

Towards a Sustainable Workplace: A case study of outsourcing firms in Malaysia

Muhammad, U. D.

Department of Building

Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Nigeria

Correspondence email: drudmuhammad@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper presents a framework for better facilities performance and services delivery excellence. This requires proactive transformation in outsourcing strategy in order to meet ever changing taste in customers. Promoting excellence and competitive edge require viable strategies and organization adaptability to move beyond the reactive management culture which is obtainable in most firms now. The functional perspective on performance varies greatly, understanding these differences give basis for alignment and improvement in the services delivery quality. This paper tends to address the often fragmented approach to performance issues with the aim to maximize services quality and returns. A total of 185 sets of Questionnaires were sent out to outsourcing services delivery firms in Malaysia and 54 responded. The approach uses analysis of variance and quality control tool to ascertain pattern and strategy performance in the firms. The results have shown that more than half of the sampled population opted for high performance delivery goal; however this vision was not supported adequately by coherent structure. This inflexibility in strategy by most firms gave rise to usurpation and sub optimality, which had failed to take facilities management profession beyond the reactive maintenance culture of the years back. Today savvy customers are looking for more value, reliability, quality services with cost certainty. The workplaces require strategic reforms in order to foster better facilities performance and value. This study introduced a paradigm using influence factors to ensure timeless outsourcing practice. This breach the gap in theory by integrating multiple facets of performance measures as tool which can facilitate effective and sustainable services delivery in a workplace.

Keywords: Facility Management, Strategy, Outsourcing, Performance, Flexibility, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The global depression and change in business arena had brought lot of opportunities and challenges as well. Firms faced high velocity conditions and this render strategies increasingly temporal (Yiannis *et al.*, 2012). Strategic flexibility is thus key and critical for enabling rapid adaptation to change. Customers want more value with services required to be delivered at shortest time possible. Current issues of economy downturn and poor services delivery had forced many corporation and establishment to outsource in order to meet up quality and competitive edge. However outsourcing deliveries by most firms are questionable, critical problems raised was that of competency and adaptability (Hui and Tsang, 2004; Yiannis *et al.*, 2012; Umbugala, 2016). Development in many fronts, require transformation in strategies, in order to meet flexibility in the taste of customers.

This paper addresses the often fragmented approach to strategic to meet performance sustainability and business excellence. The ability to develop novel solutions to perceived organization problems requires significant investment in the facilities resources ‘people, place, process’ that build organization capability. This indeed becomes vital and necessary to understand the profound importance of intellectual principle to offers sustain facilities performance. Outsourcing strategies requires a methodology that is proactive with consistent measure as benchmark to give basis for better and optimal services delivery (Friedman, 2006, Umbugala *et al.*, 2011).

Managing facilities performance to corporate objectives and its continual improvement remain a challenge. Building a culture of performance excellence requires provision of strategy and matrix that

will empower employees' to the many facets and outlets of creativity and innovations (Kumar & Sushi, 2013). This indeed will meet this era of choice and flexibility. Focusing on ecological future is only part of the story; Sustainability entails responsiveness and complimentary organization strategy that can meet change and uncertainty (Best *et al.*, 2003, Dubem *et al.*, 2014). It could be defined as improvement that meets the future without comprising the present dynamics. This entails providing a flexible working environment, a cause and effect relations to proactively response to issues, thereby magnifying the likelihood of success and business result. Facilities management as concept needs to be adopted in a holistic manner to realize fully the benefits and treasures in it. This study extends the theoretical debate on harmonizing strategy and operational performance measures of a workplace. Sustained quality delivery involves achieving balance and congruence between the practice suppleness and time to meet global change and competitive edge (Gottschalk, 2006; Tucker and Pitt, 2010). Savvy consumers are looking for proficiency; their perception of value is tied to quality, the degree of excellence in firm's services delivery. The emerging organizations to be successfully need effective and sustainable strategy that can give logical balance and basis for high performance and services delivery excellence. Facilities management profession had esteem on performance and thus should be judged on business outcomes that give focus on continual creation of value. Organisations that can translate strategy into measurement system have better potentials to meet ever changing taste in customers and enhanced business results (Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Amaratunga and Baldry, 2003; Tucker and Pitt, 2010; Simoes *et al.*, 2011; Umbugala, 2016).

