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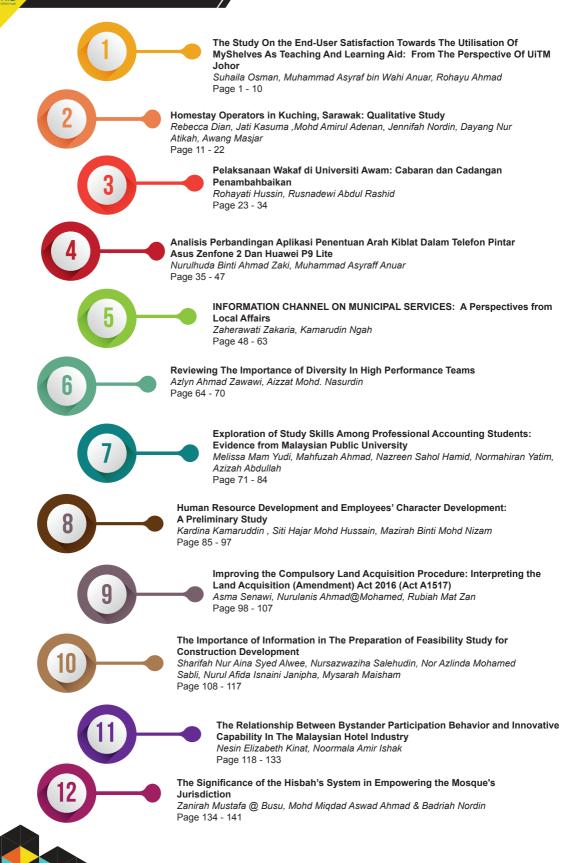*Graphic Designer-* Syahrini Shawalludin

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INFORMATION CHANNEL ON MUNICIPAL SERVICES:
A Perspectives from Local Affairs

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ABSTRACT

Past studies on customer satisfaction in Malaysia highlight low awareness from the public in municipal services. The previous studies mainly address the lack of efforts and initiatives of the authorities in organizing effective participation programs in waste management, cleanliness, drainage and culverts affairs. The Public Complaints Bureau stepped up efforts to promptly deal with complaints received from the public. On average, 50 per cent of complaints received were on the failure or delays in attending or responding to the needs of customers effectively. By using the quantitative methods approach, this study attempts to examine the factors that influence the community in Sungai Petani. The extent of satisfaction level in municipal services, both from internal customers and external customers attempt to establish association between customer satisfaction and social characteristics such as feedback towards complaint and information channel as resident and customer. Based on the findings, in order to make customer satisfaction increase on municipal services, future strategies need to be done by focusing on making customer satisfaction exercise more satisfactory and people more satisfy and participative

1. Introduction

In rapid development nowadays, customers do not only demand the efficiency, effectiveness, economy and transparency in service delivery but they also want public agencies to be more responsive to the users as well as consumers of public services (*Drewry, 2005*). The close relationship between government and civil society leads democratic practices and facilitates better provision of public services (*Kamarudin et al., 2011*). Citizens are often skeptical towards the public sector when they are asked in general and abstract terms, but relatively satisfied with more specific services when demands and needs are well received by them (*Christensen and Lægreid 2005*). Does the level of trust is same for all kinds of public institutions? This question gives challenges to government's respond due to the level of serving people is different to each other. Local governments have to meet the challenges of urban growth in partnerships with other stakeholders (internal and external) due to the limited resources and capacities of urban local governments. Regardless many constraints in getting allocation and grant by upper level, sometimes local governments fail to manage its service delivery in a good manner. As a result, the activity of

urban management has evolved from its narrow meaning of the functioning of municipal government to the broader theme of focus groups among municipal manpower, community leaders, and households (Jamaliah, 2004). The drivers for this research have arisen in response to a numbers of perceived weaknesses in service delivery identified in various sources.Many complaints rise up in daily activities around MPSPK territory. Thus, this study is proposed to facilitate a better understanding on what makes customers complaint and the way information of municipal services disseminated to local people accordingly.

