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for improving customer provider relationship:
a case study

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THE PARTNERSHIP TABLE AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL TOOL FOR IMPROVING CUSTOMER-PROVIDER RELATIONSHIP: A CASE STUDY IN FACILITY MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a successful experience of Partnership Table (PT) implementation in a Facility Management (FM) contract case study. The case is a multi-services contract signed by *Azienda per i Servizi Sanitari n.1* in Trieste (customer), a medical service authority, and *Consorzio Nazionale Servizi* (provider), Italian FM service provider leader.

We give an in-depth description of the purposes of PT implementation, its organizational structure, its working and the benefits from the PT implementation. Findings from the PT benefits evaluation have highlighted that the PT strengthens cooperation between the customer and the provider, looking for profitable results for both contractors. Moreover, the PT allows the parties to have constructive discussions. Indeed, the results of the research have put out that the table is an useful tool for an effective and quick problem solving and it facilitates the customer-provider relationship improvement.

Keywords: Partnership Table; Facility Management; Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

In the Facility Management (FM) industry, it is more and more important for customers and providers to follow the dynamic variables that change continuously the environment in which the contractors operate. In fact, facility management is exposed to the following dynamic variables:

- change in the customer's and final consumers' needs;
- higher service levels required;
- evolution of the technological solutions;
- evolution of the organizational models and management approaches.

These dynamic variables call for frequent changes in the customer-provider relationships. Nevertheless, the strict obligations included in some contracts – especially in the public sector – limit the parties' actions. Usually, contracts can't follow the dynamic variables because of a strong strictness. Furthermore, there are several variables that are impossible to anticipate in the contract (Hart and Moore, 1988; Anderlini and Felli, 1994; Maskin, 2002). So, contracts are characterized by a strong incompleteness.

As a consequence, whereas on the one hand the service is subject to the changes in terms of needs, service levels, etc., on the other hand it is bound by static contract terms. This dangerous situation could be cause of disputes between the contractors.

Previous case study research about FM contract – signed by *Azienda per i Servizi Sanitari* in Trieste (ASS1, customer) and *Consorzio Nazionale Servizi* (CNS, provider) – confirmed what we just say. Indeed, the research highlighted a gap between the real needs of the ASS1 and the activities provided for the contract. The change in the services or the activation of new ones were quite complex, due to the contract strictness and incompleteness.

Starting from the ASS1-CNS contract problems, we proposed a new model that has allowed the parties to follow the FM dynamic variables. The model, called *Open Facility Management* (OFM), provides for the integration of three operational tools referring to different areas (De Toni, 2007):

- *flexible contract with Service Level Agreement (SLA)* in the juridical area: it allows the parties to adjust the contract in order to follow the dynamic variables;
- *Performance Measurement System (PMS) shared by the contractors* in the management area: it allows the contractors to have shared and impartial contract evaluations;
- *Partnership Table (PT)* in the organizational area: it allows the parties to analyze the contract, to highlight the problems and to share the solutions. It is a discussion place where information about services, service levels and the technical, managerial and organizational contract issues is exchanged. Recurring meetings are called in order to discuss the problems and in order to look for the best solutions.

OFM has been adopted by ASS1 and CNS in order to improve the contract. At the present time, only the PT is fully implemented.

We have just described in detail the open facility management model (De Toni, 2007; De Toni *et al.*, 2007a; De Toni *et al.*, 2007b) and its management tool, the shared PMS (De Toni *et al.*, 2007c), in previous works. The aim of this paper is to describe the OFM organizational tool: the partnership table. The last OFM tool, flexible contract with SLA in the juridical area, will be the object of future work.

We describe the PT implemented in the FM contract between ASS1 and CNS. In particular, we give an in-depth description of:

1. purposes of PT implementation;
2. PT organizational structure;
3. PT working;
4. benefits from the PT implementation.

In the following section we describe the research methodology: an action research. Section 3 deals with the contract case between ASS1 and CNS. The features of the contract and the main criticalities between the contractors are described. Then in the fourth section we describe the proposed solution to the contract criticalities. The solution is the open facility management model with its operational tools: the flexible contract with SLA, the shared PMS and the partnership table. The last tool is the only one that has been implemented in the case study (section 5). PT features and the benefits from its implementation are described in section 6. Future developments and conclusions are at the end of the paper.

RESEARCH METODHOLOGY

An action research, about an Italian FM contract, has been realized. The contract was signed by *Azienda per i Servizi Sanitari n.1* in Trieste (ASS1, customer), a medical service authority, and *Consorzio Nazionale Servizi* (CNS, provider), Italian FM service provider leader.

Action research started in 2004 and it has provided for the following steps according to Coughlan and Coughlan (2002) (De Toni *et al.*, 2007b):

- *Data gathering e data feedback*: analysis of the contract and identification of the main problems. We have realized 17 semi-structured interviews to 8 customer's managers and 9 provider's managers. Managers came from different offices (administration, plants and buildings maintenance, purchasing, corporate finance, etc.). Furthermore we have analyzed

the qualitative and quantitative features of the contract in detail, the costs of the contract above all.

