A Qualitative Research on

the Job Ability of Architects

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to investigate the job ability of architects in Korea. For this purpose, seven architects who have more than 7 year architectural designing careers in total were interviewed. In this paper, an architect is operational definition as a term which means a person who majored in architecture and conducts architectural design practice for an architectural firm or construction company. The in-depth interview with seven architects identified that architects should have 8 different abilities: understanding human beings, an expressive ability, a drawing ability for a structural drawing and facility maps, an artistic ability, and understanding of a local area and environment, communication skills, a collaboration capability, and a drawing ability in software.
Keywords: Job Ability, Job Skills, Vocational Skills, Architect

1. Introduction

The 21st century knowledge information era has been advancing rapidly with the state of the art technologies of mass communication. These technologies have made it much easier to acquire knowledge and information than the previous societies. This has created a situation where “the ability” is more important than “the knowledge” concerning lifetime careers. Therefore, it is important to put the focus on the personal ability with which a person is able to conduct a job. Similarly, a person should have the job performance capability to manage a successful vocational life. Dana Cuff argued that the emphasis on the art itself caused a dilemma in practicing as a professional [1]. It is true that the image from mass media such as movies and TV shows put a great importance on the artistic aspects of professional life. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the ability which is needed to conduct architectural design work. This paper tries to examine the integral ability of architects in performing architectural practice.

2. Research Methods

There are specific terminologies for people who practice architectural design works in Korea, such as an architect, a registered architect, a registered architect assistant. In this paper, an architect is operational definition as a term which means a person who majored in architecture and conducts architectural design practice for an architectural firm or construction company. A qualitative research method was used for investigating the necessary ability of architects in conducting architectural design practice. In-depth interviews with professionals from the construction field were conducted in order to investigate ability. The professionals who participated in these interviews were only limited to those who have more than seven years practice in architectural design work. A professional is one who has at least ten years (or 10,000 hours) of working experience and acquired knowledge in the field [2, 3]. However, due to the nature of the construction design industry in Korea, including working overtime at night and weekend business trips, this study sets a standard for a professional who has over seven years practice. Table 1 shows the respondents who participated in in-depth interviews for this research project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Company scale</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>12years</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>7years</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Small and Medium</td>
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Table 1. (Continued): Interview respondents

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<td>E</td>
<td>15years</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Small and Medium</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>16years</td>
<td>M</td>
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3. Results

In-depth interviews were conducted to investigate the ability of architects with seven professionals in the construction industry. The questionnaire was titled “What ability do architects need to have?”

There is an expression that says “Architecture is a container of human beings.” An architect is a person who constructs buildings for the quotidian lives of people. Therefore, the architects need to understand human beings. Buildings with a well-organized spatial configuration are easy to use. On the contrary, it would be inconvenient for people to use less well-organized buildings. Therefore, not only understanding human beings but also caring for human beings necessary for architects.

“It is a humanistic ability; somehow we create space in society. In general, we need to have multilateral plans with care and consideration for human beings. We need to consider those aspects…”

Expressive ability is also an important skill for architects. When a building owner requests a building design, an architect needs to express what the building owner asks for in the sketches and floor plans. Expressive ability is needed to make a constructor understand the intent of the building design at the actual constructing stage.

“I think that it is necessary to have the drawing ability to make floor plans based on others’ ideas. Expressive ability is necessary to make both a building owner and a constructor understand the drawings.”

Most people believe that architectural design is only for floor plan drawings, but architectural design is a truly integrated task and this means the ability to integrate interdisciplinary studies related to it is a necessary skill. Buildings are not constructed only with floor plans. Various drawings, such as structural drawings and a facility maps, are required in order to construct buildings. Therefore, respondents mentioned that architects should have related knowledge for this even if they cannot compose structural drawings or facility maps by themselves.
“People think that architectural design only requires the ability to draw a floor plan, but architects should know how to read structural drawings and facility maps accurately. I have been working for various locations including regional areas as well as Seoul for a large company along with smaller and medium sized companies. There is no big difference between them because of their sizes. Companies in Seoul contract out the structural drawings to structural engineering firms, but local companies have to produce structural drawings as a matter of circumstances.”

