Affective Roles for Agents in Local Government Corporate Real Estate Projects

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ABSTRACT

Corporate real estate (CRE) projects require, among other things, the navigation of a psychological ‘Affective domain’ because there are subjective evaluations of the projects and their management. Australian local government CRE research reveals that agents of CRE management (CREM) play a role in delivering positive affective assessments of the outcomes of CRE projects.

Two projects are illustrative of these roles. The first project’s design team was commissioned to consult, design and communicate on behalf of CREM. Qualitative analysis allows evidence of affect to be traced across each stage of this commission, including the management of affect to provide positive assessments. The second role is an internal organizational agent that buffers facility users’ affective responses.

Considering agents’ roles in the psychological of managing CRE conceptually advances the field’s understanding of how to deal with and achieve positive subjective assessments of CRE and its management.

Keywords: Agents, Corporate Real Estate, Local Government, Management Practices, Psychology
1.1 INTRODUCTION

Projects for new and renewed corporate real estate (CRE), at a range of scales, rely on agents of CRE managers and their organizations to deliver project outcomes. These projects could be ‘minor’ real estate transactions or large strategically important workplace changes. Traditional issues of agency have been those of the professions in service of CREM, where an agent acts on behalf of a principal to achieve the principal’s goals – currently known as ‘out-tasking’. These goals are a ‘performance effect’ of CREM and the agent’s achievement of a project goal should be assessable objectively against that goal.

Anecdotal evidence from CREM practice shows that, despite available objective information, CRE decision-makers and users employ subjective assessments in their decisions and use. Assessments based on things like ‘satisfaction’ and ‘acceptance’ operate in the psychological realm of affect. Affect is a psychological function relating to feeling states (Forgas, 2000), and is one of three psychological functions that contribute to forming attitudes, belief, and the like (Triandis, 1971). The other two are cognition (thought and knowledge processes) and behavior (conation).

The use of outsourcing of real estate services raises issues of agents in CREM, which the outsourcing literature rarely considers. Gibler and Black (2004) is a rare example that considers the increased opportunity for principal’s to incur agency costs from outsourcing when the principal’s and agent’s self-interests diverge, and the agent does not act in their client’s best interest.

Traditional texts on CREM define the discipline’s roles in terms of tasks conducted by CRE managers as staff, for example Brown et al. (1993, §2.6 & 2.7) and Gradient and Hook, Jr (1987), or devising appropriate internal structures, such as profit or cost centers (Nourse, 1990, Chapter 10). Relationships with external service providers, always part of CREM were seen in terms of defining tasks – the consultant’s (Chekijian, 1987). More recently, relationships with a now broader, range of external service provider agents have been suggested as requiring their own strategies (Lambert et al., 1995, Chapter 4).

This paper examines the role of agents in proposals to change local government CRE facilities. These proposals have the capacity to provoke affective responses that perplex the facility providers and managers. These responses may occur at the building, service delivery, or management processes levels and are frequently construed negatively through phenomena of civic protest, but it may be as important for local government CREM to achieve positive affect, as it is to avoid negative affect.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

A study by Heywood (2007) mapped affect’s role in CRE management processes using a psychologically-orientated qualitative enquiry (Patton, 1990). Four facility proposals that illustrate issues in the field were studied, but two are particularly relevant to this paper. CREM’s language in text and
verbal data was analyzed using an *Affective Lexicon* (Clore et al., 1987; Ortony et al., 1987) which listed between 500 and 600 words, linked with affect, sorted according to a typology of psychological conditions (Clore et al., 1987). These conditions include psychological forms such as states, frames-of-mind and state-like conditions, either a discrete psychological function (for instance, *affective states* which are definable as ‘pure’ emotions), or in combinations of the psychological functions. These psychological conditions are additional to conditions that describe physical and bodily states, and affectively nuanced subjective evaluations and objective descriptions (Ortony et al., 1987).

