Leadership Skill: A Missing Dimension in Architectural Education

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Abstract

Every architectural design and construction have engaged various disciplines, not only in the field of design, technology and construction but also society, environment and economy. Therefore, the effective leadership capability is an essential key to orchestrate all disciplines to achieve goals of the project. However when public portrays the images of architect, ironically, leadership is not one of them. Role and responsibility of an architect as a leader which rely on the ability to lead, manage, collaborate, and coordinate the effort of relevant parties to create better living environment have been questioned. This missing qualification gives a hint to one of the weaknesses in architect profession while it is gearing toward the complexity and constant changing of professional practice in 21st Century. This article is aimed to 1) investigate the factors that affect the missing of leadership skill in architect and 2) to raise the awareness of the importance of leadership skill. It is both necessary and urgent to integrate and enhance the leadership skill with architecture education.

Keywords: Architectural practice, Image of architects, Missing dimension, Leadership skill, Architectural education

Introduction

The Leading Role of Architect in Societal Evolution

Throughout the development of civilization of humankind, the innovation of architectural design, as one of the most profound benchmarks, has brought better living standard, expressed the aesthetic quality of built environment, served the society, and added value to cultural aspects. It is not an exaggeration to say that architecture interacts with our life and our society in every dimension since we were born. However architects alone cannot create everything by themselves. As a matter of fact, behind every single building and city, to achieve exceptional quality of architectural design and construction, a lot of collaboration and multi-levels of cooperation between architects and several professions (urban planners, interior designers, civil engineers, contractors, consultants, investors etc.) are both essential and inevitable. This fact has been remarkably expressed since 30 B.C. in Vitruvius's 10 Books on Architecture (Rowland & Howe, 2001);

"It is difficult for someone to gain expertise in the breadth of areas needed for a good architect. Good architects are therefore rare. While an architect may not be the best in all these areas, they will be good in understanding and focusing on the principles that brings these areas together. They will depend on the experts in these areas when necessary. What is interesting to note is the realization of the need for architects to understand domains and work with domain experts closely."

It would be implied that even though architects might not be the expertise in every field, they should have ability to lead and manage the relevant people to achieve the common goal. As a result, it has made public acknowledge to the role and responsibility of architects as leader to society ever since. Over 2000 years after Vitruvius's 10 Books on Architecture, the portraits of architects have been evolved and defined by their profession and public. One of the most renowned images of an architect (Saint, 1983) is portrayed as a hero and genius such as a character of Howard Roark, an aspiring architect, objectivist, individualist, integrity and idealist, in the Fountainhead novel by Ayn Rand. Furthermore, from the late 20th century until present 'Starchitect', referring to avant-gardist architects or architectural firms who are praised by their iconic architectural design, have become celebrities, mostly by the media. Therefore, regarding the history of profession and by nature of its task, Architects are expected to be leader since the beginning of design proposal throughout the completion of the project.

However, currently architects have been losing their leading role. From the interview in 'The Executive Architect: Transforming Designers into Leaders" (Harrigan, J.E. and Neel, P.R., 1996), Gensler expressed his concern about losing leadership status because architects tend to walk away from this responsibility and avoid any liability by letting other expertise take over. Typically architects are the one who have holistic understanding of the entire project therefore they should not only be able to synthesis all the factors but manage all parties as well. Architectural design and construction are complex collaborative process which its success is depended highly on leadership. However over the past several years architects seem to satisfy by just creating beautiful building rather than leading or inspiring a team. This negligence reveals the crisis of leadership

in architect profession. In Thailand, Chompunich (2011) also mentioned the lacking of leadership skill is one of the weaknesses of some Thai architects.

Leadership: The Essential Key of Success in Architect Profession

Proven by a lot of researches, leadership has been considered as one of the most important keys of success in every profession and organization. For architectural practice, leadership skill is not only counted as an essential component of successful practice but one of the keys factor of great architecture as well. Undoubtedly it is as important as design skill. (Ronco & Jassaume, 2009, Cramer and Simpson, 2004, Scott Simpson in Pressman, 2007). It is suggested to the architect firms to provide professional development to staff members in order to attain necessary skills to become effective leaders. Sthapitanonda (2010), a Thai national artist in Contemporary Architecture, suggested leadership is an acquired skill of successful architects. The increasing demand of leadership skill in design profession is a result of new challenges from changing paradigm in complex society, global economy, rapid growth of urban area, information technology, and advanced construction technology in 21st Century. Currently even simple project, the numbers of people who get involved are increasing so that the talented design skill is not the only key of the success of architect but also ability to lead, manage, collaborate and bring out the best of other built-environment professions to achieve the common goal. Deutsch (2013) concluded in KA Connect seminar that in the next five years the changes that architects would face are adjusting to new technology, acquiring leadership skills, and mastering the management of design metrics.