- *Data analysis and action planning*: action plan design, that has been the OFM model and tools implementation. We have realized different meetings with the contractors in order to share with them the OFM solution and in order to define jointly the action plan for the implementation of the operative tools.
- *Implementation*: OFM model and tools have been implementing at different times. The partnership table have been implemented on March 2006. The shared PMS is developing. The flexible contract with SLA could be implemented after the end of the present contract.
- *Evaluation*: PT has been the first OFM tool fully implemented. The benefits from its implementation have been investigated. We have adopted the following performance indicators:
 - a. problem solving effectiveness;
 - b. problem solving quickness;
 - c. openness to new challenges and ideas;
 - d. overall satisfaction of the managers in charge of the contract (both for costumer and provider).

THE CASE STUDY

The contract case was signed by:

- *customer*: ASS1, an Italian medical service authority which supplies sanitary services to citizens in the province of Trieste (north-east Italy);
- *provider*: CNS, main contractor of a consortium made up of 5 other qualified service providers.

The FM services of ASS1 outsourced to CNS have been:

- *technical services or “hard FM services”*: plants and buildings maintenance and energy supply;
- *non-technical services or “soft FM services”*: cleaning, restoration, laundry and logistics.

Moreover, the provider has had to implement a custom-made information system and a call center in order to manage the service calls and in order to monitor the service levels. CNS has had also to establish the ASS1 real estate register. In Table 1 some data about the contract established services are presented.

Table 1 – Data about the contract case (source: CNS, December 2006)

SERVICES		DESCRIPTION	DATA (per year)
Technical services	Plants and buildings maintenance	Ordinary and extraordinary maintenance (programmed and reactive) of buildings and plants. Emergency maintenance for damages possibly harming people.	– 2,820 maintenance (excluding programmed maintenance) – 190.000 m ³ (44 buildings)
	Energy supply	Buildings heating and air conditioning.	– 200.000 m ³ (46 buildings)
Non-technical services	Cleaning	Cleaning of offices, surgeries, toilets and locker rooms, bedrooms, outside areas and common spaces (dining hall, stairs, ...).	– 43.000 m ² (53 buildings)
	Restoration	Catering and food-stuffs supply.	– 135,000 meals and 42,000 breakfasts for catering – 56,000 meals and 23,000 breakfasts for food-stuffs supply
	Laundry	Washing of work clothes and sheets.	– 74,000 work clothes and sheets
	Logistic	Transport of laboratory tests, pharmacy products and various transports (moving, clearing and portorage).	– 11,800 hour/man – 1,300 days/motor vehicle

The final consumers of the FM services are the ASS1's employees (about 1.200) and the citizens in the province of Trieste (about 240.000).

The contract started on January, 1st 2003. Its total duration is six years. The total amount is nearly 24.000.000,00 Euro.

The criticalities between ASS1 and CNS

After two years from the beginning of the contract, some criticalities between ASS1 and CNS – about the management and provision of the FM services – came out.

The main problems came from plants and buildings maintenance. Our previous research (De Toni *et al.*, 2007b) highlighted that there were three major criticalities:

1. *Small budget for the maintenance activities.* The financial analysis of the contract pointed out that ASS1 allocated a limited budget for the maintenance compared with the number and complexity of the contract established activities. In fact ASS1 cut down the maintenance expenses considerably (- 40% compared with the expenses before the contract assignment). As a consequence the provider discovered an imbalance between the contract established activities and the budget. So, it was difficult for CNS to provide good quality services.
2. *Poor trust between the ASS1's managers of the technical services and the provider.* The analysis of the FM services invoices received by ASS1 highlighted that customer's managers of the technical services still outsourced several maintenance activities to other providers. Indeed among the 137 maintenance invoices received by the customer, only 33 were issued by CNS. So, ASS1 still preferred to outsource numerous activities to other providers.
3. *Different service level perception between customer and provider about programmed maintenance.* The scheduling adherence analysis of the programmed maintenance pointed out that the parties had different perception. We submitted to the contractors a questionnaire aiming to identify which programmed activities were really realized. The provider claimed that 92% of the activities were realized, while they were only 7% for the customer. This different perception caused several disputes between the contractors.

There weren't strong problems for the other services, except for the real estate register. Indeed the customer reported the provider slowness as far as the geometric survey of the buildings was concerned.

Besides the criticalities we just say, there were structural problems between the parties. Those problems restrained the service management and provision and the contract development (Table 2). Mainly, it didn't exist a systematic coordination between customer and provider which allowed contractors to solve the contract problems quickly and jointly. Moreover, the parties seldom could change the contract terms. In fact the contract, that proved to be incomplete, was very strict. As a result the service provided was often unsatisfactory for the customer.

