

MANAGING HUMAN CAPITAL IN CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF TWO ITALIAN MUSEUMS

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Abstract

Quality management is well established in the industrial manufacturing sector. More recently, interest has started to grow in the service sector and notably in the area of cultural and artistic organisations, such as museums. Several public and private museums have started to use quality management in order to improve their performance. The purpose of this paper is to examine and discuss the effects of training on the quality of human capital in Italian private and public museums and the general effects of quality management on the health of the museum staff. Bringing these aspects together could provide synergies and finding to manage and develop the human capital in the museum. Furthermore, the empirical basis of the paper consists of two successful case studies. In the first study, Fondazione Mazzotta, a private museum, the general effects of quality management on human capital is studied. In the second study, GAMEC (Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea), a public museum, the effects of quality management on the human capital were investigated.

Keywords: Quality, museums, human capital

Introduction

Around the world, the service sector of the economy is going through a period of almost revolutionary change, in which established ways of doing business continue to be shunted aside. In global markets, we are seeing the manner in which we live and work being transformed by new developments in services. Innovators continually launch new ways to satisfy existing needs and meet needs that we did not even know we had. The same is true regards to services directed at corporate users. The dynamic environment of services today places a premium on effective marketing. Among the keys to competing effectively in this new and challenging environment there are skills in marketing strategy and execution-areas in which many services firms are traditionally weak. All products deliver benefits to the customers

who purchase and use them. Goods can be seen as physical objects or devices, whereas services are actions or performances (Berry-Leonard, 1980). Early research into service sought to differentiate them from goods, focusing particularly on four generic differences, referred to as intangibility, heterogeneity (or variability), perishability of output, and simultaneity of production and consumption (Zeithaml et al., 1993). Although these characteristics are still quoted, they over-simplify the real-world environment. Worse, they simply do not apply to all services. More managerial insights distinguish the tasks associated with services marketing and management from those commonly involved with marketing physical goods. This also highlights some managerial implications that will form the basis for much of museum analysis and case studies discussion. It is important not to identify these differences, but we need to keep in mind we are still dealing with generalizations that do not apply equally to all services. We examine in the next paragraph the characteristic in more detail and highlight fundamental managerial implications for museums.

Quality in the museums

Of course, buyers have always been concerned with quality, but the increasingly competitive market for many services has led consumers to become more selective in the museum service they choose. The conceptualization of the quality of museum services is more complex than the one for goods because of the absence of tangible manifestations; therefore the measurement of the service quality can be difficult. Many analyses of service quality have attempted to distinguish between objective measures of quality and measures which are based on more subjective perceptions of customers. Swan and Combs (1976, pp. 56-62) identified two important dimensions of service quality – “instrumental” quality describes the physical aspects of the service while the “expressive” dimension relates to the intangible and psychological aspects. A development of this idea by Gronroos (1997) identified “technical” and “functional” quality as being the two principle components of quality. Technical quality refers to the relatively quantifiable aspects of a service that consumers receive in their interactions with a service firms. Examples of technical quality in a museum include the waiting time at a museum reception, the exhibition of one of the most important printers, guide’s art knowledge, standard of equipment. This, however, is not the only element that makes up perceived service quality. Because services involve direct consumer-producer interaction, consumers are also influenced by how the technical quality is delivered to them. This is what Gronroos (1997) describes as functional quality and cannot be measured as objectives as the element of technical quality (Mels et al., 1997). In the case of queue at a museum reception, functional quality is

influenced by such factors as the environment in which queuing takes place and consumers' perceptions of the manner in which queues are handled by the museum's staff (including attitudes of staff, appearance of staff, atmosphere of museum, light of the print). Gronross (1997) also sees an important role for a service's firm corporate image in defining customers' perceptions of quality, with corporate image being based on both technical and functional quality. If quality is defined as the extent to which a service meets customers' requirements, the problem remains to identify specially what those requirements are. The general absence of easily understood criteria for assessing quality, makes the articulation of customers' requirements and communication of the quality level on offer much more difficult than in the case of goods. Service quality is a highly abstract construct, in contrast to goods where technical aspects of quality can be easily identified. Many conceptualizations of service quality therefore begin by addressing the abstract expectations that consumers hold with respect to quality. Consumers subsequently judge service quality as the extent to which perceived service delivery matches up to these initial expectations. Analysis of service quality is further complicated by the fact that production and consumption of a service generally occur simultaneously, with the process of service production often being just as important as the service outcomes. A further problem in understanding and managing service quality flows from intangibility, variability and inseparability of most services in museums which results in a series of unique buyer-seller exchanges with no two services provided in exactly the same way. Services in museum are high-contact services, in which customers not only interact with service personnel but also rub shoulders with other customers. Museum need to devote special care to selecting, training and motivating employees who will be serving customers directly. In addition to possessing the technical skills required by the job, they also need to possess good interpersonal skills. At the same time, museums have to manage and shape customer behaviour so that the misbehaviour of a few doesn't spoil the experience for everybody else.

