

The Power of Three

How collaboration in service triads drives client satisfaction



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Zwolle, August 19, 2025

Master Thesis

Facility & Real Estate Management
Academy Hospitality Business School
Saxion University of Applied Science



Master Facility & Real Estate Management

Title assignment : Thesis

Name module/course code : BUIL- 1230

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Full-time / Part-time : Part-time

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Academic year : 2024-2025

Date : 19 August 2025

Word count : 19854

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Summary

Outsourcing in facility management continues to expand, however confidence in complex outsourcing models (e.g., managing contractor, total facility management, integrated facility management) is declining. This thesis investigates whether this lower trust is inherent to such structures or rooted in how actors collaborate. The main question was: *To what extent, and through which mechanisms, does collaboration within FM outsourcing models, conceptualised as a service triad, influence client satisfaction?*

Using an inductive approach, the study focused on the managing-contractor model. In this study 13 semi-structured exploratory interviews (3 clients, 6 main contractors, and 4 subcontractors) were conducted. Data were open-coded and axially coded to find patterns. Key results are:

Unclear or inconsistently interpreted contracts, a gap between sales promises and operational capability, and compressed, under-prepared implementations create early friction. Client motivations (cost-driven vs transformation-driven), outsourcing experience, and internal buy-in further impact relationship quality. These contractual issues quickly translate into relational risks affecting satisfaction.

Regular (and frequent) meeting helps, but value comes from openness, respect and honesty. The main contractor's "bridge" role safeguards coordination and cost control yet can become a bottleneck if it hinders direct exchanges among all three actors. Internal client communication also shapes end-user acceptance of changes.

Goodwill trust, grounded in interpersonal fit and reliability, underpins collaboration. Trust must extend across the full triad; reliability (doing what was agreed) and transparency around quality, timelines and costs are essential.

Service value depends on timely transfer of explicit and tacit knowledge. First-time outsourcing and staff turnover expose gaps; structured onboarding, overlap, joint site visits and everyday peer exchange mitigate disruption. Subcontractors often step in to onboard main-contractor staff to keep the triad effective.

Clients prioritise communication, proactivity and commitment, then delivery quality and trust, and finally clarity, keeping agreements and transparency. Consistent collaboration leads to recognisable service value which leads to satisfaction.

In conclusion, overall results suggest that the model itself is not the primary problem but the way actors collaborate within it is. Human factors and multi-level communication are central. Hybrid governance, transactional clarity combined with relational flexibility, best supports collaboration, service value and satisfaction.

Preface

Writing this thesis has been a challenging yet incredibly fulfilling journey one filled with moments of doubt, growth, persistence, and ultimately, pride. It reflects not only my academic effort but also the unwavering support of those who stood beside me throughout the process.

First and foremost, I want to dedicate this work to my beloved daughter, Zoe. Over the past two years, you have shown a strength and resilience far beyond your age. You supported me with your love, your warm hugs, and your constant presence. Your patience, your smiles, and your “Go, Mama, go!” encouragement gave me the courage to keep going, even on the hardest days. You reminded me that learning something new is not always easy, but it is always worth it. This thesis is as much yours as it is mine, and I hope one day you will see in it the proof that perseverance and love can overcome the greatest of challenges.

I also want to express my deepest gratitude to my dear One and Only, Gido. Your support went far beyond kind words and advice. You stepped in when I needed you most, taking on extra chores around the house, caring lovingly for our daughter, and never once letting me feel alone on this journey. You were my motivator, my sound board, and even my Excel wizard! Thank you for helping me make sense of messy data and build those pivot tables when my patience ran thin. I truly couldn’t have done this without you!

I would also like to thank my tutor, Hester van Sprang, for the valuable guidance, motivation, and trust you placed in me throughout this process. My sincere thanks as well to Dr. Brenda Groen and Dr. Adrienn Eros for the academic skills and insights that were indispensable to the completion of this thesis. Further, I want to thank Moniek for all her administrative and support work, and everyone at Saxion University for their accessible teaching, encouragement, and consistent support. Your guidance helped shape both the quality and clarity of this work, and I am sincerely grateful for the time and knowledge you shared with me in the last two years.

This thesis is, except where otherwise stated, the result of my own independent work. All sources and contributions have been acknowledged to the best of my ability.

Looking back, the process of creating this thesis has been as much a personal milestone as an academic one. I hope this work serves as a guide for future outsourcing decisions, with an eye to the importance of communication, knowledge sharing, trust, and other interpersonal elements in building successful outsourcing relationships.

Szilvia Kiss

August, 2025

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1. Introduction

Managing people, places, processes, and technology to keep buildings functional, safe, and efficient in support of an organisation's core business is called facility management (FM) (Van Sprang & Drion, 2020). Over the past decades, FM has transformed from a focus on maintenance and building services to a more strategic discipline that contributes directly to the performance and value creation of an organisation (Jensen & Van Der Voordt, 2017). As FM represents a significant cost, companies are looking at ways to optimise their FM expenditure (Zhang et al., 2014). Additionally, many organisations aim to focus more on their core business operations and make a strategic choice to outsource non-core FM services (Wynstra et al., 2014). Within the sector, outsourcing has become an established practice and is defined as the "transfer of certain activities, functions or processes to external organisations" (Van Sprang & Drion, 2020, p. 366).

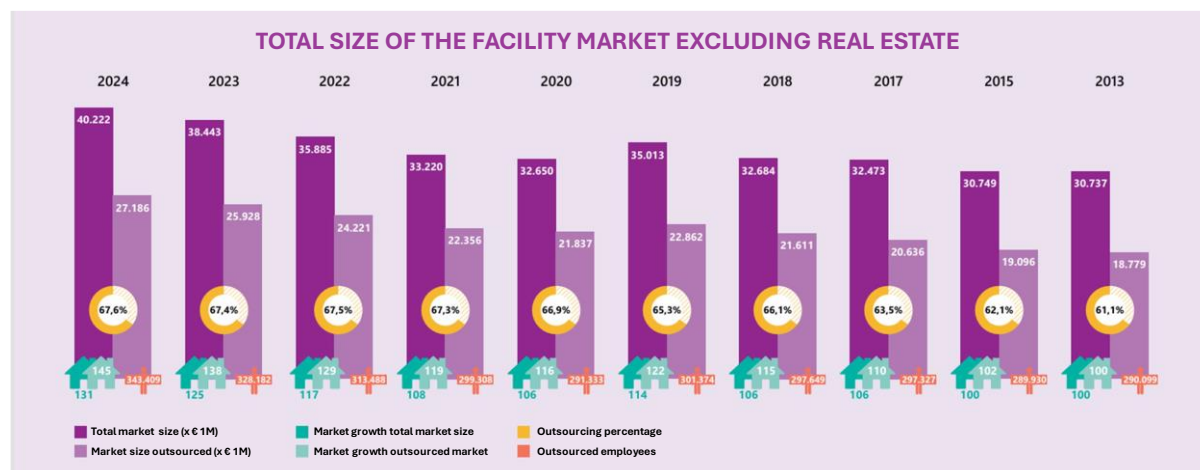
1.1 Growth of outsourcing

Worldwide the outsourcing industry is experiencing rapid growth. The global market for both in-house and outsourced FM services is projected to reach USD 1,903.7 billion by 2033, growing from USD 849.0 billion in 2023 during the forecast period from 2024 to 2033. According to Market.us (2024), 70% of all FM services were outsourced globally in 2023 (see Appendix A).

According to the Facility & Workplace Market Research 2025 by TwynstraGudde and the association of Facility Management Nederland, it is estimated that the size of the Dutch facility market (excluding real estate) was 40.2 billion euros in 2024 (see Figure 1). Outsourcing accounts for 27.1 billion euros which means that, like the global trend, 67.6% of FM services in the Netherlands are outsourced (TwynstraGudde, 2025).

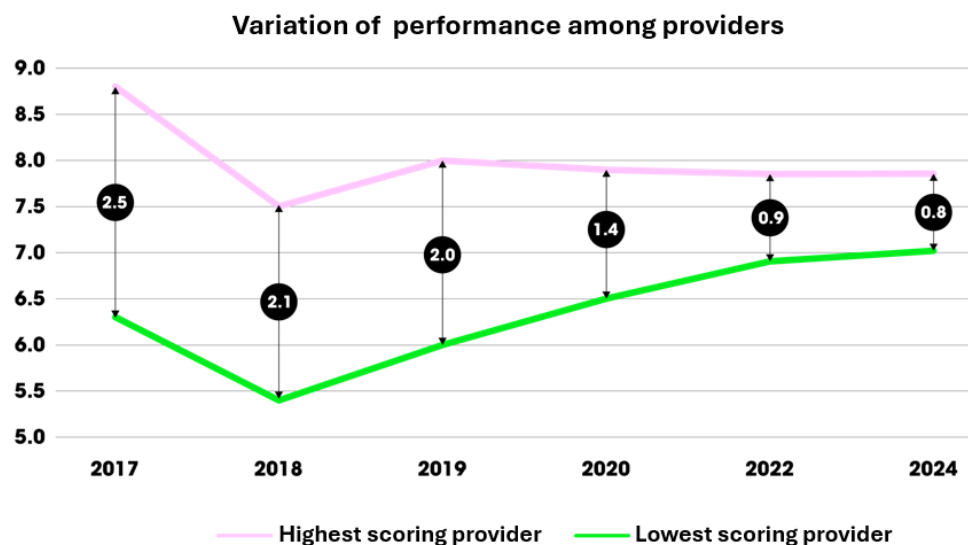
Figure 1

Facility market size, excluding real estate in the Netherlands.



Source: TwynstraGudde. (n.d.). Facility & Workplace Marktonderzoek 2024

Overall, the total market is growing, including the outsourced FM services (see Figure 1). However, the percentage of outsourced services has remained stable at a rate of 67-68% since 2020. According to the Facility & Workplace Market Research 2024, the performance differences between the various providers are negligible (see Figure 2), with no providers exhibiting insufficient performance.

Figure 2*Evolution of performance dispersion*

Source: Hospitality Group & FMN (2024) Conclusions – FM provider performance 2024

The comparable performance of service providers, combined with the stable rate of outsourced services, suggests an increase in competition among FM service providers. To retain existing clients, service providers need to find ways to differentiate themselves from competitors through increasing service value, instead of ‘just’ providing services. In this search towards increasing service value, the importance of collaboration is growing, and clients consider collaboration, integrity, reliability, and expertise as the most important competencies that a provider should possess (Competencies – FM Provider Performance, 2025). This increasing importance of collaboration is also highlighted by the Facility & Workplace Management market research (2025) where collaboration is expected to be the number one competency from FM professionals by 2030 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Prioritised Competencies for Facility Management Professionals

2025	2030
1. Clear communication	1. Collaboration
2. Collaboration	2. Flexibility
3. Leadership	3. Leadership
4. Organizational skills	4. Building and maintaining relationships
5. Building and maintaining relationships	5. Organizational skills

Source: TwynstraGudde and FMN: Facility & Workplace Management market research 2025 (p. 51).

1.2 Problem Statement

Even though collaboration is seen as essential within FM outsourcing partnerships, many organisations struggle with maintaining successful relationships with stakeholders (Rhodes et al., 2014). In addition, different outsourcing models such as integrated facility management, multi service contacts, or managing agent contracts introduce additional complexity. In these cases, contractual relationships are no longer between a client and a service provider, but introduce an intermediary, known as the

main contractor who subcontracts the services to a secondary provider (i.e. a subcontractor). This structure is known as a service triad (Li & Choi, 2009; Van Der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011; Siltaloppi & Vargo, 2017) where a client, main contractor, and subcontractor are interconnected, but not all contractually linked. The latest market trends indicate a growing scepticism towards these complex outsourcing models (see Table 2).

Table 2

Trends in FM Outsourcing Models, 2023–2025

Contract type FMsuppliers	2023	2025	Deviation 2023-2025
Integrated Facility Management	60%	46%	-13% ↓
Single service	30%	39%	10%
Multi service	58%	36%	-22% ↓
Public Private Partnership (PPP)	18%	18%	0%
Managing agent	35%	11%	-24% ↓

Source: Facility & Workplace Management market research (2025, p. 34)

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether this decline stems from the structure of these complex outsourcing models themselves, or whether deeper, underlying issues, such as communication breakdowns, lack of trust, or misalignment of objectives are contributing to lower client satisfaction and in return the loss of confidence in these arrangements.

1.3 Research Gap

While there is extensive research on service triads in industries like supply chain management, little empirical evidence exists regarding how collaboration in FM partnerships specifically affects client satisfaction. According to Li & Choi (2009), "an important root cause of failures in outsourcing relationships is the lack of understanding of the dynamic nature of triadic relationships" (Li & Choi, 2009, p.28). Van der Valk (2022) underscores this issue, stating that "more attention should be given to the dynamics of governance based on contracts and relationships" (Van der Valk, 2022, p. 14). These insights point to a critical research gap in understanding how collaboration practices within outsourced FM services influence client satisfaction and performance.

In response to the lower trust in complex outsourcing models and the growing emphasis on collaboration, this study examines the extent to which (and through which mechanisms) collaboration within these FM outsourcing models, conceptualised as a service triad, influences client satisfaction. By analysing key factors influencing collaboration, such as communication, trust, and shared knowledge, among all actors in a service triad (i.e. client, main contractor, and subcontractors), this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding why these relationships fail, and how collaboration can be improved to reach better service outcomes and enhance client satisfaction within these outsourcing models.

2. Literature review

To further explore these complex outsourcing models and the growing emphasis on collaboration, this chapter provides an overview of existing knowledge on outsourcing collaborations within service triads. It first clarifies different service types and their implications on governance and then reviews outsourcing models in FM. Next, it examines the structure and dynamics of service triads between client, main contractor, and subcontractors which is followed by more insights on collaboration mechanisms including communication, trust, shared knowledge, and goal alignment. Finally, it establishes the conceptual model for the study's research questions and objectives.

2.1 Service types in facility management

Within FM various types of services can be outsourced. Zhang et al. (2014) differentiate between physical goods and service outsourcing. In supply chain management, outsourcing typically involves tangible goods (e.g., parts, raw materials) where processes and outputs can be more easily defined and controlled (Li & Choi, 2009). Since it is more difficult to define and measure quality for services when compared to delivering goods, they present greater complexity (Molin & Åge, 2017). In FM service outsourcing, service providers deliver services directly to the client, but with variations in the level of interaction between the service provider and the client. According to Chase, as cited in Li and Choi (2009), the literature differentiates between the following types of services:

- **Pure services:** On-site services, real time, high levels of interaction, for example cleaning and security services.
- **Mixed services:** Blend of on-site and remote services, including predictive or preventative maintenance.
- **Back-office services:** Remote services without direct interaction, for example energy management.

In FM service outsourcing, services like reception or cleaning typically fall under pure services, since the service provider is physically present on-site and interacts daily with the client as well as with the client's end users (Lehtonen & Salonen, 2006) who make use of the client's facility. Similarly, outsourcing hard services such as on-site maintenance involves frequent, often daily, interaction with both the client and its end users, reinforcing their classification as pure services (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).

In contrast, activities like annual preventive maintenance or specialised equipment repairs, require less frequent on-site presence but may still involve direct engagement with both the client and its end users. These are better classified as mixed services, as they combine elements of remote planning and on-site execution (Van der Voordt & Jensen, 2021). Finally, back-office services, such as remote monitoring of building automation systems, helpdesk operations, are performed without direct contact with the client's end users yet play a vital role in supporting operational service delivery (Alexander, 2010). However, next to the type of service also how these services are outsourced can influence client satisfaction.

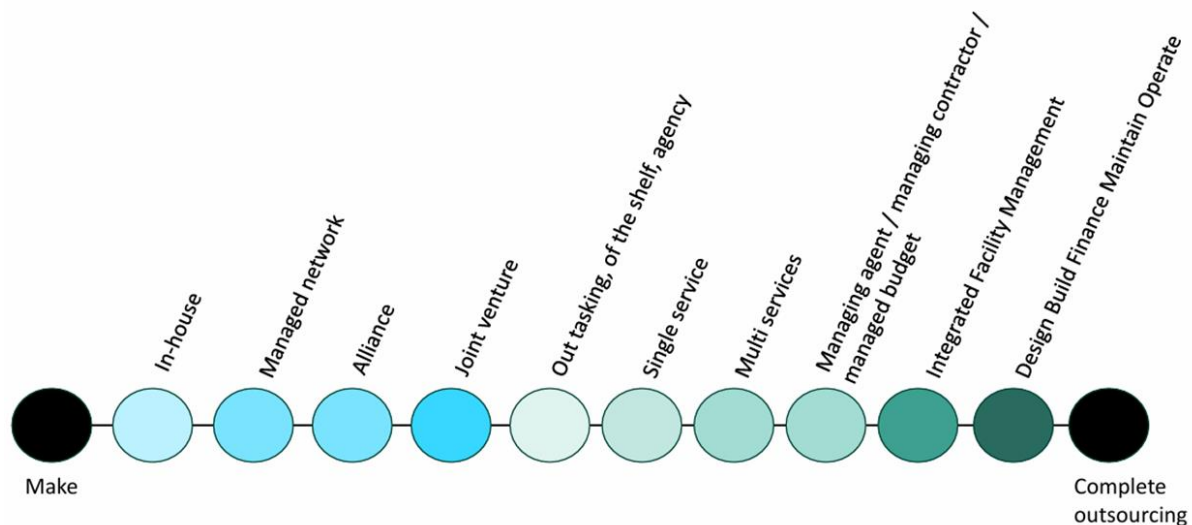
2.2 Sourcing models in facility management

Outsourcing has been widely defined in literature as the delegation of operational responsibility to an external agent for processes or services previously delivered internally. According to Lok and Baldry (2016), "Outsourcing is a management approach that delegates to an external agent the operational responsibility for processes or services previously delivered by the enterprise itself" (pp. 221–222). Similarly, Li and Choi (2009) describe services outsourcing as "the conscious choice of replacing internal service functions with the use of external agents to perform one or more service activities" (p. 28).

Within the field of FM, outsourcing involves transferring responsibility for specific FM services (e.g., cleaning, security, maintenance, catering) from an organisation (i.e., the client) to one or more external service providers. The choice of outsourcing approach depends largely on the organisation's strategic priorities and operational requirements. In return, different organisational strategies give rise to different sourcing models which define how outsourced services are structured and managed. As illustrated in Figure 3, these models can be positioned along a spectrum from fully in-house service provision, where the client performs all activities internally, to fully outsourced arrangements, where all services are provided by one or more external service providers.

Figure 3

Sourcing models in outsourcing



Source: Atkin & Brooks, p.132-138; Barrett & Baldry, ch. 4; Van Asch et al. (2022, p. 51)

Within FM most common sourcing models are single-service, multi-service, managing agent, managing contractor, total facility management (TFM), and integrated facility management (IFM) which all have different structures, implications for governance, and typical benefits and risks.

- **Single-service:** Contracts are made for one specific service (e.g., cleaning or security) carried out by one service provider (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).
- **Multi-service:** Contracts are made for a combination of services and can be managed by multiple service providers (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).
- **Managing Agent:** An external company oversees multiple service providers on behalf of the client. Contracts are between client and service providers, but daily management is done by the managing agent (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).
- **Managing Contractor:** There is a contract between a client and a main contractor. The main contractor outsources services for the client to subcontractors. For the client, the single point of contact is the main contractor. Subcontractors deliver services to the client but maintain contact primarily with the main contractor (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).
- **Total Facility Management:** For a set fee, a client hires a main contractor to manage all aspects of its facility management (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).
- **Integrated Facility Management:** All services are consolidated under one provider who manages both service delivery and strategic oversight (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).

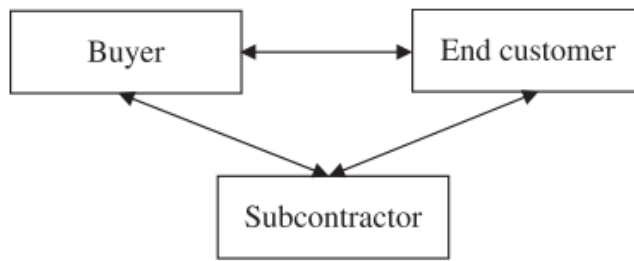
These sourcing models differ in complexity, contractual structure, and the degree of control retained by the client over service delivery (Atkin & Brooks, 2021).

2.3 Service triads

When an outsourced service relationship expands from a single-service outsourcing model (client and service provider) to include an intermediary, known as the main contractor, this creates a collaborative three-party dynamic: a service triad (Van Der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011). Service triads have been studied across various industries, including supply chain management, telecommunications, military avionics maintenance, and healthcare (Sengupta et al., 2018). Van Der Valk and Van Iwaarden (2011) define a service triad (see Figure 4) as a situation in which “the manufacturer has a service level agreement with the subcontractor, but the subcontractor delivers directly to the end customer” (p. 198). In this situation there is typically no formal contractual relationship between the subcontractor and the end customer.