Table 2 – The structural problems between ASS1 and CNS

AREAS	PROBLEMS
Juridical	Low contract flexibility as regards time, costs, quality and service levels
	Low contract ability to follow the final consumer needs
	High bureaucracy to put into action new services
Management	Slow and complex problem solving process
	Low information sharing between the contractors
Organizational	Complex customer departments reorganization

THE PROPOSED SOLUTION: OPEN FACILITY MANAGEMENT

The contract problems between ASS1 and CNS have in common some things, that is the contract inability to make the changes which are necessary to improve the services provision.

This is a recurrent situation in FM, especially in the public sector. In fact there are some different FM dynamic variables which are often in contrast with strict contract terms (Figure 1). The problems come out when the contractors can't manage the services in a flexible way cause of the contract strictness.

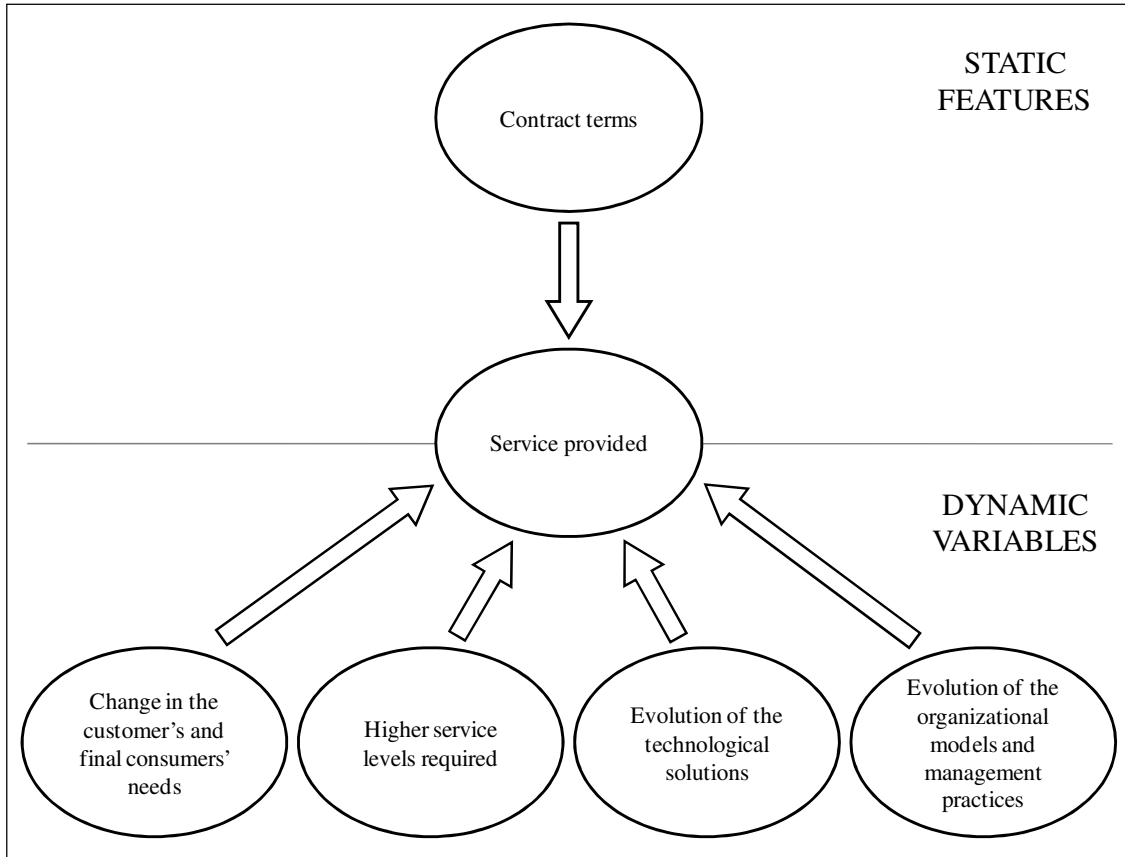


Figure 1 – Service provided between static features and dynamic variables (De Toni, 2007)

We proposed an innovative model, the *Open Facility Management (OFM)*, in order to solve the criticalities of the contract case. The OFM provides for a higher sensitivity by the parties to the existing and potential changes. Openness to the changes occurring in the FM is the starting point for revising and improving the service management process. OFM owes its name to the openness concept.

The OFM approach is open not only to changes but also to the “new” actors who are not taken into consideration in the traditional FM approach (i.e. consultants, specialists, research centres, etc.). Opening to “new” actors means considering their needs and expertises as a good opportunity to revise and improve service management. In fact every actor could bring technological opportunities, calls for development, management and organizational improvements, etc.

The OFM model is founded on three principles:

1. contract flexibility;
2. shared performance measurement system;
3. actor coordination.