Quality in managing and developing human capital in museums

Museums should learn to achieve social and institutional purposes in efficient and effective ways. The improvement of the offer of the services provided by museums is possible through management methods and work models that are typical of a service company that works according to a quality assurance system. Strategic features are, therefore: orientation towards quality and excellence, orientation to the clients and investment in human capital. The administrative rigidity has restricted the managers' power of deciding, and the consequent bureaucratisation of museums has reduced the chance for the staff to be involved in a business management

system. Permanent staff is too often neglected into the daily routine and it loses its qualification, entering a process of disaffection which only constant vocational trainings and refresher courses could stop. Indeed, museums, like other business companies, constantly work with different targets of audience (on different markets), which in this specific field requires suitable means of vocational training and information in order to convey to the public not only more or less quantifiable goods and services, but a very important series of values such as development of knowledge concerning history and art, respect for masterpieces and believes in conservation. Not all the clients, in fact, are able to perceive and keep with the right predisposition, sensibility, attitude, will and interest. In the museum, as a services company, the creation and diffusion of value comes from a process of interaction between provider and consumer, the latter takes part in this production and what he gets in the end is closely connected with the success of the interrelation mentioned above. The end value, therefore, depends not only on the provider's ability but also on his way of understanding the consumer's needs during each phase of production process and of managing to meet these needs. Moreover the result of the service is connected with the consumer's ability to make his request understandable, to get in touch with the provider and even with the consumer's mood, with his predisposition toward the service and toward the supplier. In a cultural context, whoever gets the value takes even a more active part in the production process of the same value because the subject matters and the meaning related to the use depends largely on his knowledge, on his awareness, as well as on his ability of interacting with the provider and getting the best of service. Moreover, since what he can obtain is closely connected with the production process and it cannot be associated with the use of any tangible dimensions, the relation with the supplier is the only creation driver of value. For the above mentioned reasons, in cultural context and even more in a museum company, the relation with the staff or with whoever supplies the service has great importance. As a result, relation context and human resources management have a special emphasis. In the museum context, moreover, the staff member who interacts with the client might influence deeply his predisposition to the cultural product. The reason is that in many cases the message is conveyed by them. Provider's competence and skill affect deeply and directly the client way of understanding the product, of reaching better acquaintance and awareness, of looking at that product or service. The relational aspect consists not only of words, that is what the staff communicate to the client, and actions, that is the behaviour towards the client, but also of image, that is what the client sees (e.g. cleanliness, order, appearance, both of the object and the staff). Moreover, the contact staff perform an active task which consists of providing a series of fixed and specified services, even concerning subject

matter, for each duty. Among the staff of a cultural organisation it can be distinguished, according to the increasing importance of their vocational training: 1. staff that provides welcome and auxiliary services: in the cultural demand context they provide facility services (e.g. booking service, food and beverage, information about places) or accessibility. They are often the first contact with the client and they might affect his predisposition somehow. 2. teaching staff: they convey the subject matter of the cultural message by adapting it to the features of the different target purposes (e.g. the guide in museums). Provider's education, his way of explaining subject matters, as well as his empathy, are the main dimensions that have to characterise these people. They are subjects who know the product, who study and define it in its topic dimension, who consider the intrinsic value of the product and associate to it a specific message. 3. staff that work as keepers: the mere routinized job has to be replaced as much as possible with technology, and it has to acquire new skills in order to be able to accomplish more meaningful tasks such as welcome services. Some studies have emphasized a second kind of vocational training whose purpose is to obtain motivated employees. The following methods are used to: increase relationships among the staff in order to make a better atmosphere and to encourage the spread of culture; increase employees motivations; get an higher level of subjects' ability; develop the employee sense of responsibility, presence, attention. To shape, to communicate and to develop the staff autonomy involve him and make him active character of the corporate culture. According to Normann (1984, pp. 78-82), indeed "all the organisations and, by definition, all the social systems own our culture". Employee behaviour and attitude should be affected and the concepts of inside atmosphere and corporate culture should be emphasized. They are important aspects in order to do a proper work and the employee satisfaction for his job depends on them in the sense that a satisfied employee causes a satisfied client. The crucial task belongs to the management: all depends on the managers ability of arranging the relationship, guiding the action, recognizing the right vocational training. The result of the relationship is better defined with the concept of psychological contract. By definition this contract is not compulsory and gives shape to a specific engagement that is different from the one between organisation and employee and to a different relationship between the involved subjects. This relationship may be briefly defined as care in growth and collaboration to achieve a common purpose. The change of attention from the formal contract to the explicit and rational vocational training contract, to the more hidden and important contract for the new purposes that should be defined psychological contract, according to the agreement looking at attitudes may be seen as progressive change of attention from the first steps of the relationship with the staff to his vocational growth, to the