2. Literature Review

Performance by municipalities' in general even good performance must be constantly improved to meet the needs of stakeholders and improve their quality of life (*Putnam & Mumby, 1993*). It is poor performance in particular that needs to be improved. In order to do this, it is important that causal and contributory reasons for poor municipal performance could be analyzed. Furthermore, municipality service delivery involves the visible products and reliable provision of goods and services to the community. This needs to be conducted in accordance with integrated structural plan and strategic planning, and within the allocated budgetary funds constantly approved by the council of a municipality. This outcome simply depends on too many factors and stakeholders (*Putnam 2000; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992 and De Buijn* (2002).

Nevertheless, internal customers, i.e. the employees within the organization are equally important towards delivering the service quality. In the context of this study, with referring to Malaysian Local Authorities (LAs), "service provider" refers to management staff including employees of LAs which involves day-to-day tasks as implementers. They face pressure, interference and challenges from many parties such as politicians, public, central government or even council members. Therefore, the study of internal customer satisfaction must not be overlooked. Although other researchers rarely focus on them, Stershic (1990) recognized that "employees are the critical link in delivering service quality and customer satisfaction". Customer satisfaction can show that what go wrong are the little things, where people feel as if they have not been treated with care. Customers are, after all, the experts on what they feel like to use a service. From the staff attitude to the right information, a focus on customer satisfaction helps to get things right and improving services in a cost-effective way (*Evans 1997 Tendler 1997; Montero and Samuels 2004 & Montalvo 2009*). In return, the evidence is clear that staff feel more motivated where they work for an organization with a strong customer focus. Customer segmentation identifies key groups of service users such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), Households, Community Leaders and Local Authority staff can be a powerful way of building diversity into strategic planning from the start (*Kamarudin et al., 2001*).

Several researchers such as Feldman (1991) and Sanfilippo (1990) have jointly addressed the importance of the internal support activities and operations as the key link to external customer satisfaction. The quality of internal service operations has been identified as one of the essential elements of an overall service quality strategy (*Feldman, 1991; Lewis (1989; Gremler et al.*, (1994) and thus, resulting benefits tolong-term cost savings and increasing the financial gains. Some scholars have collectively contributed to the establishment of a theoretical framework within the customer concept involved throughout the service production system.Furthermore, winning quality award does not guarantee that external customers will be fully satisfied with their service provision. This is because the internal customers or the staff might not able to foresee the results of their own

service provision to these external customers (*Sharifuddin, 1998/1999*). In this study, the households, business communities, associations and community leaders were chosen as external focus groups due to know to what extent their level of satisfaction towards municipal services. External environmental factors that contribute to this complexity are the political environment within which governments operate sometimes at many different levels, the evolution of programs and policies during their lifespan, a wider group of stakeholders and the need to ensure accountability (*Kuppusamy, 2006*).

Many literature reviews on customer satisfaction and the focus groups (internal customer and external customer) are studied in the contemporary measurement. However, the scholars and authors discussed more on customer satisfaction models in marketing field such as SERVQUAL Model and Balanced Score Card BSC Model. Hence, all discussions are based on realistic viewpoint, which mainly ignored its relationship with political bargaining process. These models do not show how actual emphasis on various performance dimensions linked to various stakeholders interest. Thus, there is a little empirical research into the way in which managers learn from and respond to information communicated in the performance measures adopted. To derive benefits of customer satisfaction in performance, multiple tools need to take into consideration. The example is the unique characteristics of local government such as the Households and Community leaders as stakeholders and what indicator makes them satisfied on municipal services and what the approaches taken has not discussed earlier. Thus, the focus of MPSPK is trying to understand the internal and external customer towards the better satisfaction in local service quality by adapting these models into municipal as well.

3. Research Methodology

The three main instruments used in this study are: (1) a household survey which was designed to examine the feedback towards complaints and information channel on municipal services provided by in its zone (C, G & H); (2) a business community which was designed to identity the level of satisfaction perceived by them towards municipal services and how their complaints will be reflected to the municipal decision making process; and (3) semi-structured interviews with the key informants in Sungai Petani who were involved in the customer satisfaction process on municipal services. The key informants interviewed in this study including community leaders, councilors and head of MPSPK's department. By using qualitative data, it can explain the issues and problems due to unsatisfied cases through public complaints which are logged on the municipal services. Plus, it will discover the unsettled cases yet to be handled and what the feedback given by the council to address this problem. The process of public complaints handled by respective department is another issue which should be asked to the household and business community whether they are having a quick response or otherwise, and this can measure the level of satisfaction among the residents.

