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DEFINING SERVICE QUALITY PERFORMANCE OF ARCHITECTS FOR PUBLIC CLIENTS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

In Turkey, there is pressure on public clients on awarding architectural design contracts with cost based selection process which leads to the lowest bidder gets contracted. This is mainly because the project owners in the public sector are held accountable for their decisions and they usually opt to select an architect by considering the lowest bid. However, the application of cost based bidding in architectural services is found problematic and price based competitive bidding may possibly lead to future cost increases. The value of architectural consultants should not be merely measured in monetary terms, but should be considered in terms of their service performance, experiences and resources. Public clients should realize that the most qualified consultants may not necessarily offer the lowest price.

In this paper, a descriptive set of service quality performance criteria of architects is listed for public clients and a simple framework is proposed to exemplify the service performance evaluation process. Later, projected system is advocated for being a primary step for qualifications based selection procedure on public contracts for future prequalification purposes. Finally, architects' service quality performance score use is discussed with its potential to provide a scheme for professional competency.

Keywords: Architectural consultants, service quality performance evaluation, performance criteria, public clients, Turkey

1. Introduction

Public clients in Turkey recruit consultants on a price competitive basis. However, it is known that some consultants would prefer to submit unrealistic bid at the expenses of services quality (Hamilton, 2001). In general the implementation of price based competitive bidding for professional services is not recommended as price pressure would reduce the innovative side of architects in performing entire facets of the task (Ng & Chow, 2005). Building projects are inherently sophisticated in the current decade and most clients in general would entrust and rely on architects to provide professional advice and services so as to make vital decisions and maintain their interests. Therefore, architects play a crucial role from the inception to completion of a project (C{Please_Select_Citation_From_Mendeley_Desktop}han et al., 2004).

The fundamental objective of engaging architects for an assignment is to provide a source of knowledge and experience which is not readily available within client organizations (Ng & Chow, 2005). A capable architect should ensure a project could be delivered on time and within budget, also it is claimed that commendable architects should bring genuine values to the projects by providing innovative, functional design, appropriate budgetary control, cheap and easy facility maintenance, etc. (FIDIC, 1997; CIB, 1996). It is known that, the accuracy and relevancy of consultants' design and recommendations could have intense impacts on the succeeding works quality. Hence, the selection of incompetent architects may lead to problems in design, planning, cost control, which could in turn affect the time, cost and quality levels of a project.

2. Cost Based Architect Selection in Turkey: A Problematic Method

There is stress on public administrators in Turkey for awarding architectural design contracts with cost based selection process mainly because the general understanding of competitive bidding is the best method of procuring equipment and goods which can be specified precisely (FIDIC, 1997). However, the application of cost based bidding in architectural services is found problematic since in order to survive in a highly competitive market, some incompetent consultants would prefer to submit unrealistic bid at the expenses of services quality (Hamilton, 2001). In general the implementation of competitive bidding for architectural services is highly risky as money pressure would erode the qualificational competence and it hinders the innovative side of architects. Besides, competitive bidding may possibly lead to future cost increases that are not known during the bidding process (Ng & Chow, 2005). Clients should, however, realise that the most qualified consultants may not necessarily offer the lowest price, and there is a possibility that the lowest bid is indeed from a newly established consultant or one who does not have adequate experience or resources to handle the project. Therefore, the value of professional services of consultants should not be merely measured in monetary terms, but should also be considered in terms of their service performance record and their experiences which guide for a best suit for a project.

3. Describing Service Quality Performance of Architects

Architectural services are considered as 'professional services' in marketing discipline and as a part of the general services field. Professional services are defined as tailor type functions performed by independent consultants whose occupation is the production of such services. Professional services contracts include those of: architects, engineers, attorneys, dentists, law firms, and physicians. The services are considered 'professional' and the job is usually limited to licentiate individuals (or firms) holding professional license. The enormous growth of the service sector in world economies after 1950s has resulted in a growing literature on service quality. Defining and modeling the quality of services is generally acknowledged to be more difficult than modeling the quality of goods due to the intangible nature of services themselves (Grönross, 1984). There are two popular models of service quality in use: Grönroos's service quality model (Grönross, 1984) and Parasuraman's 'Gap' model (Parasuraman et al. 1985; Zeithaml et al. 1990). In this paper Grönroos's service quality understanding is used as a basis for application.

According to Grönroos (1984) customers perceived and analyzed any particular service with two dimensions, (1) Technical quality - What the consumer receives, the technical outcome of the process- (2) Functional quality - How the consumer receives the technical outcome- what Grönroos calls the "expressive performance of a service" (Grönroos, 1984) (Figure 1). The service performance of professional services should always be evaluated against a pre-agreed set of evaluation criteria established by the evaluator. In architectural services the evaluation criteria are mainly categorized in two different ways. Some literature prefers to classify the evaluation criteria in different groups pertinent to different project phases (feasibility, design etc.; Ng, Chow, 2004). Others categorize the evaluation criteria into various key performance indicators (resources allocation, documentation etc., Nelson, 1996). There is no general trend on the way of categorization and it mainly depends on the preference of clients or evaluator. In this paper architects' service performance is defined as a function of Grönroos's 'Technical Quality' and 'Functional Quality' definitions of service performance in Turkish context and described in the following part.