preservation and reinforcement of the involvement during the relationship. Staff knowledge becomes more and more strategic for the company; since the better or worse ability to meet market needs and create value depends on it. Knowledge management, that is way of dealing with knowledge and mental resource in order to create wellness, is a key factor of success. An institutional and organisational change in museums, that, as already stressed, would create a better human resource management, both on a quantity and a quality level would require competence. Without this competence the change would be partial and perhaps useless, and it should be, indeed, made in advance to reach easily responsibilities which now are firmly requested but that the present museum managers are not ready to bear. Just think of economic, financial and administrative autonomy; autonomy means to be able to manage a budget, meanwhile, to find new financial sources, predict the possible clients, act in order to make the prediction right, and be willing to be judged at the end of a job on the overall results of the institute. Being aware that in Italy in public museums the manager figure is not even expected, the new trend is to create managers. In the future, they should be educated so that they can manage museums with an approach that is different from the present one and they can receive the reasonably requested autonomy. Going into details, the activities related to management in a museum are the following: the decision about mission and purposes, arrangement for a company policy, decision about the annual budget, research, development, management of the strategic relationships and management of the human resources, vocational training and development. Human resources management, whether it applies employees or volunteers, is one of the most strategic key activities for a manager. Therefore, in order to improve these institutions activity and reach easily the wished change, company leaders have to work with staff and help employees and volunteer to acquire and refine their skills, above all concerning the more innovative and communicative functions. These figures are: sources finding manager, marketing and communication manager, public service manager, control and administration manager. Concluding, much time is still needed to reach a mutually useful engagement of volunteers (although the change of the law in force should be the first step), even though positive practices already exist. Firstly it is necessary to identify the museum areas where the volunteer can be better engaged, and also to develop a series of activities, one above all the vocational training, that are aimed at improving and keeping their work. Concerning the action areas, for example welcome and entertainment functions, also in special occasions, the coordination of activities such as booking and guided visit, and in general the public service area, can be backed by volunteers in full working order although they cannot replace the employees. The fact that volunteers can be thought only as keepers is no

doubt reductive, as a such function requires continuity and contractual responsibility. The research activity of a museum can also be helped by volunteers who could have a specific professional background in order to have a easier learning. It is important to highlight that the cultural voluntary service in museums should not have specialised people, otherwise the chance of working for all the people who are driven by non vocational motivations, so much typical among volunteers, would be denied. Some steps to solve the previous issues have already being undertaken. For instance, in Italy volunteers are filtered by specific associations, that therefore have already made active processes of selection and communication of their purposes. The intent is to stress that all the museums are in competition with one another or other organisations, whether or not they are cultural, for drawing volunteers and the real contribution of the volunteers depends mainly on the ability of the museum to spur them and on the wish to keep them. If too much selected tasks are given, if they are not vocational educated, if the purposes are not communicated and their contribution are not continuously backed, volunteers will leave the institute.