### 1.3 AN AFFECTIVE DOMAIN

Analysis of the language in three of the four cases studied showed the pervasiveness of affect as a significant proportion had an affective basis (Table 1, below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Non-affective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case 1</strong> <em>(2002 rates increase to fund facilities)</em></td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=364</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case 2</strong> <em>(Library-Community Centre project)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Brief’s strategic options</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief-building interactions’ notes</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building descriptions</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=143</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (Case 2 briefing process)</strong></td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=339</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case 4</strong> <em>(non-Council aged care facility in the municipality)</em></td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=244</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB The remaining data to make 100% are *physical and bodily states*. Also, Case 3 did not have sufficient analyzable data for this analysis.

This demonstrates that local government CREM operates in a significantly ‘Affective domain’. For example, project expectations and evaluations have an affective basis (Case 2’s ‘Performance Brief’s strategic options’ and ‘Brief-building interactions’ notes’, and ‘Building descriptions’, respectively). In order to be effective, CREM needs to address this psychological function in its CRE stakeholders. Management practices, such using agents, and the use of language in the service of CREM were about delivering positive affective project assessments.
1.4 POSITIVE AFFECTIVE ASSESSMENTS

When project assessments move away from a project's objectifiable performance effects, such as time, cost, and quality, affectively-based subjective assessments such as satisfaction (affective state), acceptance ((affective) cognitive state) and happiness (affective state) become evident and important. These positive psychologically-based assessments may be of the CRE as an artifact and/or the management processes used in delivering the CRE project. This research is primarily interested in the latter, but the former, also, impinges on considerations.

1.5 AGENT’S ROLES

This research revealed two affective roles for agents of CREM. These were:

1. The agent (an architect) dealing with affective design information as an ‘affective integrator and communicator’ in a Library-Community Centre; and
2. An internal organizational agent as an ‘affective buffer’ for CREM in a Council provided aged care facility.

While not an exhaustive treatment of agents, or agency roles, these two roles both have affective consequences, and occur within schemes of affective management where positive affective measures-of-success are sought as project outcomes.

It should be noted that these agency roles took place within project management coalitions formed to achieve the project’s desirable performance effects (Walker, 2002). This paper’s two cases had fairly conventional coalition forms with Project Control Groups (PCGs) whose core was CREM, Council service delivery units, and the design consultants. Individual coalition members may be required to act for, or as representatives of the coalition, thereby conferring an agency relationship on individuals; in addition to the internal agency role exercised by the PCG on behalf of Council. The agency role of architects for clients is familiar, however, this research considers such relationships from the client (CREM’s) perspective.

1.6 AGENT AS AFFECTIVE INTEGRATOR-COMMUNICATOR

The affective Integrator-Communicator agency in the Library-Community Centre project operated within a project decision-mode of ‘try and maximize happiness and satisfaction’. This made CREM’s use of agents to deliver and demonstrate affective outcomes for the project part of an affective

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1 In this paper, words from the Affective Lexicon are bolded, with the category of condition italicised in brackets thereafter, as herein.
management scheme. Responsibility for achieving desired outcomes was shifted to CREM’s agent – the architect – through a commission that included conducting extensive stakeholder interactions, on behalf of CREM, throughout the project. A major requirement was to achieve favorable project assessments, to be evaluated against affective measures-of-success.

The required interactions were, in part the result of the creation of a Performance Brief (Stage 1 of the project’s pre-construction phase) (Smith, 2002 & 2005). Stage 2 involved gathering data for design purposes in lieu of the client (CREM) providing all the necessary briefing information. Stage 3 was the presentation to, and receiving feedback from, all levels of project stakeholders. This paper considered the language in the final, pre-tender presentations that were to demonstrate how briefing expressions, particularly those expressed in Stage 2, had been dealt with in design. The agent, in this phase of dealing with affective information, closes an affective cycle of gathering affective data, integrating it in design, and demonstrating that integration (see Figure 1, below).

