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# **Users' Satisfaction towards Facilities Management, FM Help Desk in Public Higher Educational Institutions in Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

Higher educational institution (HEI) is a one of an organisation in a service industry field. It likes any other organisations are realising that the mission of the university is to provide a high quality environment that meets the requirements of users in an efficient and effectively. Basically students, academic staff, and non-academic staff can be categorized as users since they make use of the services and products provided by the university. One of the most challenging facing HEI is to provide services that will fulfill users' satisfaction as required and expected. Due to this matter, the administration of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, UTHM seen the application of facilities management, FM help desk as a mechanism or a user complaint system in improving the delivery of facilities management services system. It provides the main administrative support function to the Development and Property Management Office in UTHM for a focal point for all UTHM's users to make a complaint, report routine and emergency calls about building or equipment faults and request maintenance and also facilities

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services in the university. A case study methodology was adopted, with semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the intents of this research are to know the effectiveness of the FM help desk as a user complaint system and also to obtain feedback on users' satisfaction using this system. As a result, this system could be a good tool to enhance the systematic management of users' complaints for better facilities management in UTHM.

**JEL classification numbers:** 129 (I2 - Education and Research Institution)

**Keywords:** FM help desk, higher educational institution, users' satisfaction, university

## 1 Introduction

Facilities management areas in all organisations today are very important pressures especially for facilities management services which are important resources to the university in providing for their core business, teaching and learning services [1]. Public higher educational institutions (HEI) categorized as an organisation in a service industry field. It likes any other organisations, they are realising that the mission of the university is to provide a high quality environment that meets the requirements of users in an efficient and effectively. As we know students, academic staff and non-academic staff can be categorized as the users as they used the services and products provided by the university. But, one of the most challenging facing the HEI is to provide services that will fulfil users' satisfaction as required and expected.

According to Amir Shareghi Najar, 2009 complaint handling becomes as an important part for minimizing user dissatisfaction among the users in an organisation both in private or public sector. In the organisation like university, there are various parties involved in an organisation and also have a range of demand and requirements that must be to fulfil especially focus on the facilities management issues. In the facilities management field, various parties involved in organisation and also have a range of expertise to manage the facilities. While in the organisation like public HEI required an efficient and effective facilities management services in terms of providing the good services to the users.

Organisations such as higher learning institutions require an efficient and effective facilities management system in terms of providing good services to the users [2]. If the building and other facilities are not managed properly, it will impact the organisation's performance. In view of the above constraints, the public universities in Malaysia should use the application of facilities FM help desk as a user complaint system. It is a one of mechanism in managing the facilities trough online with systematic and efficiently automated computerized system.

Owing to this matter, the administration of UTHM considers the FM help desk as

one mechanism or user complaint system in managing the facilities efficiently and systematically. There are various applicable models or systems which utilize the help desk concept that have been implemented locally or overseas [3]. FM help desk is an electronic user complaint system which can handle, record and maintain complaints systematically and efficiently in the Development and Property Management Office, UTHM. Reports can be generated automatically either monthly or annually which assist in the orderly management and control of the facilities in UTHM.

There is no universal approach to managing facilities. Each organisation even within the same sector will have different needs. Understanding those needs is the key to effective facilities management measured in terms of providing good services in organisations [4]. Managing facilities in higher education is very critical due to the various parties involved in the organisation. One of the parties is the users of the facilities who at times get frustrated waiting on effective services such as after having reported for repairing a breakdown [5]. It happens when the central point through which problems or issues are reported are not subsequently properly managed and coordinated. Based on these issues, there is a need for solutions on how to handle the public complaints with efficiency and systematically. An effective user complaints system on managing the facilities should therefore be made available in the university to cater to users' needs.

The situations where reports cannot be generated effectively to show statistics, data, figures or any important information by the end of the year is also a reason why the FM help desk must be used efficiently. There are some reasons why the complete report is required, such as for audit purpose, for billing process, for administration work and so on. Hence, a practical report with graphical presentation such as bar charts, pie charts, and tables can depict the actual figures on the numbers of total complaints effectively. FM help desk becomes an integral player in a university's ability to expand technology to the community. Its capability to keep up with the constantly changing and growing support needs has become an increasingly difficult challenge [6].