The principles are paired up with three operative tools referring to different areas (Table 3). In the juridical area, the flexible contract with Service Level Agreement (SLA) allows the parties to overcome the limits imposed by strict contracts. The second area provides for the management aspects related to the assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the actions. Finally, in the organizational area, the Partnership Table (PT) allows the parties to identify, to discuss and to solve

the critical aspects in service management. The three tools are integrated in a service management process which enables the parties to jointly discuss problems arising from time to time and to jointly look for the most relevant solution (De Toni, 2007). Here we describe the three tools.

Table 3 – Principles, areas and tools of the open facility management model (De Toni et al., 2007b)

PRINCIPLE		AREA	TOOL	DESCRIPTION
Contract flexibility		Juridical	Flexible contract with Service Level Agreement	It defines the criteria for the service quality assessment. Contractors revise the criteria periodically in order to follow the dynamic variables of facility management.
Actor integration	Shared performance measurement system	Management	Shared Performance Measurement System	It collects the indicators that are necessary to measure the contract. Indicators are chosen by the contractors jointly.
	Actor coordination	Organizational	Partnership Table	It is a discussion place where information about services, service levels (related to the service level agreement) and the technical, managerial and organizational contract issues is exchanged.

Flexible contract with service level agreement

There are two classes of FM contracts, i.e. strict and flexible (with Service Level Agreement, SLA) contracts. A contract is strict if it doesn't allow the parties to change service levels during the contract. Instead, a contract is flexible if the contract assignment is followed by a start-up phase and by the definition of the service level agreement (which allows service levels changing).

The service level agreement is a contract attachment that defines the scope and the assessment criteria for service quality, the penalties and related bonuses. SLA focuses on the outcomes and not on the service operations (Atkin and Brooks, 2000). SLA enables the parties to modify what follows:

- *performances*: change in the frequency of data recording; variation in the agreed performance levels; redefinition of the list of services measures;
- *services*: variation in the service content; need for new services.

As a result, flexible contracts enable the parties to modify the contract terms by adopting a service level agreement. In this manner, contractors can increase the range of service options to adjust activities to the relevant needs.

In the traditional FM approach, the parties can select the contract class according to their needs, whereas in the OFM the flexible contract (with SLA) is preferentially used.

Shared performance measurement system

In the management area, the Performance Measurement System (PMS) shared by the customer and the provider is the OFM tool. Sharing PMS requires that:

1. the framework design involves both customer and provider;
2. the indicators selection is realized by the parties jointly;
3. data are collected in the customer's and provider's information system and the results are spread to both contractors.

The shared PMS collects the measures necessary to the contract evaluation. This tool gives the contractors objective and shared information which are important for the discussions at the PT. The adoption of a shared PMS allows the parties to improve the services levels and to strengthen the cooperation.

The Facility Management Balanced Scorecard (FMBSC) is the framework we designed for the contract analyzed in this study (De Toni et al., 2007c). We called the framework FMBSC because it

follows the same structure and principles adopted by the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). We chose the balanced scorecard as the reference model after a careful review of the PMSs used in FM. We found that the Kaplan and Norton's model is the most adequate PMS for facility management (Coronel and Evans, 1999; Amaratunga and Baldry, 2000; Brakertz and Kenley, 2002).

Partnership table

The Partnership Table (PT) is the OFM organizational tool. The PT is a discussion place where information about services, service levels (related to the service level agreement) and the technical, managerial and organizational contract issues is exchanged. At the partnership table the information is dealt with (Figure 2):

- the shared performance measurement system;
- the service level agreement;
- the changes caused by the dynamic variables of FM.