Figure 4

Business service triad



Source: Van Der Valk, W., & Van Iwaarden, J. (2011). Monitoring in service triads consisting of buyers, subcontractors and end customers. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, 17(3), p. 199.

Suurmond et al. (2022) similarly describe a service triad as a structure where “a buyer contracts a supplier to directly deliver service to the buyer’s customers or end users” (p. 3352). In addition, a defining feature of such triads is the direct provision of services by the subcontractor to the end customer (Van Der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011).

2.3.1 Service triad types

Based on the actor responsible for initiating the triadic arrangement, service triads can be classified into three main types: buyer-initiated, supplier-initiated, and customer-initiated. While each type involves three interlinked actors, they differ in their origins, dynamics, and implications for governance, value creation, and risks (Li and Choi, 2009; Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011; Suurmond et al., 2022).

In buyer-initiated service triads a buyer contracts a subcontractor to deliver services, often making the service an integral part of their value proposition (Suurmond et al., 2022). This can enhance efficiency and provide specialised expertise. Risks include potential misalignment between the subcontractor’s performance and the buyer’s promise, as well as lower visibility over end customer interactions. (Van der Valk & Wynstra, 2012).

In supplier-initiated service triads a subcontractor decides to involve an intermediary (i.e., buyer) to facilitate or mediate exchanges with end customers. This structure enables subcontractors to access new markets and leverage the intermediary’s resources or credibility (Wynstra et al., 2015). Risks can arise from dependency on the intermediary, potential dilution of direct customer relationships, and conflicts over customer ownership and control (Zolkiewski et al., 2017).

In customer-initiated service triads a customer engages a third party (i.e. buyer) to mediate or support interactions with a subcontractor. The buyer then becomes the focal service provider and facilitates service delivery between the customer and subcontractors (Andersson-Cederholm & Gyimóthy, 2010). Benefits include improved service facilitation, reduced transaction complexity for the customer, and enhanced operational support for the subcontractor. Risks can emerge from overlapping responsibilities, unclear role boundaries, and miscommunication between the parties.

Across all three types, structural choices influence the distribution of benefits and risks, the governance mechanisms required, and the relational dynamics among the actors. Understanding these distinctions is essential for designing effective contractual arrangements, monitoring systems, and collaborative practices (Sengupta et al., 2018).

2.3.2 Service triad in facility management

The terminology used to describe the actors within service triads vary across disciplines. Where in supply chain management literature the actors are often referred to as the buyer, subcontractor, and end customer (see Table 3), in FM these are respectively referred to as the main contractor, subcontractor, and client.

Table 3

Terminology of actors in business service triads and FM service triads.

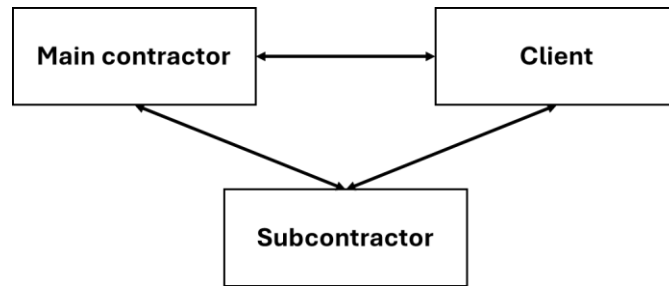
Business service triad	FM service triad
Buyer / Manufacturer / Prime contractor / Intermediary	Main contractor / Managing contractor / Intermediary
Subcontractor	Subcontractor
End customer / End user	Client

Source: By author, 2025

Within FM service triads are common within the managing agent, managing contractor, TFM, and IFM sourcing models. In these complex outsourcing models, a formal dyadic contract exists between the client and the main contractor. The main contractor may further subcontract specific services but remains the sole contractual and operational point of contact for the client. While there is no direct contractual link between the client and subcontractors, FM services, such as cleaning, security, technical maintenance (i.e., pure services), or occasional repairs (i.e., mixed services), are delivered on-site and frequently involve interaction with the client and its users. This creates a triadic structure in which the client, main contractor, and subcontractor are functionally interconnected (see Figure 5) but not necessarily bound by direct contractual relationships.

Figure 5

Service triad in FM service outsourcing.

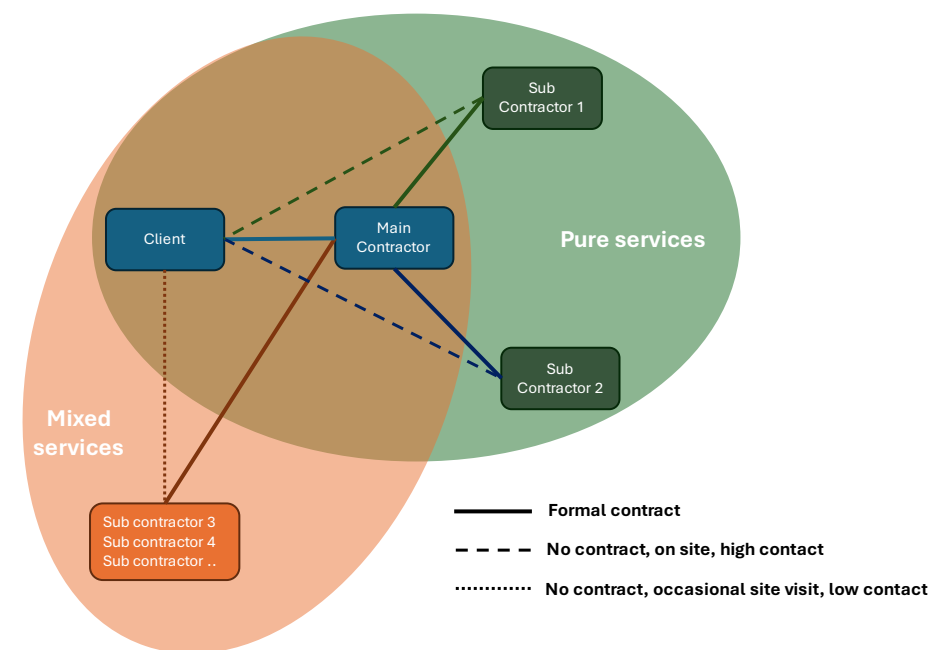


Source: By author, 2025

Within these complex outsourcing models both pure and mixed services commonly coexist and give rise to parallel service triads, increasing the complexity of relational dynamics between all actors. Each triad consist of three primary actors: the client, the main contractor and a subcontractor who ultimately deliver services to the client and its end users (see Figure 6). Each service triads contain formal contractual relationships between actors (solid lines), operational relationships that arise due to daily, on-site interactions related to pure service (long dash lines), and operational relationships that occur less frequent on location related to mixed services (dotted line).

Figure 6

Triadic relationships model in complex FM service outsourcing.



Source: By author, 2025

For pure services direct interaction between service triad actors (subcontractors, the main contractor, the client and its users) is common. How these different actors collaborate, independent of contractual relationships, play a crucial role in shaping the collaboration, service value, and client satisfaction.

2.4 Contracts in facility management service triads

In outsourcing contexts collaboration officially begins once the contract is signed. This contract establishes deliverable services and sets the foundation for communication, coordination, and governance among the actors (Kadefors, 2008).

The role of contracts in interorganisational relationships is debated in the literature. Malhotra and Murnighan (2002) argue that contracts may diminish trust by signalling suspicion, whereas Poppo and Zenger (2002) and Kern and Willcocks (2000) state that well-structured contracts can reinforce rather than hinder trust. Lazzarini et al. (2008) go further, describing contracts as “crucial” for collaboration. Vlaar, Van den Bosch, and Volberda (2006) highlight that, between multiple actors, clear, specified contracts facilitate monitoring while Jensen and Van der Voordt (2015) emphasise their role in value delivery. In complex service triads, structured governance mechanisms, such as well-designed contracts and performance feedback systems, are essential for preventing coordination failures and performance breakdowns.

2.4.1 Contract types

Contracts not only establish enforceable obligations but also initiate the process of relationship building through communication and the signalling of expectations (Kadefors, 2008). In FM service outsourcing, contracts can be categorised into two types: transactional and relational. Each type represents different governance and relationships (Poppo & Zenger, 2002).

Transactional contracts are typically long, detailed documents specifying deliverables, pricing, timelines, and penalties for non-compliance (Kadefors, 2008). They are most common in short-term, arm's-length relationships where uncertainty is low, and service requirements are well-defined (Malhotra & Lumineau, 2011). In FM service outsourcing, transactional contracts were historically dominant because FM services were often viewed as non-strategic (Atkin & Brooks, 2009). The advantages of transactional contracts lie in their clarity and enforceability, but they can lack flexibility in dynamic environments (Cannon et al., 2000). In service triads, transactional contracts may increase the risk of opportunism by providers, requiring strict governance mechanisms to protect all parties (Sengupta et al., 2006).

Relational contracts, by contrast, emphasise flexibility, mutual adaptation, and shared norms of cooperation. They are less prescriptive about specific contingencies, instead relying on ongoing communication, trust, and joint problem-solving to manage uncertainty (Baker et al., 2002). Relational contracting thrives in long-term relationships where parties see each other as strategic partners (Frydlinger et al., 2021). In FM service outsourcing, purely relational contracts, if lacking clear documentation of expectations, may expose clients to performance risk (Lumineau & Henderson, 2012), whereas overly rigid transactional contracts can stifle innovation and erode trust (Van der Valk, 2022).

2.4.2 Relational history and dual contracts

The nature of the relationship prior to tendering can significantly impact post-contract behaviour. Research indicates that a history of positive collaboration tends to reduce opportunistic behaviour, whereas a history of conflict increases it. Collaborative relationships are often linked to long-term benefits and higher outsourcing success rates. Organisations that treat their suppliers as partners in a collaborative relationship are more likely to achieve favourable outcomes. In contrast, adversarial relationships have been associated with outsourcing failures (Li & Choi, 2009).

Moreover, recent research also suggests that contracts should not be seen as static legal instruments but as evolving frameworks. Van der Valk (2022) proposes a dual-contract approach where one

contract documents the technical scope of work, and a second relational contract incorporating behavioural expectations and collaborative principles. Frydinger et al. (2021) emphasises the practical importance of such agreements. Ultimately, in multi-actor outsourcing arrangements such as FM service triads, the contract plays a foundational role. It defines the operational and relational boundaries of the partnership, sets the tone for communication, supports trust-building, and enables the monitoring of service delivery. A balanced governance design, integrating transactional clarity with relational flexibility, offers the best hybrid solution for collaboration and high performance (Frydinger et al., 2021).

2.5 Communication in facility management service triads

Effective communication is a cornerstone of any relationship, but it holds growing importance in service triads. In such arrangements, communication must flow not only between two actors but across all three actors and across multiple hierarchical layers within each organisation (Li & Choi, 2009; Suurmond et al., 2022). Due to the contractual alignments in most triads an intermediary is present. This intermediary role is typically held by the main contractor, who occupies a bridge position linking the other two actors (Li & Choi, 2009).

2.5.1 Bridge position of the main contractor

This bridge position can be a double-edged sword. On the positive side, a skilled main contractor can translate client requirements into clear, actionable instructions for subcontractors, coordinate schedules, mediate conflicts, and integrate services for consistent delivery (Choi & Wu, 2008; Mena et al., 2013). In FM service outsourcing, this coordination can ease the client's workload, enable faster resolution of service issues, and improve the quality and integration of bundled services (van der Valk & van Iwaarden, 2011). However, this position can also create information asymmetries and governance risks.

Acting as a gatekeeper, the main contractor plays a key role in the flow of communication and controls what information is shared, when, and with whom, called the bottleneck. This control can be misused, for example, by withholding information or restricting communication and knowledge flow (Choi & Wu, 2008). Such asymmetries can reduce transparency, lower service quality, and erode trust within the service triad.

2.5.2 Routines and safeguards for the bridge position

To maximise the benefits of the bridge position and avoid bottlenecks, collaborative, multilateral communication among all three actors is essential and includes:

- **Formation:** Joint expectation-setting and clear role definition.
- **Functioning:** Regular updates, shared performance metrics, and swift resolution of operational issues.
- **Feedback:** Open exchange of lessons learned and improvement ideas (Suurmond et al., 2022).

A mix of formal channels such as contractual reporting, performance reviews, escalation procedures, and informal channels (direct calls, site visits, discussion) ensures both accountability and flexibility (Thomas, 2013). When supported by well-designed contractual provisions and underpinned by trust, communication through the bridge position can enhance goal alignment, reduce coordination costs, and create value for all members of the triad (Kadefors, 2003; Vlaar et al., 2006). Communication, however, does not operate in isolation. Its effectiveness is deeply influenced by the level of trust between actors. With trust, information flows more openly, problems are addressed constructively, and collaboration strengthens making trust the natural next focus in understanding governance in service triads.

2.6 Trust in facility management service triads

Trust is widely regarded as “the most critical element of any successful collaboration. Without trust, partnerships become strained, communication breaks down, and collaborators hesitate to share ideas or take risks” (Dbe, 2025, p. 1). In FM service triads this is not different. Trust acts as the relational glue that support collaboration despite fragmented visibility and potential power imbalances (Zhang, 2014).

2.6.1 Trust during contract formation

Trust in FM service outsourcing often begins during the contracting phase, when roles, responsibilities, and information-sharing obligations are first established. The way these elements are formalised can either inspire confidence or foster suspicion. While overly detailed clauses may signal a lack of trust, well-structured agreements clarify expectations and provide a shared basis for collaboration (Poppo & Zenger, 2002; Van der Valk, 2022).

The way these contracts are applied matter. A balanced, flexible approach encourages goodwill trust, the belief that a partner will act with good will and in the other party’s best interest even when not strictly required (Das & Teng, 2001), whereas rigid enforcement risks eroding trust (Lumineau, 2014). Recent studies emphasise that in complex service arrangements, contracts should be designed not only for compliance but also for joint problem-solving and adaptive governance (Suurmond et al., 2022). Joint problem-solving refers to the ability of all parties to address unforeseen issues collaboratively, drawing on shared expertise and resources rather than defaulting to contractual sanctions (Jap & Anderson, 2003).

Adaptive governance involves embedding flexibility into the contract so that service requirements, performance metrics, and resource allocations can be adjusted in response to changing operational needs, without undermining the agreement itself (Schiemer et al., 2019). Such flexibility is particularly relevant in FM service outsourcing, where client requirements and end users’ needs can change unexpectedly.

2.6.2 Trust during service delivery

Once services start, trust is built, or undermined, through how day-to-day service delivery is managed. Reliable execution of agreed services, timely resolution of issues, and visible adherence to quality standards strengthens trust and the belief that a partner has the capability and expertise to deliver (Das & Teng, 2001; Kadefors, 2003). In FM service triads, this means that both the main contractor and subcontractor must consistently meet contractual performance levels, since service quality failures at any point in the chain can weaken the client’s confidence in the entire arrangement. Here communication plays a central role in strengthening trust. Regular updates, transparent reporting, and open two-way dialogues allow emerging issues to be addressed before they escalate (Suurmond, 2019). In triadic FM structures, where the main contractor acts as the bridge, accurately sharing information, such as complaints, maintenance progress, or resource constraints, help to ensure all actors remain aligned. In these structures informal communication channels can complement formal reporting to build rapport and strengthen relational trust (Li & Choi, 2009).

Trust during service delivery is however fragile and can be significantly influenced by financial performance. When costs unexpectedly exceed agreed levels, whether due to scope changes, unforeseen technical issues, or market price shifts, they can be perceived as opportunistic, particularly if the increases are poorly communicated or lack sufficient justification (Mellewigt et al., 2007; Wuyts & Geyskens, 2005). Such situations risk eroding goodwill trust, leading to stricter monitoring, more rigid contract application, and damaged collaboration (Lui & Ngo, 2004). Conversely, early and transparent communication of cost changes, supported by open-book accounting or joint cost reviews,

can mitigate negative perceptions and even strengthen trust by demonstrating fairness (Jap & Anderson, 2003; Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011). In addition, cost savings achieved without compromising service quality can also strengthen trust. Demonstrating efficiency, competence, and a willingness to act in the client's best interest signals alignment in goals (Hawkins et al., 2008). Savings generated through process improvements, resource optimisation, or innovative service delivery build goodwill and increase the likelihood of contract renewal, especially when shared openly with all actors. High-trust delivery environments are characterised by collaborative problem-solving, adaptive service adjustments, and proactive issue resolution, contributing to improved service quality, greater reliability, and higher client and end user satisfaction (Hartmann, Roehrich, & Frederiksen, 2021).

2.6.3 Trust in mature relationships

Over time, repeated positive interactions create relational trust, enabling greater flexibility and reducing the need for constant monitoring (Kadefors, 2008). In this stage, trust complements rather than replaces formal governance. Contracts remain the structural backbone, but trust fills the inevitable gaps in formal terms (Poppo & Zenger, 2002; Van der Valk, 2022). In mature FM service outsourcing relationships, high trust levels allow for adaptive problem-solving, innovation in service delivery, and a shared commitment to long-term value creation (Hartmann, Roehrich, & Frederiksen, 2021). This makes service triads more resilient to changes, such as sudden service changes, end user demands, or market disruptions.

However, time alone is no guarantee for building high levels of trust which can mature or erode over time. The foundation of trust is laid down during the contracting phase (Poppo & Zenger, 2002), the quality of communication sets the tone for collaboration (Suurmond, 2019) and through consistent service delivery performance standards are reached (Das & Teng, 2001). In addition, transparent handling of financial matters (Jap & Anderson, 2003; Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011) and fair commercial practices (Kadefors, 2003) have lasting effects on trust. Without these elements, a long-standing partnership may remain transactional and cautious rather than truly collaborative. When these factors align positively, mature relationships benefit from adaptive problem-solving, where unexpected issues are addressed jointly and constructively, and from greater openness to innovation in service delivery. High-trust environments encourage actors in a service triad to share knowledge, innovation and commit to joint value creation without fear of exploitation (Lumineau, 2014). In mature relationships, trust becomes a strategic necessity, not only preserving relationship stability but actively enhancing service quality, efficiency, and the perceived value of FM service outsourcing (Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011; Hartmann et al., 2021).

2.7 Knowledge sharing in facility management service triads

Knowledge can be defined as “a product of human reflection and experience” (De Long & Fahey, 2000, p. 114) encompassing skills, competencies, and expertise (Argote & Ingram, 2000). In the context of ongoing labour shortages, knowledge in organisations is increasingly recognised as a critical resource and the foundation for creating economic value and sustaining competitive advantage (Yeboah, 2023).

2.7.1 Documented knowledge and experience

A widely used distinction is between explicit and tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Where explicit knowledge is ordered, documented, and easily communicated in formal language (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), tacit knowledge is based on experience, context-specific, and difficult to formalise or communicate.

Examples of explicit knowledge within FM include Service Level Agreements (SLAs), Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), equipment manuals, maintenance schedules, and compliance checklists (Atkin & Brooks, 2015; Jensen & Van der Voordt, 2015). Explicit knowledge provides a consistent reference

point for operations, ensuring contractual obligations and performance standards are clearly defined and understood. Explicit knowledge is easy to transfer across organisational boundaries and should be worded so everyone has the same understanding.

Tacit knowledge resides in individuals' skills, insights, and practical problem-solving abilities (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In FM, tacit knowledge can include understanding building-specific quirks, informal routines for managing end-user expectations, and intuitive problem-solving skills developed through years of on-site experience. Tacit knowledge is often transferred through shadowing, informal conversations, experience of mentoring (Atkin & Brooks, 2015; Suurmond, 2019).

2.7.2 Importance of knowledge sharing

A balance of both explicit and tacit knowledge is essential in FM service outsourcing because it directly influences both operational consistency and adaptability to client needs, which are the foundations of perceived value (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Blumenberg, Suurmond, 2019). This balance becomes especially critical during supplier changes or in first-time outsourcing. In the latter, clients often hold a large portion of the operational and contextual knowledge, much of it tacit and undocumented. If this knowledge is not effectively captured and transferred, service performance can drop, operational risks can increase, and the perceived value of outsourcing can be compromised. Likewise, when changing suppliers, insufficient handover of explicit data (e.g., asset registers, maintenance histories) or tacit insights (e.g., site-specific practices, stakeholder preferences) can disrupt service continuity. A structured approach to capturing both types of knowledge, through documentation, shadowing, joint site visits, facilitates a smooth transition, supports service consistency, and sustains value creation over the contract lifecycle (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Blumenberg, 2009; Suurmond, 2019)

In FM service triads maintaining the right mix of knowledge sharing ensures that services remain consistent (through explicit knowledge) and adaptive (through tacit knowledge). Documentation provides operational stability, while tacit insights allow for flexibility, rapid problem resolution, and stronger working relationships, all of which are critical for sustaining service quality and delivering long-term value (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Atkin & Brooks, 2015).