To illustrate the awareness of the essential of leadership skill, meaning and description of leadership in architect profession have been questioned. Swett (2005) defined leadership as an ability of architects to convince their clients to believe in their visions for high quality outcome while motivating other parties to follow and implement those visions enthusiastically. Harrigan and Neel (1996) explained about two primary objectives of leadership of architects which are "to find an opportunity and develop a well-considered assessment of the challenge presented by client and to appreciate the importance of teamwork as pooling of experience and expertise" (p. 25). In The American Institute of Architecture's Foresight Report: "The Changing Context Business, and Practice of Architecture 2013" (2013) defined the meaning of leadership as managing change. The report also described the significant trends in upcoming future of leadership which are 1) evolving modes, 2) new metrics of leadership, 3) leadership development options, and 4) changing expectations.

The awareness of the essential of leadership skill has also been raised in academic as well. In 2008 AIAS's Issue Brief on Architectural Education (2008) predicted that leadership skill as professional and multidisciplinary capacity is one of nine emergent trends in architectural education which need to be taught in the school. Furthermore in 2009 Conditions for Accreditation of National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), the importance of leadership skill of graduating architect was clearly stated in Educational Outcomes and Curriculum, on Student Performance – Educational Realms & Student Performance Criteria.

Nature of Leadership in Architect Professional Practice

Since the ancient time, the concept, definition and story of leaders and their leadership characteristics have been comprehensively and extensively studied by both researchers and historians. Some believe that leadership is innate, some focus on the interaction process and relationship between leaders and followers toward the common goal, whereas some concentrate on situation or event which create the leaders or they have to confront. Northhouse (2013, pp.5) described the way leadership has been conceptualize as a) leadership is a process, b) leadership involves influence, c) leadership occurs in group, and d) leadership involves common goals.

Considering these four components, it has raised the question of either definition or desired characteristics of leadership in architect profession. Basically, the nature of leadership in Architect profession can be defined into three categories. Firstly leadership of architects can be defined by their assigned tasks and positions. Usually architects acquire leadership skill from their real experiences through their assigned tasks, beginning as intern and junior staff where they gain experience of leadership and team working from their mentor and teammate. After they successfully obtain higher design and leadership skill they will be promoted as project architect then project manager responsible for leading and managing all aspects of design and construction. Along the way they might also be promoted to be associate, principal, vice president or finally the president. Pressman (2007) implied this developing process as term of scale of influence which is very essential for accomplishing true architect profession.

Secondly by their characteristics and behaviors, Kindel (2013) categorized leadership styles in architect profession into six archetypes which were 1) the Visionaries, 2) the Strategies, 3) the Experts, 4) the Warriors, 5) the Veteran, and 6) the Peace makers. Kasapoglu (2011), divided the leadership in architectural design offices into three groups based on their orientations which were 1) achievement-oriented, 2) employee-oriented, and 3) task-oriented.

Leadership as a missing dimension in Architect Profession and Education

Considering architects as multi-talented visionary leaders and trendsetters. By nature, most of the projects are initiated by architects, hence they should naturally keen on the leadership skill. However there are many evidences proved otherwise. For example, over and over innovative and creative ideas of architects are deliberately marginalized and overlooked because of their weak-leadership that fail to develop owners' confidence. Ironically, instead of evaluate their incapability for leading and communicating, architects tend to complain about the lack of imagination or understanding of the owners. Chompunich (2011) also illustrated another incapability to lead the team due to the lack of knowledge and experience. Therefore architects who cannot make any argument or comment with other expertise become followers.