Figure 1. Grönroos's service quality model (Grönroos, 1984).

4. Incorporating Service Performance Concept into Evaluation of Architects

The service performance evaluation criteria can be categorized into groups that pertinent to different project stages, together with a set of criteria describing consultants' general performance from the point of view of public clients (Ng & Chow, 2005). In Table 1 a hypothetical evaluation criteria is proposed on Grönroos's service performance theory for public clients in Turkey. The criteria showed on Table 1 is generated from literature (Ling. 2002; Ng, Skitmore, 1999; Ng, Chow, 2004, Ng & Chow, 2005) and customized for a probable Turkish case according to its relevancy. The criteria evaluated here can be elaborated for special use however a basic demonstration is intended as a subject of this paper. To demonstrate the process, here project stage based assessment used and the quality of service delivery evaluated according to the specific characteristics of the project stages including the (i) feasibility stage, (ii) design and contract stage, and (iii) construction stage. The assessment on architects' service performance general performance is to measure the quality of some general aspects such as the management skills, achievement of targets, etc.

Architects' Service Performance Evaluation Criteria	G*	Success Rate	W**	WS#
1. Technical Quality (Phase assessment)			5	
1.1. Feasibility stage			4	
1.1.1. Architect has a good knowledge of design, legislation and regulations, which are relevant to the project.	3	100%		
1.1.2. Architect has a good knowledge of economical design	2	67%		
1.1.3. Architect's ability on consideration of alternatives and innovative ideas	2	67%		
1.1.4. Ability of collection and appreciation of background information	1	33%		
1.1.5. Cost approach	2	67%		
1.2. Design and contract stage			5	
1.2.1. Design ability with technical functional quality	2	67%		
1.2.2. Architect has a good knowledge of constructability	3	100%		
1.2.3. Quality of contract drawings/ documents	3	100%		
1.2.4.Ability to collect and interpret of information	2	67%		
1.2.5. Approach to cost effectiveness	2	67%		
1.2.6. Cost estimate	1	33%		
1.3. Construction stage			2	
1.3.1. Supervision of contractors and quality of works	2	67%		
1.3.2. Administration of contracts	3	100%		
1.3.3. Recruitment, supervision and administration of site staff	3	100%		
1.3.4. Financial control of contracts	2	67%		
1.3.5. Certification of interim payments / final accounts	2	67%		
1.3.6. Handling of contractors' claim	3	100%		
1.3.7. Provision of record drawings / manuals / other records	2	67%		
2. Functional Quality (General Assessment)			**4**	
2.1. General Performance			4	
2.1.1. Programming, progress reports and adherence to programme	2	67%		
2.1.2. Competency and adequacy of staff	2	67%		
2.1.3. Achievement of objectives and targets	2	67%		
2.1.4. Effectiveness in overcoming problems	1	33%		
2.1.5. Appreciation of client's requirements and procedures	2	67%		
2.1.6. Responsiveness of Architect or /Principals	3	100%		
2.1.7. Management of sub-consultants	2	67%		
2.1.8. Planning, preparation and management of site investigation / conducting of field	3	100%		
TOTAL SCORE (Sum up of Weighted Scores)				

G*, Grade (Scale 1 to 3; 1,poor; 2, average; 3 excellent);
W**, Weight (Scale; 1 to 5; 1 least important; 5 utmost concern)
WS, Weighted Score (Defined as a function of grade and weight of criterion)

Table 1. Architects' Service Quality Performance Evaluation Criteria Proposed for Public Clients

A reliable consultant performance evaluation system could only be engaged with the existence of an appropriate evaluation scale. Since the reliability and objectiveness of the proposed system relies on the adequacy of decision making techniques employed in developing the evaluation framework. For a basic demonstration and ease of applicability a three-grading service performance evaluation system is suggested for public institutions in Turkey. A three level (excellent, average and poor), four level (excellent, above average, average and poor) or five level grading scales (excellent, above average, average, below average and poor) can be adopted for the evaluation by clients to assign a suitable grade to the evaluation criteria. Here, for the ease of applicability a three level grading system is engaged and hypothetical grading is shown on Table 1. The proposed system quantifies the performance of architects' service performance into three different grades including (3) excellent (good or above), (2) average and (1) poor. In Figure 2, success rate of the architect on pre-set criteria is depicted with percent scale on which %33 percent means poor performance; %66 means average performance and %100 percent means excellent performance.

