

EXPLORING CHALLENGES AND DRIVERS OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT OUTSOURCING IN SRI LANKA

A.F. FAYASA¹, NAYANTHARA DE SILVA², MOHAN KUMARASWAMY³ & JOSEPH H.K. LAI⁴

^{1,2}Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, Moratuwa

³Department of Civil Engineering, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong/Department of Building Economics, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, Moratuwa

⁴Department of Building Services Engineering, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

¹aariffaya@gmail.com, ²nayanthara2053@gmail.com, ³endds@uom.lk, ⁴mohan@hku.hk

⁴joseph.lai@polyu.edu.hk

Abstract

There has been a growing trend of organisations adopting a sourcing strategy that increases their competitive advantages through improving the performance of their facilities management (FM) services. Facilities Management Outsourcing (FMO) is a management strategy whereby FM services are contracted to one or more external providers with the aim of improving organisational efficiency and effectiveness. However, this kind of contract procurement is yet to acquire its full potential in Sri Lanka and thus, it is vital to unfold its current status and make suggestions for enhancement. Therefore, a study was conducted to investigate the existing FMO challenges, drivers and the strategies to overcome those challenges in Sri Lanka. Initially, a literature review was made on FM services sourcing strategies, challenges and drivers of FMO. Then a qualitative approach was taken to carry out semi-structured interviews with six FM experts in the industry. The data captured was structured and analysed by using a manual content analysis method. Fourteen challenges and eleven drivers were revealed as significant to FMO. The results of this research, which contribute to the understanding on FMO, serve as a cornerstone upon which further studies can be pursued in the context of FM in Sri Lanka and countries in a similar state of FM development.

Keywords: *Challenges; Drivers; Facilities Management; Outsourcing; Sri Lanka*

1. Fundamentals and Trends in Facilities Management

Facilities management (FM) is the process where an organisation provides and maintains support services in a quality environment to meet strategic needs (Parn, Edwards and Sing, 2017). As an integrated approach to maintaining, modifying and upgrading the building facilities, FM creates an environment which supports achieving the primary objectives of an organisation (Barrett and Baldry, 2003). As IFMA (2016) defined, FM is a profession encompassing multiple disciplines to ensure proper functionality, safety, comfort and efficiency of the built environment by integrating people, place, process and technology.

With the rapid advancement in technology development, FM practice has witnessed increased levels of sophistication in its day-to-day operations (Adama and Michell, 2018). This is also driven by the increased competition in modern economies (Islam, Nazifa and Mohamed, 2013) that demand work spaces which are conducive to higher productivity. FM covers a wide spectrum of activities, including operation and maintenance of engineering services, security, health and safety, housekeeping, pest control, car parking and space planning in a built environment (Kurdi, et al., 2011; Drion, Melissen and Wood, 2012; Perera, et al., 2015). Traditionally, most of these activities are performed by in-house staff. However, with the increases in building stock with sophisticated facilities, the reliance on in-house FM has been changing to an “outsourcing method” (Yik and Lai, 2005; Wiggins, 2010; Sridarran and Fernando, 2016). Moreover, Facilities Management Outsourcing (FMO) has become a modern global trend (Willcocks, 2010).

2. Facilities Management Outsourcing

The term Facilities Management Outsourcing (FMO) can be defined as ‘contracting out the FM services to an external provider through a formal contract over a given period’ (Atkin and Brooks, 2009; Adegoke and Adegoke, 2013). It is one of the most widespread business strategies to address organisational needs efficiently, both in public and private sectors (Jiang, Frazier and Prater, 2006; Kurdi et al., 2011).

The trend towards FMO has increased with the rapid changes in the competitive business environment that forced organisations to focus on their core business activities (Willcocks, 2010; Sridarran and Fernando, 2016). The increased demand for the outsourcing of services has largely contributed to the growth of the profession (Cathy, Michael and Amir, 2013). As Ahamed, Perera, and Illankoon (2013) revealed, FM services outsourcing is an increasingly used method for achieving increased efficiency in performance and improvements in cost effectiveness.

2.1. TYPES OF OUTSOURCING STRATEGIES IN FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Rapidly rising needs for FM combined with the increasing interest of adopting outsourcing emphasise the imperative for organisations to make right decisions on selecting proper strategies for sourcing services (Ancarani and Capaldo, 2005). Based on the nature of services and the terms of contract, three types of outsourcing strategies are commonly used; Managing Agent, Managing Contractor and Total FM (TFM) (Atkin and Brooks, 2009). The selection of a suitable outsourcing strategy depends on cost consideration, risk transfer and flexibility (Ikediashi, 2014). The following Table 1 shows the summarised facts of outsourcing strategies in FM from the existing literature (Atkin, 2003; Atkin and Brooks, 2009; De Silva., 2018; De Toni et al., 2012; Hamzah et al., 2010; Ikediashi and Aigbavboa, 2019; Sridarran and Fernando 2016).

