

The Impact of Collection and Dissemination of Information towards Public Complaint on Municipal Services

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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) has introduced the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to enhance the delivery of public services to customers due to 50 per cent of complaints received were on the failure or delays in attending or responding to the needs of customers. By using quantitative method, this study attempts to examine the extent of collection and dissemination of information towards public complaints on municipal services. The finding shows the strong association between customer satisfaction and social characteristics of feedback towards complaint and information channel in Majlis Perbandaran Sungai Petani, Kedah (MPSPK). Based on the findings, in order to make customer satisfaction increase on municipal services, future strategies need to be done by focussing on the way of collection and dissemination of information among households.

Keywords: Information, Complaint, Knowledge, Customer Satisfaction, Municipal Services.

I INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, there has been growing media attention on cases of public sector customer grievances, especially at the local government level. The response has been pushed to improve the quality of public service delivery. The Public Complaints Bureau under the Prime Minister's Department revealed that around about 17% of total complaints on civil service are on local governments. Much has been written about how IT could be and has been used to enhance service quality (Ali & Green, 2007; Zhu et al., 2002). Jabatan Kerajaan Tempatan (JKT) is department under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) and the main function is to guide and facilitate the Local Authorities (Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan-PBT) with planning and implementation of socio-economic development programmes and municipal services. The drivers for this research have arisen in response to a numbers of perceived weaknesses in service delivery identified in various sources. Many municipalities including Majlis Perbandaran Sungai Petani kedah (MPSPK), however, are unable to deliver services to residents especially in sanitation, cleanliness, drainage and culverts matters (MPSPK, 2010).

The Complaint statistic produced by Public Relation Officer (PRO) in 2010 shows the total of public

complaints of e-aduan, Unit Gerak Cepat and Biro Pengaduan Awam in 2007 until 2011. The data shows until August 2011, e-aduan is the highest channel used by the customers in lodging their complaints. This time series from 2007 until August 2011 concluded that the most favourable channel in giving information and complaints is e-aduan.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

The customer of local government services maybe an individual, local community interest group, one or more elected members of government department or ministry, internal staff, but enlarge the customer in any member of the public (Brysland & Curry, 2001). There are many sources of literature that identify how to achieve the customer satisfaction. This concept intends to summarize the key relevant literature in order to conceptualize the research into how MPSPK can improve its customer satisfaction through appropriate performance measurement tool (Crew, 1992).

The power of customer satisfaction in organizations has been proven by its nature as service needs to be listened. Someone who uses local services refuse to pay them directly, so they have less chance to signal their preferences. In particular, citizens can end up with the services that someone else thinks they ought to have rather than those they really want themselves. The concept of the internal customers in services has evolved, originally through the idea of selling jobs in the service sector and making the job attractive for the employees (Reynoso and Moores, 1990). This idea is followed in wider terms as internal marketing by authors such as Berry (1981), Gronroos (1990) and Gummesson (1990). They have suggested that if the management staff wants the employees to deliver an outstanding level of service to customers, then they must be prepared to do a great job with their employees. According to Schneider & Bowen (1985) consultation and community development are seemed to be the essential part of service delivery and performance measurement in local authorities. According to Unwin (1975), there is a bewildering range of indicators that had been proposed in past studies to measure satisfaction in municipal services; however this study specifically interested in the following aspects of feedback toward complaints and

information channels. A research shows that 35% of complaints (across all sectors) are met with a response of 'seemed uninterested' (Kamarudin et al., 2012). However, where complaints are met with a positive and helpful attitude, customer satisfaction with the handling of the complaint is significantly higher. This suggests that an employee's response when a complaint is first raised is crucial in setting the tone for the way the customer views the whole experience. For example, where customers felt an employee 'listened carefully and wanted to fully understand the problem' they gave a satisfaction score of 4.4 points (on a scale of 1 – 10) – higher than customers who felt the employee 'seemed uninterested'.

There are a number of key steps organisations can take to improve customers' experience of reporting complaints or problems. These include providing a choice of methods to make a complaint; undertaking root cause analysis of what's causing common complaints, agreeing a timescale for resolution, and following up with customers after the issue has been resolved. Some 20% of the Institute's membership is made up of public sector organisations. All are members because they believe in the importance of having a customer service strategy and are committed to developing and improving the experience they give to customers (Kamarudin et al., 2012).