Figure 1 Affective architectural agency roles in CREM

The advantage of using the architect this way in this affective management scheme was that it allowed the direct apprehending, interpreting and inclusion of affective information as part of the design integrative process, be that affective information words, or other forms. That affective information came from:

- Stakeholders expressed valenced information – things that were important to them;

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2 In this phase, there is also an agency role in presenting the Project Control Group’s agreed proposal containing the valenced information provided.

3 Apprehension of affective information other than words and also non-affective communication is not considered in this research.
Council officers being able to identify and describe affective qualities of the facility – things desirable and undesirable (affective-cognitive state); and

The architects’ own identification of affective qualities in interactions with stakeholders.

Feelings and items were communicated to the architect and who was then left to integrate and realize this in planning and built form proposals (integration role). The actual integration process is not considered here because it was the design output from that process that was important for CREM. As affective measures-of-success matter here, because positive subjective evaluations were sought, this early apprehension and integration of affectively-based information was positive for CREM in the types of assessments they have received in regard to the new facility.

One particular example from the Performance Brief – Sensitivity – may be used to trace the evidence of affect across each stage of the agent’s commission (Figure 2, below).

Other affect-based concepts from the Performance Brief that could have used included:

- Secure (affective-cognitive state-like);
- ‘Belonging’ and ‘ownership,’ which have to do with affect in ‘place attachment’ (Altman and Low, 1992);
- ‘Diversity’ which has a contemporary usage of accommodating, or accepting ((affective) cognitive state), different ethnic groups, religious affiliations, gender orientations, and marital status.

Sensitivity, in the Stage 1 Performance Brief, recorded an expectation of Council officers for the new facility. The affective condition was expressed in the Stage 2 Brief-building by municipal stakeholders’ expectations of the design being considerate of their needs, as neighbors and users (Figure 2, below).

An expectation of a softened visual appearance is one that the building will be considerate towards recipients potentially hurt by the facility’s Externality effects. A physically comfortable building ((affective) physical and bodily state) is one that is sensitive (considerate) of the users and occupants physical needs. Serenity of décor is an Internality effect that is about sensitivity (considerateness) to facility users.

The Stage 3 ‘Descriptions of the building’, as a building evaluation by the architects, contains affective terms that correspond to the sensitivity expectations. ‘Domestic’ for appearance and scale is not in the Lexicon, but this term is often equated to environmental descriptions of sensitivity (considerateness) towards a building’s physical and social contexts. Such a building could be, and was, described as being friendly ((affective) cognitive-behavioral frame of mind) to that environment.
A serene internal environmental qualities, and its acoustic equivalent of quiet (affective objective description), corresponds to Stage 2’s serenity. In producing such a color scheme, it was assessed that it would be unlikely for users to be offended (affective-cognitive state).

It was observed, and supported by Council officer reports of earlier presentations, that important, affective briefing information was specifically included on the agent’s presentations to those groups that provided that information. This tactic demonstrated the integration of their affective-based information within a strategy of ensuring satisfaction with design proposals and contributed to generating positive responses to the proposal – even enthusiasm – laying foundations for later positive affective project assessments such as happiness and satisfaction. These positive responses are indicative of the use of affective measures-of-success that the agent was achieving the project outcomes sought by CREM.

1.7 AGENT AS AFFECTIVE BUFFER

The second identified agency role was an internal organizational agent as a buffer between CREM and affective responses to a proposal to replace an existing Council aged care facility. The facility’s tenants were vulnerable (affective objective description), being elderly and at risk of homelessness. The inclusion of the agent – a service delivery Council officer (SDCO) – in the project’s coalition was to contribute to the project’s affective management in two ways:
1. Through sensitivity to tenants’ affective conditions they were able to identify and deal with affective responses at the source, thereby avoiding a ‘spot-fire’ of civic protest; and
2. Through interactions achieving affective measures-of-success – satisfied, accepting, or at least not unhappy.