Table 1: Comparison between outsourcing strategies in FM

	Managing Agent	Managing Contractor	TFM
Definition	A specialist (individual or corporate entity) assigned to arrange and procure or provide FM services and act on behalf of the client in arranging the services.	An external party appointed by the client to manage all the service providers of the organisation.	A sourcing method where all FM services and their management are provided by an organisation that specializes in this field and offers a single point solution to the client.
Roles and responsibilities	Act as a direct representative (agent) of the client organisation.	Select, manage and coordinate individual service providers/sub-contractors.	Totally responsible for delivery, monitoring, control and managing the outsourced services.
Contractual relationship	No direct contractual relationship between managing agent and the individual service providers.	All the individual service providers maintain contractual relationships with the managing contractor.	Client signs FM contract with an outsourcing company.
Control of FM services	Client and vendor have control over the activities to be performed by themselves and client can predefine the requirements of services to be provided by the vendor.	Certain level of control remains with client through managing contractor who has direct control	Client has no direct control of outsourced services, so must specify requirements in advance.

2.2 CHALLENGES OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT OUTSOURCING

Although the transition to FMO leads to a variety of benefits to the organisation, the challenges in FMO may lead to undesirable consequences in the expected performance of FM services. According to Ikediashi, et al. (2012), the identification of the challenges in FMO is crucial, since these can impact on the success or failure of an outsourcing relationship between client and vendor. In one of their past studies, Ikediashi, Ogunlana and Udo (2013) revealed that minimal vendor accountability for service performance, improper invoicing and billing practices, lack of knowledge (resulting from high turnover, including discontinuations of serving staff), higher management overhead, critical service failures, underperformance of service providers and 'cultural rejection' due to 'cultural conflicts' between the interacting teams, were significant practical problems in FMO.

In a survey conducted by Ikediashi, et al. (2012), poor quality of services, security issues and inexperienced client were found to be the three highest challenges in FMO. Furthermore, absence of a standard form of contract, poor understanding of contract formation and contracts, lack of benchmarks for quality, inadequate definition of scope of services, unclear roles, responsibilities and targets, shortfalls in procedures for awarding contracts and unfavourable contract terms were highlighted as critical contractual issues in outsourcing (Lai, et al., 2004; Lai, et al., 2006; Ikediashi, et al., 2012; Ikediashi and Ogunlana, 2015).

Atkin and Brooks (2009) established a set of risks associated with outsourcing faced by the FM industry, such as imprecise roles and responsibilities, poor relationship between client and contractor, loss of control in FM services, conflicts of interest when sharing works with the in-house team, lack of standard FM contracts, poor scope and schedule of services and poor quality and cost benchmarks for measuring performance. In addition, use of different methods to perform standard activities, poor control of service delivery which leads to interruption of services, absence of adherence to proper guidelines and delays in delivery were highlighted as risks associated with FMO (Ahmed, at al., 2013; Perera, et al., 2015).

2.3 DRIVERS OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT OUTSOURCING

A number of studies have identified various drivers (Cigolini, Miragliotta and Pero, 2011; Parn, et al., 2017) that are conducive to the practice of FMO in the organisations. For example, Kurdi, et al. (2011) developed an outsourcing decision framework where cost saving is highlighted as an important driver to make outsourcing decisions. A study by Ahamed, et al. (2013) concurred that good practices in FMO enabled an organisation to achieve better efficiency and cost-effectiveness of delivered services, and reduced cost through specialisation and flexibility.

According to Ikediashi, et al. (2014), the key determinants of FMO are cost transparency, quality of service delivery, increased efficiency in supporting services and time saving. Higher quality of service, increased access to new technologies and expertise, paying more attention to the core function of the organisation (Cigolini, et al., 2011), cost savings, risk transfer, single point responsibility, strategic positioning and reduced managements' burden on non-core functions of the organisation, were also identified as drivers of outsourcing (Natukunda, Pitt and Nabil, 2013; Ikediashi and Aigbavboa, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

Research design is a plan which should identify particular tasks to be conducted by whom, when and how, in order to complete the research process (Polonsky and Walker, 2011). The current study commenced with a literature review on FMO, including an overview of the trend of FMO, types of FMO, and challenges and drivers of FMO. According to the literature review findings, no prior studies have been conducted to reveal specifically the challenges and drivers of FMO in Sri Lanka. To address this knowledge gap, the following research questions were formulated for the current study:

- What are the challenges of FMO in Sri Lanka?
- What are the strategies to overcome the challenges of FMO in Sri Lanka?
- What are the drivers of FMO in Sri Lanka?