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is quantitative though distributed of questionnaires to selected Zone (C, G and H) in Sungai Petani, Kedah. The instruments used in this study are households and employed stratified random sampling. Sample sizes of approximately 319 respondents of households are taken 0.4 % of population from each zone (Sekaran, 2003). The survey is done in Four months from April to July 2012 with the help of 4 enumerators and this study included 3 administrative zones of the MPSPK under Ten Zones for Area Officers' (AO) supervision such are Zone C, Zone G and Zone H. The selection of these zones is based on the variations of the housing and neighbourhood characteristics of their area. Zone C consists of 25 neighbourhoods and 6 villages. This zone was developed due to rapid development of industrial and business community lead to tremendous growth of neighbourhoods since 1990's (MPSPK, 2011). Many projects are developing at this zone which causes some problems. Some complaints are lodged among the residents due to unsatisfied of waste management, cleanliness, drainage and culverts affairs in some neighbourhoods such as Bandar Puteri Jaya and Kampung Pengkalan Lebai Man. The next zone is Zone G which is comprised of 15 neighbourhoods and 5 villages to be supervised by an AO consisting of the Head of Departments and councillors in respective area. This zone is divided into 2 main areas which are

Sungai Lalang in urban area while Bukit Selambau in rural area due to rubber estates and traditional villages. As suburban area, there are many commercial spots in Sungai Lalang. Most of the houses that can be spotted in Sg Lalang are the row of terrace houses and some medium to high-cost bungalows as well. The last zone chosen for this study is Zone H, comprises of 19 neighbourhoods and 8 villages to be in charged by an AO. This zone chosen due to its area is formerly known as tourism area such as Lembah Bujang, Semeling, Merbok and Tanjung Dawai and the result can be traced on what the community in this area perceived satisfaction on municipal services in different level or otherwise.

IV FINDINGS

A. Households Information profile

The sample of the study comprises of 310 respondents of households which male were the highest respondents with 156 (50.3%) followed by female with 154 (49.7%) and Malay ethnicity comprises the majority of respondents with 99 or 32 percent followed by Chinese 94 (30.3%), Indian 75(24.2%) and Siamese 42(13.5%). Respondents' ages are ranged from 40 to 49 years, with a mean of 2.965 (S.D =1.08). Majority of the respondents were never had any formal education (38.1%) followed by primary education (26.1%), post graduate (14.2%) and only 0.3 percent of the respondents are the STPM holders. 44.5% respondents in the sample are reported to work as general office administrator (44.5%), followed by professional, top management & administration (43.9%) and only 11.3 percent working as semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker.

In terms of category of house, majority of the respondents are from the "moderate" category (59.7%), followed by "Elite" category (29.7%) and only 1.6 percent respondents from "Low cost" category. Most of respondents came from Zone C (40%), followed by Zone G (35.8%) and 24.2 percent from Zone H. The respondents are reported to be in the private limited firm sector (44.5%), followed by governments sector (43.9%) and only 0.3 percent respondents working in multinational company. Most of respondents are married and followed by single (49.4%) and most of them are stayed 2 – 5 years (44.2%), followed less than a year (43.9%) and only 0.6 percent respondents in this study are stayed 6-15 years. 67.4 % respondents in the sample are reported having owned house and only 32.3 percent rented the house. The respondents are living in double terrace type which represents 33.5%, followed by single terrace (30.3) and only 21.6 percent living in bungalow type. This indicates that most of respondents are the middle income society.

B. Major complaints towards households

The study indicates that majority of household and business communities lodged complaints on cleanliness (mean=2) and drainage and culverts (mean=3). This finding shows that the cleanliness, drainage and culvert are the major problems facing by MPSPK. However, data does not reflect the earlier given which waste management is the major problems as described in e-complaint on the municipal website. As discussed in problems, the waste issues are the major complaints lodged by residents and have proven to be the core problem in daily operations of MPSPK. The different of result refers to different zones selected in Sungai Petani while the data from MPSPK was derived from 10 zones in Sungai Petani and this study only selected three zones. On the other hand, the weak management in handling cleanliness, drainage and culverts which lead to flash flood in selected zones derives to the highest complaint compared to waste management problems.

