

Facilities Management from A to Z

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oice of the Customer

Voice of the Customer (VOC) processes are used in Six Sigma process improvement for the gathering and analysis of customer views in order to drive business improvement. VOC itself is the data that describes or defines the customers' needs and expectations. VOC processes are the activities that are used to systematically capture and analyse VOC data to facilitate improvements in products and services.

Because of the emphasis that Six Sigma places on understanding customers it is an appropriate tool for application to a service discipline like facilities management. The benefit of using Six Sigma is that it provides a structured suite of tools and methodologies that allow the identification and removal of barriers to success.

Systematic effort to understand the Voice of the Customer avoids the trap of unknowing indifference which some big service organisations fall into, where their processes focus on their own internal efficiency rather than harnessing the valuable data that frontline team members hear from customers every day.

It is important to have a comprehensive mix of VOC data from both structured and unstructured sources including solicited and unsolicited feedback, qualitative and quantitative information with both numeric and language based content. Developing what are often ad-hoc communication transactions into a systematic organisational capability lies at the heart of robust VOC analysis.

Sources for this data would include routine survey results and feedback forms along with less structured input from user groups and client interviews. Unsolicited complaints and bouquets should be recorded as well as unsolicited input gained from walking the floor and help desk conversations. Bringing these elements together into an integrated VOC report provides the opportunity for Six Sigma analysis, improvement and control.

However, the Customer's voice is not the only one that the FM should be paying attention to; After all, the customer may know what their needs are but they don't often understand the needs of the facility itself. A professional Facilities Management function needs to apply its technical expertise to listening to the Voice of the Process as well. These are the measures that capture the effectiveness of the facilities strategy being implemented in terms of compliance, lifecycle costing and good practice facilities management technique.

There are many good books on Six Sigma. One that includes several chapters on the use of Voice of the Customer to drive service improvement is "Lean Six Sigma for Service" by Michael L George published by McGraw-Hill Professional ISBN-10: 9780071418218