

## Chapter 13

# Construction Briefing Process in Malaysia: Procedures and Problems in the Public Sector

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Malaysia is progressing smoothly toward the achievement of Vision 2020. In achieving this vision, the country has to undergo tremendous development. Aside from providing houses for the people, the construction industry has to support the development of other industries with various types of wide-scale projects implemented by either public or private sectors. It is acknowledged that project briefing is the most important process conducted during the initial stage of project development. The research was undertaken to study the public sector's construction briefing process and to investigate the problems arising during the process. Data was gathered through face-to-face interview. The data gathered supported that the public sector was using the RIBA plan of work but leaning towards the Netherlands approach. In addition, the project brief was seen as a powerful tool to be controlled at the early stage of project planning (initial stage). The result supported previous studies that pointed out the lack of knowledge and the involvement of inexperienced parties, either clients or consultants, as the main barriers for the integrated and strategic project briefing. This study contributes useful and beneficial information for the public sector to mitigate the project problems.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia is one of the fastest growing countries in Southeast Asia. As Malaysia progresses towards the achievement of the developed nation stage by the year 2020, numerous development projects are being planned and implemented by both the government and the private sector. However, it is the projects implemented by the government that attract public's attention due to the use of public money. These projects, such as public hospitals, schools and bridges, are of vital importance to the nation because of their nature, that is, they benefit the general population.

Thus, it is crucial for public projects to be completed with the highest quality but with less cost and in less time. However, many public projects have been questioned in terms of their accountability, as they suffer from delays, incompleteness, low quality, and higher cost. Among them are hospitals, computer laboratories, and administration buildings. *Berita Harian*, one of the Malaysian newspapers, has managed to compile a list of failed projects for the period of 2005-2007. The cost of these projects ranged from RM3 million to RM500 million. Most of these projects suffered from late completion, and even if the buildings had been completed on time, there were cases when the buildings could not be used due to various defects. However, all of these projects were beneficial to the community, thus making it severely important for them to be completed on time, within the budget, and with satisfying quality.

The development of a construction brief is the process of clarifying the objectives and requirements of a project at the early stage of project development. The purpose of this process is for the clients to communicate to the design team and specialist consultants their needs and objectives in initiating the project (Bowen et al., 1997), with emphasis on the clients' objectives (O'Reilly, 1987). O'Reilly (1987) further explained that the root of an effective briefing is dependent on the

clear definition of the clients' requirements and their communication to the procurement team. On the other hand, Hibberd et al. (1995) emphasized clear project objectives in terms of building requirements, cost, time, and budget given by the clients. Jenks (1988) argued, "Inadequate briefing is probably the main reason why buildings have been wasteful of resources or defective in use." Briefing has become a highly complex task, needing to match the increasing complexity of client organizations and the parallel complexity of building projects (Kelly et al., 1992).

Many researchers tend to agree that an inadequate and unclear project brief is one of the main factors contributing to project failure. Briefing is a critical process in construction, and a considerable amount of research has been conducted to look into the ways to improve the briefing process since the result of the Banwell Report was published in 1964 (Newman et al., 1981; O'Rielly, 1987; Salisbury, 1990; MacPherson et al., 1992; Latham, 1994; Green, 1996; Construction Industry Board, 1997; Fisher, 1998; Barret & Stanley, 1999; Kamara et al., 2001; Blyth & Worthington, 2001). However, Barret and Stanley (1999) pointed out that many people still overlook the importance of briefing in construction. These people feel that a brief can be constructed quickly and efficiently merely by writing down the clients' requirements during the start of the project.

An intensive literature review reveals that there has been less consideration on the design and use of information technology (IT) to assess the briefing stage. Smith and Jackson (2001) came out with a research study to introduce the soft systems approach known as the strategic needs analysis (SNA) to help clients, stakeholders, and their design teams in determining the strategic needs of a project. Their research attempted to propose a solid base for project development, which focused more on client satisfaction. SNA incorporates the use of network-based software as part of the structure for strategic decision making. In the U.K., Rezgui et al. (2001) proposed the IT-

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