Outsourcing services delivery

The last decade has placed more demands than ever upon the profession, more than ever the corporate and Facilities management world had focused on provision of added value at fair price (Jensen, 2010). The profession has its rationale on performance (Kwok and Warren, 2005; Umbugala, 2011) and this constitutes a serious challenge. Global changes exposed the new workplace to a variety of culture and practices (Bovee and Thill, 2006). Fundamentally these had affected the human resource trail in great dimension which brought the requirements for strategy change in firms. Performance and services reliability are source of competitive advantage, most firms lacks the continuity in approach leading to performance excellence. Malaysian government has experienced massive upsurge and had spent trillions in construction of its assets and infrastructures since 1976 to date, which are met by highhandedness, negligent and in-competency (NAFAM, 2007).

Research studies had attributed the decline in services delivery excellence to lack of adaption. This inexorable fact and reality of life obviously had changed the dynamics of many workplaces. There is worldwide trend towards outsourcing because it offers potential for value enhancement. However the focus on tactical issue and strategic planning is given inadequate consideration by most firms consequently under performance and obvious resource wastage is imminent (Ernst and Young, 2002; Best *et al.*, 2003; Umbugala, 2011). To meet the challenges of the 21st century, organisation strategies need to become more participatory and flexible. The increasing business competitiveness the past decades highlighted the relevance of performance measure (Yang *et al.*, 2010) and the need to integrate and coordinate resources to sustain competitive advantage (Simoes *et al.*, 2011; Myeda, 2015; Umbugala, 2016). Most research work had identified the lack of facilities integration and alignment in most firms as a major setback in performance excellence (Sezgin *et al.*, 2004, Kwok and Warren, 2005). The realization of an integrated approach necessitates a strategic planning framework that must integrate and align facilities to provide services delivery at the most quality and sustainable way.

Sustainable outsourcing services delivery requires viable strategies that focus towards a human capital; this consequently triggered the need for a shift in performance measurement and management (Ployhart *et al.*, 2006; Keith, 2007; Xianhai and Micheal, 2011). This indeed will bring flexible and sustainable workplace that will generate more dividends; this is further illustrated in figure 1 below.

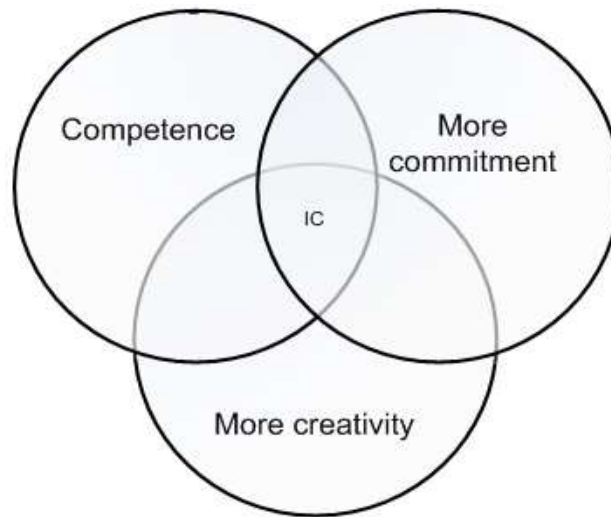


Figure 1: I. C. Principles, adapted from Baum *et al.* (2005)

Literature on performance is characterized by inconsistency and proliferation of metrics, with the transition to knowledge era the key critical factors in firms had shifted from efficient to the satisfactory metric as determinant of sustainability. The new workplace requires transformations that will yields measurable performance to meet uncertainty and change (Amaratunga and Baldry 2003; Myeda, 2011; Umbugala, 2016). Clear understandings of the changing work requirements, how individuals engage and respond to its forms and needs with the career trajectories suggest for greater strategy flexibility.

As the drive towards more business value heightens it is more evident to reflect on the intertwined relationship between business goals such as cost cutting to rising shareholder value. Transformational outsourcing is an emerging practice that requires proactively leaps over the traditional limited functions and strategies to yield more dividends. To achieve sustainable success requires relevant performance measure to communicate insights and value to all stakeholders. Fleming (2004), Tucker and Smith (2007), Tucker and Pitt (2010) suggested for shift to a more holistic approach in facilities performance assessment. Performance measurement as criteria provides a basis for an improvement initiative; however for a typical or maximum performance measure requires adequate understanding on the influencing factors. To this light reviews and benchmarked of performance research on factors that influence performance was carried out. A conceptual approach by Amaratunga *et al.*, (2002), Gilleard and Granath (2007) and Tucker and Smith (2007) were adopted.