2.7.3 Challenges and enablers of knowledge sharing

While knowledge sharing is critical to FM service outsourcing performance, several barriers can hinder its effectiveness. These barriers can arise from structural, relational, and cultural factors, each affecting how information and expertise flow between actors in the service triad.

Structural challenges often originate from the contractual arrangement itself. In a service triad the main contractor acts as an intermediary between client and subcontractor. This bridge position can create communication bottlenecks and information asymmetries (Li & Choi, 2009). When operational teams are disconnected, essential service knowledge may be delayed, distorted, or withheld (see also section 2.5). Enablers for overcoming these issues include establishing direct multi-level communication channels, integrated IT platforms for real-time data sharing, and joint site visits to ensure all actors have access to the same information (Bastl et al., 2018; Suurmond et al., 2022).

Relational and cultural barriers appear when trust is low or when parties fear that shared information could be used opportunistically (Kadefors, 2003). This is particularly relevant during supplier change or first-time outsourcing, when clients hold most operational knowledge and may be reluctant to share it fully (Blumenberg et al., 2009). Enablers include long-term relationship building, open-book costing, and fair payment practices, all of which encourage transparency and mutual commitment (Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011).

Finally, knowledge-type specific challenges can arise because explicit knowledge, such as service manuals or SLAs, is relatively easy to transfer, while tacit knowledge, embedded in staff experience, is harder to codify and can be lost during staff turnover or supplier transitions (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Suurmond, 2019). Enablers of sharing knowledge involve structured overlap periods during handovers, job shadowing, and informal daily contact between operational staff to capture and transfer tacit expertise effectively.

Ultimately, overcoming these barriers not only ensures smoother operations but also directly contributes to service value. High-quality, timely knowledge sharing reduces service inconsistencies, supports adaptive problem-solving, and fosters innovation, leading to higher client satisfaction and contract success (Hartmann, Roehrich, & Frederiksen, 2021).

2.8 Collaboration in facility management service triads

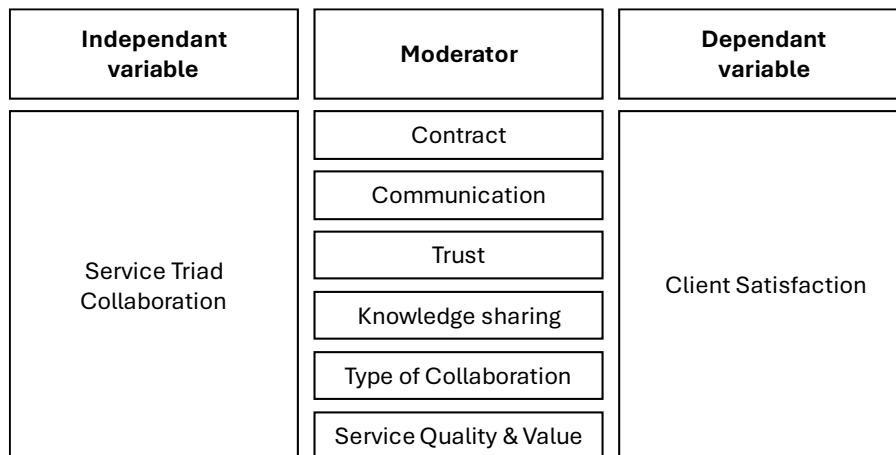
Cambridge dictionary defined collaboration as: “the activity of working together to create or achieve the same thing, or a product of this” (Collaboration, 2025). Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2015) defined collaboration as “together (co) working (labor)” and also linked this to cooperation, meaning “doing things together” (Walker & Lloyd-Walker, 2015, p. 63). In FM service outsourcing, strong teamwork enables faster problem-solving, smoother service integration, greater responsiveness to changing client needs, and opportunities for innovation (Kalra et al., 2020, Suurmond et al., 2022; Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011). Effective cooperation in a service triad depends on the alignment of all levels (i.e., strategic, tactical, and operational) across the three organisations of the actors.

Strong collaboration supports high quality service delivery. When this service delivery meets or exceeds expectations, it creates service value, which in turn leads to client satisfaction (Atkin & Brooks 2021). On the other hand, breakdowns in communication, erosion of trust, poor knowledge transfer, or overly rigid contracts can reduce service value and harm satisfaction, reducing the likelihood of contract renewal ((Kalra et al., 2020). High-performing FM service triads can consistently deliver value for the client through strong collaboration. When this constant high service value delivery is combined with a solid relational foundation between the actors, a loyal and long-term partnership can develop.

2.9 Integrative conceptual model

This literature overview above mapped FM service outsourcing onto triadic structures and highlighted importance of collaboration within service triads and various factors that play an important role in maintaining good client relationships and satisfaction. Building on the literature review, its findings can be integrated into a conceptual model explaining how collaboration within FM outsourcing models influence client satisfaction (see

Figure 7).

Figure 7*Conceptual model**Source: By author, 2025*

The model above suggests that collaboration mechanisms such as communication routines, trust, knowledge sharing, and goal alignment shape service delivery (quality, responsiveness, reliability) and, in turn, client satisfaction. Moreover, contractual governance (transactional vs relational and hybrid/dynamic contract types) provides formal routines and safeguards, while the main contractor's bridge position channels information and knowledge flows that can enable (or hinder) performance. Contextual factors (relationship history, dependence, sector, and complexity) function as boundary conditions that moderate these effects.

3. Methods

The literature review mapped FM service outsourcing onto triadic structures and highlighted the importance of collaboration within these service triads. Combined with the conceptual model and the initial research gap on how collaboration in FM partnerships affects client satisfaction, this leads to the following research question:

“To what extent, and through which mechanisms, does collaboration within FM outsourcing models, conceptualised as a service triad, influence client satisfaction?”

In answering this research question the purpose of this study is to explore how collaboration in FM service outsourcing influences client satisfaction. Client satisfaction is treated here as the dependent variable, which may vary depending on factors such as the delivered or perceived service value from either the main contractor or subcontractor, the frequency and quality of communication, the level of trust, the degree of information asymmetry in shared knowledge, and the type of contract or form of collaboration between the actors, referred to as moderators (Saunders et al., 2019). Guided by the conceptual model, the following sub-questions are formulated to further operationalise the research question:

1. What relational and contractual risks and challenges are commonly encountered in triadic outsourcing relationships?
2. In what ways does the quality and frequency of communication between triad members affect collaboration and perceived service outcomes?
3. How does the role of the main contractor as a bridge between client and subcontractor affect trust, collaboration, and knowledge flow within the triad?
4. How does knowledge sharing among stakeholders influence collaboration and the delivery of service value?
5. How does mutual trust among stakeholders (client, main contractor and subcontractor) influence collaboration within the triad?
6. From the client’s perspective, what are the most important factors driving service value and satisfaction in FM outsourcing models?

Overall, this study aims to identify relationships between these moderators and to examine the interrelationships between multiple actors (client, main contractor, and subcontractor) and how these interactions affect client satisfaction. The research design and methodological choices are guided by the framework of Saunders et al. (2019).

3.1 Research design and strategy

This study applies a constructivist research philosophy, which assumes that reality is not objective but is socially constructed through the meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This perspective is particularly appropriate for this study as the aim is to understand the subjective perceptions of collaboration between actors in FM outsourcing models, and how these perceptions influence client satisfaction. Constructivism aligns with qualitative inquiry, where the researcher seeks to co-create meaning with participants rather than test pre-existing hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2019).

A case study strategy is adopted to enable an in-depth investigation of how the moderators (see

Figure 7) influence the complexity of working in a service triad. Case studies are particularly valuable when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined, and when multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 2018). In service triad the various actors, different interests, asymmetry in knowledge, and previous experiences all influencing individual's perception on service delivery and service value. This study aims to capture these perspectives from all three actors within the same service triad linked via the same FM outsourcing model, thereby producing valid and comparable data.

As FM outsourcing model within this study the focus was on the managing contractor model. This model introduces additional complexity because the client holds a single contract with the main contractor, while the main contractor subcontracts service delivery to subcontractors. This arrangement not only creates a complex contractual environment but also introduces more stakeholders in the process. As a result, the relationships between the client, the main contractor, and subcontractors are both interdependent and dynamic, making this model ideal for examining the mechanisms through which collaboration influences client satisfaction.

An inductive research approach is employed, which is suitable when theory is developed from data rather than evaluated against it (Saunders et al., 2019). This study begins with empirical data collection, through semi structured interviews, which is then interpreted and linked to relevant literature. This approach is particularly suited to exploratory studies where the objective is to identify patterns, develop concepts, and build theory rather than verify existing propositions (Bryman, 2016).

The qualitative research method is selected for its ability to capture rich, descriptive data that reflects the complexity of human interactions and perceptions. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited to research focusing on processes, relationships, and meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this context, qualitative inquiry allows for the identification of subtle but significant differences in how collaboration is perceived to influence client satisfaction. Consistent with this rationale, recent service triad studies used interview-based multiple-case designs to unpack operational complexity. For example, Suurmond et al. (2022) studied four cases using 17 semi-structured interviews, and work on modelling service triads argues that "quantitative approached fall short of grasping the nuances and complexities of a situated social reality" (Andersson-Cederholm & Gyimóthy, 2009, p. 271) in service triads.

Given that relationships, influencing factors, and processes in this context are not yet fully understood, this study adopts an exploratory design. Exploratory research allows to investigate "what is happening" and to develop new insights into the phenomenon under study (Saunders et al., 2019). This research combines two complementary elements:

1. Semi-structured interviews with professionals directly involved in managing contractor outsourcing to explore their perceptions of collaboration and their effect on client satisfaction. This approach enables participants to share their experiences in depth, while allowing flexibility to probe and clarify responses.
2. A targeted literature review on outsourcing and inter-organisational collaboration, which provides the conceptual framework for this study.

The conceptual framework incorporates key constructs such as collaboration, communication, knowledge transfer, trust, and risk in triadic structures, as well as the influence of actors in bridge positions. These constructs are used to investigate how collaborative dynamics within service triads influence outsourcing outcomes, with a specific focus on client satisfaction.

By combining exploratory interviews with insights from the literature review, this research strategy is expected to generate a rich body of qualitative evidence on inter-organisational collaboration in service triads. This dual approach allows both theory-driven and emergent themes to be addressed, supporting the identification of key mechanisms through which collaboration influences client satisfaction in a managing contractor outsourcing model.

3.2 Sampling strategy and participants

This study employed non-probability sampling techniques, specifically a combination of purposive sampling, critical case sampling, snowball sampling, and in certain cases, convenience sampling (see Appendix H). The use of multiple sampling methods is common in qualitative, exploratory research where the objective is to obtain rich, relevant, and context-specific data rather than statistical generalizability (Saunders et al., 2019).

All participants opted into the study after receiving an information letter (Appendix C). This letter provided details about the study's purpose, procedures, and requirements, enabling recipients to decide whether they were willing to participate and whether they possessed the necessary knowledge and expertise on the topic.

Following a positive response, an interview appointment was arranged. At the same time, participants received a consent form (Appendix B) and were asked to return a signed and dated copy before the interview took place. A few days prior to each scheduled interview, the researcher confirmed receipt of the completed consent form; if it had not yet been returned, a reminder email was sent. All consent forms were checked and stored securely, with access restricted solely to the researcher to protect participant confidentiality.

In all cases, consent forms were received. Most of them prior to interview took place, two of them after the interviews due to participants' workload and scheduling constraints. One participant explicitly requested that their interview data be used solely for the purposes of this research. This condition was noted at the top of the transcript, ensuring that the participant's wishes were respected.

Main contractors were selected first, with the specific aim of using these interviews to gain access to both clients and subcontractors working within the same service triad. This sequencing aimed to map out the triadic relationships from the perspective of the main contractor and to facilitate introductions to relevant clients and subcontractors.

3.2.1 Sample size and selection

Data was collected from 13 participants, a range that provides both sufficient diversity of perspectives and manageable depth for detailed qualitative analysis (Guest et al., 2020). In total, six main contractors, three clients, and four subcontractors participated in the study (see Appendix G). The main contractor participants represented tactical or strategic levels, the client participants represented both strategic and operational levels. The subcontractor participants represented either strategic or tactical levels. Respondents were purposefully selected to represent the three actors in the service triad, ensuring that multiple perspectives were captured and enabling a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2.2 Main contractor participant sampling

All main contractor participants were drawn from the same FM organisation. The main contractors were identified from a list provided by the FM organisation upon request from the researcher on contracts relevant to the scope of this study (case selection). Based on this list, the researcher contacted all potential participants (respondent selection) working at the tactical or strategic level. From ten individuals approached, nine responded positively, and the first six that confirmed availability

were interviewed to ensure timely scheduling. While the researcher's employment within this organisation provided easier access to participants, this indicates an element of convenience sampling (Saunders et al., 2019). However, the primary selection criterion was that participants shared similar professional backgrounds, collaborated with various clients, and possessed direct experience and knowledge of the managing contractor outsourcing model. In this respect, the selection of main contractors reflected homogeneous purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher did not personally know any of the main contractor respondents prior to the study, which helped reduce the likelihood of personal bias in participant selection or interaction. However, working for the same organisation could have introduced response bias, as participants might have been reluctant to express openly critical views. To mitigate this, the researcher maintained a neutral interviewing style, avoided leading questions, and reiterated assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, thereby encouraging candid and honest participation.

3.2.3 Client participant sampling

Client participants were selected using a combination of critical case purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Initial attempts to get introductions for potential client participants via the main contractors were largely unsuccessful. Initially only one client participant was included in the study, having been recommended by a main contractor who identified them as part of a triad with a notably strong working relationship. This case displays snowball sampling, as the referral came from an existing participant (Saunders et al., 2019).

Following several refusals from other client organisations, the researcher sought participants within her professional network who could provide relevant insights into the managing contractor outsourcing model. In doing so, particular emphasis was placed on identifying examples of positive collaboration within service triads, as these were expected to provide valuable insights into the mechanisms that foster client satisfaction. This targeted approach reflects critical case purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2019), whereby participants are deliberately chosen because they are likely to offer particularly informative or exemplary cases.

This combination of sampling techniques ensured that the client perspectives captured in the study were both contextually relevant and illustrative of effective collaboration within the managing contractor model.

3.2.4 Subcontractor participant sampling

Subcontractor participants were selected using a combination of critical case purposive sampling and snowball sampling. One subcontractor was recruited via snowball sampling following a recommendation from the same participant who had referred the client participant. This subcontractor agreed to participate after being invited, reflecting both snowball sampling.

The other three subcontractors were selected based on their relevant experience and their involvement in diverse client environments. Where possible, subcontractors were matched to the same accounts as the main contractor and client participants to complete the triad, representing an example of critical case purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2019).

This approach enabled the study to capture a range of subcontractor perspectives across varying operational contexts, while also ensuring that, where feasible, participants represented all three actors within the same service triad.

3.3 Data collection techniques

Given the exploratory nature of this study, semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection. This approach is well-suited to exploratory research because it provides a

consistent structure across all interviews while allowing for flexibility to probe emerging themes in depth (Saunders et al., 2019). Such flexibility is particularly valuable for capturing the complex dynamics of collaboration, trust, communication, and risk within triadic outsourcing relationships.

3.3.1 Interview protocol

Although the interviews were based on the conceptual framework developed from the literature review, all questions were open-ended, encouraging participants to share context-rich narratives and detailed professional insights. To ensure validity and relevance, separate interview question sets were developed for each actor (i.e. client, main contractor, and subcontractor). These questions were prepared by the researcher based on the literature review and the conceptual model (see Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F)

3.3.2 Interview procedure

Due to time constraints and geographical distance, all interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. With the permission of participants, all interviews were recorded for transcription and analysis. The structured formats ensured consistency across interviews, while the open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to discuss topics in their own words. This balance between structure and flexibility produced rich, nuanced accounts of professional experiences and perspectives.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Prior to each interview, participants received an information letter (see Appendix C) outlining the purpose of the study, procedures, and ethical safeguards. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B) before the interviews took place. Ethical assurances included anonymisation such as the removal of personal information (e.g., name, age), company names, and any other identifying information from the transcripts, enabling respondents to speak freely and share their knowledge without concern for confidentiality breaches. Finally, participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any point.

3.5 Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed after which the transcripts were analysed using a qualitative approach, following an inductive strategy inspired by grounded theory principles (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). This approach enabled the researcher to remain closely aligned with the data, maintaining an open mind and allowing findings to emerge organically. While the analysis was predominantly inductive, elements of deductive reasoning were incorporated to uncover latent patterns that might not surface through a purely inductive process (Miles et al., 2020). Throughout the analysis, care was taken to avoid forcing the data into pre-defined theoretical frameworks or overlooking subtle insights.

3.5.1 Coding approach and tools

The analytical process consisted of two stages of qualitative coding procedure, open coding followed by axial coding (Saunders et al., 2019) informed by principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). This combination provided both a structured process and the flexibility to capture emergent insights.

Open coding was conducted using Taguette, an open-source qualitative analysis tool (Rampin & Rampin, 2021). In this stage, interview transcripts were uploaded into the software, after which the researcher systematically identified and labelled relevant text segments, manually creating codes (tags) for each text segment (see Appendix I for a sample). The software allows the addition of detailed descriptions for each new code, which helped maintain consistency in interpretation as the number of

codes increased. A complete overview of all open codes, including their descriptions, is presented in Appendix J.

Once open coding was completed, a comprehensive list of all tags and corresponding quotations from the transcripts was exported from Taguette. These exported codes were reviewed and reorganised where necessary to ensure that deeper analysis could be achieved within the available time. This process was designed to capture emerging themes, variables, and concepts without imposing pre-defined categories, thereby allowing patterns to surface naturally from the data.

Following the open coding stage, the coded selections were transferred to Microsoft Excel for axial coding. In this stage, related codes were grouped into broader categories, pre-determined during the operationalisation developed in the literature review. This process involved identifying thematic relationships, linking open codes to axial codes, and establishing connections across interviews and organisational levels. Many axial codes were derived from the conceptual framework, such as trust, communication, knowledge transfer, and collaboration, while new codes also emerged, such as change management, reflecting unanticipated but significant themes.

Finally, pattern matching (Yin, 2018) was then employed to compare observed patterns with those anticipated from the conceptual framework. This allowed the researcher to assess whether emergent themes aligned with theoretical expectations or revealed new explanatory insights.

3.5.2 Data saturation

Defined as the point at which no new themes emerge from additional data collection (Guest et al., 2020), data saturation was reached for both the main contractor and subcontractor participants. In these categories, the iterative coding process yielded repeated themes, with no novel codes arising in the final interviews. However, saturation was not achieved for the client participants due to limited participation and time constraints. As a result, while findings from the main contractor and subcontractor perspectives can be considered thematically robust, themes associated with the client perspective should be interpreted as indicative rather than exhaustive.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings to the study aimed to examine the extent to which collaboration influenced client satisfaction and to uncover mechanisms through which this occurred. In total 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders across the triad: 3 clients, 6 main contractors, and 4 subcontractors. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and just over one hour and provided rich accounts of experiences.

4.1 Relational and contractual risks in triadic outsourcing

This section explores the contractual and relational risks that arise in triadic service outsourcing relationships and examines how these risks shape collaboration and client satisfaction.

4.1.1 Motivation for outsourcing

When outsourcing is part of a strategic initiative, as mentioned by Interviewee 12 for example who said that *“one of our goals is to make the employee experience as good as possible”* (Interviewee 12, Client, 9:14) and that they *“truly want to be a market leader”* (Interviewee 12, Client, 10:50), or when a client is unsatisfied with previous suppliers, as mentioned by Interviewee 4 who said, *“the customer is open to the change because they were very dissatisfied [with previous supplier]”* (Interviewee 4, Main contractor, 30:09). This typically creates a more collaborative, trust-based, and partnership-oriented relationship. In these cases, clients tend to be more engaged, show greater openness to collaboration as Interviewee 12 for example stated that, *“you cannot do this alone, you have to do it with your partners”* (Interviewee 12, Client, 10:50).

A key contractual risk arises when outsourcing is driven primarily by cost savings and decided centrally. In such cases, contracts emphasise efficiency metrics and penalties rather than building relationship. This creates relational challenges such as rigidity, limited trust, and reduces willingness to collaborate. For example, Interviewee 4 mentioned that *“when the customer decides centrally to outsource, but the branches do not fully support it. As an FM party, you are immediately 100% behind”* (Interviewee 4, Main contractor, 31:36). Contractors in such arrangements are treated more as an external vendor than as a strategic partner, illustrated by Interviewee 9 who said, *“we will never belong, even if we do everything for them, we still won't belong”* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 9:04) when referring to the client organisation. This can hinder responsiveness, limits trust building, as highlighted by Interviewee 9 who mentioned *“we constantly have to defend ourselves”* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 18:09), and reduces the potential for joint problem-solving or service improvement.