Architectural design requires not only professionalism but also artistic value. Lots of people get to think that they also would like to design awesome buildings by themselves when they look at beautiful examples. The artistic value is a real charm in designing an architectural drawing just like people appreciate the beauty of buildings and get inspired by them. The professionals who participated in interviews often mentioned artistic ability. However, it cannot be overlooked that artistic ability is subject variations depending on the individual.

“Artistic ability comes next. Personally I think that artistic ability comes last. It is hard to make a distinction between the first and the second but the third is artistic ability. The aesthetic side of things depends on the personal taste of architects, so I would put it the last.”

There is a tendency to think that artistic ability is a sort of inborn gift. In other words, respondents mentioned that it is not acquired from curricula at school nor from experience according to the below interviews.

“The technical skills can be acquired through a certain regular curriculum, or a certified course as well as several experiences; however, somehow artistic ability has different dimensions.”

“Generally speaking, it is a gift. However, the gift is not all there is to it. I think that a gift comes first compared to efforts or passion. The efforts and passion are important but without the gift, I feel like it would be like heading into the ground or filling a broken jar with water…something like that?......omission…. When it comes to the idea that architecture is all about design, I think a person who designs should have a gift. There might be limits with only efforts. It is a tough job without the gift.”

“These days, architects use computers to design; hmm…I think that design ability is more necessary. People can learn the technical and engineering skills, but they cannot pick up the design ability…”

Architects need to understand the environment. When they plan to construct a building they have to consider how the building construction blending in with its environment and by extension they have to consider the whole image of the city. They also have to predict various cases which might happen during the building’s
construction. The effect on the local area or the whole nation by buildings cannot be ignored, so understanding of the environment is essential.

“I think a comprehensive understanding of the environment and the local area where the building is going to be constructed is crucial. The ability to see the whole picture of the locality because around the building is necessary. It influences the development of the local area.”

They also argued that basic occupational competencies in architecture are necessary just like any other job. Because most jobs require cooperation with others rather than merely working alone, good communication skill or a strong collaboration capability are necessary.

“Well, when I assess my employees’ job performances, it seems that an employee who is good at this job could also do well in another job. For large architectural firms, I think that basic communication skills and collaboration capability is more important than any other special abilities related to designing. An employee with design ability is on top of all that is ideal.”

Practitioners in the area of architectural design argued that the capability to collaborate is important. As mentioned before, architecture has a nature for integration, which is required in order to conduct architectural design jobs with integrated knowledge and skills in related fields. It seems to be important to have a collaboration capability in order to work with subcontractors, the persons concerned with stakeholders, and other co-workers.

“Well, if I am in the position of hiring new employees, I would rather choose someone who can work with others and can deal with software proficiently rather than someone who has a sense of design.”

“In my case, planning the architectural design and drawings are not that difficult: they are interesting. However, I felt skeptical in dealing with constructors. The architectural design work includes dealing with constructors or building owners so it is not merely limited to a plan or a drawing of a floor plan.”

The in-depth interview with seven architects identified that architects should have 8 different abilities.

<Figure 1> shows job ability of architects from the in-depth interview in this research. They are as follows: understanding human beings, an expressive ability, a drawing ability for a structural drawing and facility maps, an artistic ability, and understanding of a local area and environment, communication skills, a collaboration capability, and a drawing ability in software.
4 Conclusions

The in-depth interview with seven architects identified that architects should have 8 different abilities: understanding human beings, an expressive ability, a drawing ability for a structural drawing and facility maps, an artistic ability, and understanding of a local area and environment, communication skills, a collaboration capability, and a drawing ability in software.

This research result is based on the experience of the respondents, therefore this paper aims to form a cultural and phenomenological meaning of each factor rather than to create a generality. Furthermore, if there is further study on the analysis data related to the architectural design work and on synthesizing it, it allows us to learn more about the abilities needed to become architects.

References


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