4. Findings and Materials

4.1 Households and Business Communities 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 119 or 38.4 percent followed by Chinese 94 (30.3%), Indian 75(24.2%) and Siamese 22(7.1%). Respondents' ages are ranged from 40 to 49 years,

with a mean of 2.965 (S.D =1.08). Some of the respondents were never had any formal education (14.5.%) followed by primary education (17.1%), post graduate (14.2%) and 22.6 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.

Most of respondents of business communities came from Zone C (36.7%), followed Zone G (33.3%) and 30 percent from Zone H. It also explains the majority of the respondents involved in hypermarket and restaurant business (42.2%), followed by mini market (17.8%) and only 5.6 percent involved in franchise business. Most of the respondents are having business owned by Family/Member/Friend (60%) while 40 percent of them have their own business.

4.2. 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 and as indicated in the Table 1, 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.

"*Satisfaction on public complaint*" and strongly communicate in "Two ways

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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

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Table 1: Response received after lodge complaints

Items	Household				Business			
	N	Min	Max	Mean	N	Min	Max	Mean
Time taken	310	1	3	1.487	90	2	2	2
Feedback	310	1	3	2.155	90	2	2	2
Two ways communication	310	2	5	3.277	90	5	5	5
Satisfaction on public complaint	310	2	5	3.277	90	5	5	5

Source: Field study, 2012

4.3 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 (Table 2 and Table 3). From the table, 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 JKKKP and MKK. 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. They prefer their local representatives to hand over their complaints. This was expressed by a community leader in Zone G in handling complaints:

"People preferred me to lodge their complaint rather to use technology tools. They felt satisfied with face to face complaint and comfortable to do it. Majority of them were matured people and I assumed maybe young generation like to use easy way like e-complaint or email to the municipal rather come and see me" (Community leader A)

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*).

Table 2: Inward and Information Channels that are appropriately and efficiently perceived by respondents

Items	Household				Business			
	N	Min	Max	Mean	N	Min	Max	Mean
Contacted residents association	310	1	5	4.835	90	1	5	4.433
Contacted JKKKP & MKK	310	1	5	4.843	90	1	5	4.211
Contacted local councillor	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	4.211
Contacted Political Party representatives	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	4.211
Contacted ADUN	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	3.899
Contacted MP	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	3.899
Contacted mainstream newspaper	310	1	5	3.335	90	1	5	3.768
Telephone	310	1	5	3.335	90	1	5	3.768
E-Complaint	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	3.333
Mailing	310	1	5	3.135	90	1	5	3.333
Online Forum	310	1	5	3.135	90	1	5	3.333

Source: Field study, 2012

Table 3: Outward Information Channels that are appropriately and efficiently perceived by respondents

Items	Household				Business			
	N	Min	Max	Mean	N	Min	Max	Mean
Contacted residents association	310	1	5	4.835	90	1	5	4.433
Contacted JKKKP & MKK	310	1	5	4.843	90	1	5	4.211

Contacted local councillor	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	4.211
Contacted Political Party representatives	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	4.211
Contacted ADUN	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	3.899
Contacted MP	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	3.899
Contacted mainstream newspaper	310	1	5	3.335	90	1	5	3.768
Telephone	310	1	5	3.335	90	1	5	3.768
E-Complaint	310	1	5	3.835	90	1	5	3.333
Mailing	310	1	5	3.135	90	1	5	3.333
Online Forum	310	1	5	3.135	90	1	5	3.333