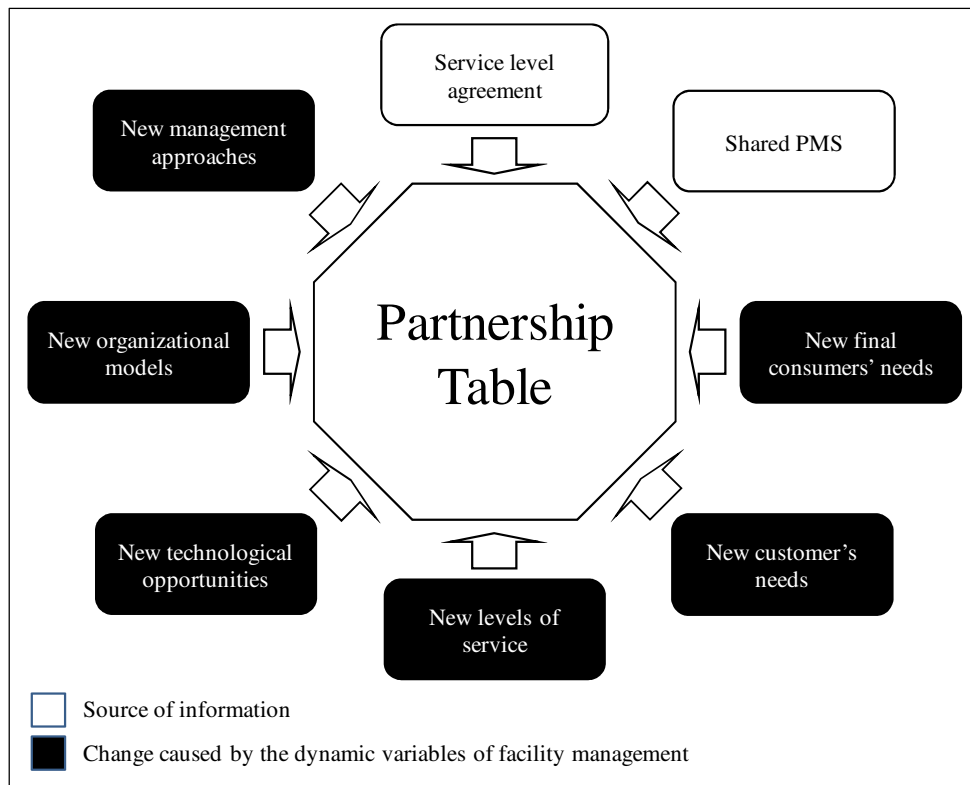


Figure 2 – Sources of information and changes caused by the dynamic variables of facility management

The information is used by the participants at the partnership table to assess the contract and to solve criticalities through the shared design (or re-design) of services.

Customer's and provider's managers attend meetings of the partnership table. Moreover the contractors could invite actors from outside the contract in order to consider new technological opportunities, calls for development, management and organizational improvements, etc.

The table meetings are not called regularly; on the contrary, they are arranged by the parties in a flexible way. The partnership table is called solely when services need to be revised and improved.

The partnership table strengthens cooperation between customer and provider. It aims to improve the relationship between the contractors, looking for a profitable partnership. Similar experiences of PT are the Joint Partnership Board between Derbyshire Royal Infirmary and Bateman/Carillion

(Okoroh *et al.*, 2001) and the User Group Meetings between Rank Xerox Limited and CBX Ltd (Houston and Youngs, 1996), in the UK FM sector.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OPEN FACILITY MANAGEMENT

The OFM model was adopted by ASS1 and CNS in order to solve the contract criticalities. The implementation of the model started with the design of the shared PMS custom-made for the contract case (January, 2006). Now this tool is developing. The partnership table was implemented on March, 2006. On the contrary, the flexible contract with SLA could be implemented after the end of the present contract (December, 31st 2008).

Therefore, only the PT is fully implemented and works. Here we give an in-depth description of:

1. purposes of PT implementation;
2. PT organizational structure;
3. PT working;
4. benefits from the PT implementation.

THE PARTNERSHIP TABLE BETWEEN ASS1 AND CNS

From January to March 2006, ASS1 and CNS called nine meetings in order to test the usefulness of the partnership table. During those meetings the parties:

- presented all the service managers to the counterpart, in fact not all customer's managers met provider's managers (and vice versa) before those meetings;
- discussed about the major contract problems (as regards maintenance, buildings heating and cleaning above all);
- had a picture of the situation for every contract established services, even if there weren't serious problems;
- wrote the partnership table regulation, covering the organizational structure and working.

On March, 22nd 2006 the parties officially put in action the PT signing the regulation (additional to the contract). The PT still worked at the experimental stage for six months (till September 2006). Since October the parties have decided to make use of the PT systematically till the end of the contract.

From January 2006 (when the PT wasn't officially implemented yet) to December 2007, the parties called 24 meetings. Nevertheless 16 reports of meetings were drawn up. In fact, from January to April 2006 contractors called 10 meetings, but only 2 reports were drawn up (January, 9th and 18th). From May 2006 the parties drew up reports regularly (14 on the whole). As a consequence, information in this section comes from 16 reports out of 24.

Hereafter we describe the partnership table implemented in the case study. We have looked for information up in different sources (Table 4). We have used multiple sources of evidence, where it was possible, to obtain data triangulation (Yin, 2003).

Purposes of partnership table implementation

The partnership table is implemented in order to develop a durable cooperation between the contractors, in order to satisfy ASS1 needs and in order to monitor the contract carefully. It is founded on the mutual trust and the information and competences sharing. According to the partnership table regulation, its main aims are:

- planning the activities jointly between contractors;
- problems solving of the contract;
- contract monitoring;
- applying service level agreement conditions and redefining the terms of the contract;
- interpreting the contract terms jointly.

