

I

input Specifications

Service specifications are documents which quantify the service required by the facilities customer and generally form part of the contract with the service provider. There are different approaches to the development of service specifications polarised between the two extremes of prescriptive input specifications and performance related output specifications.

Input specifications specify exactly how the desired outcome should be achieved. This is generally based on a schedule of tasks, frequencies, and methodologies dictating exactly what should be done, when and how. This differs greatly from the output approach which specifies the standard to be achieved but not the method or resource required to deliver it.

Input specifications are easy to compare during the procurement process. Removing all the variables from the process apart from profit and overheads can be a convenient way of sourcing the cheapest supplier. Performance management is also simplified as compliance with the contract is restricted to performing the tasks in the approved method at the specified time.

Monitoring such contracts requires good management with strong administrative and planning skills. If the client has highly developed technical skills and up to date market knowledge they will be able to produce service specifications that closely match their precise requirements rather than rely on third party interpretations of their needs.

However specifications that are dominated by input criteria can result in duties being followed irrespective of actual needs. The contractor is relieved of any requirement to innovate or apply intelligent management to the process. Prescriptive specifications are, by definition, restrictive and are often incapable of change once the contract is running. Changes in environment may force frequent reviews or result in the wrong things being done.

Most output specification schedules incorporate some prescriptive elements in their requirements. Compliance with certain policies and regulations, availability at specific hours of operation or the achievement of particular standards or qualifications may be specified within a performance based contract in order to satisfy mandatory needs.

It is important that tenderers are given an opportunity to discuss the content of the specification before tenders are returned so that any ambiguities or uncertainties can be clarified. It is vital that when the contract is awarded the successful supplier and the client have a clear and common understanding about the requirements of the specification and what the supplier's commitments are under the contract. Problems often occur as a result of suppliers being unclear about some aspect of the contract or specification that they are being asked to deliver.

A useful chapter on service specifications can be found in 'Total Facilities Management' by Brian Atkin and Adrian Brooks published by Wiley-Blackwell ISBN 978-1-405-18659-9