C. Complaint Response

Local government is frequently the first point of contact for the public in accessing public services. It is critical that local authorities deal with customers in accordance with the principles of courtesy, fairness, openness and transparency. In such an environment as found by Kloot and Martin (2000), customers should have the opportunity to say when service standards are not being met or when they have not been treated with courtesy and fairness. A responsive culture, which quickly resolves difficulties, can lead to a better way of conducting business with the public and also assist local authorities in improving the services they offer. Most local authorities have already taken the initiative to establish internal procedures for responding to concerns expressed by local citizens about service delivery, including in many cases of appropriate appeals mechanisms (Kamarudin et al., 2012).

From this study, it seems that the responses received after lodged complaints have a strong relation with customer satisfaction. Households felt satisfied with the statement of "Time taken to response is less than 30 minutes" while business respondents took "30 minutes to 1 hour" in dealing with the local authority as their major. The households also satisfied with the statement of "Feedback" with mean=2.155 and business communities with mean=2 shows the complaint received and in progress. In addition, the households felt having less communication in "Two ways communication" and they felt not sure on the "Satisfaction on public complaint". The result shows that households were not satisfied with the two way communications with the council due to unsettled complaints of the residents and the ineffective approach in disseminating and collecting information.

On the other hand, the majority of business respondents stood with very satisfied on the statement

of "Satisfaction on public complaint" and strongly communicate in "Two ways communication" with the MPSPK with the mean=5, while "Time taken" is more than 30 minutes to 1 hour and "Feedback" also received-in progress. From the business respondents, the findings found that they were very satisfied with the two ways communication due to the complaints of the respondent were noted accordingly and quickly settled within the schedule given. The findings also correlate with many previous studies on the positive association between the communications and timeliness in complaints system (Jonsen, 2001, Parasuraman et al., 1996, Norton and Kaplan, 1996). In addition, Jonsen (2001) feels that an individual may not be satisfied with the quality of a service provided by the local authority. A complaint may arise where an individual is dissatisfied with the manner in which a staff member interacts with him or her, the issue here may be on courtesy, fairness or openness. Such issues about the standard of service and appropriate to the complaints system, as in the view of the complainant the service, was not provided in accordance with good administrative practice.

According to Bowen & Hedges (1993), one possible method of determining which service quality dimensions is more important to different groups of customers is by utilizing customer demographics. An analysis is also undertaken to investigate which extent of demographic profile of respondents associate with the level of satisfaction in municipal services. From the study, it seems that the mean score of age and gender have significance differences towards awareness and satisfaction as resident or customer in Sungai Petani.

D. Information of Service Provider in Sungai Petani

Household respondents were disagreed with the statement of "List of contractors are provided", followed with "Address are given to the clients" with the lowest of mean=2.29. "Telephone number are provided" with mean=2.322 and "Schedule of operation are provided" at mean=2.456. At the same time, business respondents were also disagreed with the statement of "List of contractors are provided" and "Address are given to the clients" with the lowest of mean=2.4 while, they were agreed with "Telephone number are provided" and "Schedule of operation are provided" with mean=4.133. The mean rank indicates that respondents with low relative with the service and accessibility offer by E-Idaman especially the list of contractors/companies are not provided as they expected as well as no address given to customers accordingly. On the other hand, the residents also disagreed with accessibility of bags, baskets and bins as well as they felt that the municipal did not provide enough staff to run the services. It is due to the new operation of E-Idaman which is taking over the environmental functions of the local authority. At the

beginning of the services, many complaints were made to local associations, community leaders and councillors.

E. Collection and Dissemination of Information

The research question on whether the customers have enough aware of the opportunities for them to participate whether in formal or informal channels is revealed in this study. There are several channels used by MPSPK to collect and disseminate information to the residents. The finding identified that local associations are the preferred choice of channel used for the respondents to voice out their grouses and complaints on the municipal services. The local associations act as the representatives of the local government and work as the appropriate and effective channels to disseminate and collect information.

