

FM Book Review

by David Reynolds¹

“Just include that in the SLA” advised my FM consulting partner Stephen Brown to a client a few years ago, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The client sought to renew an FM services contract just as the pandemic took hold and occupation of the buildings had become uncertain. Cancer took Stephen Brown last year, but his remark stayed with me, demonstrating that the SLA was already meeting a frequent and important FM prerogative to enhance communication, share understandings, and confer both structure and flexibility at every stage.

In a new FM book, *‘Facilities Management Service Level Agreement, A communication tool and mechanism for fostering an effective partnership’* (© 2023 Steven Ee,

Amazon Kindle and print), author Steven Ee² presents the SLA fully, in economical, easily followed, tightly organized style, with illustrations to clarify the main ideas. Take a moment to recall times and incidents of slow and uncertain performance from service providers and the disagreements, missed calls, uneven results, and loss of reputation for FM that can follow. Can FM create and use well-formed SLAs to help leave all that behind? Steven Ee takes things a long way in the right direction.

FM has the central role. At the start, we learn, consolidate, and convey to interested service providers stakeholder needs and expectations to meet. Communication at this point brings FM understanding of service provider strengths and limitations and informs procurement and performance to follow. SLA development begins with FM and the internal client settling on operational needs and priorities explicitly, then proceeds to procurement and outsourcing³. Outcomes sought are thought of in performance terms.

Effective communication fosters partnership among FM, demand organization clients, and services providers. Communication, largely represented as explicit shared information to confer visibility to all parties, is in the foreground through four compact chapters on understanding, developing, enabling, and implementing SLAs. The balance, about a third of the book’s 78 pages on my Kindle, furnishes convenient SLA “how to” guides, a project plan Gantt chart, glossary, bibliography, and resources.

Chapter 2, *Developing*, provisions for writing, data, and information structures are specific and extensive in ten sections from context to conflict management. There is even an SLA glossary, a suitable resource as SLA matures as an FM competence. The topics and structures in this



chapter do not overcome, but instead encourage familiar conversations among parties. Interpersonal communication is a partnership element made more useful when the underlying data and structured information provide a ready, trusted basis for actions, adjustments, and improvements for the parties to take up.

Chapter 3, **Enabling**, gives detailed attention to rigor in measuring performance. With deliberate design, reliable measures including satisfaction of stakeholders and continual improvement are feasible, linked to prescribed actions by FM and the service provider under the SLA. Actions in response to key measurements mainly serve to improve or adjust work and results under the SLA. Typical provisions may include merit compensation for extraordinary results or improvements. For situations of performance falling short, progressive reductions in compensation and even eventual release can be invoked for not meeting targets. In every case, well designed data and structured information are the bedrock for performance based management using SLAs.

How do FM technology applications figure in SLAs? The book makes a complete and technology agnostic guide for SLA substance. It does not prescribe technologies to meet the functions described. This is not a drawback because organizations vary in their technology uses, capabilities, and resources. I found myself weighing the amounts, types, and presentations of information essential to monitor performance - information to reach all parties and bring communications, decisions, and actions. FM systems now in wide use, whether large or small, can support SLAs as described⁴.

'Facilities Management Service Level Agreement - A communication tool and mechanism for fostering an effective partnership' has a strongly desirable combination of sufficiency for purposes of creating, assessing, and using an SLA in any circumstances, while being compact, readable, and inexpensive. Procuring and operating with SLAs is basic fare for FM. This book will support and unify you, your clients, and service providers who have a stake in service performance.

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² FMCC member, CFM, and IFMA Fellow Steven Ee leads FMS Associates Asia, an FM training and consulting company. He lectures in university programs in FM and Project Management. His mission, ongoing and well executed as author (three previous books and numerous articles), presenter, and advocate, is to bring FM to notice as a resource to everyone with a stake in the built environment.

³ IFMA and IFMA members and their organizations maintain research, presentations, promotion, and consulting activities in procurement, a rapidly evolving area. Suggestions: CPE, Center for Procurement Excellence (<https://center4procurement.org/>), and PBSRG, Performance Based Studies Research Group (<https://pbsrg.com>)

⁴ Performance data and information acquired and reported as key should require the least possible time, work, analysis, and interpretation. Such information must be decisive. Otherwise do not bother. The “K” in KPI is for key. Keep these few, essential, quick, and understandable. Stacey Barr (<https://www.staceybarr.com>) is a thorough source for richly practical design and use of KPIs.