failure-based improvement, ‘communication errors’, ‘lack of awareness of customers’ and ‘lack of customer experience about FM services’ are the most specified issues by the respondents of all three cases. ‘Lack of awareness of customers’ was confirmed by Managing Director of case B by mentioning, “*sometimes the customers are not aware about the company policy and procedure and they are expecting more than from the service which company provides therefore it might be a challenge of satisfying all the expectations of the customer*”. Hence, ‘lack of awareness of customers’ is another major issue for the improvement of service consistency. Thus, ‘communication errors’, ‘lack of awareness of customers’, ‘lack of customer experience about FM service’ are the key issues for the improvement of service consistency.

4.4.3 Proposed Strategies

As per the case responses, various strategies were proposed. Facilities Manager of case C suggested that, “*creating customer focused mind-sets is the best solution to enhance the service consistency*”. These assertions confirm that ‘developing customer care strategy’ is the major suggested strategy for better improvement of service consistency. Further, ‘improving communication skills’ is another most important strategy for failure-based improvement.

The summary of the cross-case analysis findings for failure-based improvement is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5: The summary of key findings for failure-based improvement

Failure-based Improvements		
Existing strategies	Issues	Proposed strategies
Better customer interaction	Communication errors	Improving communication skills
Direct interaction with customers	Lack of awareness of customers	Developing customer care strategies
Providing branded service to the customers	Lack of customer experience about FM service	
Providing customer focused service		
Collecting customer feedbacks		

Accordingly, the key research question of “how service consistency could be enhanced, which is applied in FM service providing organizations in Sri Lanka?” was fulfilled.

Hence, ‘continuing customer-based service culture’ and ‘fulfilling client’s requirement correctly’ were the most common strategies used for cultural-based improvement and ‘continuing team work’ and ‘conducting training programs’ are the most common existing strategies which were related to design based improvement. Similar strategy was found by Scheidt and Chung (2018), the study identified customer interaction can be improved through training programmes and individual education. Further, State Government of Victoria (2017) stated that delivering customers’ promise as a key strategy for service consistency. Accordingly, ‘conducting training and development programs’ was the most common strategy for variation-based improvement and ‘better customer interaction’ was the most common strategy for failure-based improvement. Further, it has been realized that, there are minor differences in the strategies being performed by the FM service providers in Sri Lanka due to their lack of homogenous characteristics. Most common related issue for cultural-based improvement was identified as ‘different working environment’. ‘Employee turnover’ was the most common issue for design-based improvement of service consistency. Hence as the strategies, ‘educating the employees’ for cultural-based improvement and ‘implementing and ‘scheduling better recruitment system’ for design-based improvement, ‘enhancing communication skills’ for variation-based improvement and ‘developing customer care strategies’ for failure-based improvement were recognised and proposed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study presents the existing strategies, related issues and suggestions to overcome the issues, which were related to the improvement of service consistency of FM service providing organizations in Sri Lanka under four broader headings of cultural-based improvement, design-based improvement, variation-based improvement and failure-based improvement. Strategies to deal with each issue faced by FM service providers were also identified from the case studies findings. ‘Continuing customer-based service culture’ and ‘fulfilling client’s requirement correctly’ were the most common strategies used for cultural-based improvement and ‘continue team work’ and ‘conduct training programs’ are the most common existing strategies which were related to design based

improvement. ‘Conducting training and development programs’ was the most common strategy for variation-based improvement and ‘better customer interaction’ was the most common strategy for failure-based improvement. Further, it has been realised that, there are minor differences in the strategies being performed by the FM service providers in Sri Lanka due to their lack of homogenous characteristics. Most common related issue for cultural-based improvement was identified as ‘different working environment’. ‘Employee turnover’ was the most common issue for design-based improvement. Hence, the proposed strategies will create a major contribution by facilitating an approach for improving the service consistency in company processes. Further, this study increases the present level of importance associated with the effective management of FM. Indeed, FM industry practitioners could ensure their consistency in service delivery success via following the accurately identified service consistency practices.

6. REFERENCES

- Amaratunga, D. and Baldry, D., 2000. Assessment of facilities management performance in higher education properties. *Facilities*, 18(7/8), pp.293-301.
- Dawson, C., 2002. *Practical research method*. United Kingdom: How to Books Ltd.
- Dissanayake, D.M.R. and Ismail, N., 2015. Relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand attitude: With reference to financial services sector brands in Sri Lanka. In: *Proceedings of 6th International Conference on Business and Information (ICBH)*, pp. 472-487.
- Domingo, R., 2003. Consistency in service quality [online]. Available from: <http://www.rtdonline.com/BMA/CSM/9.html> [Accessed 01 June 2019].
- Fonseca, L., 2014. ISO 9001: 2015 Revision. In: *1st ICEQM-International Conference on Quality Engineering and Management*, Portugal: Guimaraes.
- Goyal, S. and Pitt, M., 2007. Determining the role of innovation management in facilities management. *Facilities*, 25(1/2), pp.48-60.
- Han, S.B., Chen, S.K. and Ebrahimpour, M., 2007. The impact of ISO 9000 on TQM and business performance. *The Journal of Business and Economic Studies*, 13(2), p.1.
- Hartline, M.D. and Ferrell, O.C., 1996. The management of customer-contact service employees: an empirical investigation. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(4), pp.52-70.
- Hui, E.C., Zhang, P.H. and Zheng, X., 2013. Facilities management service and customer satisfaction in shopping mall sector. *Facilities*, 31(5/6), pp.194-207.
- Kaya, S., Heywood, C.A., Arge, K., Brawn, G. and Alexander, K., 2005. Raising facilities management’s profile in organisations: developing a world-class framework. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 3(1), pp.65-82.
- Krehbiel, T., 1994. Quality Service and the Taguchi Philosophy. *Mid-American Journal of Business*, 9(1), pp.7-15.
- La, K.V. and Kandampully, J., 2004. Market oriented learning and customer value enhancement through service recovery management. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 14(5), pp.390-401.
- Natukunda, C.M., Pitt, M. and Nabil, A., 2013. Understanding the outsourcing of facilities management services in Uganda. *Journal of Corporate Real Estate*, 15(2), pp.150-158.
- Scheidt, S. and Chung, Q.B., 2018. Making a case for speech analytics to improve customer service quality: Vision, implementation, and evaluation. *International Journal of Information Management*, 45, pp.223-232.
- Schneider, B., 1986. *Creativity in Services Marketing: What’s New, What Works, and What’s Developing*. Chicago: American Marketing Association.
- State Government of Victoria, 2017. Keep customers with customer service excellence [online]. Business Victoria. Available from: <http://www.business.vic.gov.au/marketing-and-sales/increasing-sales-through-marketing/customer-service-excellence> [Accessed 15 May 2019].

- Watier, C., 2018. When stability goes hand-in-hand with profitability [online]. Available from: <https://www.lanla.com/en/publications/consistency-business-stability-goes-hand-hand-profitability/> [Accessed 15 February 2019].
- Weerasiri, R.A.S., 2015. A Study on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction of Supermarkets in Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Journal of Marketing*, 1(2), pp.36-46.
- Wong, A. and Sohal, A., 2003. Service quality and customer loyalty perspectives on two levels of retail relationships. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 17(5), pp.495-513.