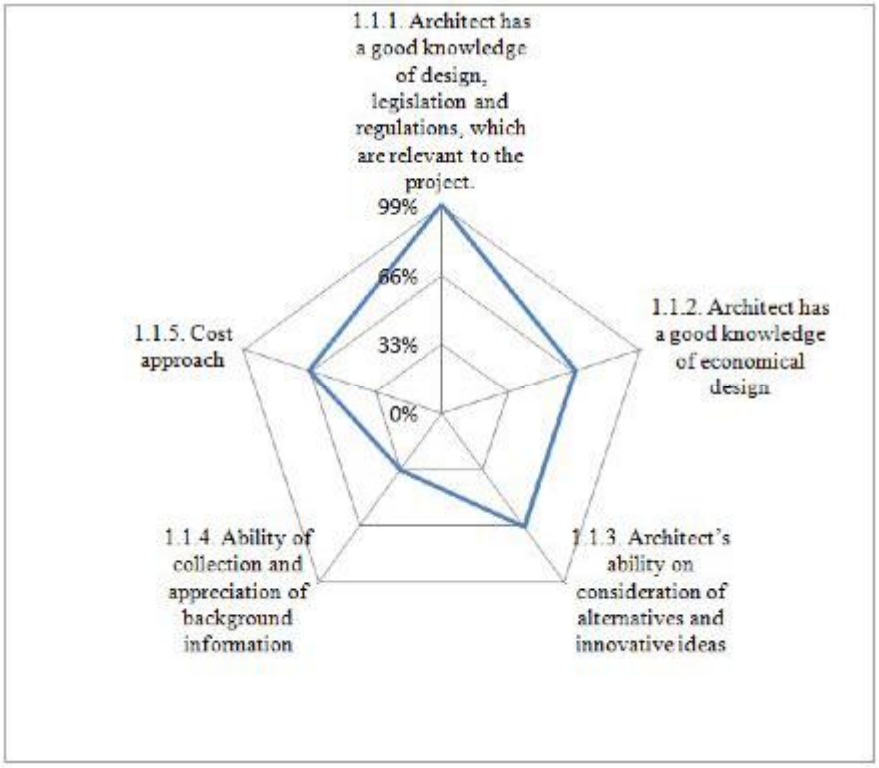


Figure 2. Radar chart displaying the success rate of architect on pre-set criteria

The grades (G) are then translated into corresponding service performance evaluation score by multiplying with the pre-arranged set of weightings (W: 1 to 5 scale). After this process weighted scores (WS) are reached. The weighting process is not exemplified here, since the process outline is beyond the matter and objective of this paper.

The grades can be further translated into corresponding service performance scores for the use in future architect prequalification and final selection, or other purposes. During the prequalification and technical assessment of architects, the service performance evaluation score of the projects in the past few years can be utilized by for computation of total past performance score against a pre-agreed importance weightings.

5. Conclusion

Integrating architects' service performance data for project rewarding purposes can help both for maximizing final project success and a sustainable way of growth for architectural business. Moreover, service performance based approach for the prequalification and final selection of consultants could significantly uplift the probability of achieving high quality projects. To illustrate the relation of fee scales and the service performance score a two-envelope system is proposed which utilizes past service performance score and fee assessment of the architect (Toprakli & Gultekin, 2010). With the implementation of the two-envelope system final selection of architects can be decided according to the scores of the assessment of service performance score and fee proposals with a prearranged service performance/ fee ratio.

Type of project	Service Performance : Fee
Multidisciplinary projects that requires special emphasis on technical input, including complex feasibility studies, investigation-stage consultancies and design and construction consultancies of above average complexity	70% : 30%
Less complex feasibility studies and investigation-stage consultancies and design and construction consultancies of average complexity	60% : 40%
Technically straightforward design and construction consultancies	55% : 45%

Table 2. Proposal for the weightings of the Service Performance and fee proposals of the public client

The weightings between the service performance and fee scores depend on the nature and complexity of projects, and the probable range of service performance/fee weightings of public clients are illustrated in Table 2. Here, the weightings are arranged to appreciate the importance of service performance. According to the pertinent literature it can be advised that public clients should stress on the professional competency of consultants than the competitiveness of consultancy fee (Ng & Chow, 2005). Here, the high service performance weighting in calculating the final score justify the final selection process is service quality controlled.

The quantification of architects' service performance and its integration into the architect assessment method is discussed in this study with a basic framework for public clients in Turkey. Though, institutions/clients can set up their own criteria, weightings, and customize the procedure proposed in this paper to compute the service performance score for their projects. Furthermore, the service performance scores computed through the same model (with constant benchmarks), can be stored in a centralized database so that the performance information can be shared for different projects in countrywide. It is expected that the use of service performance scores could promote successful buildings and environment for the future of Turkey.

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