This study used satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency as metric for performance measure with elaboration on its influence factors (figure 2). Importantly this priori research studies provide a robust compendium of findings which indeed give basis and benchmark to this research work. Most of the research study discussed some of these variables that influence performance but rarely the factors were considered integrated as elaborated in this paper. These factors have been reviewed from prior literatures. Nine theoretical performance sub-factors whose definitions are discussed in Table 1 are hereby summerised.

The caveat is that, while most past studies discussed the influence of some of these factors seldom were these collectively considered and structured to an integrated evaluation of such performance measurements. So, the issue here is how these factors should be interconnected to form proactive measures. In particular, there have been no prior studies that functionally specify these factors into a system of psychometric models. Although we believe that subjective evaluation of performance has to be made based on some qualitative grounds, by directing respondents to somewhat cardinal evaluation using Likert scale.

Table 1: The influence factors used.

Exogenous Variables	Definition	Measurement
Flexibility (FLEXBLTY)	Coherence and responsiveness in the facilities. Whether the facilities are passive or proactive to issues.	How effective is the strategy to the facilities ‘place, people and process’
Integration (INTEGRTN)	Strategy alignment of goals, which gives a firm’s approach in harmonizing, its goals and objectives.	How clear are the specific goal and major goal?
Sustainability (SUSTNABTY)	Strategy that meets short term expectations without compromising the future	Strategy in place to meet its Facilities development and training
Pattern of strategy (PATTERN)	Strategy approach adopted to realizing its business results.	Workflow or Impact of strategy on a goal and visa viz.
Participation (PARTCPN)	Mode and form of a firm conduct on a service delivery	Facilities or unit’s conduct on a specific delivery
Facilities performance (PERFMCE)	Strategy in place to ensure achievement of goal and vision by the facilities.	Quality of the service delivered
Activities operation (ACTVTS)	Strategy requirements to ensure specific project success	How result oriented are the units with respects to its goal
Commitment by the facility resources (CMMITMT)	Strategy in place to ensure passionate and more devotion by the facilities	Mode of delivery by the facilities Whether it is active, passive or proactive
Value by the facilities (VALUE)	Strategy in place to focus teams on delivering more results	Balance delivery with goal
Endogenous Variables:		
Satisfaction of the workplace (SATISFACTION)	The strategy flexibility, integration and sustainability in a workplace	A manifest measure of the healthiness in a firm
Effectiveness of the strategy (EFFECTIVENESS)	Provide specific practices to frame to ensure delivery of desire performance by the facilities.	Quality of the goal realized
Efficiency of the strategy (EFFICIENCY)	Deploying scheduled and accountable activities process	Return on investment for a facility goal

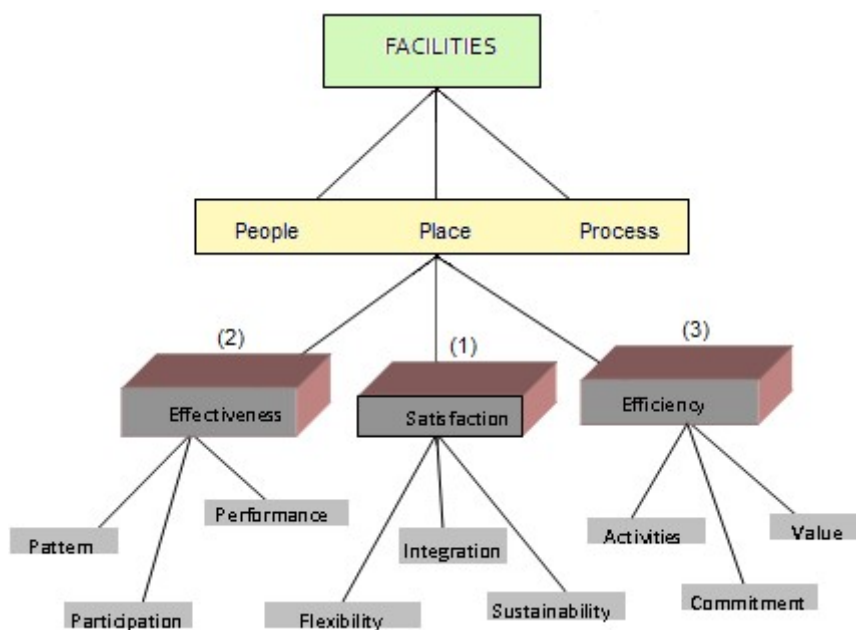


Figure 2: Workplace Performance excellence

With the global change satisfaction measure has great influence on effectiveness and efficiency of a workplace. Effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction metrics focus on related, yet contrasting