According to Creswell (2014), research plans and procedures are developed from research approaches which translate comprehensive assumptions to processes that provide the detailed data collection and data analysis methods. Basically, research approaches are classified into three methods viz., qualitative approach, quantitative approach and mixed approach, where the qualitative approach was chosen to better achieve the aim of this research study based on its characteristics and benefits and available data, compared to the other methods. Considering the nature and depth of issues to be

explored, semi-structured interview was selected as the method for data collection. Accordingly, given the time and resource constraints, six substantive experts were selected from the industry. Their profile is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Profile of the Interviewees'

Respondents' code	Designation	Nature of business	Years of experience
R1	Manager System Complaints	Health Care	13 years
R2	Head of FM	Commercial	10 years +
R3	Head of FM	Financing	6 years +
R4	Senior Engineer Facilities	Commercial	6 years +
R5	Facilities Engineer	Commercial & Industrial	10 years
R6	Manager Facilities	Telecommunication	25 years

Manual content analysis was used in this study to analyse the data collected through the expert interviews.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 CHALLENGES OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT OUTSOURCING

Based on the literature survey, eighteen challenges were identified. Each of these was thoroughly discussed with the expert interviewees as to whether the respective challenge applies in the context of FMO in Sri Lanka. The responses to this part, as summarised in Table 3, shows that fourteen challenges were recognised as significant to FMO in Sri Lanka.

Table 3: Responses on challenges of FMO

No	Challenges	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	Count
Factors identified from literature								
1	Lack of knowledge	√	√		√	√		4/6
2	Poor coordination between client and vendors	√		√	√		√	4/6
3	Higher management overhead	√	√		√	√	√	5/6
4	Cultural change	√	√	√	√	√	√	6/6
5	Vendor underperformance	√	√		√		√	4/6
6	Poor quality and benchmarks for measuring performance	√			√		√	3/6
7	Security issues						√	1/6
8	Critical service failures				√		√	2/6
9	Loss of control in FM services	√	√		√	√	√	5/6
10	Conflicts of interest	√		√	√	√	√	5/6
11	Poor understanding of contract formation and contracts							
12	Poor scope and schedule of services							
13	Lack of procedure for awarding contracts							
14	Unfavourable contract terms							
15	Improper invoicing and billing practices							
16	Unclear responsibilities and targets							
17	Absence of standard form of contract							
18	Inexperienced client							
Newly added factors								
19	Flexibility		√	√				2/6
20	Inexperience and lack of required skills					√	√	2/6
21	Integrity issues		√				√	2/6
22	Difficulty in finding the correct vendor	√	√	√			√	4/6

All the respondents agreed that it is crucial to have a strong concern and an understanding of the challenges that influence the performance of outsourced services in an organisation. Fourteen challenges (Nos. 1-10 and 19-22) were explored and the experts further emphasised that these challenges are interrelated.

‘Cultural change’ was identified as one of the significant challenges of FMO, where the practice of outsourcing influenced a wide scope of changes such as functional changes, hierarchical changes and changes in workers’ behaviour and attitudes. In addition, a few other challenges are: ‘higher management overhead’, where the organisation has to provide additional training and awareness programmes to familiarise the outsourced vendor with the internal environment; and ‘negative behaviours and attitudes of workers’, where the in-house and outsourced teams work together. Based on the respondents’ opinions, another significant issue in FMO is conflicts of interest when works are shared between the in-house and outsourced teams.

On the other hand, four of the six respondents agreed that ‘poor coordination between client and vendor’ can be an issue of outsourcing in case the organisation selected inappropriate vendors to perform the FM services. Furthermore, they revealed that although the demand for outsourcing is rapidly increasing, client organisations are still struggling with the selection of appropriate vendors for the needed services, as the presence of inexperienced and unskilled vendors in the market often leads to the inadequate performance of such vendors in delivering FM services and failures in critical services. These challenges were in line with the literature findings.

Contractual issues (Nos. 11-17 in Table 3) were addressed as significant challenges in the literature (Lai, et al., 2004; Lai, et al., 2006; Ikediashi, et al., 2012; Ikediashi and Ogunlana, 2015). Contrary to the literature review findings, the respondents clearly did not agree with factors 11-18 (in Table 3) as challenges in the Sri Lankan context, because they typically have well-structured contract agreements that are prepared by considering the requirements of both parties involved (client and vendor). This in practice assists in minimising the contractual problems in outsourcing. Furthermore, they confirmed that an improper contract will lead to critical issues in the performance of the outsourced services. Additionally, R2 stressed that using a proper contract document is essential in outsourcing since some do face difficulties in awarding and monitoring contract performance, when informal contracts are used. Besides, all the respondents agreed that, in this modern world, most of the clients are aware of FMO and are competent enough to manage it effectively. Therefore, the 18th challenge ‘in-experienced client’ (in Table 3), which was identified from literature, could not be considered as a critical challenge in the current Sri Lankan context.