Another important factor influencing relationships is the client's prior experience with outsourcing. Clients with limited experience in outsourcing often face challenges during contracting and tend to have less clarity about the implications of outsourcing and have unrealistic expectations of service performance. One participant noted that *“customers who have outsourced before, know the shortcomings and what works and what does not. They have a more realistic picture”* (Interviewee 6, Main contractor, 32:33). In addition, also when outsourcing decisions are made without considering the needs of different organisational levels, this also gives rise to contractual risk. A strategic decision taken without guaranteeing buy-in from all those affected creates misalignment within the client, while contractors are left to bear the negative consequences of this lack of alignment. For example, a client's head office can be satisfied with the outsourcing, while individual units are not as illustrated by Interviewee 8 who mentioned that *“satisfying the end user is quite difficult at the local level. While the client says yes, we did a good job, right? Because millions have been saved”* (Interviewee 8, Subcontractor, 16:20).

Finally, a lack of clear vision regarding the implications of outsourcing often leads to last-minute contractual changes and misalignment in client organisation. This can have severe consequences for subcontractors as illustrated by Interviewee 8 who gave an example where last-minute changes led to knowledge being kept in house instead of being transfer to the subcontractor: *"It was also agreed that the technical specialist would be part of the acquisition. This did not occur and ultimately was not arranged. Therefore, the service provision is already at a completely different level"* (Interviewee 8, Subcontractor, 13:52). These contractual adjustments negatively affected subcontractor readiness and ability to provide the contracted service which ultimately reduces client satisfaction with subcontractor as well as with the main contractor.

4.1.2 Contract clarity

Contract clarity occurs as a consistently critical factor for all actors within the service triad. When contracts were vague or overly complex, they created misunderstandings and friction between the client, the main contractor, and subcontractors. As Interviewee 9 explained, *"the agreements between the main contractor and the subcontractor, and between the main contractor and the client, are not clear to each other, and you end up with constant discussions"* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 21:29). This was also mentioned by Interviewee 6 who noted that even though you have agreed on a contract *"It is always slightly different. Because we meant something else, or misunderstood each other, or it was slightly better sold, or things do not quite work out"* (Interviewee 6, Main contractor, 31:06). Another subcontractor highlighted the problem of contractual grey areas: *"But what are the agreements for shopping tools? What are the agreements for dishwashers? Yes, that remains unclear"* (Interviewee 11, Subcontractor, 5:00).

The challenges surrounding contract clarity also become increasingly complex by location-specific deviations in expectations. For example, two subcontractors working for the same client noted that each site had its own interpretation of service standards, often diverging from what was formally agreed in the overall contract. One stated that, *"you still have those location-specific agreements that you should make with the person responsible at the location of the main contractor, the customer's location manager, for example, and the subcontractor's location manager"* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 13:54). Mismatches here lead to additional strains on relationships and create inconsistencies in service delivery between locations and subcontractors. Moreover, subcontractors emphasised that a clear and detailed contract lays the foundation for effective collaboration. As one participant stressed, *"the contract must be clear to all parties"* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 34:02) and added that *"all those agreements should be clearly written down from the start, so that everyone knows what to expect"* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 12:30), something that was also mentioned by Interviewee 10, *"Actually, we should have a kind of summary contract for each partner. That way, when a new one comes along, you have two pages from the subcontractor with the highlights, and you can read it very easily. That is what I miss, and it is something that causes us problems"* (Interviewee 10, Subcontractor, 52:22).

Clients, too, expressed frustration with unclear contractual clauses. They reported spending unnecessary time interpreting specifications, which often led to conflicts with the main contractor. As one client observed, *"that we all have the same information, and not that the text is slightly different"* (Interviewee 5, Client, 41:40), and even provided a solution, *"you should really have a nice one-pager that Client uses and that Main contractor uses, which is exactly the same, so that we all have the same information"* (Interviewee 5, Client, 43:02). In addition, another client emphasised the need for shared alignment and stated that, *"for processes and such, we have started to document things more thoroughly with each other, so that it is clearer how they work"* (Interviewee 12, Client, 29:26).

Ultimately, vague contracts result in considerable inefficiency, requiring unnecessary research, additional meetings, and avoidable friction, as one client summarised: *“Then you have a lot of uncertainty, unnecessary research, and additional meetings to address these issues. This is where I think it could be so much easier”* (Interviewee 5, Client, 42:18).

4.1.3 Mismatch between sales and operations

Another contractual risk frequently highlighted by participants is the disconnect between sales teams and operational teams. Both main contractor and subcontractors expressed concern that to secure contracts, sales representatives sometimes make promises that cannot realistically be fulfilled by the operational teams responsible for delivery. When asked if there is a mismatch between what sales promises and what can be achieved, Interviewee 10 explained: *“yes. I am very honest about that, and it makes sense. Sometimes you want a customer so badly that you make all kinds of promises, and then operations will have to deliver on them”* (Interviewee 10, Subcontractor, 41:09). Another added that *“when we compete for a customer, yes, promises are made, that are difficult to fulfil later in operations”* (Interviewee 1, Main contractor, 30:01). Once such inflated expectations are formalised in contract, they often translate into friction during the implementation phase. One participant described this situation as follows *“then the client says, ‘but that is not accurate, as this is what you sold, this is what the implementation team stated, and now you are suggesting that it will not be feasible.’ That is a significant factor in your client satisfaction”* (Interviewee 3, Main contractor, 36:15). This early-stage misalignment undermines trust and sets a negative tone for collaboration within the service triad. As a possible solution Interviewee 8 mentions that *“I also think that, at all times, you need to have operational people at the table during a tender process”* (Interviewee 8, Subcontractor, 26:26).

4.1.4 Implementation under time pressure

The implementation phase was also identified as a major risk area. Six out of thirteen participants explicitly mentioned implementation as a challenge, while ten recognised it as a critical factor in outsourcing success. One participant stressed, that *“successful service delivery starts with implementation”* (Interviewee 2, Main contractor, 17:25). Importantly, implementation was in some cases planned without sufficient input from operational teams, as Interviewee 3 illustrates, *“From the operational side, no one is involved. It is important that someone is involved, because then you can often determine the turnaround time for implementation”* (Interviewee 3, Main contractor, 36:15). This in turn leads to unrealistic assumptions about resources and turnaround times. As a result, several interviewees noted that agreed timelines were unfeasible, directly affecting service quality and, ultimately, client satisfaction, as Interviewee 3 further clarifies, *“If you receive the handover from the operation and only hear about the turnaround time then. Yes, then you often do not make it, and you must go to the client”* (Interviewee 3, Main contractor, 36:15). In addition, Interviewee 10 also tells that, *“We suffered from that for years. It was very unclear for our people, and the client noticed that. Yes, if you do not get it right from the start, it is exceedingly difficult to do it with retroactivity”* (Interviewee 10, Subcontractor, 26:26).

4.1.5 Summary of findings

The most critical issue was contract clarity where vague or inconsistently interpreted agreements lead to misunderstandings, misaligned expectations, and friction among the actors. A second major risk is the mismatch between sales commitments and operational delivery. Overpromising during the contracting phase often result in unrealistic service levels, damaging credibility and straining relationships from the start. Finally, the implementation phase emerged as a recurring challenge, with compressed timelines and limited operational involvement that can create unstable foundations for service delivery. Together, these risks reduce coordination, hinder adaptability, and undermine trust, ultimately lowering client satisfaction. Addressing them requires greater inclusivity in the contracting

process, clearer role definition, and stronger communication frameworks from the start across all actors in the triad.

4.2 The role of communication in shaping collaboration and service value

This section presents in what ways the quality and frequency of communication between service triad actors affect collaboration and perceived service value. Since communication is an important factor in any collaboration, effective communication has growing importance in triadic outsourcing relationships where multiple actors need to be coordinated and the information flows through a main contractor.

4.2.1 Frequency of communication

Multiple participants described the meetings held at different levels with various stakeholders, reflecting a largely uniform approach followed by both clients and subcontractors. These meetings were reported to take place regularly, with their frequency often formalised in the contract. At the operational level, however, the frequency of communication was significantly higher. Unlike at the strategic and tactical levels, where actors are often physically separated, the operational level is characterised by more close physical proximity. Here, actors communicated throughout the day, often informally. Because subcontractors are present on-site daily, access between all actors is greatest at the operational level. An additional feature of communication at this level is the high likelihood of subcontractors coming into direct contact with end users, a situation that respondents note is almost unavoidable in daily practice.

While the frequency of communication provides structure and opportunities for interaction, respondents emphasise that communication begins with mutual respect, as one client explained, *“We started off from a position of mutual respect. I very much have a lot of respect for her. She, I would say, has respect for me in different ways. And so we have always kept our relationship underpinned by mutual respect”* (Interviewee 13, Client, 11:26). Similarly, a subcontractor reflected: *“It starts with a certain amount of mutual respect for each other and also understanding of what you need to do your daily work. To shape that in the right way.”* (Interviewee 8, Subcontractor, 32:22). Mutual respect was also linked to openness in addressing both small and large operational issues. As one main contractor noted, *“When we have a question, the subcontractor thinks with us. It is not just about a power socket but sometimes about something bigger. You respect each other, but you also dare to question each other. And that benefits the service. You build power step by step and build a relationship of trust. Things may go wrong occasionally, but it is about knowing what you can expect from each other”* (Interviewee 2, Main contractor, 6:07).

Regular meetings and daily exchanges therefore only create value when they are supported by constant sharing of relevant information, mutual respect, and honesty across all actors. In this sense, frequency of communication alone is insufficient to sustain collaboration and deliver service value; what ultimately matters is the quality of these exchanges. Respectful and honest communication lays the foundation for trust, which is explored further in the following section.

4.2.2 Honesty and conflict

Honest communication was highlighted by multiple participants as essential, not only at the contractual stage, but throughout the entire collaboration. Parties need to be transparent about both the services they provide and the limitations they face, as Interviewee 3 notes, *“And sometimes we cannot do something. Then we must communicate that as well”* (Interviewee 3, Main contractor, 35:50).

Interestingly all client interviewees noted that conflicts are inevitable, but respectful handling combined with honest communication, including acknowledging one's own limitations, creates the conditions under which trust can develop. As Interviewee 5 states, *"Of course, there are times when you don't quite agree with each other. But we have an agreement between us, right? We're not going to argue about it. Things are planned or agreed upon in the contract. And whether we agree or disagree. Yes, if we both have different ideas, then we'll just check what's written in the contract and do it that way. We would never actually have a discussion"* (Interviewee 5, Client, 10:52). In addition, relational contract can also play a role here as explained by another client, *"If there is ever a conflict, we look at it and ask ourselves: okay, how is the reciprocity here, are we being fair to each other, is the loyalty reasonable, are we asking for something reasonable, yes or no, and that is how we try to resolve the dispute"* (Interviewee 12, Client, 24:21). Finally, Interviewee 13 summed it up as: *"and when the issue is such a place where we cannot agree, we cannot resolve it in any way, either consensus or compromise or. We just leave it as, at agree to disagree and move on"* (Interviewee 13, Client, 11:26), because as the client stated, *"the first priority was always, we keep the relationship, the working relationship at a cordial and respectful level between us. So, there is no need to get angry and there is no need to get, you know, take things personally"* (Interviewee 13, Client, 13:02).

4.2.3 Communication within client organisation

An important factor noted by main contractors is the way internal communication within the client organisation influences how the main contractor is perceived. Several examples illustrate that when communication within the client organisation is weak, particularly towards end users, this negatively affects the extent to which the main contractor is accepted as a collaborative partner. Clients often associate outsourcing with cost savings and process optimisation. However, due to the main contractor's more structured administration, the true financial picture frequently comes to light. While this greater transparency is appreciated at the strategic level, it is often the main contractor who is blamed for exposing additional costs. For example, Interviewee 3 shared an anecdote where estimated costs seemed to nearly double because the main contractor provided more detailed insights into operational costs. In response the client introduced restrictions for end users and as a result Interviewee 3 mentioned, *"what we are seeing now is that decisions made by the client, are being handled by the main contractor, which means that end users are saying, yes, but we are no longer allowed to order from the main contractor"* (Interviewee 3, Main contractor, 5:59).

As Interviewee 2 nicely puts it, the *"main contractor is then the embodiment of the changes"* (Interviewee 2, Main contractor, 20:32). These changes have a long-lasting effect, with end users often holding on to memories of the 'better times' before outsourcing. As a result, the acceptance of the main contractor and the perceived added value of their role is questioned by end users as illustrated by Interviewee 2, *"I still hear about it occasionally, because they set up the action group 'Save the Croquette'. But I sometimes think we don't realise enough what the consequences are for our image as main contractor when we implement major changes"* (Interviewee 2, Main contractor, 19:59). This scepticism undermines communication, as actions from the main contractor may be received with resistance or mistrust. If this is not managed by the client, such attitudes damage trust between actors, particularly at the operational level where end users interact most directly with subcontractors.

When end users question the legitimacy of the main contractor, they are less willing to align with its processes and standards. This creates friction between client staff, subcontractors, and the main contractor, weakening the collaboration and, joint problem-solving and reducing the perceived service value. Ultimately, while strategic-level actors may appreciate the transparency provided by the main contractor's structured administration, poor acceptance at the operational level threatens to destabilise trust and collaboration across the service triad.

4.2.4 Bridge position in communication

In a service triad, the main contractor occupies the intermediary or “bridge” position between the client and the subcontractor. This position was consistently described by respondents as both critical and challenging. As a subcontractor mentions, *“that is such an important role. I think it is often underestimated”* (Interviewee 10, Subcontractor, 4:58) and emphasised, *“communication by the main contractor is very important, both to the customer and to the partners”* (Interviewee 10, Subcontractor, 4:58).

Main contractors emphasised the importance of this intermediary role. Due to the knowledge about contractual arrangements, the main contractor is responsible for safeguarding the client’s interest from opportunistic behaviour of subcontractors. One interviewee reflected on a case where a client had previously engaged directly with cleaning subcontractors, leading to substantial inefficiencies, *“it turned out that there were a lot of overlaps. That’s extra work that must be paid for”* (Interviewee 4, Main contractor, 20:07).

Since main contractors are also responsible for managing the operational cost for the client (as financial gatekeepers) they often argue that all communication should flow through them in order to prevent unexpected or hidden costs. As one respondent explained, if a client gives a direct assignment to a subcontractor, that could have financial implications, *“but we see this happening, and you should not do that, because who is going to pay for it, or who is going to check it if something goes wrong with that work?”* (Interviewee 7, Main contractor, 28:20). Several main contractors also point out that bypassing established communication lines can *“result in a significant increase in costs on an annual basis”* (Interviewee 1, Main contractor, 27:49) and that *“it is not for the client to have direct contact with the supplier at that level”* (Interviewee 1, Main contractor, 24:46).

To mitigate such risks, main contractors emphasised the importance of ensuring that clients understand and respect the agreed communication lines. They stressed that it is the client’s responsibility to make sure that end users follow the correct channels of communication. However, while the bridge position is crucial for staying aligned with budgets and managing services, main contractors also recognised the benefits of direct communication between all actors. They further acknowledged the value of three-party meetings, particularly in larger projects. An exception was noted in relation to safety issues. When such matters carried direct operational or legal implications, main contractors accepted that security subcontractors could engage directly with the client, as illustrated by Interviewee 7 who noted that, *“In that situation, the line between the client and the security provider must be very short so they can coordinate directly. At that moment, we had nothing to add”* (Interviewee 7, Main contractor, 25:24). Nevertheless, even in these cases, interviewees indicated that direct communication occasionally created confusion regarding which matters should be discussed with the client, and which should be channelled through the main contractor.

Although the bridge position is intended to safeguard the client’s interests, clients expressed that communication through the main contractor can at times be challenging. While most clients expressed a preference for focusing on strategic issues and avoiding day-to-day operational details, they also voiced frustration at their limited influence over subcontractors. As one client mentioned, *“If there is an issue, like the current one with a subcontractor, you really want to be able to discuss it”* (Interviewee 12, Client, 38:08). Another client also noted, *“We need some kind of lever to exert influence on the partner who is not performing. We are missing those levers”* (Interviewee 13, Client, 51:28) and another also emphasised the importance of feeling heard, *“The client must also feel that they are being heard”* (Interviewee 5, Client, 21:21). One client particularly argued that three-party meetings were particularly valuable in addressing issues such as innovation or sustainability, where subcontractor

expertise was directly relevant, *“that you occasionally really want to meet with all three parties in that triangle and not just go from one to the other, but rather meet up in the middle”* (Interviewee 12, Client, 45:23)

Finally, subcontractors also emphasised the need for more direct contact with clients. In the context of projects or tenders, they felt that direct interaction would allow them to tailor their offers more effectively, *“If I had been able to explore it a little more with the client, maybe they would have found it interesting, or I could have adjusted it to make it more suitable”* (Interviewee 10, Subcontractor, 6:01). Subcontractors also described feeling disconnected from the client organisation when all communication was filtered through the main contractor, but reported greater engagement when clients shared updates on organisational developments and priorities. Such updates helped subcontractors remain engaged with the client and better anticipate the client’s future needs. Interestingly, subcontractors reported preferring to communicate through the main contractor when their relationship with the client was not optimal but did not feel obliged to do so when the relationship was positive. Several subcontractors also noted that clients at different locations sometimes approached them directly for contractual clarification, suggesting that knowledge gaps and communication breakdowns exist within the triad.

4.2.5 Summary of findings

The findings show that frequency of communication itself not enough, it need to be paired with quality of communication for collaboration and perceived service value in triadic service outsourcing. While meeting frequency is usually fixed in contracts, communication only creates value when supported by openness, honesty, and mutual respect. The bridge position of the main contractor safeguards contractual and financial control but can also cause inefficiencies and frustration when it limits direct exchanges. At the same time, frequent operational contact fosters alignment but also raises risks of miscommunication with end users. Overall, service value is maximised when communication is combined with clear information and actors have mutual respect to one another.

4.3 Trust as foundation for effective collaboration

This section presents in what ways mutual trust among actors in the service triad (i.e., client, main contractor and subcontractor) influence collaboration.

4.3.1 Goodwill trust

Trust begins with the belief that the main contractor is acting with the best intentions, as one client explained, *“Always giving the benefit of the doubt. So, if I have the main contractor and they are telling me something I do not like to hear, I think there is a reason for them to tell me that, right?”* (Interviewee 13, Client, 18:20). This illustrates the role of goodwill trust as the foundation of collaboration. In a triadic relationship, such trust must be reciprocal and extend across all three actors to unlock the full potential of collaboration. Subcontractors strongly reinforced this view. One respondent emphasised that without trust, collaboration quickly deteriorates, with negative consequences for service outcomes across the triad, *“Without trust in each other, collaboration is very difficult. And I think that has a big impact on the output we deliver. For the client, for us as subcontractor, and for the main contractor”* (Interviewee 9, Subcontractor, 18:51). This aligns with prior research that identifies trust as a precondition for joint problem-solving and relational governance in outsourcing partnerships.

Examples from subcontractors, however, also revealed how fragile trust can be in practice. One subcontractor described how their local representative was not fully trusted by the client, who only accepted information once it had been validated by the subcontractor on tactical level, as illustrated by *“Because it shouldn't be the case, and it does happen, that they then include me in an email and that I then end up responding. And then someone sits down with a manager from the client and only*

then believes that it's actually true" (Interviewee 11, Subcontractor, 16:13). Such cases suggest not only a highlight lack of interpersonal trust at the operational level but also a lack of clarity regarding contractual responsibilities and authority. The fact that clients contacted subcontractors at higher organisational levels further indicates that agreed communication flows were not being followed. This results in misalignment in communication and undermines the legitimacy of both the main contractor and the subcontractor's local representative in the client's eyes. Ultimately, this weakens collaboration, erodes trust, and increases the likelihood of conflict in further communication.

4.3.2 Human elements

Beyond contractual agreement and formal communication structures, participants highlighted the critical role of human elements in shaping trust within triadic outsourcing relationships. Trust was considered particularly important in the relationship between the client and the main contractor, where confidence in both expertise and intentions provided the foundation for collaboration. Participants emphasised that trust rooted in the personalities and interpersonal styles of the individuals involved. As one main contractor explained, *"It comes from the culture of the company, the difference. That is absolutely the case. And also on a human level, of course. One manager, as a person, is perhaps easier in sharing information or in having contact and collaboration. Other places you more at a distance because they see that as safer"* (Interviewee 1, Main contractor, 50:19).

Clients similarly underlined the importance of having the right individuals in key positions. They pointed out that collaboration depends not only on trusting the main contractor's expertise but also on the interpersonal qualities of those representing the organisation. As one client stated, *"Having the right people at the table matters. One person is simply better at this than another. So, besides needing to trust that the [main contractor] has the knowledge and expertise they bring, it often comes down to the person who is actually doing it"* (Interviewee 12, Client, 13:42).