Noticeably, to solve this problem, over the past several years AIA agencies in at least eight cities across United States of America offer similar leadership training programs and the number of participants have been increasing. This event demonstrates the fact that architect

profession are aware of the lack of leadership skill. The problem of missing leadership skill in architect profession might be a result of four main causes. Firstly, insufficient support from professional practice, even though effective leadership skill is considered as key success in architectural practice, not every firm and profession organization provide leadership training or mentoring as a professional development opportunity. For instance, in Thailand since 2008, there has been no seminar, workshop, or training for professional development in leadership skill organized by Institution of Siamese Architects. Most of the events focus on design trend, technical knowledge, and office management. Secondly, the disregard of the importance of training leadership skill in architectural education, even though complex problems of the world today require new problem solving skill that integrate design with other way of thinking, most of assigned projects in the school tend to segregate those essential skills and focus on design for design's sake only. In consequence, architect students have been weakening in managing, leadership and others skill that are essential in real life practice. Harrigan and Neel (1996) mentioned some professors hesitated to address the complexity of engaging with clients believing that students had enough issues and subjects to learn. As a matter of fact, most of professors are expertise in design-oriented skill more than managerial skill. Moreover while architecture is considered as social art but regarding AIAS (2008) comment, due to the nature of architectural education which needs longer hours of studying and practicing to finish design project, the students are isolated socially, creatively, and intellectually. Hence their opportunities to attend extracurricular are almost impossible. Buchanan (2012) mentioned that the complexity of the world today is far beyond individual capacity. Paradoxically most architectural schools are continuously producing the 'solitary genius' rather than today's collaborator, blinded for the coming of new landscape of professional practice which demand a lot of collaboration between consultants in multidisciplinary. Collaborative skill will enhance the participation and interaction among people in a team. During its process students will have a chance to lead as well as follow. Obviously, lacking of collaboration experience means students are not properly trained for leadership skill. Thirdly, the influence of culture on leadership, as culture shape the way we behave and interact with other, therefore appreciation and value of different leadership styles are varied and depended on their particular culture. According to Hofstede's research (1980), the culture is identified into five dimensions which difference in various culture; 1) power/ distance, 2) uncertainty avoidance, 3) masculinity/ femininity, 4) individual/ collectivism, and 5) Confucian dynamism. Another research of culture and leadership by GLOBE – Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (as site by Northhouse, 2013, pp. 400-401) demonstrated that Southern Asia Leadership profile is valued on self-protective, charismatic/ value-based, human oriented, and team-oriented leadership rather than participative leadership which is perceived less effective. Face saving, hierarchical position, and maintain harmony are considered as important components of good leadership. Regarding Hofstede's research, Thailand is considered a nation with high on power distance, high on collectivism, high on uncertainty avoidance

and high on femininity. A study on Thai Style leadership by Hallinger & Kantamara (2001) showed that central-system leadership is still remained powerful. Deeply influenced by their culture, Thai people places high value on respectfulness to their leader or superior and try to avoid any conflict whereas asking questions or giving comments from lower authorities probably imply to disrespect and trouble maker to their higher authorities. This consequence also causes another problem, lacking of training in critical thinking, so that Thais have not been able to develop effective critical thinking as follower as well as learning leadership skill from their mentor. Therefore lacking of leadership skill is inevitable consequence when they are promoted to higher positon. Lastly is the lack of vision, sufficient knowledge, and neglect the role of team leader. According to all of these reasons, currently society and even architects themselves have started to question about the leadership skill of architects.

Suggestions
Integrating Leadership skill in Architectural Education

The complex society of 21st century needs more and more on leadership skill while very few are capable. Its essence has been raised, encouraged and then finally trained in both formal education and informal curricula. The most outstanding evidence is 21st Century Learning Framework where leadership skill is considered as one of the life and career skill that students should acquire whereas in 20th century education outcomes, are 'good to have' rather than 'must have' (Ken , 2010) since the leadership skill was once considered as personal character that innate

individually. According to Trilling & Fadel (2009, p. 85) students' outcomes of leadership and responsible skills are ability to guide and lead by using interpersonal and problem-solving skills, raising strengths, inspiring, and demonstrating integrity and ethical behavior to subordinate to achieve the common goal. This prior mention could also be applied as the general outcomes of architect students. After gaining sufficient experiences and skills, architects need to lead in small / large firms or individual practices. Waiting until they are in that position might be too late to acquire proper leadership skill training. Therefore providing training for foundation of leadership skill since they are students is more effective. Quirk (2012) suggested that teaching leadership in addition to design education was one of the issues to improve Architectural education. Ronco & Jassaume (2009) stated four leadership concepts that have distinctive relevance for architects. Those are 1) Behavioral Theory, 2) Contingency Theory, 3) Transformational Theory, and 4) Level 5 Leadership. Therefore understanding all of these concepts will offer effective leadership training for archi-tects. However considering current architecture education process, few aspects of leadership skill are provided. Leadership skill should be introduced to architect students by integrating in both academic and curriculum. This article will look at some approaches which might enhance leadership skill for architect students, these following approaches should be considered;