Table 4 – Sources of information for the partnership table description

SUBJECT		SOURCES
1. Purposes of partnership table implementation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership table regulation subscribed by the contractors
2. Partnership table organizational structure		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership table regulation subscribed by the contractors Reports of meetings
3. Partnership table working		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership table regulation subscribed by the contractors Informal open-ended interviews to the main participants at the PT Authors attendance to some meetings (direct observations)
4. Benefits from the partnership table implementation	a. Problem solving effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports of meetings Prearranged card that the managers in charge of the contract had to fill out
	b. Problem solving quickness	
	c. Openness to new challenges and ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports of meetings
	d. Overall satisfaction of the managers in charge of the contract (both for costumer and provider)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured interviews to the managers in charge of the contract (both for costumer and provider)

Partnership table organizational structure

The following elements have been specified in the PT regulation:

- Participants (Figure 3):
 - a permanent coordinator (unbiased chairman of the table) selected by the customer;
 - two permanent customer’s managers;
 - two permanent provider’s managers;
 - changeable costumer’s and provider’s managers (they could attend meetings where topics relate to their specific field of expertise);
 - changeable actors from outside the contract invited by the parties (i.e. consultants, specialists, etc.).
- Time span between meetings.

The ASS1 Administration Manager is the permanent coordinator. He calls and presides over the meetings and supervises the decisions accomplishment. The permanent coordinator can suggest the PT annual program and the topics to discuss during the meetings. He draws up the annual report about the activities of the PT. This report is sent to the ASS1 Chief Executive and to the provider’s managers.

The other permanent managers are:

- the Technical Services Manager and the Non-Technical Services Manager of the ASS1;
- the Facility Manager and the Customer Service Manager of the CNS.

Permanent managers attend meeting in order to share the solutions for the contract improvement. Delegates could take their place.

According to the PT regulation, the parties can invite some specialists (i.e. costumer’s and provider’s managers, final consumers, consultants, etc.) to the meetings of the partnership table. According to their skills, these changeable participants attend meetings where topics relate to their specific field of expertise (we verify this in the reports of meetings too). Their contribution is very important to settle social and cultural disputes and also to improve service management. So, the PT is “open” to all those actors who can substantially improve the contract. The parties invite these actors to take advantage of their contribution and their excellence experiences.

As regards the time span between meetings, the PT is called solely when services need to be revised and improved. Nevertheless, parties have chosen to call meetings once a month.