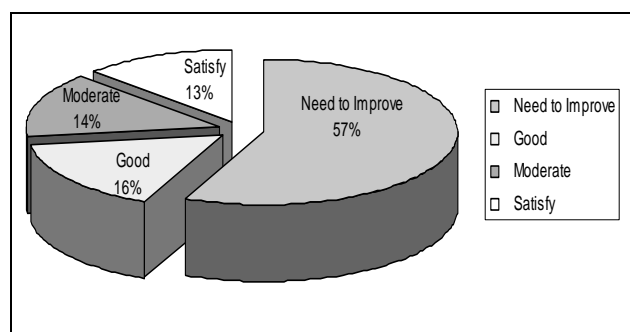


Figure 1: Level of User's Satisfaction in Development and Property Management Office, UTHM

FM help desk is seamlessly managed and reports on all maintenance activities and it is being seen as an integral part of the service function, responsible for bringing multiple resources to bear to solve issues to the client's satisfaction [7]. As a consequence of this matter, the administration of UTHM has looked at the benefits of FM help desk as one mechanism that could better manage the facilities on online user complaint system efficiently and systematically. Figure 1 shows the overall overview among the UTHM users regarding their level of satisfaction with the services provided by UTHM. Most of them opinionated that the university need to improve its services with about 13% satisfied, 14% moderate and 16% considering the services provided as good.

From the graph, we can see that the percentage of user's satisfaction level in UTHM is not at a high level. During the research period, there was no other research conducted on user complaint system that could provide a measure of the level of user satisfaction on UTHM facilities and services. This is attributed to the lack of research and specific issues discussed on FM help desk at the time of the study. Although limited, there has been a small amount of research conducted looking at the benefits of FM help desk. A completed study was done in the UK NHS District General Hospital during its final stages of commissioning [8]. It is more commonly referred to with the term "support service" where the development of the help desk itself is looked upon as a service centre [9]. Therefore, this research was done to explore the possibilities for improving the facilities management service in UTHM. It identifies problems in the process, system or service that hinder the provision of good level services in the university and whether the FM help desk as a user complaint system can play a role to improve the facilities management services in UTHM.

## **2 Related Work**

### **2.1 Facilities Management Concept in Higher Educational Institutions**

Facilities Management, FM is a profession that encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality of the built environment by integrating people, place, process and technology [4]. It covers a wide range of scopes and many aspects must be seen. FM is the integration and alignment of the non-core services, including those relating to premises, required to operate and maintain a business to fully support the core objectives of the organisation [4].

Although FM services are non-core in nature, if managed correctly they should have a strategic importance for adding value to an organisation's core business delivery. In other words, FM is geared towards providing facilities of support service. Higher learning institutions are recognised as a service industry, which place greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of their customers [5]. Support services are vital for institutions in providing better quality

outputs to meet their customer's need [6].

There are various groups that can be categorised as the customers of a university, namely students, academic staff, non-academic staff, the general public and visitors. Facilities services are important resources to the university in providing for their core business, teaching and learning services [5]. The objectives of higher learning education are to provide in-depth knowledge, seek academic development, educate students, and coordinate national development demands. In order to deliver their core teaching and learning mission, higher learning institutions need to have substantial infrastructure. This often includes an extensive estate and buildings. In the building there are important elements like process, technology and people which are needs and bear intricately-linked relationship to each other in the organisation [6].

Facilities management services are divided into three components, namely hard services, soft services and management services. Help desk is categorised as the management services which is a generic name typically associated with the end user support centre. It is seen as an integral part of the services function, responsible for bringing multiple resources to bear and solve issues to the client's satisfaction [6].

## **2.2 Facilities Management, FM Help Desk**

FM help desk differs from an information technology (IT) help desk. Providing a customer support service through the help desk for an organisation's entire property portfolio is very different and much more difficult than the IT help desk [7]. For example, calls which might range from a blocked toilet to a serious power failure, need more time and resources to deal with, a fact that will be reflected in the type of system required to record, process and manage such a wide variety of needs. The principle through is essentially the same, to respond to a customer's enquiry as quickly as possible and follow it through until it has been satisfactorily resolved [8].

FM help desk in an organisation is very important to the running of the organisation. It has emerged as a very important part of organisations and has been recognised as a place where organisations can gain competitive advantage [8]. Over the last ten years, help desk has risen to prominence as one of the most important areas of the IT and customer services industry. However, not all help desks have the same requirements, for example the help desk operating in academic environments find themselves with distinct circumstances and problems [9].