Source: Field study, 2012

4.4 The Focus Groups: Associations, Community Leader, Councillor and Head of Department in Sungai Petani

A further analysis on the socio-economic background of the interviewees found that all of 30 residents were come from three selected zones. It is estimated around 96.67 percent of the respondents are Malays and their ranges of ages are between 41-50 years. Among other notable findings are 40.0 percent of the respondents are in semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker with some 40 percent reported to have SPM, 26.7 percent reported to have STPM and 23.3 percent are degree holders. Their income ranges from RM900 to RM1500 and RM1501 to RM2500. However, it is observed that individuals represented in associations and community leaders were having low education and income level with majority of them came from moderate housing areas. The language often used in the meetings and conversation is Bahasa Melayu. The study also shows that the older respondents seem to be the trusted people in dealing with customer satisfaction on local affairs. The possible explanation is because people will feel comfortable to deal with mature and experienced representatives rather than young people as to represent them in handling public complaints and dissatisfaction. These findings prove that the work of Grönroos (2007) on satisfaction with public services tends to be highest among users with older people those who have more likely to be complaining. They tend to be more satisfied and actively deal with the service provider and the most dissatisfied groups are found among the middle classes. In the focus groups of Sungai Petani, each zone of C, G and H was represented by 30 respondents and participated either as community leaders or neighborhood-based associations. 13 respondents (43.33%) were the member and Chairman of JKKKP while 6(20%) were from religious representatives. Another 13.3% (n=4) participated as political party representatives, and another 4 respondents (13.3%) were interviewed as MKK and 2 respondents (6.67%) were from Rukun Tetangga. Only one respondent (3.3 %) represented as AJK.

4.4.1 Public Complaint Process and the Response

Public complaint is one of the mechanisms to measure customer satisfaction. People

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keep complaining about their uncollected waste, routine and daily operations are not well organized, clogged drains, flash flood in housing areas and other local matters. Nowadays, the level of education and knowledge of the resident are increasing. Their expectation on better services is more demanding due to assessment rate and other payments are increased (Zaherawati et al., 2011). Local residents thought that the municipal should change the working style to be more responsive and friendly to customers. The interviewees' experience mirrors the level of dealings with MPSPK through the public compliant process. Majority of them were satisfied with the process and the action taken in addressing the common problems in Sungai Petani in such as waste management, cleanliness, drainage and culverts. One interviewee shares his experience as community leader in his zone:

> *"I felt ok with municipal work in daily operations. Many complaints under my zone settled within the time even got some issues regarding waste uncollected and floods due to clogged drains, but still they turn up. The municipal already settle the problems but sometimes attitudes from the local residents make the problem come again. So I don't even blame the municipal. The process taken to settle the complaints also good except for those issues needed for other agencies to take part like JKR or JPS, the longer time should be expected by the local residents. When the complaint settled, i think residents satisfy as well as me". (Community leader H, 2012)*

Another supporter was satisfied in his experience as Chairman of community committee publicly complained the process and the action taken by the municipal. This is due to volunteering activities such as clean up the public places or housing area always have feedback from MPSPK and even the down to earth YDP. The response was referring to waste dumping and cleanliness complaints faced by a few housing areas in Zone C.

Community leader from Zone H also expressed his feeling towards the public complaint in his area. During the interview session, he satisfies due to his experience of the zone:

> *"My zone is based on traditional villages and tourism area; just a few housing areas were there. Due to the nature, not so many complaints were brought up to municipal. So, it's not a big deal on that. Small problem like a waste problems just happen in certain area like Tanjung Dawai and Lembah Bujang. Other than that just received a broken lamppost or cutting trees matter. So far, in my experience since last four years, i satisfy with the system of public complaints. But sometimes, we have to urge staff of the municipal to know the progress on the complaints but overall I'm satisfied". (Community Leaders K, 2012)*

The above findings shows that majority of the interviewees were satisfied towards public complaints process and the feedback given. However, the problems of dissatisfaction always occurs even the effective manner has been taken by the municipal. Zero-complaint is impossible to achieve in served public because their loyalty is uncertainty due to service perceived in different zones. This corresponds to Hirschman's exit-voice theory (Hirschman, 1974), when dissatisfied; customers have the option of exiting or voicing a complaint. Further, an increase in the number of complaints decreases customer loyalty because it depends on socio-economic characteristics.

4.4.2 Collection and Dissemination of Information

The local authority that plays the role of moderator will keep a higher level of awareness and listen to on any issues and problems arising from the discussion of these various groups of communities. To

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meet the service-expectation and service-experience as mentioned by Parasuraman et al., (1996), the source of information should be used effectively. All the focus groups should know what the best of information to channel their complaints. Some reasons are on preference of technologies and some of them choose the face-to-face way in channelling their complaints.