performance elements. To this effect this study had introduced nine influence factors identified from previous research as measures to modulate facilities performance. This gives leverage for achieving goals with ease, most especially where a link and balance is established between the three measures so that location and manipulation can be done easily on area of preference. This emergent paradigm has satisfaction measure with influence factors as ‘flexibility, integration and sustainability’. Satisfaction measure provides critical insight and control to a firm’s vision (Schermerhorn, 2007; Umbugala *et al.*, 2011) thus the denominator and ‘niche’ required for typical or maximal performance. Satisfaction metric is the latent measure of the strategic influence in a workplace, which explains resourcefulness or success of the approaches, methods and tools adopted to meet a project goal.

Efficiency measure has ‘Activities- Commitment-Value’ which provides a profile and basis for logical accountability, paving way to an obvious feedback on business objectives. This combination makes it easier to extrapolate resources and activities in terms of expenditures. It is potentially important to determine relation between facilities resources, activities and objective-costs. A kind of ‘cause-effect’ relationship designed, which is often neglected or rather giving less attention. This obviously enables consistent cross functional decision-making and budgeting which is important for continuous improvement and capacity management. Efficiency is inherent in the behavior of a particular activity and facilities combination, and might be measured without knowledge of goal though it influences facilities resource usage. While Effectiveness measure is with specific knowledge and analyses activities goals and output. This relates activities output to the goal and illustrates how well or bad a goal is achieved. The effectiveness metric with influences as ‘pattern-participation-performance’ is a mindset that evaluates tactically accomplishment on an on-going basis tracking value from the activities process to delivery. This creates opportunity for widespread participation thus providing effective link to desired performance. The three measures serve as metric and indicators for firms to manage and sustain performance objectives.

Research had shown that the more an employee participates, the greater the satisfaction and the more likely the performance goal are met (Werner and DeSimone, 2006; umbugala, 2011). Lack of participation had proven to be correlated to stress, job satisfaction, job related feeling of threat, and self-esteem. It has also shown that non participation is related to overall health, depression, dissatisfaction, low motivation to work. From cumulative learning through pattern recognition, an organization learns more about active participation which occurs at various degree of consciousness. Activities capacity must be matched constantly to process demand, too little of it results to bottle-necks and consequently non value added activities. Too much capacity result in high activities cost,

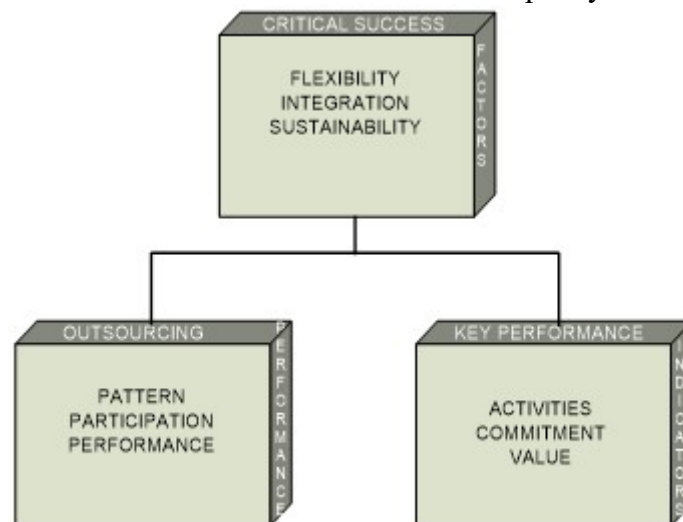


Figure 3: Timeless practice from Umbugala (2009).

which required constant evaluation to reduce potency for failure rather than magnifying risk. These are possibly pitfalls that can mess a new initiative which is seen contrary to espoused principles of participation (Gallos, 2006; Abdul Hamid *et al.*, 2015). Process variation must be understood and

constantly eliminated; this attracts constant evaluation to establish the basis for effective and optimal services delivery. The creation of balance ‘congruence’ between strategies, structure and culture poses a particular management challenge; however better capability and integration ease significant saving in diverse dimension (Gareis and Cleland, 2006; Umbugala, 2009). Further elaborations as digest summary is shown below:

The new millennium requires a paradigm shift in theory and practices that will have far reaching consequences and benefits than realized now. This research study as limitation applied these measures to the facilities, ‘place, people and process’ to ensure quality and excellence in outsourcing services delivery. The use of a structured methodology to analyses and prioritizes client requirements provides correlation and basis for services delivery excellence (Kelly *et al.*, 2005; Umbugala, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Many research efforts had in number of instances tackled the need for custom-made performance measure in specific situations. A conceptual approach by Amaratunga *et al.* (2002), Gilleard and Granath (2007) and Tucker and Smith (2008) were adopted. The research studies used satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency as metric for performance measure. Importantly this prior research studies provide a robust compendium of findings which indeed give basis and benchmark to this research work. Through review of literatures and firms survey in Malaysia the framework in figure 3 was deduced as factors that influence performance. These measures were used as benchmark against outsourcing firms using questionnaire. Viability of the firms’ strategy in contrast to a timeless outsourcing delivery was ascertained which give logical basis for output improvement and perfection. The survey was randomly sampled however greater of the distributions was done at Kuala Lumpur where there are more outsourcing delivery Firms. Performance measure of the firms was achieved using Likert scale 1-5 and elaborated below. The survey focused on project managers, unit’s leaders, activities and operations which give basis for continual and optimal performance and services delivery excellence.

Satisfaction of the workplace is theoretically influenced by the flexibility, integration, and sustainability of a company’s working environment. Effectiveness in achieving company’s mission is theoretically influenced by the pattern of company’s strategy, workers’ participation, and facilities performance. Lastly, company’s efficiency is theoretically influenced by activities operation, commitment by the facility resources and value by the facilities. The perception of the respondents on the degree of importance of each factor was arbitrarily scaled as follows: 1 = Not important; 2 = Quite important; 3 = Moderately important; 4 = Important; 5 = Very important. Further elaboration and definition of the factors are shown in table 2 below.

Performance by this study referred to the strategic approach used by the outsourcing firms in meeting their respective project goals. In view of the divergent outsourcing services delivery, the questionnaire has over 40 assessment questions that defined the nine factors. 185 sets of questionnaire were delivered by post and personal visits. 54 sets of questionnaire were returned and used in the analysis below. Tools such as basic statistic, analysis of variance and quality control tool as pareto chart were used in the analysis to bring to fore logically the most important factors influencing the performance of the firms sampled.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean value of about 3.7 on the Likert scale at (table 3) above had shown that flexibility, integration, and sustainability of a company were perceived to be “important” as seen by the respondents in achieving satisfaction of the workplace. Similarly, the pattern of company’s strategy and workers’ participation were both perceived to be “important” for effective attainment of a company’s mission; but facilities performance was perceived to be closer to “important” in achieving this mission. In general, respondents’ perception about the degree of importance of these factors was

consensual as indicated by the coefficient of variation which was only between 12-17% from the means. “Moderately important” as ‘contention’ was perceived to be influencing company’s efficiency, these are value by the facilities, activities operation, and commitment by the facility resources.

Table 3: Basic Statistics of the Sampled Firms

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Coeff. of Variation	N
Exogenous Variables				
Flexibility (FLEX)	3.7546	0.4671	12.4394	54
Integration (INTEGR)	3.7037	0.5910	15.9559	54
Sustainability (SUSTAIN)	3.7083	0.6619	17.8486	54
Pattern of strategy (PATTERN)	3.7546	0.5309	14.1392	54
Participation (PARTICP)	3.7593	0.5827	15.5002	54
Facilities Performance (PERFMCE)	3.8333	0.5537	14.4450	54
Activities operation (ACTIVTS)	3.4676	0.6624	19.1028	54
Commitment by the facility resources (COMMITM)	3.1528	0.6841	21.6975	54
Value by the facilities(VALUE)	3.6173	0.5277	14.5874	54
Endogenous Variables:				
Satisfaction of the workplace SATISFTN)	3.0139	0.7746	25.7016	54
Effectiveness of the strategy(EFFECTV)	2.3120	1.0097	43.6713	54
Efficiency of the strategy (EFFICNCY)	2.9306	0.6450	22.0105	54