Table 1: Summary of Literature Reviews upon Help Desk Issues by Years

<b>Authors &amp; Years</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Issues</b>
1) RitaMarcella & Iain Middleton, 1996.	<i>The Role of the Help Desk in the Strategic Management of Information Systems.</i>	Focuses on the potential of the help desk in enabling an organisation or its customers to gather data on systems use, plan and implementation of IT development strategies.
2) Ian Stinton, 1996.	<i>Helping the Help Desk.</i>	Examines a unique product which intends to offer support to the supporters by using artificial intelligence to the handling of users' queries.
3) Iain A. Middleton & RitaMarcella, 1997.	<i>In Need of Support: The Academic Help Desk.</i>	This research addresses the issues of distinguishing the help desk in academia and it also finds that it often suffers from difficulty in defining its role and obtaining recourse.
4) Rachel Niedzwiecki & Macauley Peterson, 2002.	<i>Help Desk Support: To Be or Not To Be Eligible.</i>	This paper is designed to review relationship and the related issues arising between help desk as a support with the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) in the university.
5) Yooncheong Cho, Roxanne Hiltz & Rutgers, 2002.	<i>An Analysis of Online Customer Complaints: Implication for Web Complaint Management.</i>	The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current sources and causes of online complaints, seek effective ways of handling customers complaints by examining different product types and provide guidelines for successful e-CRM.
6) Michael Workman, 2003.	<i>Results from Organizational Development Interventions in a Technology Call Center.</i>	This study concurrently investigated the effect technology call center among the organisational development intervention focused on American economic sector.
7) Ye Chen, 2004.	<i>To Help Help desk : A Field Study of Online Help System in Campus Context.</i>	This paper reports on a field-based study of online help desk systems at the University of Maryland.
8) Daryl May, 2010.	<i>Facilities Management Help Desks.</i>	The purpose of this paper is to provide an exploratory look at facilities and estate management help desks in four different case study organisations.

Literature review of help desks based on the various scope and issues of the help desk over a period of 14 years shows that help desk information is limited with a small amount of research conducted looking at the benefits of FM help desk as summarised in Table 1. Nevertheless, the literature survey on help desk has been most useful in identifying various related issues arising from help desk as a call centre, IT help desk, online customer complaint system, information system, and lastly about FM help desk. Although limited, there has been a small amount of

research conducted looking at the benefits of FM help desk [10].

A completed study by a student of Sheffield Hallam University looked at facilities and estate management help desk in four different case studies of organisations. The findings suggest that the key factors for success of a facilities management (FM) help desk include mapping out all customer requirement, recruiting the correct operating staff, ensuring an appropriate working environment, and customer's communication once the help desk is operational [9]. Other authors have discussed how to get the help desk up and running. Among the points raised are staffing issues and a debate as to whether staff on help desk need to be experts or generalists. He contends that most help desk managers prefer staff with good communication skills, customer service, experience and an ability to handle stress, over and above other attributes [11].
























### 2.3 Application of Help Desk in 20 Public Universities in Malaysia


Table 2 and 3 show the details about the categories and justifications of help desk categories employed in 20 public universities in Malaysia. Referring to Table 3, there are only four universities utilizing the FM help desk in their management to handle the facilities management aspects in the university included Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, UTHM as a case study for this research. As seen in Table 2, five categories are identified to show the functions of help desk application in the public universities in Malaysia.

Table 2: The Help Desk Justifications

HELP DESK CATEGORIES	JUSTIFICATION FOR THE HELP DESK FUNCTION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES
<b>1. Inquiries, feedback &amp; comments</b>	- Questions and Answering - To solve the problem - For comments related issues - For inquiries, given feedback
<b>2. IT services</b>	- IT Services & Public Complaints for IT solution - Remote Control - Help for IT technical problem - IT Maintenance
<b>3. Library</b>	- Loan of Book from Library - Online Book at the Library - Asking questions to the librarian - Access the Digital Collection
<b>4. Complaint (all services)</b>	- Complaint on staff behaviors - Safety Issues, Administrator and others - Complaints about the process or system in the organisation
<b>5. Facilities Management, FM</b>	- For complaints on the breakdowns of electrical, mechanical, civil equipments & etc. - Maintenance and Repairs

Table 3: Overview of Implementation for the Help Desk Application in 20 Public Universities in Malaysia

