

The development of a habitus shock model for architect-client relationships on house projects

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A) Statement of originality

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this dissertation is the result of original research, which was completed subsequent to admission to candidature for the degree

Signed _____ Date _____

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Abstract

The widening gap between architects and clients and the associated problems in the management of their relationship have long been recognised by practitioners and researchers alike. Researchers tend to develop prescriptive models to provide some overall systematic strategy to those seeking guidance. Such models assume that the architect-client relationship can be systematically structured which is a highly optimistic, if not unrealistic view of the situation. An emerging trend has been to develop descriptive models to describe behavioural characteristics of successful and unsuccessful relationships based on observations of 'real world' practice. Such descriptive models indicate the significance of understanding the complexities of the social environment in which the architect-client relationship is within. This research built upon the work of past descriptive models by exploring the architect-client relationship on house projects with a focus on the client's voice. It is positioned within an interdisciplinary approach drawing from sociological and psychological perspectives to further our understanding of this built environment industry problem. Sixty-nine percent of architects in Australia spend some of their work time on house projects and therefore improvements in this area can have significant impact on a considerably large portion of the profession. *Habitus* theory borrowed from sociology highlighted that the nature of architecture as a specialised activity places architects within an *architectural habitus*, distinguishing architects from clients who are not trained in the architectural field. An underlying premise of this study was that a mismatch between the architect and client's habituses occurs as they enter into a relationship on the house project. This phenomenon was termed *habitus shock*, referring to the client's experience of disorientation as they are confronted with an unfamiliar architectural habitus on the project. Culture shock theory was examined for its contribution to explain the process to which the client adjusts to the unfamiliar environment during habitus shock. The habitus shock model proposed that the client may achieve learning during habitus shock and it is this client learning that leads to successful relationships. Using the qualitative approach underpinned by the constructivist perspective for data collection and analysis, eight in-depth interviews were conducted across five case studies of successful architect-client relationships. The narrative inquiry approach was used to establish the extent to which habitus shock occurred and to describe the stages involved in the client's adjustment process during habitus shock. The findings indicate that habitus shock occurred on all five case studies, which resulted in client learning, enabling clients to function with competency in the unfamiliar environment. Client learning achieved during habitus shock was directly linked to the amount of difficulty experienced. This study has refined our understanding of the architect-client relationship on house projects by exploring more deeply client behaviour and the ways in which clients successfully deal with difficulties on house projects rather than simply identifying the uncertainties and conflicts that occur on projects. The findings demonstrate that client learning during habitus shock is a characteristic of successful relationships. One of the most significant outcomes of this study is that it demonstrated the potential to facilitate client learning during habitus shock to contribute to the development of successful architect-client relationships. It also indicates the potential for further development of the model and methodology by suggesting potential areas for future research.

Chapter 1: Introduction