Ironically, satisfaction of the workplace and efficiency of the strategy were perceived to be only “moderately important” in determining service delivery performance, by the respondent firms, although their influencing factors were perceived to be “important”. Coefficient of variation in respondents’ perception about satisfaction of the workplace was rather large at 25.7%. Even more baffling, effectiveness of company’s strategy was perceived to be only “quite important” in determining facilities service delivery performance with an even larger coefficient of variation at 43.7%. In general, all respondents have perceived satisfaction of workplace, effectiveness and efficiency of strategy to be only “quite important” to “moderately important” in determining facilities service delivery performance. This outcome has left us wondering: what make the respondents firms perceived these three endogenous factors to be less than “important” in determining such performance? Further studies with different research approaches are definitely required to answer this question¹.

Table 4: ANOVA of the influence factors shown in table 1

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between variables		97.032	53	1.831		
Within variables	Between Items	130.579	11	11.871	39.291	.000
	Residual	176.139	583	.302		
	Total	306.717	594	.516		
Total		403.750	647	.624		

Grand Mean = 3.4173

Table 4 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) carried out on the variables used (see Table 1). The result had shown a significant F-value at 39.3, statistically significant result from a one way ANOVA

¹ A probable answer...strategic and operational gaps noted among the firms studied, others even have no methods for measuring the performance of their employees which is vital for attaining excellence in services delivery.

entails rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0 : no differences between factor versus H_1 : there are differences). This result indicates the existence of significant variation in the perception about the degree of importance of the nine factors that were theoretically postulated to be influencing outsourcing services delivery performance (OSDP). Variation within a particular factor of OSDP was much larger than that between factors. This means, the firms do not basically agree on many issues with respect to a particular services delivery performance (SDP) factor. This had also relatively reflected different mission of the sampled firms with regards to dissimilar facilities services undertaking. Take for example, the flexibility factor. Different firms have different strategy approaches to respond to issues, strategic initiatives to ensure an effective or sustainable workplace, patterns of actions to ensure voluntary, active participation and commitment by its employees to realize the achievement of goals or added value.

Further exploration of the data obtained from the firms has revealed the strength, weakness and opportunities of the firms studied, these correlations give basis for performance improvement. Table 5 shows the strength in Malaysia outsourcing firms. The results had shown that 37% of the firms have skills and knowledge in their professional work, while 33% identified collaborated workplace and team working as their strength. Also 30% of the sample population has ‘flexible structure’ as their strength. This result had shown that over 70% of the population sampled lack flexible structure signifying that the employees are not adequately empowered to meet outsourcing focus.

Table 5: Strength of the firms

Factor	Frequency	%
knowledge/skills	20	37.03
flexibility	16	29.63
team working	18	33.33