These examples illustrate that trust within service triads cannot be reduced to contractual design or formal governance mechanisms alone. Instead, the basis is shaped by interpersonal "fit", openness in communication, and the ability of individuals to build respectful relationships.

4.3.3 Service delivery

A recurring theme across all actors was that the basis of trust lies in reliability, doing what was promised. Main contractors emphasised that failing to honour agreements immediately undermines credibility, as one participant mentioned, *"that is the most important thing. Because if you do not do what you agree to, then yes, then you will not get any trust"* (Interviewee 4, Main contractor, 12:54). Subcontractors confirmed this perspective, pointing out that unmet commitments quickly destroy confidence, *"Well, a lot of things were said, but nothing was done"* (Interviewee 11, Subcontractor, 13:58). These examples highlight how the consistency between promises and actual (and perceived) performance was described by participants as a foundation for maintaining trust. In addition, participants also noted that operational failures, such as unclear timelines, poor quality, or unexpected financial discrepancies, are damaging to trust. As one main contractor explained when asked what damages trust, *"Being unclear about when you will deliver something, for example, taking a very long time. Delivering poor quality, not doing what was agreed, or occasionally getting into financial difficulties with each other. Getting much higher invoices than expected"* (Interviewee 2, Main contractor, 7:33). Such shortcomings not only create inefficiencies but also place strain on the relations within the triad, leading to heightened monitoring and conflict.

4.3.4 Summary of findings

Once trust is established, collaboration becomes more efficient, and service outcomes improve. Trust enables actors to share information openly, resolve problems proactively, and adapt services more

effectively to client needs. These findings suggest that trust functions as both a relational resource and a performance enabler. High-trust relationships reduce the need for monitoring and allow actors to focus on value creation, while low-trust relationships reinforce rigidity, duplication of effort, and monitoring and conflict. In this way, trust directly shapes quality of service delivery and the perceived value of outsourcing arrangements.

4.4 Knowledge sharing as a catalyst for collaborative value creation

This section explores how knowledge sharing among stakeholders in a service triad influence collaboration and the delivery of service value.

4.4.1 Knowledge sharing enforces faster service delivery

The transfer of knowledge mainly takes place at the operational level, where the service takes place. Knowledge transfer, or the lack of it, directly affects service quality and perceived value. One subcontractor emphasised this point and stated, *"It starts, of course, at the worksite, where you have a certain amount of knowledge that you simply need to know. What do I encounter daily, what is expected of me, what do I report? That's very basic, but ultimately, it's very important."* (Interviewee 8, Subcontractor, 9:56). Another subcontractor revealed that the client also plays a pivotal role in knowledge transfer, especially for first-time outsourcing, *"Clients have an enormous amount of knowledge. In the case of [client], they had always operated dishwashers and shopping tools themselves. Share that knowledge, take us along in the story and ensure that we can gather our own knowledge based on their experience"* (Interview 9, Subcontractor, 14:55). This illustrates that service outsourcing is not a "done deal" upon signing a contract. Rather, successful collaboration requires clients to engage actively in transferring their organisational knowledge to service providers to enable adaptation and continuity.

Knowledge sharing also emerged as particularly significant within client organisations where health, safety, and security play a central, strategic role. In these environments, knowledge related to safety is actively shared not only locally or regionally, but also across the organisation on a global scale. This demonstrates that knowledge sharing by these clients mitigate risks and ensure safety and compliance. Similarly, Interviewee 7 highlighted more local informal knowledge sharing, *"We do organise a 'local contractor safety drinks party' at our own location, and we invite all our suppliers at the same time. We discuss safety and how we approach it together. So that's how we do it, but we also catch up with each other. Okay, these new rules are in place"* (Interviewee 7, Main contractor, 31:23). This is beneficial to share knowledge but also to build strong partnerships. The same interviewee also mentioned the importance of knowledge sharing within the main contractor organisation, expressing the need that knowledge within the organisation can be better utilised. Another main contractor also expressed the importance of internal knowledge sharing, *"We should maybe visit each other's workplaces again to learn from one another"* (Interviewee 3, Main contractor, 27:08). This would be beneficial to retain knowledge and keep loyal employees.

4.4.2 Employee turnover effect

From the interviews it is also clear that employee turnover has a disruptive effect on knowledge continuity across all three actors, which in return has a negative effect on service delivery. When experienced personnel leave, accumulated tacit knowledge is often lost, creating service disruptions and requiring actors to repeatedly re-establish mutual understanding. This was emphasised by one subcontractor, *"People leave, knowledge leaves with them, and knowledge is power. So the more knowledge you have, the better you can serve the client"* (Interviewee 8, Subcontractor, 12:55). In addition, another subcontractor explained, *"When a new manager arrives, or a new manager joins our team or the main contractor, yes, then it's like, 'what about that, because I read this in the contract'."*

Yes, then it becomes difficult again, because you have to explain everything again" (Interviewee 11, Subcontractor, 7:18). These findings suggest that internal knowledge sharing within the actors' own organisations is often limited or insufficiently structured, resulting in new employees being required to learn on the job.

However, a striking finding concerns the extent to which subcontractors assume responsibility for onboarding newly appointed main contractor staff. In several cases, subcontractors reported providing both explicit knowledge (e.g., contractual details, procedural information) and tacit knowledge (e.g., operational routines, client-specific practices) to main contractor employees, as one subcontractor illustrated, *"We have sometimes taken on this role, informing new people extensively, even though I felt they should have been properly onboarded through another line. But as I said, it is also in our interest that this person succeeds"* (Interview 10, Subcontractor, 49:05). This practice points to a lack of formalised training and knowledge transfer processes within the main contractor organisation. Although this additional responsibility increases subcontractors' workload, many acknowledged that supporting new main contractor employees ultimately benefits them as well, showing that they feel collective responsibility within service triads. Trained main contractor employees were perceived to facilitate smoother collaboration, reduce misunderstandings, and improve the coordination of service delivery across the triad. As another subcontractor remarked:

4.4.3 Summary of findings

These findings on knowledge sharing among stakeholders in a service confirm that knowledge sharing is a collective responsibility within service triads. When employee turnover occurs, the balance within the triad is disrupted and service delivery is affected. Continuity of knowledge requires active contributions from all actors: clients must share organisational insights, main contractors must establish structured onboarding processes, and subcontractors must transfer operational expertise. In conclusion, while proactive and transparent knowledge sharing supports collaboration and enhances service outcomes, insufficient training, unstructured onboarding, and employee turnover were identified as critical barriers that undermine service value in outsourcing service triads.

4.5 Service value and satisfaction

When asked to identify the most important factors influencing their satisfaction, clients consistently emphasised relational and collaborative dimensions. In first place, they highlighted communication, proactivity, and a committed attitude, indicating the importance of being kept informed, receiving anticipatory support, and perceiving a strong dedication from contractors. In second place, clients emphasised service delivery quality, trust, and the fulfilment of expectations, reflecting the link between operational performance and relational confidence. Finally, in third place, clarity, keeping agreements, and transparency were underlined as essential for building reliability and reducing uncertainty in complex outsourcing arrangements.

When reflecting on what they would like to see changed within the triadic structure, two clients offered clear points of improvement. First, they expressed the desire for greater input regarding subcontractors, suggesting that subcontractor performance and practices should be more visible to the client. By underperformance of subcontractors clients feel powerless and have no influence to motivate (or punish) subcontractors. Clients also feels that some subcontractors (mainly delivering occasional on-site services) do not always know their needs. Second, clients stressed the value of meeting together as a triad (see also sections 4.2 and 4.4. This illustrates that while clients are satisfied with having operational management taken out of their hands by the main contractor, they would nonetheless expect more structured opportunities for transparency and joint problem-solving when subcontractors are involved.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that client satisfaction in the service triad depends not only on service value but also on collaborative practices such as transparent communication, active involvement of all actors, and shared responsibility for resolving challenges and issues.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to understand client satisfaction within FM outsourcing models and to what extent, and through which mechanisms, collaboration influence this. Recent market research highlights the importance of collaboration but also that client satisfaction with multi-service outsourcing is declining. As the term suggests, multi-service outsourcing involves outsourcing multiple services simultaneously and as a first step this study conceptualised FM outsourcing models as service triad where three stakeholders (actors) are represented: the client, the main contractor (who holds a contractual link with the client), and the subcontractor (who holds a contractual link with the main contractor). While this concept is well researched in other sectors, it has not yet been extensively studied in the FM context and by focusing on the managing contractor model, this study investigates various actors' perspectives in depth in one outsourcing model at the time. The aim here is to better understand the complexity of FM outsourcing models and to contribute practical knowledge on how collaboration within FM service outsourcing can be improved and ensuring greater service value for clients. Drawing from relevant literature key factors influencing collaboration within service triads were identified and provided the basis for a conceptual model. This gave input to 13 semi-structured interviews providing perspectives from each actor within the service triad (3 clients, 4 subcontractors, and 6 main contractors).

5.1 Relational and contractual risks in triadic outsourcing relationships

This first section in the discussion focuses on the sub-question in this research on what relational and contractual risks and challenges are commonly encountered in triadic outsourcing relationships.

The findings indicate that contractual risks were frequently associated with relational challenges, confirming that contracts function not only as legal instruments but also as relational frameworks (Kadefors, 2008; Poppo & Zenger, 2002). In service triads, where subcontractors deliver directly to end users without a formal contract (Van der Valk & Van Iwaarden, 2011; Suurmond et al., 2022), such risks are amplified because ambiguity easily escalates into mistrust and inefficiency.

An important critical risk lies in the client motivation behind outsourcing as the findings show that when outsourcing forms part of a strategic transformation initiative, relationships tend to be more collaborative and trust-based. This aligns with the relational contracting literature, which emphasises shared goals, flexibility, and mutual adaptation (Macneil, 1980; Baker, Gibbons, & Murphy, 2002). By contrast, cost-driven outsourcing, particularly when decided centrally, is more likely to produce transactional contracts that emphasise monitoring, penalties, and efficiency (Lumineau & Malhotra, 2011). These rigid governance mechanisms can hinder trust-building, reinforce defensive behaviours, and limit opportunities for joint problem-solving. This is consistent with criticisms that transactional contracts risk inhibiting innovation and eroding relational quality in FM service outsourcing (Van der Valk, 2022).

Client experience with outsourcing emerged as another factor. Participants highlighted that inexperienced clients often entered contracts with unrealistic expectations and limited understanding of outsourcing implications. This finding matches with arguments from Vlaar, Van den Bosch, and Volberda's (2006) that contracts serve as a reference framework. Without common interest, ambiguity is amplified, which increases the likelihood of inefficiency and conflict. Conversely, experienced clients, familiar with both the promises and pitfalls of outsourcing, approaches contracting more realistically, which helped stabilise relationships.

Organisational misalignment within the client adds further complexity. Strategic-level decisions not supported by local units and operational teams create a disconnect between contractual ambitions

(e.g., cost savings) and operational realities (e.g., service quality shortfalls). This reflects Sengupta et al., (2018) warning that service triads amplify coordination risks when governance mechanisms do not extend across all actors. Without genuine buy-in across organisational levels, main contractors and subcontractors are left to take in the consequences of misaligned expectations, eroding satisfaction across the triad.

The findings also highlight contract clarity as a foundational issue. Unclear or overly complex contracts generated misunderstandings, location-specific deviations, and disputes that could have been avoided. This aligns with Vlaar et al. (2006) who emphasise the interpretive role of contracts in reducing ambiguity across multiple actors. In triadic structures, unclear agreements can act as a multiplier, as subcontractors often feel pressured to make undocumented “local adjustments” to satisfy clients, which in turn creates hidden expectations and undermines transparency.

Another recurring theme was the disconnect between sales and operations. Sales teams, motivated by securing contracts, sometimes overpromised, leaving operational staff unable to deliver on contractual commitments. This pattern, described by participants as starting the relationship “at a disadvantage”, reflects broader critiques in outsourcing literature about the dangers of opportunism (Williamson, 1985) and the decoupling of commercial from operational logics (Kalra, Ansari, & Khan, 2020). When such inflated promises become codified in contracts, they not only undermine early trust but also set a negative relational tone that is difficult to recover from.

Finally, the implementation phase was consistently identified as a high-risk stage. Compressed timelines, unrealistic resource assumptions, and limited operational involvement undermined service readiness, reducing client satisfaction and trust. This finding supports prior work emphasizing the centrality of implementation for outsourcing success (Jensen & Van der Voordt, 2015) and echoes broader governance literature, which stresses that well-designed processes for transition are as critical as contractual terms themselves (Frydlinger, Hart, & Vitasek, 2021).

Taken together, these findings suggest that contractual risks, whether unclear agreements, unrealistic promises, or misaligned incentives, directly generate relational risks such as mistrust, rigidity, and inefficiency. This reinforces the argument of Poppo and Zenger (2002) that neither contracts nor trust alone are sufficient: hybrid governance structures, integrating transactional clarity with relational flexibility, are most effective in managing uncertainty and enabling collaboration in complex service triads. In line with Van der Valk (2022), FM service outsourcing relationships may benefit from a dual-contracting approach that balances technical scope with explicit relational norms.

5.2 Communication in triadic outsourcing relationships

This section focuses on answering two sub-questions that are closely related to each other, namely, “In what ways does the quality and frequency of communication between triad members affect collaboration and perceived service outcomes?” and “How does the role of the main contractor as a bridge between client and subcontractor affect trust, collaboration, and knowledge flow within the triad?”

Results of this study indicate that effective communication forms the foundation of any collaboration, including triadic outsourcing relationships. Yet, the observed dynamics illustrate that its role is far from straightforward. The need to coordinate multiple actors through the main contractor amplifies the complexity of communication flows. Because the main contractor holds critical knowledge and acts as the central channel of information between subcontractors and clients (Li & Choi, 2009), communication becomes highly dependent on the main contractor’s ability to manage and share information effectively. The quality, availability, and acceptance of this mediated communication are

crucial. They ultimately determine whether all actors follow the established communication lines or seek alternative, informal channels.

Communication becomes particularly important, and challenging, at the operational level, where the number of stakeholders is at its broadest. At this stage, all members of the three actors effectively become part of the triad, and the inclusion of end users as an additional stakeholder group further expands the network. The result is a dense and fragile system of information flows, in where messages are easily distorted or lost. Moreover, at the operational level, communication intensity increases due to actors' physical proximity. Daily, often informal, exchanges between subcontractors, main contractors, and clients distinguish this layer from the more distant tactical and strategic levels. Crucially, subcontractors have direct contact with end users, creating opportunities for rapid feedback and enhanced service responsiveness, but also crease risk. End users may evaluate service value differently from contractual benchmarks, creating a sense of dissatisfaction at the local level even when, strategically, the purchased services align with contractual specifications. This recurring mismatch between operational realities and contractual agreements is well-documented in outsourcing research but remains underexplored in the literature on triadic service relationships.

Taking together, these findings indicate that communication is a critical factor in enabling collaboration. Its effectiveness depends not only on people's willingness to engage with and accept one another, but also on the availability and accessibility of relevant information. At the operational level, communication within one's own organisation as well as across multiple actors in the triad is both unavoidable and essential.

5.3 Trust as foundation for effective collaboration

This section focuses on trust and how mutual trust among stakeholders (client, main contractor and subcontractor) influences collaboration within the triad.

The results from this study show that mutual trust is the cornerstone of effective collaboration in a service triad, and it is primarily rooted in human factors rather than formal structures. Participants repeatedly emphasised that trust grows out of interpersonal qualities and what they described as "the good click between people". Acceptance of one another, coupled with the positive assumption that both main contractors and subcontractors act with the client's best interests in mind rather than opportunistically, forms the basis of goodwill trust. This interpersonal trust provides the foundation for developing long-term outsourcing partnerships.

Although goodwill trust provides the relational base for collaboration, in service triads it must extend across all three actors to unlock the full potential of joint working. While this can be facilitated through formal structures at higher organisational levels, at the operational level trust depends even more strongly on everyday human interactions and the perception of each other. On an operational level, operational teams and even end users become part of this relationship, extending the service triad with additional actors. In such environments, mutual respect, openness, and interpersonal understanding are essential to collaboration.

The fragility of these human connections was illustrated in cases where clients bypassed local subcontractor representatives and escalated issues directly to higher organisational levels. Such actions not only undermined interpersonal trust but also disrupted agreed communication flows. They exposed gaps in relational governance, knowledge of contractual agreements, and respect for roles. These breakdowns weakened the validity of contractual arrangements and reinforced Sengupta et al.'s (2018) argument that failures by one actor ripple across the entire triad. Subcontractors highlighted the centrality of human trust, stressing that without it, "no actor gets the best out of the relationship".

Meaning, that service delivery may still occur in the absence of trust but, that without it, honesty in communication and the openness to share knowledge will suffer, limiting the potential service value, something that a trusted partnership will add to the collaboration. Trust is in this case an enabler of constant good service delivery and allows relationships to grow but can also be a barrier when acting upon service delivery failures.

5.4 Knowledge sharing as a catalyst for collaborative value creation

This section dives into the sub-question on how knowledge sharing among stakeholders influences collaboration and the delivery of service value.

The findings suggest that knowledge sharing perceived to contribute to service value in triadic outsourcing relationships. While outsourcing transfers responsibilities of services, value is only realised when knowledge, both explicit and tacit, is also transferred. At the operational level, due to reluctance of clients sharing knowledge, subcontractors struggle to find ways around this and can take longer to deliver agreed services on the contractual agreed level.

At the tactical level, open knowledge flows support cost savings and innovation. Conversely, knowledge loss, for example through staff turnover or poor handover, can erode service performance and continuity, highlighting the fragile nature of tacit knowledge. Structured sharing mechanisms, such as shadowing, can help minimise disruptions and may help preserve service value.

Overall, the results suggest that knowledge sharing enhances service value by improving continuity, enabling efficiency, and fostering innovation. Beyond technical performance, it also strengthens relational trust, reinforcing collaboration and reducing the need for costly control mechanisms. For clients, this means that proactive sharing of knowledge maximises the benefits of outsourcing, while for contractors and subcontractors, systematic knowledge management ensures sustained value delivery.

5.5 From collaboration to service value, to satisfaction

Participants framed client satisfaction as primarily influenced by the perceived service value. This value is not only created by constant service delivery but also by adding value to the client organisation. This added value can occur in various forms from constant and stable service delivery, sturdier finances and optimisation, providing new insights, or innovation, depending on the client's core business and strategic importance.

However, the basis is the same for every client: constant service delivery, meaning fulfilling contractual agreements and deliver the services. This service delivery mainly links to operational level, which importance is often overlooked in research. To deliver services in a service triad, where various stakeholders work together, the role of collaboration is crucial.

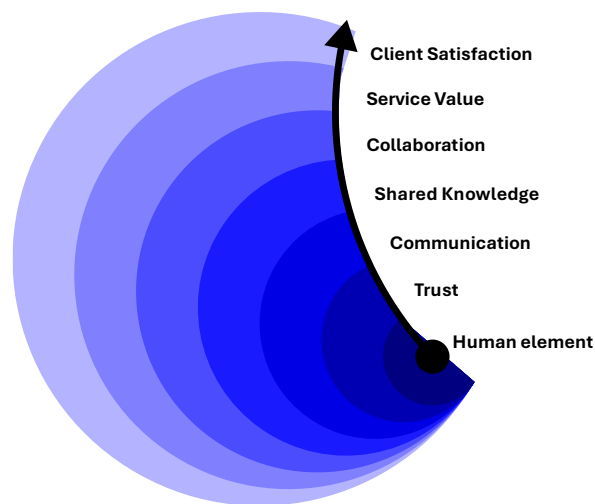
When looking at the main research question, "To what extent, and through which mechanisms, does collaboration within FM outsourcing models, conceptualised as a service triad, influence client satisfaction?" there are two parts to this question. First, the mechanisms, which through literature review were identified as communication, trust, and knowledge sharing. The second part is how these factors inform client satisfaction for which the results and discussions above suggest that collaboration is mainly failing due to two main factors: the human element, and communication.

How these two factors are linked together and build upon each other is illustrated in Figure 8. When peeling back from outside to inside, just like an onion, the most influential factor, the human element, is at its centre. Across all interviews, a recurring theme was the importance of personal "fit" between actors. Trust is built between individuals who connect on a personal level, often shaped by instincts,

biases, and shared goals. When the “right people” engage with each other, trust is more likely to emerge. Trust, in turn, enables openness and constructive collaboration. With trust, information flows more freely and openly, which creates opportunities for knowledge sharing, new perspectives, and innovation. As collaboration deepens, actors work together as a team toward shared goals, thereby co-creating service value that goes beyond the basic contractual deliverables.