The acts of communicating with the politicians and councillors appear to be stronger and the finding shows that the strong relationship between respondents and local representatives which they most prefer to communicate with community leaders. Newspaper, e-complaint, mailing, online forum are among the additional communication tools identified as being effective in disseminating and collecting information from MPSPK's residents. The possible explanation on why the most appropriate and effective channels are contacted by local associations and community leaders is due to easy way of face to face in dealing. Other reason is due to the residents was not friendly enough with the technologies in advanced and most of them were in range of 40-49 years old. The study also found that the usage of the internet and electronic displays are not considered appropriate by the respondents. However, the data does not reflect the actual fact on how complaints are made through e-complaint as compared to other channels as proven by MPSPK itself. This is not a surprise finding as it has been proven in previous study that low usage of ICT application among the population of Seberang Perai (Kamarudin et al., 2002).

V DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study, it is concluded that the community of Sungai Petani is largely satisfied with the municipal services provided in Sungai Petani. The majority of the respondents preferred to use the former channels of local associations and community leaders in disseminating and collecting information. In addition, further analysis on the level of dissemination and collective information by using other qualitative methods such as online archival records from the e-complaint and councillors' blogs also are found the best to be the platform of this study. It is proven that there are a small number of active residents who depend on information technology as the main tool in garnering collective actions in order to influence

public complaint systems. These active residents are described by Putnam (1993) as cyber activists who utilize the information technology to gain widespread support from the wider population and capture the attention of the higher authority to review their decisions.

This study finds that respondents from households basically agreed with cleanliness, drainage and culverts as their main problem in local affairs. However, this finding does not reflect with the data given by MPSPK earlier that waste management was the highest public complaint in their area. This study also indicates that service provider and accessibility offered by E-Idaman were disagreed. Many of households have the same feeling that the service provider did not provide the complete the list of address and the telephone of contractors and companies. The accessibility is not enough in terms of facility, equipment and publicity to the people. One conclusion that derived from these findings is that the service provider has lack of publicity and not enough facility to run the services. Even the equipment's like bins and other tools are supported by the municipal; they still seem incompetent to perform well.

Other variables of feeling when dealing in MPSPK is found related to satisfaction level on municipal services while frequent of dealing, time waiting in dealing, feedback and response, satisfaction given and service received have a positive association with municipal services. On the other hand, the other variables in response received after lodged complaints seem to have the strong relationships with the customer satisfaction while the household and business community do satisfy with the time taken, feedback, two way communications and process in public complaint.

As recommendations, knowledge and understanding about the daily operations of municipal services are needed in order to encourage the local people to be more satisfied. The awareness among public is important as to voice out the dissatisfaction and to complain on the right channel. It is important for a municipal council to have a comprehensive understanding on the focus groups that exist in a community. Public should not be treated as one single entity as there are different kinds of people who take on municipal services differently. The municipal should also take into consideration the existence of organized and unorganized public and whose interest do they represent. There are instances where a municipality might feel that instead of providing the service directly, they would rather hire someone else (service provider) to do it. It is important to provide services that are affordable but municipalities must do so without compromising on its ability to operate and maintain existing services by having municipal service

partnership (MSP) is an agreement between a municipality and a service provider (Gronroos, 2007 and Parasuraman et al., 1996).

VI CONCLUSION

There are a lot of things and practices need to be done as to improve the quality of customer satisfaction, and lift it to be a higher level. But, in the nutshell, the strategies must target on strengthening the focus groups: households, business communities, local associations, councillors, community leaders and officer, as suggested in the previous sections in this chapter. While, it is important for the public to have awareness and sense of citizenship as to make them concerns on the municipal services in accordance. On the other hand, the government needs to be creative in engaging public, and emphasizing what is equally important factor for the public to be more connected to their neighbours. The councillors and officers need to foster community solidarity when they are holding position in helping and making the neighbourhoods as much more desirable to have a quality of life, and as good citizen in their localities. Therefore, apart from focusing on improving customer satisfaction process and the system of public complaints, future policies and rules should also be directed on the relationship with local associations and representatives as well as concern on the political ideologies accordingly.

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