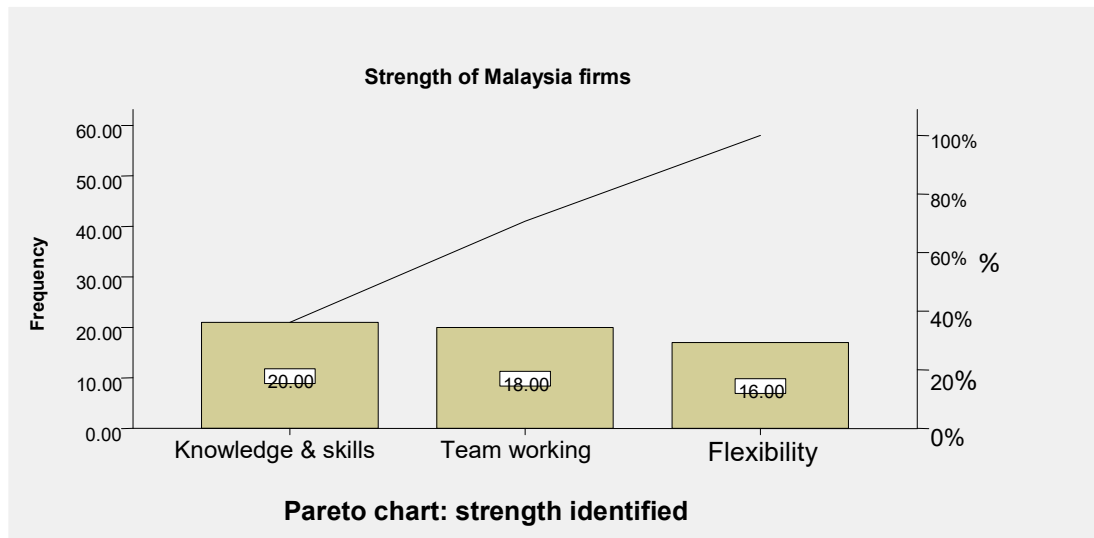


Figure 4 had shown that knowledge, skills and team working had formed 80% of the strength in Malaysian workplace. While flexibility gives 20%. Pareto chart as one of the seven basic analytical tools of TQM (Jayyousi, 2001), which enables managers to focus on the ‘critical few’, rather than the ‘trivial many’. The tool allows categorization of data by frequencies of occurrences which facilitate the representation in a picture form the percentage attributed to a cause (Oakland, 2003). This was applied to give a manifest of the factors that are critical to the firms’ performance excellence.

Table 6: Weakness of the firms

² factor	frequency	%
knowledge/development/training	22	34.38
skill/teamwork/benchmark	15	23.44
management support/flexibility	27	42.19

Table 6 had shown that 27 firms which formed (42%) of the sampled population lack flexibility and adequate management support. Also 22 firms, that is 34% of the population identified lack of ‘knowledge development and training’ as their weakness, while 15 firms as 26% of the total population covered identified lack of ‘skills, team working and viable benchmarking option’ as their weakness. This lack of facilities development which formed organization weakness entails that the firms might not give a sustainable workplace. The very essence of management is human sensitivity and collaboration by getting work executed in an appropriate way by people through adequate initiatives and communications. These are the essential elements to make an effective organization besides structured and resourceful facilities.

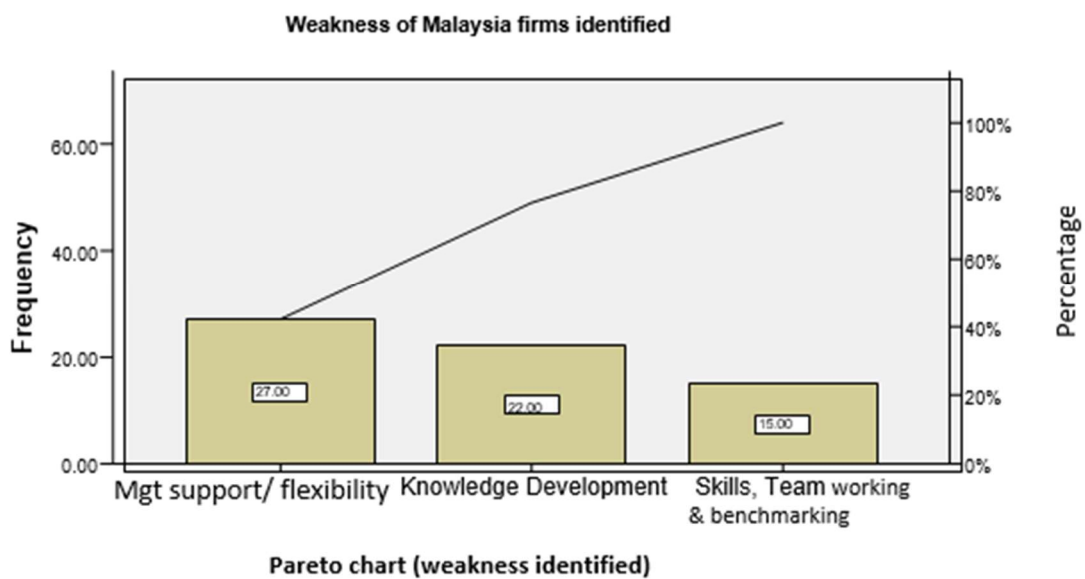


Figure 5 has shown that adequate management support, flexibility and knowledge development formed 80% of the causes attributed to poor quality services delivery in Malaysia firms. While skills, team working and lack of viable benchmarking option constituted the remaining 20%.

Table 7: Critical factors of firms

Factor	Frequency	%
Flexibility	18	33.96
Knowledge/skills/development	10	18.87
Viable strategy	25	47.17

Table 7 shows critical factors identified by the sampled population. The result had shown that 47% of the firms require strategic planning to ensure effective services delivery. Adaption in the strategy is necessary to give driving business success. While 34% of the firms need flexibility in their structure and operations, to give a culture grounded on strong values. It is extremely important to balance the desire to create more value oriented culture simultaneously with viable business process to give result-oriented workplace. And also 19% of the firms need knowledge and skill development to enable sustain quality services delivery. Well the reality is that focusing just on short term result will not in

² However this does not provide information as to how many of the mean values are dissimilar and also as to whether any specific pair of populations are likely to have different mean values which provide a gap for further study.

the long run, yield sustainable long term performance. A company that generates on one side of the equation generally will not give performance that can last long.