Figure 8

Service onion

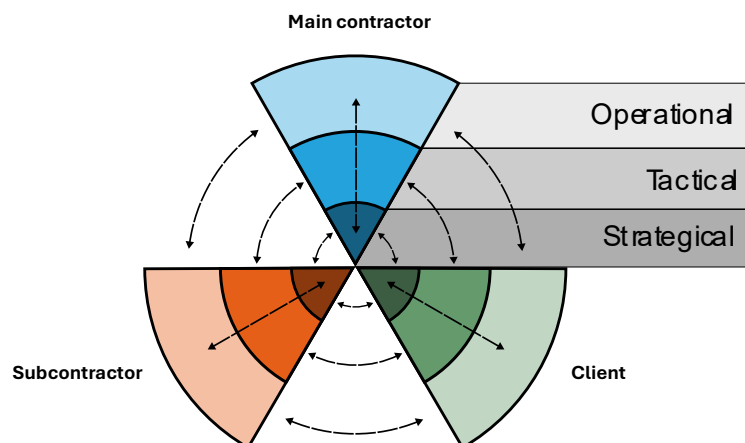


Source: By author, 2025

The second key factor is clear, organisation-wide communication. In a service triad, all actors need to have access to their job specific information, which is understood by each actor in the same way. Participants reported frequent misalignment between strategic, tactical, and operational levels. While client satisfaction and collaboration on higher organisational levels were judged as good, on operational level this can be experienced differently by other actors. This misalignment falls partly to (lack of) communication, at the client organisation: are expectations managed properly and is all available information clear, at the main contractor: do employees know all the ins and outs of the contracts, and at subcontractors: is there knowledge about client specific tacit and explicit knowledge.

Figure 9

Communication (arrows) between all three actors in a service triad, as well as within their own organisations.



Source: By author, 2025

Effective communication flows (see Figure 9) both within and across organisations, appear important for aligning expectations, may help preventing misunderstandings, and can help ensuring consistent quality. When communication is fragmented, imbalance and tension arise, which ultimately diminish the value delivered to the client.

In summary, client satisfaction in the managing contractor outsourcing model appears to be shaped by the extent to which service value is created. This value is realised through trust-based human relationships and effective communication, which together form the foundation for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and continuous improvement. Collaboration therefore can be improved by solid communication and finding human connections between actors. Making clear and realistic contracts and creating platforms to share information actors will gain better understanding. Paired with finding connections between actors (e.g., team building activities) this will create links which trust can build upon. Once these factors are managed well, collaborations may be supported, potentially contributing to more constant service delivery and service value for the client.

5.6 Validity and reliability

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), research quality is addressed through credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity). Choices are aligned with the qualitative, constructivist, multiple-actor case strategy adopted in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019)).

5.6.1 Credibility

To enhance credibility, multiple representatives within service triads were interviewed, in total: three clients, six main contractors, and four subcontractors, providing perspectives of all three roles in FM service outsourcing triads (Yin, 2018). Actor-specific interview guides (see Appendices D–F) were developed from the conceptual model and covered communication, trust, knowledge sharing, collaboration, risks, and satisfaction, to improve construct clarity and enable pattern matching between emergent themes and theory (Yin, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to express their views freely while ensuring coverage of the core topics (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

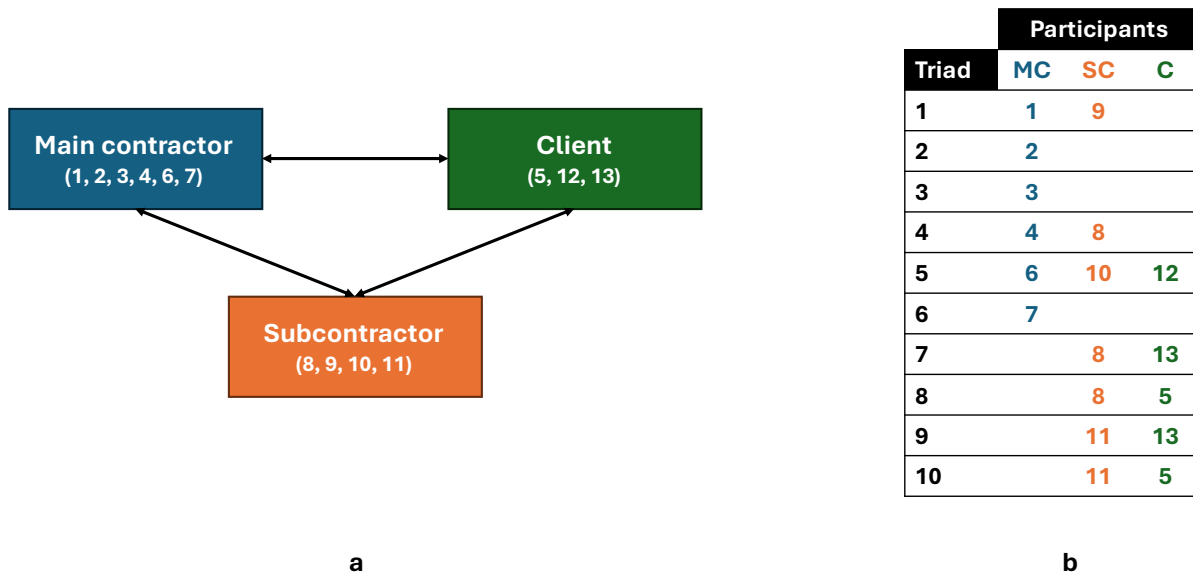
5.6.2 Transferability

One complete triad was achieved in which all three actors were interviewed from the same account (a Dutch insurance and financial services company). Beyond this, main-contractor participants at strategic/tactical levels covered multiple accounts. In addition, several subcontractors drew on experience across multiple clients, supporting analytical transfer through contextual variation. Overall, this represented a total of ten different service triads (see

Figure 10) illustrating the complexity of multiple collaborations and relationships.

Figure 10

Role of interviewees (a) and their relationships to each other in different service triads (b).



Source: By author, 2025

A full overview that summarises role, level (strategic/tactical/operational), and experience in the field to provide the thick description needed for readers to judge applicability can be found in Appendix G.

5.6.3 Dependability

A standardised procedure was followed: after signed consent, interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and audio-recorded with permission; recordings were then transcribed and anonymised (Saunders et al., 2019). Open coding was conducted in Taguette, with written code definitions (Appendix J), followed by axial coding and cross-case linking in Excel with versioned export. This approach is consistent with inductive, grounded-theory-inspired analysis and pragmatic thematic grouping (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rampin & Rampin, 2021) and supports procedural consistency and traceability (Miles et al., 2020).

5.6.4 Confirmability

Original recordings and transcripts are retained and accessible only to the researcher. An audit trail links raw data to coded segments (exports from Taguette), to axial categories (in Excel), and finally to thematic claims (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2020). Given the researcher's employment within the same organisation as the main-contractor participants, mitigations included a neutral interviewing style, avoidance of leading questions, repeated anonymity/confidentiality assurances, and reflexive notes on potential influence, consistent with constructivist qualitative standards (Charmaz, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5.6.5 Data integrity and ethics

All participants received an information letter before agreeing to participate and signed consent forms (Appendices B–C); two participants returned forms shortly after the interview due to workload. Transcripts were anonymised (i.e. personal and company identifiers were removed) and stored securely with access restricted to the researcher (Saunders et al., 2019). Finally, data sufficiency is made transparent: thematic saturation was reached for main-contractor and subcontractor interviews,

but not for client interviews due to limited participation and time constraints; client-side themes are therefore interpreted as indicative (Guest et al., 2020).

5.7 Limitations

This qualitative, multiple-actor case study provides rich, situated insights into collaboration within FM service triads; nevertheless, several limitations should be highlighted and acknowledged.

5.7.1 Scope and sampling

The study focuses on the managing contractor outsourcing model in the Netherlands. This may limit transferability to other sourcing models or national settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2016). In addition, all main contractor participants came from a single Dutch FM company, so organisational culture and processes may be over-represented (Yin, 2016). Finally, two subcontractor companies belonged to the same parent group as the main contractor (while operating as separate legal entities and contracts). Such corporate affiliation can shape perceptions of collaboration and trust, underscoring the importance of reflexivity about researcher and organisational positioning (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

5.7.2 Sampling strategy and self-selection

Non-probability techniques (purposive, critical-case, snowball) prioritised relevance over statistical generalisability. Self-selection may have favoured more engaged stakeholders and positive cases (Saunders et al., 2019).

5.7.3 Researcher role

The researcher's employment within the same organisation as the main contractor participants may introduce social desirability or confirmation bias. Mitigations (e.g., neutral interviewing, confidentiality assurances, reflexive notes) reduce this but do not eliminate this risk (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

5.7.4 Data collection

All interviews were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams. Although effective for access, remote interviewing can limit observation of non-verbal cues and contextual detail; no on-site observation was undertaken and document analysis was limited, making the evidence interview-dominant (Miles et al., 2018).

5.7.5 Saturation asymmetry

Thematic saturation was reached for main contractor and subcontractor interviews but not for clients due to fewer interviews and time constraints. Client-side findings should therefore be read as indicative rather than exhaustive (Guest et al., 2020).

5.7.6 Analytic choices

The inductive pipeline (open coding in Taguette, axial grouping in Excel, followed by pattern matching) supports depth but remains interpretive. While a version-controlled codebook and audit trail were maintained, the study did not employ full intercoder reliability; any code–recode/peer checks were limited, which may affect analytic stability (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2020).

5.7.7 Construct boundaries

Measures of “client satisfaction” and “service value” rely on participants' perceptions rather than independent performance data. This fits a constructivist stance but can blur distinctions between perceived and observed performance (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine to what extent and through which mechanisms collaboration within FM outsourcing models, conceptualised as service triads, influences client satisfaction in complex, multi-service outsourcing environments. From 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews with clients, main contractors, and subcontractors, the research explored what shapes the relationship between these actors and how this influences client satisfaction. The findings reveal that client satisfaction is not primarily determined by the formal structure of these outsourcing models, but rather by the quality of interpersonal collaboration among the parties involved. While operational factors, such as contract clarity, implementation duration and quality, and service performance play an important role, these are secondary to the relational dynamics that underpin successful collaboration.

6.1 Key mechanisms

The results identify three key mechanisms that drive effective collaboration:

1. **Interpersonal Fit:** a strong personal match between key representatives at all levels accelerate the formation of trust and supports long-term cooperation.
2. **Trust:** the foundation of every effective outsourcing relationship. Where interpersonal fit exists, trust develops early, fostering openness, reducing conflict, and promoting mutual understanding.
3. **Communication:** transparent and continuous communication between all actors ensures alignment of expectations and enables the timely resolution of issues.

These insights are captured in the conceptual model developed through this research: the “Service Onion”. This model emphasises the relational aspects of outsourcing partnerships and illustrates that effective collaboration is built in layers, with the human factor at its core.

6.2 Complexity and declining satisfaction

The study further highlights that declining satisfaction in multi-service outsourcing is not caused by the model itself, but by the increasing complexity of relationships and communication lines that accompany such arrangements. As the number of stakeholders grows, maintaining coherence, transparency, and trust becomes more challenging, and at the same time, even more critical for success.

6.3 Implications

For clients, the findings show that outsourcing is not a one-time transaction, but rather the beginning of a different type of relationship, one that requires ongoing trust, transparent communication, and collaboration to succeed.

For practitioners in facility management, the results underline the importance of investing in relational quality, not only in contract design or performance metrics. The start-up phase of the outsourcing relationship is crucial for client satisfaction and for creating a positive first impression. To support this, it is essential to extend the implementation period where possible and to invest in training and knowledge sharing.

6.4 Final reflection

Ultimately, this study concludes that successful outsourcing is driven by people, not processes. While models, contracts, and performance indicators provide necessary structure, it is the quality of human interaction, the trust, communication, and shared understanding among the actors, that determines whether a partnership truly delivers value.

7. Recommendations

In this section, the findings from this study are translated into recommendations for the facility and real estate management field (with a focus on FM) and into recommendations for future research.

7.1 Practical recommendations

Based on this study's findings, there are several recommendations for clients, main contractors, and subcontractors. In short these relate to change management, alignment of sales and operations, importance of implementation, and a human-centered focus.

7.1.1 Outsourcing – change management

Outsourcing initiatives often fail to deliver expected value when organisational levels are not aligned. This study highlighted that unclear contract and misinterpretation of these contracts often create conflict.

In large organisations, where the distance between strategic and operational levels is greater, it is particularly important to involve operational stakeholders early in the process. Aligning operational processes with their needs before finalising the tender helps to ensure that both operational requirements and broader strategic objectives are addressed. Where operational and strategic priorities are misaligned, structured change management becomes even more crucial for achieving service value in a timely manner. In such cases, Kotter's 8-Step Change Model provides a comprehensive framework to guide the transition and strengthen organisational readiness. For existing outsourcing arrangements where collaboration has not yet reached its optimum, the use of Maurer's 3 Levels of Resistance Model is recommended. This framework helps leaders diagnose and address the root causes of resistance, offering insights into what is hindering progress.

7.1.2 Aligning sales with operations

Misalignment between promises made during sales and actual service delivery reduces client satisfaction and damages trust. In addition, unrealistic offers create operational pressure, rushed preparation, and poor implementation quality. To address this, operational knowledge should be involved in the tendering process to ensure that commitments are realistic, and operation teams have sufficient time to prepare for the challenges ahead. These are essential to provide the expected service and reduce early phases of service complaints.

7.1.3 Importance of implementation

The implementation phase is a critical step toward establishing a collaborative relationship between outsourcing partners. Respondents consistently identified this stage as one of the most important success factors in outsourcing arrangements. However, in practice, the time between contract signing and the commencement of service delivery is often too short. This results in insufficient preparation, limited knowledge transfer, and a greater risk of errors during the early phases of service execution. When operational teams are not adequately prepared, clients experience disruptions, delayed value realisation, and reduced satisfaction. It is therefore recommended to extend the implementation period and include this in the contract. By allowing more time, operational teams can gain a detailed understanding of the client's organisational context, processes, and expectations. A longer preparation phase also supports the transfer of both explicit knowledge, such as documented procedures, and tacit knowledge derived from the experience and insights of employees. Furthermore, it fosters the development of trust and working relationships between client and supplier, which encourages open and honest communication about service delivery and provides the supplier with the opportunity to adjust services where necessary. Following the implementation, the supplier should be consulted regarding the collaboration, and it should be verified whether the services delivered remain aligned

with the contractual arrangements. Any deviations from the contract should be documented to ensure clarity and continuity, particularly in the event of personnel changes. This documentation should explicitly outline the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved.

7.1.4 Human-centered service delivery

One of the most critical yet often underestimated factors in outsourcing success is the human dimension. Many respondents emphasised that frequent personnel changes negatively affect service continuity, leading to the loss of tacit knowledge and a weakening of trust between client and supplier. Recruitment and onboarding of new employees demand considerable resources, both in terms of time and cost. More importantly, the expertise and client-specific insights lost during turnover are not easily replaced and rebuilding them requires significant effort. During this transitional period, clients often experience a temporary reduction in service quality and value, which undermines satisfaction.

To address this challenge, organisations must place people at the centre of their outsourcing strategies. Recruitment practices should focus on carefully matching employees to specific client accounts. Aligning personal attributes, interpersonal skills, and professional expertise with client needs helps to foster stronger relationships and build trust rapidly. At the same time, greater investments should be made to retain experienced employees, thereby reducing the risk of knowledge drain. To engage employee at early stage of employment and to support new employees in acquiring the skills and understanding necessary to perform effectively within client-specific contexts, a comprehensive onboarding and training programs are needed.

To ensure that expertise is captured and transferred within the organisation, structured knowledge-sharing sessions should also be embedded into daily practice. In addition, continuous monitoring, targeted training, and consistent support of employees in their roles are essential to ensure that they remain engaged and properly equipped to deliver high-quality service. When employees feel supported, valued, and appropriately matched to client accounts, they are more likely to remain motivated and loyal, which in turn enhances stability and continuity in service delivery.

From the client perspective, continuity in service delivery and positive feedback during and after personnel transitions serve as critical indicators of success. Ultimately, when human-centered practices are embedded into outsourcing arrangements, clients benefit from consistent service quality, while suppliers achieve stronger and more sustainable collaborative relationships.

7.2 Future research

Based on this study's findings, several areas recommended for further research. First, this study faced limitations in terms of access to client organisations, which constrained the breadth of perspectives collected. Future research should therefore focus exclusively on the client perspective. Such a focus would provide clearer insights into the drivers of client satisfaction and the processes of service value creation from their perspective. Another opportunity for future research concerns the focus on a single main contractor in this study. To strengthen the generalisability of findings, further studies should replicate with multiple main contractors operating across different regions and countries. Such comparative work would not only validate the present findings but also provide deeper insights into how differences between FM providers and organisational cultures shape outsourcing governance and collaboration in diverse regional and national contexts.

Furthermore, the strategic importance of cleaning is recommended as a subject for future studies. Cleaning was highlighted as having a significant effect on the end user. Comparative research between office-based environments and industrial or factory settings could determine whether the perceived value of cleaning is high enough to justify its treatment as a strategic factor within organisations.

Most importantly, further study is recommended on the differences between end-user and client perspectives at the operational level. Interviews in this study revealed that clients and end users often hold distinct expectations. Ultimately, satisfaction is only achieved when the client receives high service value and the end user both recognises and accepts the value of the service provided.

Finally, future studies could examine the role of effective change management in shaping collaboration. Specifically, research could investigate whether structured management practices change the time required to build trust and how this, in turn, influences long-term client satisfaction. To address this question, a longitudinal case study could be conducted, following collaboration from contract initiation through renewal or termination. Such an approach would provide valuable insights into how contractual design, communication, and trust evolve in practice. Although this type of study would be more resource-intensive (and therefore more suited to doctoral-level research), it would overcome the limitations of this study's snapshot approach and generate richer, time-based insights into the governance of FM service outsourcing.

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Appendix A. Worldwide facility management industry

Figure 11

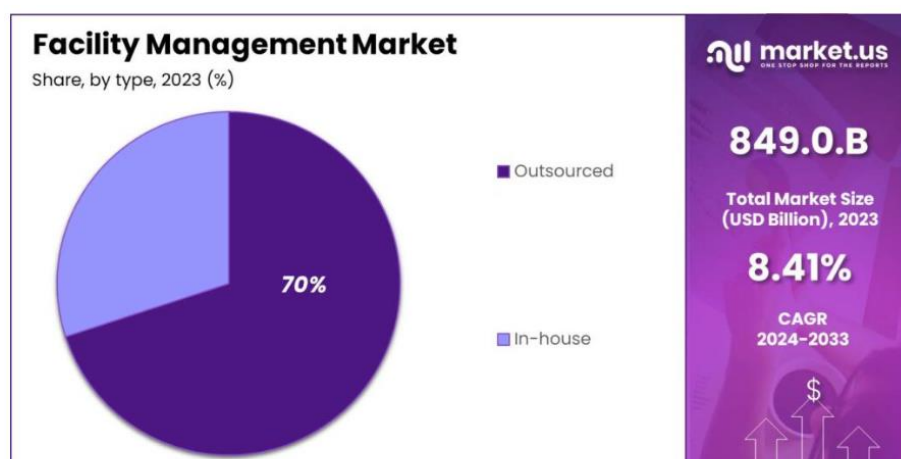
Global Facility Management Market Size



Source: Market.us. (2024, December 16). Facility Management Market Size, Share | CAGR of 8.41%. <https://market.us/report/facility-management-market/>

Figure 12

Facility Management Market Share in 2023



Source: Market.us. (2024, December 16). Facility Management Market Size, Share | CAGR of 8.41%. <https://market.us/report/facility-management-market/>

Appendix B. Consent form

We ask you to indicate below whether you consent to participate in this survey. Please read the following points carefully

As a participant in this research:	yes	No
Have I been informed about the nature, method and purpose of this research in a way that is clear to me.		
Got enough time to decide on participation		
Have I had the opportunity to ask questions about this investigation		
Do I know that participation is voluntary		
I know I can stop participating at any time. I don't have to give a reason.		
I consent to the collection, retention and use of my data for the purpose of answering the research question in this study.		
Do I know that the results of this interview can be incorporated in a report or (scientific) publication?		
I consent to the re-use of my data after this research for as yet unknown research that falls within the scope of this research. In doing so, the recognised ethical standards for this form of research will be observed.		
I know that only for the purpose of verifying the scientific integrity of the research, some people can access my collected data.		
I understand that any information I provide in relation to this study will be collected anonymously and will not be traceable to me.		
Do I know that I can inspect the way in which the data is processed and stored.		
Do I know that if I withdraw, my data can be used until then, unless I also ask for the data already collected to be deleted.		
<i>Optional</i>		
Permission to make audio recordings. These can only be listened to by the researcher(s) and to check the scientific integrity.		
Permit me to make video recordings. These can only be viewed by the researcher(s) and to check the scientific integrity.		
Give me permission to take pictures. These can only be viewed by the researcher(s) and to check the scientific integrity.		