The explosion and evolution in the information and communication technologies provide windows of opportunities to communities and to contribute to the role, function and operation of the local authority as well as to raise their concerns and rights towards an issue. This technology becomes a mechanism which provides the local community a means for feedback and discussion and also to be used to distribute information, events and news regarding the local authority and the area administered. The other channel that can be used is the community forum. This channel is less formal and open to all users including non-residents. This forum does not focus to any specific groups. Hence, any users including the residents outside the local authority areas can post any message of interest in this channel. Both these channels can be used to create a platform for discussion, deliberation and learning. There are several channels used by the MPSPK to collect and disseminate information, from and to, residents. Channels or information collection are dissemination that are considered appropriate and effective (Table 4).

Table 4: Inward and Outward Information Channels that Perceived Appropriate and Effective by Respondents

	Appropriate and Effective Information Channels	Frequency
1	Associations (e; Persatuan Penduduk)	27
2	MKK	23
3	JKKKP	21
4	Councillor	18
5	Rukun Tetangga	17
6	Political Party Representative	10
7	Religious Representative	6
8	Telephone	6
9	E-complaint	5
10	Mailings	5
11	Online Forum	3
12	Signage/Billboards	1
13	Newspapers	1

Field Study, 2012

Some interviewees express their feelings as local associations and community leaders due to experience in disseminating and collecting information from municipal and residents as well. Some of them prefer to contact local associations and community leaders as municipal representatives while the rest prefers ICT and mass media as their channel to lodge their complaints:

> *"Some of these discussions could be concerning on ways to improve the social quality of the neighbourhood, ways to compete with each other in order to either generate new ideas or create a shared understanding about the causes of a problem as well as to look for possible*

solutions. This in turn can lead to an innovation of ideas that could bring about different and various competing perspectives and rationalities. Usually my local residents will come and see me first before i deliver the complaint to MKK." (Resident Association A, 2012)

"The communities can fully utilize the meetings and dialogues with local associations by bringing the people together to interactively contribute and collaboratively share information, ideas and feedbacks among themselves. The community society, institution, mosque or other local establishments in the local area can utilize these interactive channels to publish current news, on-going activities, articles and messages". (Community Leader G, 2012)

"People like to face to face complaint to me. Majority of them are villagers, no one knows how to complaint through internet or use computer. They feel easy to come and see me. Majority of them are matured residents and low education. How come they know about technologies?" (Community Leader K, 2012)

Customer satisfaction is all about customer expectation and customer experience. The outcome of the result sometimes can be seen as a battle ground between the residents and the government. Norris (1980) explains that sometimes the engagement between the authority and the residents does not create a situation of working together instead the reverse is what usually taking place, with the outcomes on win or lose basis.

The general attitudes towards participating in those channels are reflected in Sungai Petani as related by a councillor of MPSPK in the following quote:

"The residents of Sungai Petani are generally passive in e-complaints. Majority of them preferred face to face complaints to the local representatives rather than use easy and simple channel. I think only 30 percent of residents know about this". (MPSPK councillor, 2012)

Another interviewee quotes that sometimes there are individuals who feel easy to deal with people they know rather than technologies. This mentality is usually influential to the community and it turns to be difficult for the MPSPK to actually reach out to the people and explain on the process of public complaints. Realize on this scenario, the Sungai Petani Kedah Council (MPSPK), Simon Ooi Tze Min opened the Mobile Service Centre at Emirates Park morning market in order to fulfil his responsibilities as a Council Member of MPSPK after recently appointed for the session. Simon said, he opened the Centre Mobile Service in the market as to visit the community who wish to make any complaint about their respective areas to him. With mobile service centre, people more easily make a complaint or problem to him and indirectly reach out to people:

"Mobile Service Centre is opened in the first week of every month from 8 to 10 hours and so far I am getting positive feedback and positive response. Besides, I can introduce myself as a new council member and responsible MPSPK in Zone C. I will be in the Office of the Legislative Assembly (Assembly) Sidam Kiri every Tuesday at 8 pm and 10 am to receive public complaints. I'm also organizing a collaborative activity involving Pengkalan Lebai Man's problem of hygiene and flash floods. This is to organize a collaborative effort by joining with the parties involved, namely the E-Reach of Pengkalan Lebai Man in order to clean up the village and reducing the risk of flash floods and disease. Establish a collaborative effort is to raise awareness of the villagers on the importance of hygiene

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residential areas that are free from harmful diseases such as dengue. Through E-Reach and the villagers, together we can check and solve the problem of clogged drains to improve hygiene village". (Simon Ooi Tze Min, 2012)

As shown in Table 4, the findings show that there is a relatively high between local associations and community leaders which act as representatives of the local government. These are the appropriate and effective channels to disseminate and collect information about the satisfaction of MPSPK's residents. Other channels including telephone, e-complaint, mailings, online forum, signage and newspapers are among the additional communication tools identified as less appropriate and less effective in disseminating and collecting information. This study also found that the usage of the Internet and electronic displays are not considered appropriate by them. The findings reflect the work of Shepherd (2010) stresses that enforcement of Freedom of Information Act 2000 that allows the public access on information relating to public services will increase customer satisfaction and hence, accountability of public sector in United Kingdom. The statement was supported by Wisniewski & Stewart (2004) which explains that reporting, meetings and open discussions in the performance measurement as demanded by key stakeholders can become a good start for local authority to increase their transparency and satisfaction level rather than ICT usage as adequate platform.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1.1 Local associations and representatives have more predictive power in disseminating and collecting information and explaining the satisfaction in Sungai Petani

The data reveals that there are relations between local associations and representatives. The councilors and community leaders played the important role and most preferred by the local people in public complaints or in disseminating and collecting information on municipal services in Sungai Petani. The residents also have strong feeling in dealing with associations like Rukun Tetangga, Persatuan Penduduk and religious representatives in their neighborhoods. The residents in Zone C feel that their councilor is active in representing them and always concerned on public complaints. Perhaps, these positive feelings on their active local associations and representatives added on motivations to participate on local authorities' activities in order to increase the satisfaction among their localities. This findings shows that the more engagement among the public towards their associations and representatives, the more likely they to be satisfied on municipal services. Almost all interviewed community leaders, councilors and local associations feel that the local government does provide appropriate and effective channel as for public to deal with municipal services. Thus, the findings show that gaining citizen feedback provides valuable insight into how well the municipal authority meets their customers' needs. The information can be used in quality improvement programs to help municipal councilors recognize opportunities to improve services and creation of a positive perception among citizen.

5.1.2 Communication problem that exist between tiers hinders the quality of customer satisfaction

The residents need to know and be assured that their views and opinion are important to the decision-makers and their involvement in municipal activities should not be seen as something wasteful. Finding of the study found that the residents do not fully engaged with their JKKKP and MKK representatives as well as councilors and some of them do not bother to get to know who actually represent them. On the other hand, the local representatives feel that the residents are just not

interested in working with them. At the same time, it also illustrates that there is communication problem between the municipal, councilors, JKKKP and MKK. An interview with councilor from Zone G was reported that he felt not comfortable to work with MPSPK's officer as AO in respective zone. It is due to the approach in settling public complaints in different ways and most of the times of councilors were around in their community. In contrast, the municipal officers have their own office hours which make them have limited time to meet and deal with their public. This has caused thefrustrations as he feels that officers should be involved accordingly in the decision-making process with the community as the decisions made may affect the zone that they are presenting.

