ARCHITECTS AND MANAGERIAL COMPETENCES: DO THEY MASTER THEM?

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ABSTRACT

Being an architect is far more complex than simply being a designer. The management side of the profession is increasingly acquiring importance (e.g. Emmit, 1999), despite managers traditionally lie outside the architectural culture (Blau, 1994; Cuff, 1991) and art and business as well as efficiency and artistic logic often clash (Thornton et al., 2005). This is reinforced by training and practice in the sense that architecture courses do not include management among studied subjects, and symbolic performance is often more valued than economic one, being strong ideas practices much more reputed that strong delivery or strong service ones (Winch & Schneider, 1993). According to Emmit (1999), architects are paradoxically notorious for their lack of managerial ability, notwithstanding the fact they should be well equipped to become effective managers thanks to their systematic and creative problem solving skills. Yet, they are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of balancing professional and managerial skills.
Existing research deals with architecture as a business to be managed (e.g. Emmitt et al., 2009; Klein, 2010; Reigle, 2011; Rubeling, 2007), discusses day-to-day issues encountered by professionals (e.g. Bennet, 1981; Willis & George, 1952) or how to run projects (e.g. Chappel & Willis, 2010). In fact, architectural practice and project management publications are increasingly growing in importance in the last two decades. While management at the organizational and project level is therefore addressed, managerial competences at the individual level are underexplored, even if professionals should first manage themselves before managing a practice.
Given this, this paper draws upon the literature on the individual level of managerial competences and applies it to the context of architects, intended as professionals providing architectural services.
At the individual level, competences have been defined in several ways i.e. an intrinsic characteristic of an individual that leads to effective or excellent performance in the job and that can be motivation, trait, skill, aspect of self-image or social role or a "body of knowledge that the person uses" (Boyatsis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In particular managerial competences have been associated to the ability to perform effectively the functions associated with management in a work situation (Hornby & Thomas, 1989) or to a set of interrelated skills, knowledge, attitudes and behavioral skills to be effective in a managerial or professional position (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2007). A recent framework, which integrates previous work and on which this research is based, is the one proposed by Slocum et al. (2008). Six areas of managerial competences are outlined and nineteen relative dimensions. According to him these are the managerial competences ensuring excellent results in individual performance and management of organizations: 1) communication (informal communication; formal communication; negotiation); 2) planning and administration (information gathering, analysis and problem-solving; planning and organizing; time management; budgeting and financial management); 3) teamwork (establishing

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teams; creating a supportive environment; managing team dynamics); 4) strategic action (understanding the industry; understanding the organization; taking strategic actions); 5) multiculturalism (cultural knowledge and understanding; cultural openness and sensitivity); 6) self-management (integrity and ethical conduct; personal drive and resilience; balancing work and life issues; self-awareness).
This paper aims at sketching a map of how Italian architects self-assess themselves on these managerial competences, also understanding their self-awareness.
The Italian context is also particularly interesting being Italy the country with the highest number of architects in Europe and in the world, where it is only second to Japan (CRESME, 2011; COAC, 2010). This implies the smallest average practice in Europe (1,4 employees/practice). Individual architects are increasingly called therefore to be personally and directly involved into management issues and not only design ones.
The paper performs descriptive statistics on a dataset of 300 Italian architects who completed an online survey self-assessing the extent to which they think they possess the different managerial competences. They also provide personal demographic information, as well as information regarding the area of business, the type of expertise and indicators of both economic and symbolic performances.
Preliminary results highlight for example that the strongest managerial competences are: informal communication, cultural openness and sensitivity, integrity and ethical conduct, self-awareness, personal drive and resilience; while the weakest ones are: budgeting and financial management, establishing teams, understanding the industry, understanding the organization, taking strategic actions. There is also a strong positive correlation between planning and teamwork and between planning and strategic action. The results presented in this paper will be beneficial for architect, notwithstanding their geographic location as well as creative workers and professional service ones who share common issues in pursuing the 'balancing act' suggested by Lampel et al (2000) between artistic and managerial issues.

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