Interviewee

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Interviewer

As an interviewer, I declare that I have given oral explanations about the nature, method and purpose of the investigation. I declare that I am willing to answer any questions that may arise regarding the research into ability.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Email:

Appendix C. Participant information letter

Szilvia Kiss
De Goeijenmarke 16
8016LD Zwolle
0630-118117
556727@student.saxion.nl

Zwolle, 09-05-2025

Dear Participant,

You are receiving this letter because you have been asked — or have already agreed — to participate in a research thesis I am conducting as part of my Facility and Real Estate Management (FREM) program at Saxion University of Applied Sciences.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important that you understand the purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Please read the following information carefully. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Research Title

To what extent, and through which mechanisms, does collaboration within a Managing Contractor outsourcing model — conceptualised as a service triad — influence end-client satisfaction?

Principal Investigator: Szilvia Kiss

Saxion University of Applied Sciences / University of Greenwich

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore how collaboration between the client, the main contractor, and service providers (subcontractors) — together forming a “service triad” — influences client satisfaction. Specifically, the research aims to identify:

- The most important factors influencing client satisfaction
- Whether communication, knowledge sharing, and trust impact the quality of collaboration and
- What relational risks and challenges exist in service triads, where the main contractor outsources services performed on the client’s premises.

Method and Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to a **semi-structured interview** focusing on your expertise and experience within this collaborative triangle. The interview will last **approximately 60 minutes** and will be **audio recorded**.

The recordings will be transcribed and analysed by me as the researcher, and, to ensure scientific integrity, may be reviewed by supervising faculty. If the findings are published, I will share the conclusions with you.

Voluntary Participation and Consent

Your participation is **entirely voluntary**. You have the right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. If you choose to withdraw, you may request the deletion of any non-anonymised data collected up to that point.

To **confirm your participation**, you will be **asked to sign a statement of consent**. An example of this consent form is **attached to this letter**.

Confidentiality

Your identity (name, position, company) and the **information** you provide will be kept **strictly confidential**. All **data will be anonymised**, and any quotes or excerpts used in the research report will be presented in a way that preserves the anonymity of you and your organization.

The data (interview recordings and transcripts) will be securely stored and accessible only to me as the researcher. It will be retained for 36 months and used solely for this research. If I wish to use the data for any follow-up research, I will request your permission again.

We comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (AVG). More information can be found here: <https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/nl/over-privacy/wetten/algemene-verordening-gegevensbescherming-avg>

Risks and Benefits

Potential Risks:

1. Participation will require approximately one hour of your time.
2. Some questions may require thoughtful, reflective responses.

Potential Benefits:

- Contributing valuable insights to research on collaborative models in the FREM field.
- Gaining a deeper understanding of how communication, knowledge sharing, and trust influence collaboration and client satisfaction.

Complaints and Questions

If you have complaints regarding data management, you can contact Saxion's Complaint and Dispute Desk:

<https://www.saxion.nl/over-saxion/organisatie/klachtenloket>

If you have any questions or would like further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me.

Name: Szilvia Kiss

Email: 556727@student.saxion.nl

Tel: 06 30 118117

Thank you for considering this request. Your participation will be greatly appreciated and will contribute significantly to the success of this research.

Your Sincerely,

Szilvia Kiss

Appendix D. Interview Guide – Client

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Thank the interviewee for participating.
- Briefly explain the purpose of the study: *“This interview is part of my academic research on triadic outsourcing arrangements, where services are delivered by subcontractors under the coordination of a main contractor. I am particularly interested in your experiences regarding collaboration, communication, trust, and risks.”*
- Assure confidentiality and anonymity.
- Mention that the interview will last approximately **one hour**.

2. Background & Role (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand the client’s role and context of the service arrangement.

- Can you describe your role and responsibilities within your organisation?
- What types of services are outsourced to the main contractor?
- Are these services conducted by the main contractor directly, or do they involve subcontractors?
 - If subcontractors are involved, who holds the legal contract with them—your organisation or the main contractor?
- Are these services delivered at one or multiple of your sites? If multiple, how many?

3. Contracts (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand how contractual aspects influence outcomes.

- How long is your organisation working with the main contractor?
- Are you familiar with the type of contracts used (e.g., outcome-based vs. task-based)?
- For example, are results expected (clean facilities) or specific actions required (clean restrooms every two hours)?
- In your view, does the contract type or duration affect collaboration, trust, or satisfaction? If yes, how?
- Have you experienced challenges due to unclear or overly rigid contracts? Can you provide an example?

4. Knowledge Sharing (10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand how information is shared between parties.

- How would you describe the knowledge sharing between parties?
 - How do you receive updates or information from the main contractor and its subcontractors?
 - How do they receive information from your organisation?
- Are there areas where you feel important information is not being shared? If so, how does this affect the relationship or service quality?
- How transparent are the main contractor and their subcontractors in sharing information relevant to service performance/ costs?
- Have you experienced situations where better information sharing improved service delivery or outcomes?

5. Communication (15 minutes)

Purpose: Examine communication practices and their effect on service quality.

- How would you describe communication between your organisation, the main contractor, and subcontractors?

- How does the quality and frequency of communication influence service performance and satisfaction?
- When problems arise, how are they communicated and resolved?
- Can you give an example of a misunderstanding or conflict and what led to it?

6. Trust & Relationship Management (10 minutes)

Purpose: Explore how trust is built and managed.

- How would you describe the level of trust between your organisation, the main contractor, and subcontractors?
- What has helped build that trust—or caused it to weaken?
- How does the main contractor manage the relationship with subcontractors on your behalf?

7. Collaboration (10 minutes)

Purpose: Explore collaboration dynamics in the triadic setup.

- From your perspective, what factors influence effective collaboration between your organisation, the main contractor, and the subcontractors?
- Can you share an example of either effective or poor collaboration?
- What lead to this performance?

8. Risks (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Identify client-perceived risks in triadic arrangements.

- Do you think there are specific risks that are unique to working through a main contractor with subcontractors, compared to direct outsourcing?
- If you could change one aspect of how this triadic relationship works, what would it be?
- And last: Could you name the top 3 most important factors what influences satisfaction with the services?

9. Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

- Is there anything we have not discussed that you believe is important?
- May I contact you again for clarification or follow-up if needed?
- Thank you again for your time and contributions.
- Briefly explain next steps (e.g., how insights will be analysed, confidentiality maintained, and whether results will be shared with participants).

Appendix E. Interview Guide – Main contractor

1. Introduction (5 min):

- Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview, I already received the signed consent form to record and use the information provided.
- This interview is part of my academic research into triadic service arrangements. I am particularly interested in how collaboration, trust, communication, knowledge sharing, and risks are managed between clients, main contractors, and subcontractors.”
- The purpose of this interview is to explore your experiences and perspectives on collaboration, trust, risks, and service delivery in triadic outsourcing relationships.
- Your responses will be kept confidential, and no identifiable information will be shared.
- The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

2. Background & Role (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand the interviewee’s position and context of the service arrangement.

- Can you briefly describe your position and role in the organisation?
- Who are your key stakeholders (e.g., client representatives, subcontractors)?
- What kind of services does the main contractor provide to the client?
- Who holds the legal contract with the client for these services?
- Are these services delivered on the client's premises? If so, how many client locations are involved?

Note: Emphasise that research focuses on services provided by subcontractors under a main contractor, performed on the client’s site (e.g., cleaning, security). Define that the focus on Managing Contract relationship is, and the services are conducted on the clients location.

3. Collaboration (10 minutes)

Purpose: Explore factors influencing collaboration in the service triad.

- In your opinion, what factors most influence the collaboration between the client, main contractor, and subcontractors?
- Can you provide an example of effective or poor collaboration in practice?

4. Communication (15 minutes)

Purpose: Assess how communication impacts outcomes in triadic service delivery.

- How would you describe the communication patterns between the client, your organisation, and the subcontractors?
- How does the quality and frequency of communication impact collaboration and client satisfaction?
- What happens when something goes wrong?
 - How are misunderstandings or conflicts between parties managed?
 - Can you share an example and explain what contributed to the issue?

Note: Follow up with additional questions based on responses.)

5. Knowledge Sharing (10 minutes)

Purpose: To understand how information flows flow between stakeholders.

- How does the main contractor share knowledge with stakeholders, and how does it receive information from them?
- Are there types of information that are deliberately not shared? If so, how is that information used?

- How do the client and subcontractors perceive this (lack of) transparency?
- What practices help or hinder effective knowledge sharing among the three parties?
- Can you recall a situation where improved knowledge sharing led to better outcomes?

6. Trust & Relationship Management (10 minutes)

Purpose: To explore the role of trust in managing the triad.

- How important is mutual trust between the client, your organisation, and subcontractors?
- What factors contribute to building or damaging that trust?
- How does the main contractor foster or manage trust between the client and subcontractors?

7. Contracts (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand how contracts influence collaboration and service quality.

- Are you familiar with the type of contract between your organisation (e.g., the main contractor) and the subcontractors? *Example: is the work outcome-based or more structured (e.g., specifying that restrooms must be cleaned every two hours)?*
- If yes: In your opinion, does the type of contract influence client satisfaction?
- Who within your organisation is responsible for managing these contracts and understanding their contents?
- Do the type or duration of contracts influence collaboration, trust, or client satisfaction? If yes, how?
- How do you use contracts to manage performance and reduce risks?
- Have you experienced a situation where an unclear or poorly defined contract caused problems or increased costs for the client? Could you share an example?

8. Risks (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: To examine perceived risks in triadic service delivery.

- Are there specific risks you believe are unique to triadic arrangements, as opposed to traditional client-supplier relationships?
- If you could change one thing to improve triadic collaboration, what would it be?

9. Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

- Is there anything we have not covered that you feel is important?
- Would it be okay if I contact you later for any follow-up questions or clarifications?
- Thank you again for your time and valuable input.
- Briefly explain the next steps (e.g., how the data will be used, timeline for analysis, and how results may be shared).

Appendix F. Interview Guide – Subcontractor

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Thank the interviewee for participating.
- Briefly explain the purpose of the study: *“This interview is part of my academic research on triadic outsourcing arrangements, where services are delivered by subcontractors under the coordination of a main contractor. I am particularly interested in your experiences with collaboration, communication, trust, contracts, and risks within this structure.”*
- Assure confidentiality and anonymity.
- Mention that the interview will last approximately **one hour**.

2. Background & Role (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand the subcontractor’s role and context of the service arrangement.

- Can you briefly describe your role and responsibilities within your organisation?
- What types of services do you provide under the contract with the main contractor?
- Who holds the legal contract with you, the client directly or the main contractor?
- Are the services you deliver performed at the client’s site? If so, how many locations? How many locations are you involved with?
- How long has your company been working with the main contractor and/or for this client?
- How are you considering as your stakeholders?

3. Collaboration (10 minutes)

Purpose: Explore subcontractor perspectives on collaboration in the triad.

- What is your working relationship like with the main contractor and the client?
- In your view, what factors most influence successful collaboration between you, the main contractor, and the client?
- Can you share an example of a situation with strong collaboration—or one where collaboration failed?
- What do you think contributed to that outcome?

4. Communication (15 minutes)

Purpose: Assess communication flows and their effect on your work and relationships.

- How would you describe the communication between your organisation, the main contractor, and the client?
- Do you interact with the client (directly, or only through the contractor)?
- How does the quality and frequency of communication affect your ability to perform well?
- How clearly are client expectations communicated to you?
- What happens when a problem arises?
 - How are conflicts or misunderstandings managed?
 - Can you share an example and explain what contributed to the situation?

5. Knowledge Sharing (10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand how information flows between parties and impacts performance.

- How do you receive operational information or updates from the main contractor and/or client?
- How clearly are client expectations communicated to you?
- How do you share feedback or knowledge with them?
- Are there areas where you feel important information is not being shared with you? How does that affect service delivery?

- Have you experienced a situation where improved information or knowledge sharing led to better results?

6. Trust & Relationship Management (10 minutes)

Purpose: Explore how trust is built and managed within the triadic relationship.

- How would you describe the level of trust between you, the main contractor, and the client?
- What actions or behaviours help build trust—or weaken it?
- How does the main contractor manage the relationship between your organisation and the client?
- Do they help foster a good working environment or function as a barrier?

7. Contracts (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Understand subcontractor perspectives on contractual arrangements and expectations.

- What kind of contract do you have with the main contractor?
 - Is it outcome-based (focused on results) or task-based (focused on activities and time)?
- Are you fully aware of the (type of contract and the) content of this contract?
- Were you /Are you involved in defining or negotiating any aspects of the contract?
- Do you feel that the type or duration of the contract affects your performance, collaboration, or relationship with the main contractor or the client?
- Have you faced issues due to vague or overly strict contract terms? Could you give an example?

8. Risks (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Identify subcontractor views on risks in triadic outsourcing.

- Are there risks you face as a subcontractor in this triadic setup that are different from collaborating directly with a client?
- If you could improve one aspect of how the triadic relationship works, what would it be?
- In your opinion, what are the top 3 factors that most influence service quality and your ability to deliver value to the client?

9. Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

- Is there anything we have not discussed that you think is important to mention?
- May I contact you later if I need further clarification?
- Thank you again for your time and valuable input.
- Briefly explain the next steps (e.g., how the data will be used, confidentiality, and whether results will be shared).

Appendix G. Participants information

Table 4

Overview of participants with unique code, type of actor which is one of Main contractor, Client, or Subcontractor (respectively MC, C, and SC), experience in the field which is one of Junior (0-5 years), Medior (6-14 years), or Senior (15+ years), role in their organisation consisting of Facility Management (e.g., Unit Facility Manager), Client Relationship Management (e.g., Business Development Manager, Customer Manager), Organisational Leadership (e.g., Business Line Manager), and Supplier Coordination (Contract and Supplier Manager), and finally their level in the organisation (Strategic, Tactical, or Operational).

Participant	Actor	Experience	Role	Level
Interviewee 1	MC	Senior	Client Relationship Management	Strategic
Interviewee 2	MC	Medior	Facility Management	Tactical
Interviewee 3	MC	Medior	Facility Management	Tactical
Interviewee 4	MC	Junior	Client Relationship Management	Strategic
Interviewee 5	C	Junior	Facility Management	Operational
Interviewee 6	MC	Medior	Client Relationship Management	Strategic
Interviewee 7	MC	Medior	Facility Management	Tactical
Interviewee 8	SC	Senior	Organisational Leadership	Strategic / Tactical
Interviewee 9	SC	Junior	Client Relationship Management	Tactical
Interviewee 10	SC	Senior	Client Relationship Management	Tactical
Interviewee 11	SC	Medior	Client Relationship Management	Tactical
Interviewee 12	C	Medior	Supplier Coordination	Strategic
Interviewee 13	C	Junior	Facility Management	Operational

Source: By author, 2025

Appendix H. Sampling method per participant

Table 5

Overview of sampling methods per participants

Client			
Interviewee 5	Non-probability	Purposive	Critical case
Interviewee 12	Non-probability	Volunteer sampling	Snowball
Interviewee 13	Non-probability	Purposive	Critical case
Main contractor			
Interviewee 1	Non-probability	Purposive	Homogeneous
Interviewee 2	Non-probability	Purposive	Homogeneous
Interviewee 3	Non-probability	Purposive	Homogeneous
Interviewee 4	Non-probability	Purposive	Homogeneous
Interviewee 6	Non-probability	Purposive	Homogeneous
Interviewee 7	Non-probability	Purposive	Homogeneous
Subcontractor			
Interviewee 8	Non-probability	Purposive	Critical case
Interviewee 9	Non-probability	Purposive	Critical case
Interviewee 10	Non-probability	Volunteer sampling	Snowball
Interviewee 11	Non-probability	Purposive	Critical case

Source: By author, 2025

Appendix I. Sample of coded interview

Interviewee13 - 1:45

So my stakeholders, I would say is, more or less the whole store, mostly the management team or and the market manager, internally. Of course, we also has a facility department. What don't sit under the store. We report to service office, to the FM organisation. So I also have some stakeholders which are external to the store but internal to the [CLIENT] organisation. And then external stakeholders, I would say is my unit service coordinator from [MAIN CONTRACTOR]. It is other employees of [MAIN CONTRACTOR], the manager of the unit service coordinator, so the district manager as well.

Then I guess you could call him facility specialist. We communicate closely with them and then, of course, whoever would be in House. That is maybe not necessarily [MAIN CONTRACTOR], but that we also communicate with naturally a lot of the times, via [MAIN CONTRACTOR] or some of the times, alongside of [MAIN CONTRACTOR]. So that would be somebody like the object leader for the cleaning company or the technical dienst which which would then be the on location maintenance, maintenance workers maintenance colleagues from [SUBCONTRACTOR]. [Communication SC and C]

Interviewer - 3:25

Yeah.

Yeah, this you also have communication with the contractors from [MAIN CONTRACTOR]. Just the cleaning company and the technical Dienst.

Interviewee13 - 3:36

In the limited way, and we all agree that it is best practice, that if we do that, that [MAIN CONTRACTOR] is informed over the side conversations that might be going on for obvious reasons, but sometimes it might not be feasible to to run everything via [MAIN CONTRACTOR].

[Communication SC and C] Let's say if your coordinator is out of office on holiday off site, you know and I think. [Communication risks in de triad]

In our specific example. This model works for us quite well because we make it work for us, [Client Willingness] and because we kind of as a premise agree that whether we're from [MAIN CONTRACTOR] [CLIENT], that we are working as one team and pulling on one side of the rope rather than against each other. [Client Willingness]

Interviewer - 4:31

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I presume in this case, of course, the organization is open. It's a retail organization. It's open almost 24, seven to seven days at least. Then the unit service coordinator is only available to Monday to Friday then.

Interviewee13 - 4:40

Yeah.

Yeah.

Correct.

Interviewer - 4:50

Yeah, process need to carry on. So, you have to communicate directly with the suppliers as well in the weekend and holidays. Yeah. And how would you describe the communication and collaboration between the three parties? There's all in one team that is nicely said, how does it work in in practice?

Interviewee13 - 5:10

I think it can be a hit and miss, so I know from my colleagues and other stores that they might not have as smooth corporation as we have had here in the almost two years that I'm here.

[Collaboration]

On that, on that note, I have to mention that I'm I have been extremely lucky with the people that were appointed by [MAIN CONTRACTOR] in the store, and up until now we have really been able to maintain a really good working relationship. I think it very much depends on having people who are willing to cooperate from both sides. [Human element]

And then you can very much make it work. You know, if you don't feel like opponents, but a part of the same team [Client Willingness], then I think this sort of structure can very much work in everybody's favour [Advantages of Managing Contract]. I think if the relationship is a little bit more adversarial.

It's then and there might be some breakdown in communication. Then it starts to become tricky, Again for both sides, yeah. [Human element]

Interviewer - 6:26

Yeah. You mentioned very interesting things, you said you are lucky with the people who are appointed by [MAIN CONTRACTOR]. Is it important who's sitting there for you as a client? Is it important that you have a good match, of a good bond with the unit service coordinator?

Interviewee13 - 6:41

100% and I think it as long as the person is willing and a little bit suited for the job. I think I could probably, just on a personal level, try to make it work with anyone. [Human element, Expectation from MC]

But I can, I can imagine a scenario where you just cannot make it work, and in that case it's probably better to than just for everybody, cut the losses and figure out a different way of working. I can tell you that we're now in a situation where we're less happy with the cleaning service provider. And it is mainly due to the fact that the original object leader, who has been here in the store from the beginning when [SUBCONTRACTOR] has started. Has stopped working here, [Changes in personnel] and after that, basically a lot of the things, which have been put in place, a lot of good practises, lot of, you know, work, that has been done to keep the store on very high level in terms of housekeeping, has kind of fallen down the wayside. [Changes in personnel] And it is very much the case that we're still searching for, you know, a strong, competent leader to step in and kind of rectify the situation. So, I, from my point of view, you know I would try to make it work with anyone, but I can also understand how sometimes you know, that if that relationship is not there or if the perception that that relationship is working is not there.

That there can be a.

Let's say a breakdown in results. You're not going to get to the results that everybody is expecting. [Human element]

Interviewer - 8:34

Yeah.

Yeah. Just if I hear it's well then you as a client, you have lost fun you have.

You experience less good service because the personal change, so there's not the right person of the job of someone leaving and there is no replacement of need to just qualified replacement.

Interviewee13 - 8:58

Yeah.

Right.

Interviewer - 9:03

OK. Is that happening often?

Interviewee13 - 9:06

So for example, when it comes to [MAIN CONTRACTOR], I have not experienced it. I think [MAIN CONTRACTOR] has a relatively, I think from an outside person observing from the outside in, has a relatively good way of working in terms of when somebody is moving.