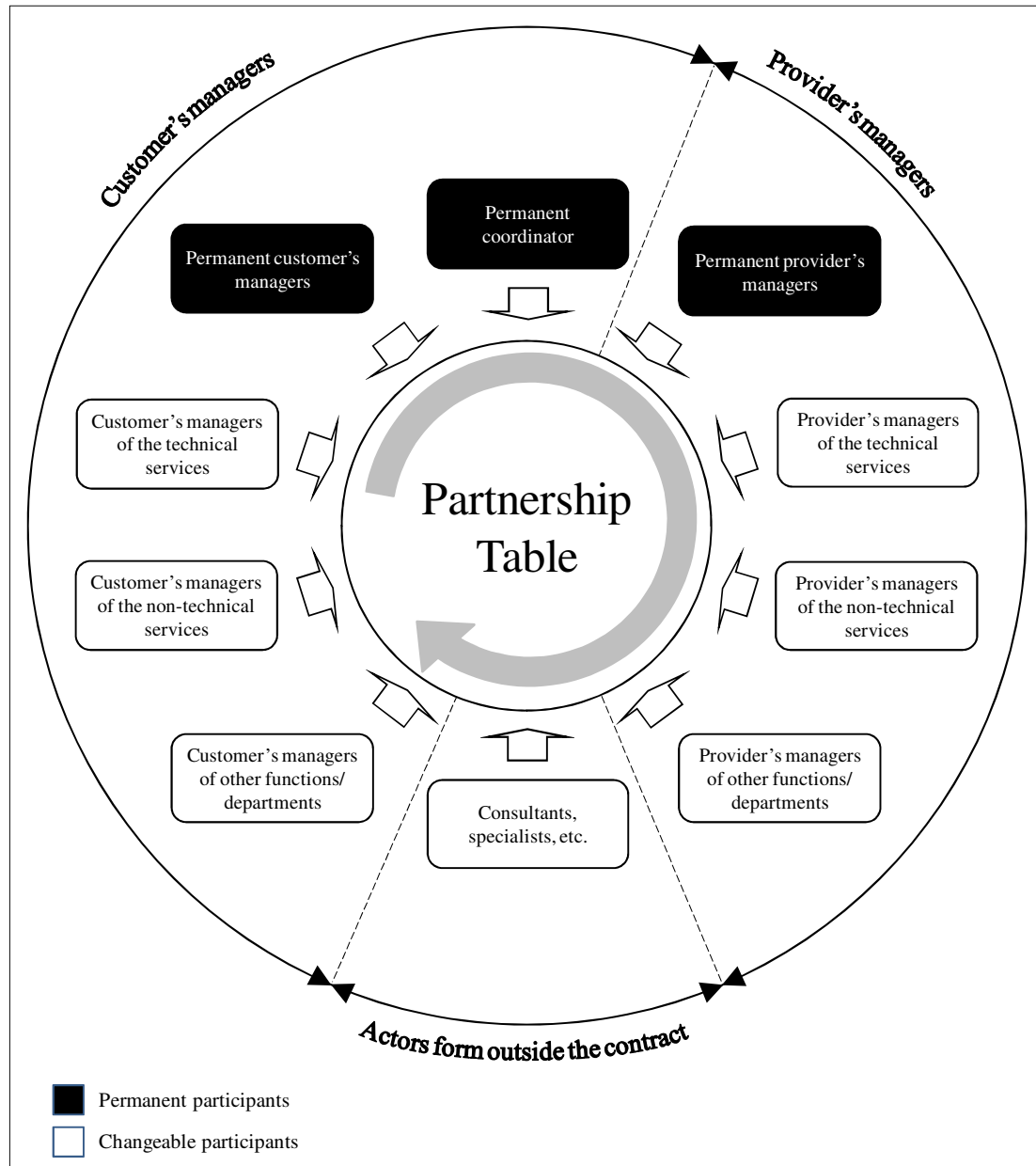


Figure 3 – Participants to the meetings of the partnership table

Partnership table working

Changes caused by the FM dynamic variables and information about the shared PMS and the service level agreement are exchanged at the partnership table. Changes and information are the starting point for the discussion at the meetings.

Permanent participants select the best solution to the problems by a majority vote (changeable participants attend meetings without having the right to vote). Nevertheless, it would be better that the solutions are accepted unanimously, according to the PT regulation.

According to the permanent managers, unanimity is necessary to produce constructive dialogue between the parties (this information comes from informal open-ended interviews about PT working we realized to the permanent managers).

Participants could decide to apply service level agreement conditions, i.e. bonuses or penalties, or to revise the terms of the contract (performance levels or service re-design) as a solution. Permanent participants have the power to decide which solutions put into practice in order to improve the contract.

Information about the PT working comes from the regulation. Nevertheless we attended some meetings in order to verify what we just describe.

Benefits from the PT implementation

The discussion during the meetings has concerned the problems of contract management and improvement (global service) mainly. Then the discussion has focused on the problems of single contract established services. Some examples of solutions related to management and improvement of contract are:

- offering training courses for customer's employees to teach them how to use the contract services correctly;
- analyzing jointly the costs of the contract to find where reducing/increasing the expenses;
- doing a final consumer satisfaction survey about contract services;

Furthermore the contractors started to define the SLA for the future contract and they introduced in the contract new management and technological innovations.

Problems related to plants and buildings maintenance, energy supply and real estate register have been discussed more than the other services. Tables 5 and 6 give us a description of the problems discussed and solved.

Table 5 – Number of problems discussed at the partnership table: service classification

SERVICE	N° OF PROBLEMS DISCUSSED	N° OF PROBLEMS SOLVED	% SOLVED/ DISCUSSED
Global Service contract	17	16	94,1%
Plants and buildings maintenance & energy supply	10	10	100,0%
Real estate register	9	8	88,9%
Cleaning	6	6	100,0%
Restoration	3	2	66,7%
Logistic	1	1	100,0%
Information system	1	1	100,0%
Laundry	0	0	100,0%
Total	47	44	93,6%

Table 6 – Number of problems discussed at the partnership table: issue classification

PERSPECTIVE (De Toni <i>et al.</i> , 2007c)	ISSUE	N° OF PROBLEMS DISCUSSED	N° OF PROBLEMS SOLVED	% SOLVED/ DISCUSSED
Financial	Reducing outsourced services costs	1	1	100,0%
	Reducing bureaucracy	5	5	100,0%
Final consumer/ customer	Improving final consumer satisfaction	9	8	88,9%
Facilities	Improving effectiveness of services operations	10	10	100,0%
	Developing contract services (improving quality and reducing services supply time)	3	2	66,7%
	Learning in detail customer plants and buildings features	10	9	90,0%
	Improving customer plants and buildings condition	2	2	100,0%
Learning and growth	Improving the information system	5	5	100,0%
	Training customer employees towards a correct use of the services	4	4	100,0%
	Looking for profitable results for both contractors and joining the risks	5	4	80,0%
	Joining information and competences between contractors	21	19	90,5%
	Programming and planning the activities jointly between contractors	5	5	100,0%
Total (the problems discussed could concern more than one issue)		80	74	92,5%

As regards the evaluation of the benefits from the PT implementation, we have measured four performance indicators:

- a. problem solving effectiveness;
- b. problem solving quickness;
- c. openness to new challenges and ideas;
- d. overall satisfaction of the managers in charge of the contract (both for customer and provider).

We have found the problems discussed at the PT from the reports of meetings in order to measure the problem solving effectiveness and quickness. Afterwards we have asked the managers in charge of the contract (ASS1 Administration Manager and CNS Facility Manager) to specify, making use of a prearranged card, what problems were solved and how much time it took.

Information about the participants' office has been used to evaluate the openness to new challenges and ideas. We have gathered information in the reports of meetings.