New attitudes of collaboration and team work in architectural pedagogy

AIAS's report (2008) pointed out that to be more capable to lead the design process or

achieve design goals, which is more than 'design value', new paradigm of teaching and learning in architectural design studio is needed. However, according to current architectural studio design project, students and their studios are isolated socially, creatively, and intellectually. Pressman (2009) argued that many academic programs carelessly educate student with wrong attitude about career working as heroic, solitary designer without awareness on how to engage and collaborate with other disciplines they have to work with. Dutton (1991) also stated that architects were rarely train in to work as part of a group-not only as a group of architects, but a group of architects and other professions. Although it contradicts to the nature of architecture education which encourages individual idea, students need to learn to work as a team and change negative attitude that team work is ineffective method to finish their works. This aspect of learning as a team will encourage sense of respect and recognize importance of sharing ideas.

New approaches in Architecture design project

In the architectural practice, architects extensively work with a group of architects/designers and other professions. Cultivating and encouraging the value, essence of leadership culture and enhancing real-life practice through collaborative learning, cooperative education, and design-build provide valuable opportunities for the students to not only work across disciplines but also gain authentic experience and knowledge of fruitful interactive relationship between leaders and followers. The prospective leadership architect should gain skill in management of both design process and design content. Moreover, the

integration of academic and practice should not only emphasize on the importance of leadership architect as a key factor in design success but also the ability to improve the quality of public interest.

Encouraging Interactive Communication Skill

If the goal of architecture education is to develop ability to acquire, synthesis and apply knowledge and present in new form of built environment for better living/working conditions, so that effective communication is the key to demonstrate that goal. Besides, architect profession is in communication business as well as leadership business (Cramer and Simpson, 2004, Quirk, 2012). Ronco & Jussame (2009, p. 57) described that "Leadership in architecture often involves communicating difficult messages. Architects who want to improve their leadership performance must especially strengthen their skills in collaborative communications as they operate in many collaborative situations with clients, peers, and subordinates." Renee Cheng, AIA, associate professor and head of the School of Architecture at the University of Minnesota also mentioned about communication skill in architectural design studio "while design remains central, critically important for studio, be skilled in arts of negotiation and facilitation." Surprisingly, throughout the long study in school of architecture students would have many opportunities to practice their communication skill during reviews, pin-ups, and desk-crits. Nevertheless, because of authoritarian role of some instructors and guest critic, the anachronistic, one-way communication, and passive participating are overwhelming to democracy, social, and active participating and communicating. Architect students

express on what they learn about communication that they had learnt to listen (Dutton, 1991). Besides, the presentation, desk-crits, and other types of review method should inspire and provoke the effective communication by sharing ideas and discussing problem for better solution. Whereas the dialogue is an exchanged rooted in respect for others, accepting other's unique experience is also valuable. However negative comment of the review should be avoided because it would lead to destructive process on students thought (Willenbrock, 1991).

Participating Extra Curricula and Activities

As a matter of fact, architecture is not only art and sciences but also relevant to society and humanity. Extracurricular activities would provide various opportunities for students to expose in others dimension in society. Integrating local community will teach students about real life aspects and creating sense of social service and responsibility. AIAS's report (2008) stated that academic has to emphasize on building leadership skill by encouraging students to participate in civic involvement, and being active member of community. However the obstacles of this issues

maybe the architectural education itself, architect students have to spent most of their time to finish their design projects, which requires long hour of works, so that they cannot participate. Therefore, schools should manage these activities during school break or integrate social services as classroom design project.

Conclusion

This article attempts to reveal the essential of leadership skill to architect profession and what have been missing in architectural practice as well as education. The problematic of lacking of leadership skill has been increased due to prior mentioned. In response to the critical need for solving this problem, the new attitudes, new approaches in architecture education, encouraging communication skill, and extra curricula should be introduced. It is also hoped these suggestions will improve the current situation. In addition further researches are urgently required to extensively investigate on what kind of leadership skills are appropriate for training architect students in changing paradigm of architecture practice of 21st century.

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