On so, our unit service coordinator, when I was here for the 1st 14 months was offered a promotion and decided to take it. But there was already a person that was she was working in, who was a junior service coordinator. Who then was allocated to stay in the store. But I think when things work out like this, it is very beneficial because, for example, we had an excellent working relationship with the previous USC and due to the fact that she was then training the current USC.

He picked up a lot of her good habits, so he picked up on the dynamic that we've had going in the store. We've both spoken to him on uncertain terms that we work as one team and we get the results. *[Changes in personnel]*

In however way we can, but it is not an adversarial relationship, it is more of a cooperative relationship. *[Client Willingness]* And I think he was able to pick up on that attitude, but also on her good habits, and how we like things done.

And so the continuity has very much been there with him. And I think it probably does have to do with the fact, that he was working alongside her for the first few months. *[Changes in personnel]*

Interviewer - 10:58

As I hear that the knowledge what the first unit service coordinator created, and the bond what she had with you, and with the store itself, didn't lost this, this that carried on.

And you also said you had excellent working relationship with the with the person. We all know who we're talking about, what made it excellent? What what is your expectations from your partner on that relationship op te bouwen

Interviewee13 - 11:26

So I think. And I think this might be to a certain extent my assumption, based on some observations, but I think sometimes, things got personal. And we very much kept things you know, not to a level where. Let me start it again.

I would say that we started off from a position of mutual respect. You know, I very much have a lot of respect for her. She, I would say has respect for me or is showing respect for me in in different ways. And so we've always kept our relationship underpinned on mutual respect. *[Respect]*

Obviously, I understand that she has a job to do and she understands I have a job to do. We are being pulled sometimes in different directions. *[Risks in triadic structure]* Often times we pull on the same side, but sometimes we're being pulled with different priorities. Myself, from the store ,her from her own company, and sometimes those priorities might clash. She needs to advocate for her company as best as she can, and I need to do the same for my company. *[Risks in triadic structure]*

structure] And so the understanding was there, that when we do that, when we disagree, we disagree respectfully. And when the issue is such a place where we cannot agree, we cannot resolve it in any way, either consensus or compromise or.

Interviewee13 - 13:02

We just leave it as, at agree to disagree and move on. If we cannot resolve it in any one of those ways, then we just both pass it on to our matrix to then resolve on a higher level. But the first priority was always, we keep the relationship, the working relationship, that we have here in store, at a cordial and respectful, you know, level between us. Yeah. So there's no need to get angry. And there's no need to get, you know, take things personally. [Conflict]

Interviewee13 - 13:38

It it was always you have a job to do. I have a job to do whenever they clash. Let's give that to the bigger heads above us to resolve. And for us we can continue the day-to-day work in the same manner that we have been. [Conflict]

Interviewer - 13:55

Yeah. And during the years, there's almost over two years of almost two years that you work together, state the relationship purely professional of othe more personal that she talked about your personal life a bit. What did you do in the weekend, helped that a bit you with the relationship of that that has no influence.

Interviewee13 - 14:15

You know, maybe, maybe, but that's I would not necessarily say that it's required [Human element]. For example, what the the previous object leader from [SUBCONTRACTOR]. I think I would, I would say that we had almost no relationship on a personal level to speak of, beyond really like a very brief small talk. It was very much, purely professional, but yet the cooperation was there, [Human element] and I think.

Interviewee13 - 14:50

You know you can have mutual respect without delving into, you know, each other's personal lives or being, you know, becoming friends or friendly. [Respect] I would almost think that in some respects it can be detrimental. Just because I've experienced that, let's say in my previous career where, when, and and I'm going to speak in general times, but when people become more friends than just cordial or friendly, they might have a tougher time.

Umm.

Let's say pushing against their friend, just because it is in the best interest of what their role requires. [Relationship closeness] So yes, we have become, you know, friendly and on occasion, you know, over lunch, speak about families or what we did on the weekend.

Where we're going on vacation, that I would say, does not stop me from pushing back where I need to from we both would, you know. And I think it has also something to do with a little bit of maturity, and advanced age, let's say because.

Interviewee13 - 16:08

You understand that the other person has a job to do, and so you don't. You don't take that personally, [Collaboration] but I almost think that like becoming like, really friends can sometimes be detrimental because then people's feelings can get hurt, you know? And, well, we're friends. Why would you? You know, push back against me or why would you, like. Question what I say or yeah. [Human element]

Appendix J. Code book: open codes

Table 6

Overview of open codes with link to axial codes and description

Tag / open codes	Axial codes	Description of open codes
Client Willingness	Shared Goals	For a successful collaboration, the client needs to want the change
Contract clarity	Contract	All actors well know the contract
Responsiveness	Service delivery	Better relationship with each other, results better service
Mismatch between sales and operations	Contract	Sales promised more or not knowing what is possible on operational level
Trust building	Trust	What do you need to build trust?
Mutual respect	Trust	Respect plays a role in collaboration
Decremental to trust	Trust	What damages trust
Control	Contract	Client needs to control the services that are outsourced
Implementation optimisation	Contract	What is necessary for a better implementation process
Frequency of communication	Communication	Dialogue structure and frequency of communication
Risks in triadic structure	Risks	Risks for actors in the triadic working structure
Communication with end user	Communication	
Innovation	Contract	How collaboration works in innovative projects, inclusive the interests of all actors
Importance of implementation	Contract	The importance of implementation
Outsourcing	Contract	client knows what they want
Change management	Contextual Factors	How change management influences collaboration and image of the main contractor
Contract management	Contract	
Service improvement ideas	Service delivery	Ideas to improve service
Integration of the client organisation	Contextual Factors	Integration into the client's organisation, being one, feeling part of the client organisation is crucial for good collaboration
Advantages of managing contract	Service triad	Advantages of working in a IFM (contract management) structure, for all actors.
Various locations	Contextual Factors	The influence of multiple location on collaboration.
Culture	Contextual Factors	Location culture or company culture

Client role	Shared Goals	The client's role in good collaboration, the task what the client needs to do to ensure a good and clear working relationships
Client satisfaction	Satisfaction	What influences the client satisfaction.
Satisfaction driver 1	Satisfaction	Answers to No.1 factor/driver what client satisfaction influence
Satisfaction driver2	Satisfaction	Answers to No.2 factor/driver what client satisfaction influence
Satisfaction driver3	Satisfaction	Answers to No.3 factor/driver what client satisfaction influence
Knowledge sharing	Knowledge transfer	How do the actors share knowledge within the triad
Reason of knowledge sharing	Knowledge transfer	The reasons of knowledge sharing benefit the collaboration and end users.
Collaboration	Collaboration	Examples of collaboration between the actors in the triangle
Transparency	Trust	Open and honest with each other when it comes to costs
Contract accuracy (towards SC)	Contract	There is no discrepancy between the contract between MC and SC
Impact of opportunism	Trust	Opportunism impact on the end client
Different systems	Contextual Factors	The effect of working with different systems within the triad
Time needed for a good collaboration	Collaboration	Time needed for good collaboration.
Role of Trainings	Contextual Factors	The role of constant training and its benefits
Training	Contextual Factors	Trainings to fulfil the client expectation, safety, and integration into their own organisation
Training by MC	Contextual Factors	Training that MC provides to his own employees
Communication SC and C	Communication	Communication between the subcontractor and the client
End user experience	Satisfaction	End user experience with the service provided by the subcontractor
Communication between end user and employee of the SC	Contextual Factors	Communication between end user and employee of a subcontractor, mostly in operational level
Bridge position	Contextual Factors	The role of MC in communication and processes
Communication between end user and MC	Communication	
Implementation barriers	Contract	What makes implementation difficult
Communication line in triadic services	Communication	Evidence how communication lines run in triadic services

Perception of service	Communication	How end users interpret and make sense of their service experiences.
Human element	Communication	For collaboration it is important that actors have a good connection with each other
Expectation from MC	Contextual Factors	What is expected from de MC - in order to support better collaboration
Changes in personnel	Changes & change management	How changes in personnel effect collaboration, and service quality
Respect	Trust	The role of respect in collaboration
Conflict	Communication	Handling conflicts and complaints
Relationship closeness	Contextual Factors	How collaboration or satisfaction is influenced by relationships within the triad
Lack of respect	Trust	Decremental to relationship - and relationship closeness
Physical proximity	Contextual Factors	Physical proximity helps informal communication and better collaboration.
Formal communication	Communication	Ways of formal communication and possible their effect
Forms of communication	Communication	Forms of communication, from meetings and systems
Flexibility	Contract	Client with flexibility with the contract
Service Quality	Service delivery	Things influencing service quality, and how are these rectified
Providing information	Knowledge transfer	
Contract length	Contract	The length of contract effect on the collaboration and investment
Trust	Trust	
Expectation from SC	Contextual Factors	Expectation from SC
Contract deviations	Contract	Cannot change the contract but local agreements have been made, some services are added, while some are not carried out
High work pressure for MC	Contextual Factors	IF MC on tactical, strategic level not addressing subcontractor problems, then on (operational level) there is a lot of pressure, causing service delays, unsatisfaction for the client and possible burn-out or high turnover on operational level
Contract justification in practice	Contract	The contract justification between the client and SC
Response time of subcontractor	Contextual Factors	
Relationship with SC	Contextual Factors	
Client frustration	Satisfaction	Client frustration with the triadic relationship and what would they like to change

Number of communication levels	Communication	Examples and the effect of multiple communication level on the service
Differentiation between client and end user	End user and client is not the same	Collect evidence, where people saying that the client is not the client (on operational level, but the end user is de client, proving that the structure is not a triad but a tetrad (four actors))
Change in the triadic collaboration	Service triad	The answers to the question what would you change in triadic relationships.
Decision making - C & SC	Communication	Wishes from Client and subcontractors to be part of decision-making processes
Benefit of correct communication structures	Communication	Explain why it is beneficial if the triadic communication is followed the right way
SC feeling accepted	Contextual Factors	
SC feeling not accepted	Contextual Factors	
Stakeholders of SC	Service triad	Stakeholders from the SC
Challenge in triadic communication	Communication	Experiences of all actors when it comes to communication within the triad
Size of company	Contextual Factors	Information on the size of a company or whether there are multiple location and if this impacts collaboration
Location-specific contracts	Contextual Factors	Information about clients with multiple locations, and if local adjustments are needed.
Knowledge sharing with SC	Knowledge transfer	Client needs to share their knowledge with the SC (in case first time outsourcing) and the effects of this info sharing
Lack of trust	Trust	Point where an actor the feeling has that they are not trusted
Maintenance influence on SC	Collaboration	Quality of equipment or maintenance on the work of the SC
Results of better collaboration	Collaboration	What are the results, benefit of better collaboration
Operational knowledge during contracting	Knowledge transfer	Is operational knowledge needed during contracting period, what would be the benefit
Contract impact on service quality	Satisfaction	
MC as advisor	Service triad	
Successful collaboration No.1	Collaboration	
Successful collaboration No.2.	Collaboration	
Good communication map	Communication	The importance of a good communication structure and knowing about it
SC aim	Service triad	

Important factors influencing collaboration	Collaboration	Important factors that influence the collaboration between the actors
The need to communicate direct	Communication	The need to communicate directly with the actors
Benefits of direct Communication in the triad	Communication	Examples of the benefits of direct communication between the actors.
Outsourcing challenges	Contract	
Communication MC and SC	Communication	Communication between MC and SC
Type of contract	Contract	Contract type must match the client needs
Collaboration between MC and SC	Collaboration	collaboration between MC and SC
Opportunism	Contract	Subcontractor opportunism
Communication risks in the triad	Contract	Risks mentioned by any actor, what refers to the risks in triadic working relationships
Effect on employees	Contextual Factors	Effect of outsourcing on employees
Contract knowledge	Knowledge transfer	
Importance of correct communication lines	Communication	
Contract trends	Contract	
Contract end	Contract	Cient are more aware/more critic at the end of a contract
Contract and client satisfaction	Satisfaction	How the contractual agreements impact the client's satisfaction
Trust between MC and SC	Trust	
Choosing the right subcontractor	Contract	The subcontractor needs to understand the client's needs
Contract interpretation	Contract	How and when is the contract read and understood
Lengths of implementation	Contract	Later make a chart of the implementation
Client willingness to collaborate	Collaboration	By keeping client satisfied changes SC the workwise
Thinking along with the client	Communication	How do SC and MC help collaborating and make it easier for the client, looking for solutions
Result	Satisfaction	
Result-oriented contract	Contract	
Honesty	Trust	
Multiple location	Contextual Factors	The effect of multiple location

Good practice in contracting	Contract	Good practices to limit the mismatch between sales and operation on MC side
Mismatch within own organisation	Contextual Factors	Mismatch between operational/tactical/strategical level within the same company
Goal of MC/SC	Service triad	
Costs effect on satisfaction	Satisfaction	
Relation management	Contextual Factors	
Exception in communication triad	Communication	
Time needed to learn the right communication channels	Communication	With IFM/MC time is needed to get used to the way of communicating
Communication MC and C	Communication	
FM hierarchy at Client	Contextual Factors	The hierarchy at the client
Mismatch between operational/ tactical/ strategical level	Risks	
Team importance	Contextual Factors	Importance of the team
Chance to communicate direct	Communication	When SC gets the chance to talk directly with the Client
Underperformance of main- or subcontractors	Contract	Signs and effects if the MC or SC underperform
Implementation and client satisfaction	Contract	How implementation influence the client satisfaction
Role of the Main contractor	Service triad	What are the benefits of working in Managing Contract outsourcing model
End user and client are not the same	End user and client are not the same	Evidence that the end user and client are not the same. Talks about the user is the client of the client, ergo: in the triad the end user is the main client?!
Satisfaction	Satisfaction	Ultimate satisfaction of client and end user
Costs	Contract	Financial discrepancies
Get to know the organisation	Contextual Factors	
Perception of MC	Contextual Factors	Hoe end user sees MC when the client is not communication changes properly
Power of IFM company	Service triad	Where is the power of an IFM company
Impact of flexibility	Contextual Factors	What is the impact of flexibility, the added value for MC and client, and de effect on the MC?

Stakeholders of MC	Service triad	MC mentions the following stakeholders
Importance of knowledge sharing	Knowledge transfer	What is the benefit of knowledge sharing?
FM Trend		Trends in FM and future focus points
Advise for FM field		
Fulfilling contractual agreements	Contract	The impact of one of the actors in the triangle not fulfilling its contractual agreements.
Keeping talent	Contextual Factors	How to remain MC talents
Stakeholders of Client	Service triad	
Involvement	Contextual Factors	SC need to look with a wider and more facility focused view and notify is something goes wrong.
Communication between SCs	Communication	Direct and quick communication between SCs
Client expectations	Contextual Factors	Client expectations match with the reality
SC Limitation	Contextual Factors	Limiting factors of SC work and service quality
Mismatch in assets	Risks	The reality differs from received asset lists
Time as limiting factor	Risks	Limited time available for something
Knowledge of people	Contextual Factors	Knowledge of people about their own work activities
Protect MC	Contextual Factors	SC protects MC, it is in the benefit of the SC to protect the MC
Communication during contracting period	Communication	Communication during contracting and implementation period
Discuss risks for SC	Risks	To limit the risks for an SC, either during the contractual agreements, implementation or during collaboration
Financial implication	Contextual Factors	All financial implications from contract to collaboration and satisfaction
Parties are not equal	Contextual Factors	Parties are not equal, don't feel equal during contract period
Client strategic interest	Contextual Factors	Client reason of outsourcing. Influences collaboration
Open communication	Communication	Actors can talk with each other and have faith in each other
Service delivery	Contract	
Type of business	Contextual Factors	Type of business influences the dynamic and expectation from MC
Client have a "say"	Communication	Client needs to feel that they have the power to make or influence decisions
End user expectations	Contextual Factors	End user expectations with the service
Disadvantages working with IFM	Service triad	

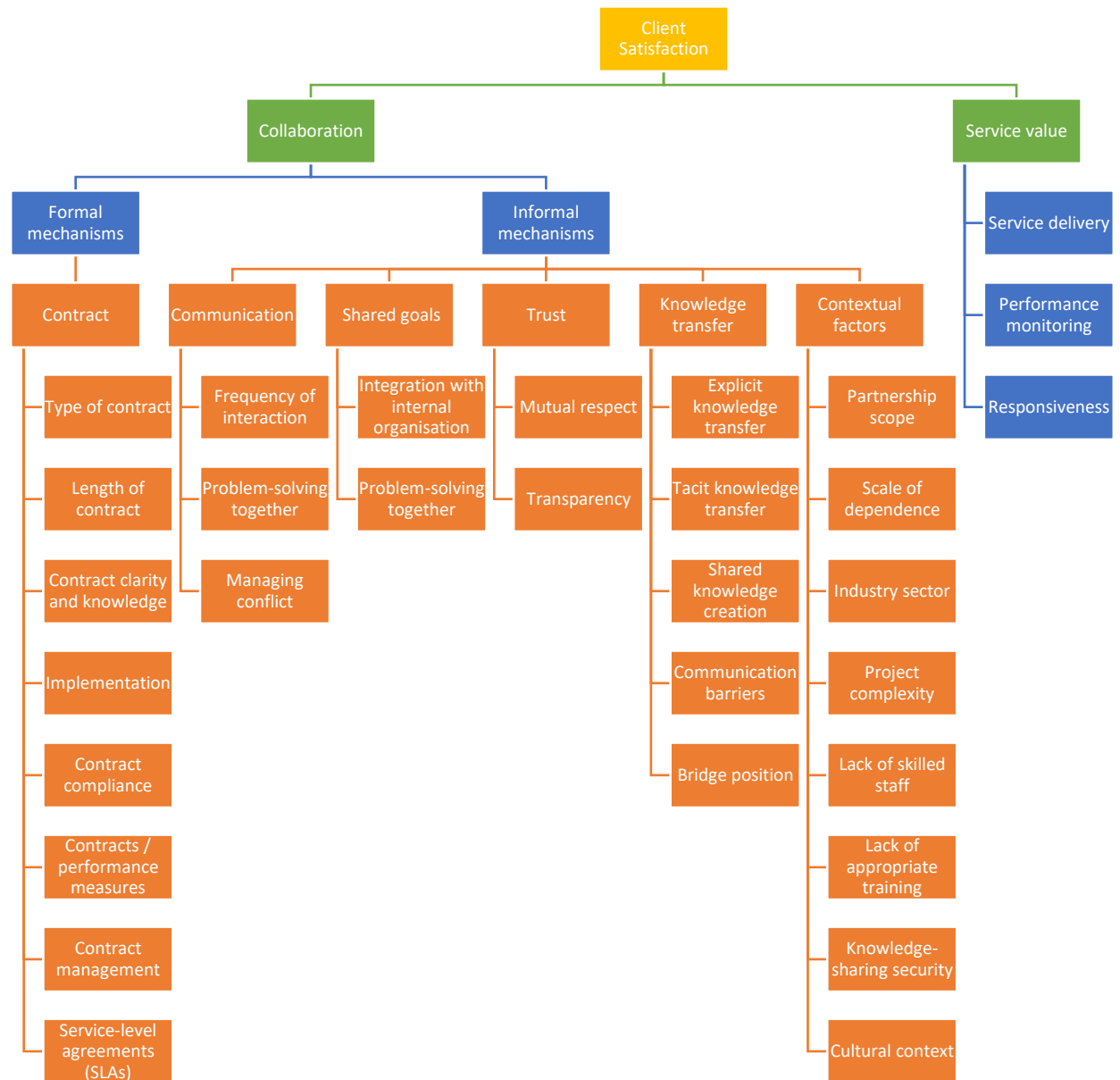
Performance of subcontractor	Contract	Performance of subcontractor effects service delivery and has a consequence on end client trust (and maybe trust in the MC). Conclusion: contract management is crucial to client satisfaction and keeping personnel.
Internal communication	Communication	Communication within client organisation
Contractual manco's	Contract	Not everything can be included in the contract (see v.d. Valk paper)
Evaluation/ flexibility of contract	Contract	Evaluation moments and openness to review the contract that has been made for long term.
Safety/ security	Contextual Factors	Exception wants security related soft services
Urgency SC	Contract	SC does not know the client or does not understand the urgency because it is so far away from them
Operation gets info after implementation	Contract	Operation begins after implementations has been closed
Multiple suppliers	Contract	One client can have multiple suppliers on location, also different contact person per regio.
MC organisation	Service triad	MC internal organisation also influences the collaboration on tactical/ operational level.
Operation starts after contract	Contract	The real work (operation) starts after contract is ready
First generation outsourcing	Contextual Factors	Building trust with first generation outsourcing.
Importance of communication	Communication	Quotes that confirming communication is the most important in collaboration.

Source: By author, 2025

Appendix K. Code Tree

Figure 13

Code tree linking open codes to axial codes



Source: By author, 2025