NAME OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA	CATEGORIES / FUNCTIONS OF HELP DESK				
	HELP DESK JUSTIFICATIONS	INQUIRIES, FEEDBACK & COMMENTS	IT SERVICE	LIBRARY	COMPLAINT (ALL SERVICES)
1. Universiti Teknologi Mara, UiTM					
2. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, UTM					
3. Universiti Putra Malaysia, UPM					
4. Universiti Sains Malaysia, USM					
5. Universiti Utara Malaysia, UUM					
6. Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, USIM					
<b>7. Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, UTHM</b>					
8. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM					
9. Universiti Malaya, UM					
10. Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia, UIAM					
11. Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)					
12. Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, UNIMAS					
13. Universiti Malaysia Sabah, UMS					
14. Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)					
15. Universiti Darul Iman Malaysia (UDM)					
16. Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)					
17. Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM)					
18. Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)					
19. Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)					
20. Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP)					

Notes:  The sign showed that university has the help desk application used in their university.



### 3 Research Methodology

The central methodology was to utilise a case study approach and interview. These approaches will help this research to achieve its stated objectives for final results. The application of FM help desk has been implemented since September 2009 in the Development and Property Management Office, UTHM. The data was captured from actual monthly and annual reports of help desk to obtain the details of the total number of users' complaints pertaining to facilities management in UTHM. The data was also derived through a user survey by conducting an interview with UTHM users, involving academic and non-academic staff as the respondents.

### 4 Results and Data Analysis

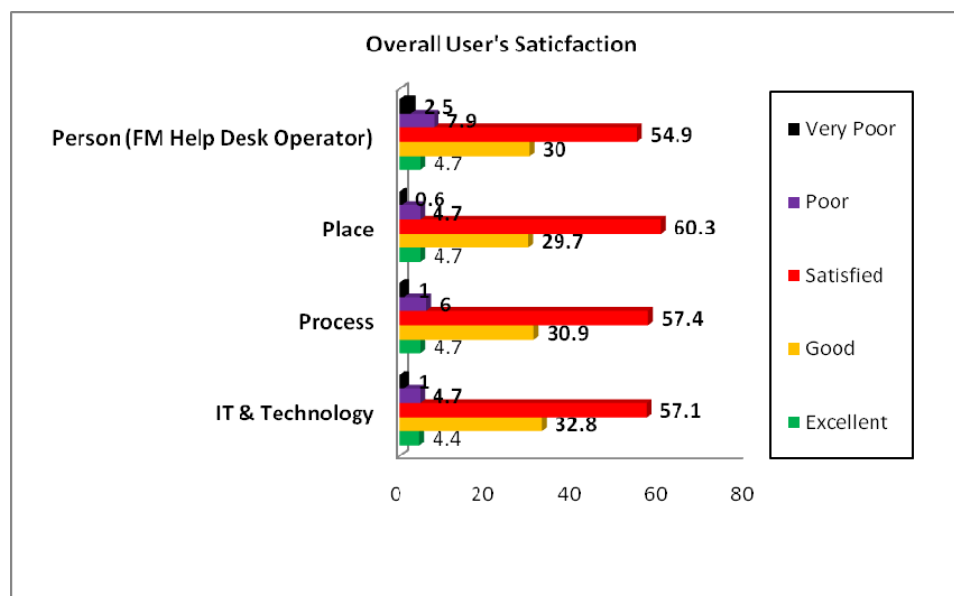


Figure 2: Overall User's Satisfaction towards 4 Factors

Based on the questioners survey among the users in UTHM on the user's satisfaction on FM Help Desk system, there are four factors that have been drawn to contribute for successful implementation of the user complain system in the university with refer to the Figure 4. As demonstrated earlier, help desk research focus on the most important customer requirement surrounds communication for example, information on working progress for the maintenance repair or breakdown [6]. Person factor which refer to the FM Help Desk operator looking for the staff responsible in managing the system. Second factor refer to the place where the system and location for the FM Help Desk reflects its importance. The

third and fourth factor the process and IT and technology used for the FM Help Desk system as a user complaint system. As the final finding, most users satisfied with the four factors which have been identified during the survey. The result or percent indicated above 50% of user among UTHM staff satisfied with the service provided. Thus, this analysis expressed that the overall view for the user's satisfaction towards FM Help Desk as a user complaint system is a good tool to enhance the systematic management of users' complaints for better facilities management in UTHM.

## 5 Conclusion

Consequently, conducting this research on the application of FM help desk in UTHM can improve the facilities management system in the university. For the expected results, this implemented system can help the Development and Property Management Office, UTHM to achieve the standard level of users' satisfaction among the users in UTHM. Thus, this research will show that this user complaint system can provide significant benefits and enhanced work system for better facilities management in the university.

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