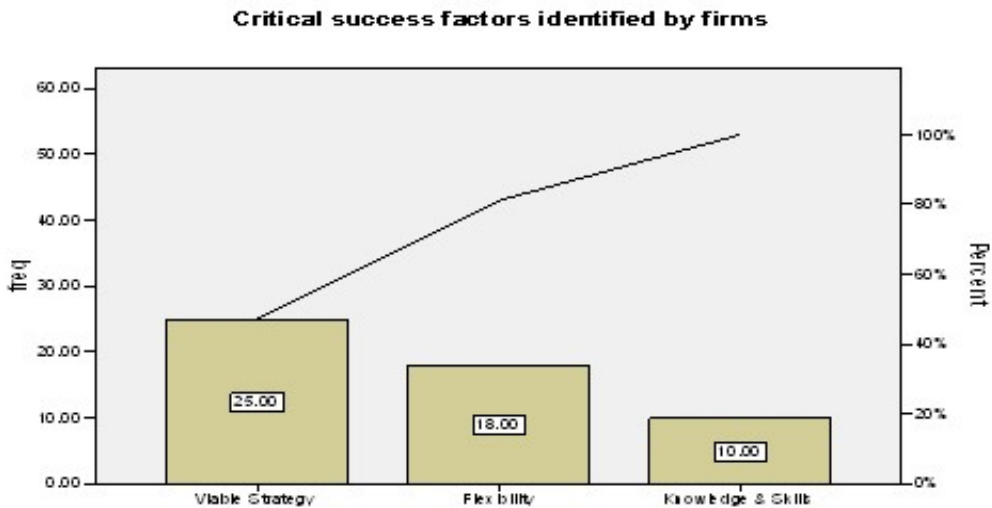


Figure 6: CSF identified by the firms.

Figure 6 above had shown that Viable Strategy and flexibility formed 80% of the factors required in improving employees’ performance. While the factors ‘knowledge and skills’ constitutes 20%. These factors are further elaborated below.

The analysis had shown that 59% of the sampled population opted for high performance, with 80% as their goal, however this vision was not supported adequately with coherent structure.



Figure 7: Fish bone diagram

Figure 7 shows fish bone diagram giving summary and manifest of the potentials in outsourcing services delivery firms. The diagram had shown that the factors “knowledge, skills and team working was identified as strength of the firms sampled. While lack of management support, flexible structure and facilities development identified as weaknesses. Also the diagram had shown that viable strategy and flexible structure was identified as factors required by the firms’ to meet global change and sustain quality services delivery. The cause and effect diagram had given the firms’ vision with elaboration on the factors affecting their strength, and weaknesses.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The unique set of factors outlined by the sampled population offered an indication of strategic gap realized by the study. This result had indicated that the firms surveyed lacked the capacity to support its mission and goals in a sustainable way. Today savvy consumers are looking for proficiency and excellence; their perception of value is tied to quality, the degree of excellence or superiority in a firm's services delivery. Building a culture of performance excellence requires strategy change that is proactive to guarantee desired value and business results. The emerging organizations to be successfully need strategy that is flexible, integrating and sustainable to pool facilities resources together as basis for high performance, excellence and added value. To this light the study recommends the framework in figure 3 to ensure sustain quality services delivery and outsourcing excellence in firms. Facilities management as a concept needs to be adopted in a holistic manner to realize fully the benefits and treasures in it.

Research implications

The study provides a methodology for improving facilities performance; this gives an alternative to the rising tides in performance research and contribution to building and facilities management profession. One is not denying the difficulty in design of such a system; however the fundamental reason is to raise awareness of its strategy application potential. Satisfaction metric is the latent measure of the strategy influence in a workplace, the framework in figure 3 is based on conceptual research study and potential limitations of the model are therefore based around its practical application. This era is moving into a conceptual age where competence will be achieved only by provision of strategy that seek to guarantee expectations of all. This study extends the theoretical debate on harmonizing strategy and operational performance measures of a workplace which is a valuable insight to facilities management profession and the research world.

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