In addition to the literature findings, four new challenges (Nos. 19-22 in Table 3) were added to the list as per the opinions of respondents. In particular, ‘flexibility’ plays a dual role as challenge and driver of FMO where it was only identified as a driver in the literature. R2 highlighted that ‘lack of flexibility’ is an issue if the FM services are partially performed by the vendor and there is a high influence of the client. As per the responses of R2 and R6, ‘integrity issues’ is also added as a challenge, as they disclosed that workers from outside often focus on their own businesses and profitability rather than the interest of the client.

According to the results of the interviews, the following strategies are suggested to overcome the challenges in FMO which presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Strategies to overcome the challenges in FMO

Strategies	Description
Appoint a specific management team	It is necessary to have a specific team of experts to select and coordinate the suitable vendors and to assess and maintain the performance of selected vendors.
Follow a proper contract management system	It is crucial to use a proper contract to direct both client and vendor. This helps to prevent the conflicts between parties involved.

Conduct awareness programs for the in-house staff	Client organisation has to conduct awareness programs to educate their in-house staff on outsourcing strategies and their roles and responsibilities.
Develop a proper performance measurement system	Client organisation should develop a performance measurement system which includes a set of suitable key performance indicators, frequencies of measurements and continuous improvements in the performance of outsourced services.

These strategies can be used to minimise the challenges in FMO as well as to improve the practice and performance of FMO.

4.2 DRIVERS OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT OUTSOURCING

Results showed that factors which triggered FMO varied from organisation to organisation, depending on the nature of the business concerned. It was found that for the FMO drivers under investigation, the opinions of the interviewed experts largely align with the literature review findings. The analysed drivers were organised based on the responses of experts (Table 5).

Table 5: Responses on drivers of FMO

Drivers	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	Count
Cost savings	√	√	√	√	√	√	6/6
Focus on core business	√	√	√	√	√	√	6/6
Expertise involvement	√	√	√	√	√	√	6/6
Risk transfer	√	√			√	√	4/6
Access to services and emerging technologies	√	√			√	√	4/6
Improve quality of services		√	√	√	√		4/6
Time-savings	√			√	√		3/6
Flexibility				√	√	√	3/6
Improve user satisfaction		√			√		2/6
Avoid major investments				√		√	2/6
Improve strategic positioning					√		1/6

In line with the literature findings, all the respondents agreed that the organisations are moving to outsourcing, in order to achieve cost savings, expertise-based higher quality and so as to focus on their core business function. R2 and R4 considered that cost savings remain as the key driver for the development of outsourcing, as the client can avoid the cost of internal staffing (e.g. welfare cost, allowances and bonus) and the uncertain material costs of work by adopting FMO.

Four out of the six respondents agreed that ‘risk transfer’ is a significant driver, as the client can share the risks and responsibilities related to outsourced services fully (TFM) or partially with the vendor (managing agent or managing contractor). According to R1, R4 and R5, outsourcing leads to improved responsiveness and delivery of quality services by specialist vendors in the field.

In the opinion of R5, ‘improve strategic positioning’ can be a driver when the organisation adopts a proper contract with clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of the vendors and the in-house staff. R4 and R6 indicated that, when the business is growing, the temptation is to expand the facilities, staff and new businesses through outsourcing, which can avoid substantial investment in support services.

5. Conclusions

Outsourcing is a growing trend in sourcing FM services in Sri Lanka as in many other countries. In making an outsourcing decision, it is fundamental to consider challenges and drivers of FMO in achieving the best performance of FM services. This paper provided insight into both positive and negative factors influencing FMO along with some suggested strategies to overcome the identified

issues in Sri Lanka. Through the interviews with six FM experts, fourteen challenges and eleven drivers were found to be influential in the practice of FMO in Sri Lanka. Among them, cultural change, higher management overhead, conflicts of interests and poor coordination between client and vendors are significant challenges of FMO, whereas cost savings, focus on core business, expert involvement and risk transfer are the major drivers of FMO (refer Tables 3 and 5). In addition, flexibility, inexperience and lack of required skills, integrity issues and difficulty in finding the correct vendors were newly added in the list. Further, the contractual issues highlighted in the literature (refer Nos. 11-18 in Table 3) were not agreed as challenges by the respondents. Besides, this paper presented different types of basic strategies in FMO such as Managing Agent, Managing Contractor and TFM, the pros and cons of which could be assessed in selecting the optimal strategy for an organisation based on the nature of services and the terms included in contracts. This study could help to understand FMO, possible FMO strategies and influential factors affecting FMO, thus helping to make effective decisions in FMO.

6. References

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