5.2 Policy Implications & Recommendations

5.2.1 Empower the Public with Municipal Services Knowledge

In this light, the local representatives and councillors do have roles in promoting such awareness and not only that, the MPSPK's officers have a role in guiding the public in understanding satisfaction process and the system. The professional body to educate and guide the general public about the waste management, cleanliness, drainage and culvert affairs will obviously help the public to respond effectively and efficiently towards the system of public complaints. In order to offer a consistently high standard of service delivery, municipal officials should make key performers aware of their role and provide them with adequate training. The professional body to educate and guide the general public about the waste management, cleanliness, drainage and culvert affairs will obviously help the public to respond effectively and efficiently towards the system of public complaints. In order to offer a consistently high standard of service delivery, municipal officials should make key performers aware of their role and provide them with adequate training. Empathy and listening skills are vital and need to be addressed in training skills to those who are actually providing the service. Recognizing the dominant role played by the employees in delivering quality service, municipal officials should make sure that there are always sufficient staffing levels. Based on Sungai Petani's experience, the availability of professional services provided by individuals who have deep knowledge in public complaint process managed to help the community leaders and local associations in understanding some issues better and this helped them in drafting more quality and relevant complaints.

5.2.2 Seek Participation from a broad range of Participants

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. Some may dissatisfy on services and some may satisfy on services, but, normally people with active vocal on public complaints will get the attention. The municipal should also take into consideration the existence of organized and unorganized public and whose interest do they represent.

5.2.3 Provide continuing Opportunities and Platform in Public Complaint System

The factor that leads to satisfy the municipal services is usually associated with the weak management in handling public complaints system. The lack of trust or confidence in the political and administrative system also seems as the indicator to measure the degree level of satisfaction. Some researchers point that the lack of trust influences people to satisfy, but some feel that may not be taken seriously by the government. In order to enhance the public trust and confidence, it is important

for the government to provide enough opportunities and platform in channelling their complaints (*Groonroos, 2007 and Parasuraman et al., 1996*). By providing adequate platform and opportunities in the right channel, it will invite the active and vocal residents and local representatives in customer satisfaction of the local affairs. Instead of creating a chance of 'good environment' between local authority and focus groups, involving the public after everything is done will create opportunities for the public to criticise and complain on the loophole of its system.

5.2.4 Enhancing the Role of Councillors and Community Leaders

Councillors and community leaders share a basic function in serving people and they have strong relationship with the grass-root. The public authority believes that these local representatives are able to understand everything happens in their locality. In municipal services context, councillors and community leaders should concern the feel of the residents towards municipal services. They are responsible to help people to voice out the dissatisfaction and deliver the public complaints in the right channel. This may involve the explanation to people on how decisions come to be made and on what basis, but the way in which councillors and community leaders communicate is absolutely needed. It is desirable if there are measures and criteria to ensure that councillors and community leaders have the capabilities in dealing with public complaints and know the best way to advise them. The selection of councillors, JKKKPs and MKKs should include candidates from diverse backgrounds. This is especially important in a multi-racial community in Malaysia. Bringing back local election is one of the alternatives that can be considered, however in Malaysian context, that solution may not feasible in the nearest future as it involves reviews and amendments of the Local Government Act 1976 (171). The best way, perhaps, is to let the residents to choose their own JKKKPs and MKKs representatives. At present, their post was appointed by the local authority and it is a common practice to appoint based on their political affiliates.

5.2.5 Provide continuing Opportunities and Platform in Public Complaint System

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In order to enhance the public trust and confidence, it is important for the government to provide enough opportunities and platform in channelling their complaints (Groonroos, 2007 and Parasuraman et al., 1996). In addition, the public participation in giving ideas and information should be given extra as to get involved in the decision-making process. By providing adequate platform and opportunities in the right channel, it will invite the active and vocal residents and local representatives in customer satisfaction of the local affairs. Instead of creating a chance of 'good environment' between local authority and focus groups, involving the public after everything is done will create opportunities for the public to criticise and complain on the loophole of its system. Instead, it would create a positive relationship between the council and the residents.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that another equally important barrier to customer satisfy on municipal services is the fact that people are now getting more disengaged from their neighbors and

neighborhoods, and thus making collaboration practices seem unachievable. To make people participate is one thing, but when they participate, it opens up to other issues such as rules and policies in public complaints system and the existence of people who see the process of customer satisfaction as a good opportunity to close the relationship with the government, instead of looking at local programs as a chance to work together with the government. The public complaints system should be well organized in order to create a user-friendly system among the community. On the government part, there are questions on the adequacy of platform and opportunities to participate and disseminate information, as well as the sincerity of the officers and councilors in incorporating public input in their decision-making and policy-making exercises. 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.

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