Finally, we have realized two structured interviews to ASS1 Administration Manager and CNS Facility Manager in order to evaluate their overall satisfaction about the PT usefulness (De Toni *et al.*, 2007b).

We have obtained the following results:

- a. *Problem solving effectiveness.* 47 problems have been discussed (nearly 3 at each table); 44 have been solved (nearly 93,6%). Among these ones:
 - 38 solutions have been implemented and they have been observed regularly (nearly 86,4%);
 - 4 solutions have been implemented, but they have been observed rarely;
 - 2 solutions have not been implemented yet.

Participants never put solutions to the vote, but they always decided by mutual consent.

- b. *Problem solving quickness.* Participants have solved 32 problems (nearly 72,7%) making use of single meetings (on average 2 hours). It took approximately 16,8 weeks to solve more complex problems (2/3 meetings).
- c. *Openness to new challenges and ideas.* On the whole, 48 participants have attended one meeting at least (including the 5 permanent managers): 24 have been customer's managers, 22 have been provider's ones and 2 have been actors from outside the contract. Every meeting have had 12 participants on average. The main customer's and provider's service managers have attended one meeting at least (laundry managers have never attended the meetings). Moreover, several both staff managers have been invited at the PT (Table 7). On the contrary, the actors from outside the contract, who have attended the meetings industriously, have been only two (the authors). We have produced information for the discussion at the partnership table (contract expenses analysis, customer satisfaction and final consumer satisfaction surveys).
- d. *Overall satisfaction of the managers in charge of the contract (both for the customer and the provider).* Both ASS1 Administration Manager and CNS Facility Manager have stated the utility of the PT. They have claimed that:
 - the relationship complexities and the conflicts between the contractors have been reduced;
 - the activities planning and the contract monitoring have been performed jointly by the parties.

PT implementation allows the parties to convene the customer's and provider's service managers in a single place and to solve faster criticalities. Indeed, before PT implementation, one of problems was that customer's managers offloaded their responsibilities onto provider's ones (and vice versa) continuously.

At first participants (customer's managers especially) spoke about problems with a certain distrust, but now every manager shows his/her ideas, uncertainties, remarks, complaints and suggestions for the contract improvement.

According to the managers interviewed, the PT is achieving the established objectives. Their overall satisfaction about PT implementation is good because of the high problem solving effectiveness and the relationship improvement between the parties.

Table 7 – Customer’s and provider’s participants to the partnership table meetings

FUNCTION		CUSTOMER’s MANAGERS	PROVIDER’s MANAGERS	TOTAL
Technical services		1		13
	Plants and buildings maintenance	4	6	
	Energy supply		2	
Non-technical services		1 + 2	2	13
	Cleaning	1	1	
	Restoration	1	2	
	Laundry	0	0	
	Logistic	1	2	
Other functions	Information System	2	2	20
	Real Estate	2		
	Administration	1		
	Legal	1		
	Quality	3		
	Purchasing	2		
	Health care	2		
	Contract management		2 + 3	
TOTAL		24	22	46

Permanent participants to the partnership table

CONCLUSIONS

Starting from the criticalities we have verified in a FM contract case, we have proposed an innovative model – called Open Facility Management – allowing contractors to solve the problems in the juridical, management and organizational area. The model is made up of three operative tools:

- flexible contract with Service Level Agreement;
- Performance Measurement System shared by the contractors;
- Partnership Table.

Open facility management was implemented by *Azienda per i Servizi Sanitari n.1* in Trieste (ASS1, customer) and *Consorzio Nazionale Servizi* (CNS, provider).

Now, only the PT is fully implemented. It works for two years. Present work describes the successful experience of partnership table implementation. Findings from the PT benefits evaluation have highlighted that the PT strengths cooperation between ASS1 and CNS, looking for profitable results for both contractors. Moreover, the PT allows the parties to have constructive discussions. In fact, the results of the research put out that:

- The table is an useful tool for an effective and quick problem solving: in fact nearly all of the problems discussed at the PT meetings have been solved. Furthermore the majority of them has been solved making use of single meetings.

- The PT is “opened” to the FM dynamic variables and to new challenges and ideas: information about FM dynamic variables is the starting point for the discussion at the PT. As regards the participants, the research points out that nearly all the contractors’ service managers have attended one meeting at least.
- The table facilitates the customer-provider relationship improvement: ASS1 Administration Manager and CNS Facility Manager are very satisfied as regards PT utilization. According to them, PT allows the parties to improve the relationship and to plan jointly contract activities.

Therefore, present research highlights that the first OFM tool implemented is useful for the contract problem solving. Nevertheless the flexible contract with SLA and the shared PMS have to be implemented as well in order to evaluate the overall OFM benefits.

The shared PMS is developing. But it is just producing usable information. In future we’ll end the developing stage, integrating the PMS with the contract information system.

Information which the shared PMS is producing will be utilized to define the service level agreement for the next contract. In fact we must wait for present contract end and for new call for tender to implement the flexible contract.

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