Once the agent was included, self-appointed advocacy and intermediary roles were useful to CREM. Advocacy tended to be for specific building items to benefit tenants while the intermediary role was about tenants being comfortable (psychologically) (affective state) through familiarity with the individual and their role for the Council. That these roles were not challenged does not suggest that CREM was avoiding affective responses. Rather, a useful agent was found to deal with possible upset (affective state). The agent’s pre-existing affective connection to residents provided two aspects to the case’s affective management:

The agency role was, largely, employed around the time of project presentations to tenants at the end of the design phase, and for the SDCO, augmented their usual working interactions with tenants.

An expected design response was affective where the tenants would be glad (affective state) of their improved accommodation. In this project, the design itself seemed not to be an issue. Rather, the prospect of displacement and the transition between the old and new facilities was thought by Council officers to induce anxiety (affective state). Initial CREM assessments were that the presentations to tenants went well, despite the presence of those anxieties.

At the time of the presentation, tenants were encouraged to express any concerns (affective-cognitive state) they may have had with the project. Approximately twenty-four hours later, a disappointment response (affective state) became evident. This was a combination of design and transition response centered on one tenant, in an existing one-bedroom unit, who was unhappy (affective state) about moving. For tenants of one-bedroom units, a response to the design was understandable, because there was, for them, no identifiable improvement to their level of accommodation (if the rundown building fabric is ignored). Any transition response may have been magnified, as no direct service delivery benefit was identifiable.

An affectively-based response, manifested in agitating other tenants, advocating protesting to their local member of parliament, required the agent’s intervention if the project was to avoid civic protest and achieve positive affective measures-of-success, such as happiness, or acceptance. The first intervention occurred a few days later, with several interactions required to achieve affective indicators of success—a positive feel, tenants feeling important, and that their concerns were being listened to. Some of these concerns were at the detail level that was

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4 The Affective Lexicon has two senses of sensitivity as noted in Table 1, above. –and. This usage refers to the considerate (affective cognitive-behavioural frame of mind), but the ‘easily hurt’ sense is also present through the agent’s awareness of the potential ‘hurt’ to tenants.
probably addressed in the presentations, but may have been lost in an information overload. These points were clarified, and the Council’s position was reiterated that tenants were not losing anything, but rather gaining.

Notwithstanding the involvement of CREM, the pre-existing affective connection was relied on to neutralize the negative affective responses, and to deliver more positive affective outcomes.

However, this buffering role may have been played too well, became an extended role, as evidenced by contrasting assessments of levels of disquiet from the project’s nine month funding-induced hiatus. While CREM noted that very few negative responses were evident in this time, despite the delay, the buffer still received the responses which were not transmitted to CREM.

This buffering could, more correctly, be called ‘filtering’ or ‘blocking’ given CREM was receiving almost no evidence of any dissatisfaction. Affective management appears to have been ceded, in entirety, to the agent on the basis of their effectiveness in dealing with it.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The paper demonstrates two roles for agents in delivering affective CRE project outcomes:

- An ‘affective integrator and communicator’ role that dealt with the affective briefing information and then communicated how that information has been treated, or integrated, in the facility design; and
- An affective buffer between CREM and affective responses from facility tenants.

Agents of CREM are a longstanding and increasingly important part of CRE managers achieving their CRE outcomes (the performance effects of CREM). Assessments of those performance effects frequently utilize psychological functions to form subjective assessments. CREM practice and theory, to date, has paid little regard to how these psychological functions may operate in the field and in shaping and forming subjective assessments. This study of local government CREM shows, from the language of CREM, that affect (an Affective Domain) is a significant feature in CREM.

Assessments of CRE projects’ effects frequently rely on affective measures-of-success (or failure) in making those assessments. The paper examined two roles for CREM agents in CRE projects achieving positive affective measures-of-success. This provides a conceptual advance with regard to how the field defines assessments of its outcomes and management processes employed in achieving positive assessments.
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