The case of two Italian museums: Fondazione Mazzotta and GAMEC

The Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta in Milan is a private institution with the objective of promoting knowledge of the plastic and figurative arts through the organization of temporary exhibitions, conferences, seminars and cultural events. The Foundation owns a collection of artworks that are shown and enjoyed by many people thanks to the cooperation with prestigious museums, galleries, private collector, cultural institutions and publishing houses all over the world. The Foundation, created in 1988 by Gabriele Mazzotta over twenty years after the founding of the publishing house with the same name, is a tribute to his father Antonio, a well known businessman and refined art collector. Since 1994 the Foundation has had is own exhibition space, created by transforming an old textile factory. The relationship with Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, whose offices are located next to those of the Foundation, contributes to make this a unique institution capable of producing specialized publications in full autonomy. Beginning in the second half of 1960s, the publishing house has developed series of publications on history, current events, psychology, architecture, cinema, and then photography, graphics and illustration, as well as books for children. Many of the titles have become indispensable references points for international arts history and criticism. Today the catalogue of publishing house includes over 3000 titles. Thus the Foundation combines the experiences of Gabriele Mazzotta as a publisher and collector with a complete body of knowledge on the world of art and culture. With the support of his staff and his family, Mazzotta has always being able to

promote new initiatives, and to be directly involved in every phase of their development, from content to organization to financing. The programs of the Foundation are also supported by local institutions including the Regional Council of Lombardy, the Lombardy Region, the Province and the City of Milan, as well as private sponsors. The headquarters of the Foundation is in the centre of Milan. The large exhibition spaces, which are located in a late 19th century building, and independent of the rest of complex, are on three levels, topped by a characteristic skylight. From the entrance of Foro Buonaparte one enters a modern art space restructured to preserve the previously existing stylistic features of the textile factory, but with radical functional modifications to prepare the spaces for the most sophisticated requirements of the contemporary art display. The entrance and the itinerary which are accessible to the disabled change from exhibition to exhibition, and include the insertion of informative elements such as videos, caption panels and photographic enlargements. The exhibition space was open on 11 April 1994 with the exhibition “Drawings in our Century. Part One: from Klimt to Wols”. In the 1995 the Foundation received the prestigious recognition of the commission of the “European Museum of the Year Award”, an institution of the Council of Europe; for “the exceptional quality of the exhibition space, which undoubtedly will have profound and decisive influence on the situation of museums in Italy”, and for “the success of the efforts directed toward reinforcing international cooperation in the field of exhibition “. In 1998 the City of Milan awarded the Foundation with the Ambrogino , the Gold Metal for civic merit, for having “given an unmistakable importance to its activities, always at very high level and always aimed at a wide audience. In 1999 the President of French Republic named Mazzotta “Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Merit”, and in 2003 the President of the Federal Republic of Germany assigned the “Bundesverdienstkreuz I. Klasse” as “recognition for services effected for many years for the promotion of Italo-german cultural relations”. Also in 2003 came the “Pino Zac” prize for political satire of Forte dei Marmi. One of the main purposes of the Foundation is to conserve and utilize the art collection put together by the Mazzotta family, starting with the collection of Antonio Mazzotta. A great talent for collecting and an innate capacity to recognize masterpieces of contemporary art have made it possible to gather approximately two thousand works, including drawings and watercolors, refined cycles of graphics and photographs, made from the 1700s to the present day. Fondazione Mazzotta has an internal organization similar to most important international museums. It organise many cultural events and expositions. Human resources that work in the museum are not many: Gabriele Mazzotta, president and founder of Fondazione Mazzotta and his daughter Martina that plays different roles, from organisation of exhibitions

to sponsorship research; scientific commitment, logistic area, public relations office, educational area. In the staff with public relation office there are many selected graduated or undergraduate students in stage, they are specialised in artistic topic. Not all the activities in the organisation of a cultural event are entrusted to internal human resources; sometimes internal human staff is helped by external specialist and freelances (restorers, transporters, editors). Editors have received a specific training on the theme of the exhibition, are contacted for big exhibitions to search key drivers aimed to offer a high quality service. Fondazione Mazzotta chooses editors currently working in university in order to join academic world with museum. Fondazione Mazzotta has an internal educational area to value and process exhibition content to offer them to waste clients. Participations vary according to the level of depth (form guided visit to dinner conference and laboratory activity), the target (primary schools, secondary schools, adults) and the moment of use (before, during or post visit). The educational section involve 20 per cent of visitors each year and gives them the key for comprehension and analyse in depth of each exhibition. To offer a complex service like that it is necessary to have a specific training of internal staff. As a matter of fact, many meeting are periodically organised to complete and integrate different knowledge and skills of staff, as regard to technical content and approach to customer. For example, it is important that human resources are able to do research and study a specific language addressed to different targets (e.g. schools, adults, handicap). In conclusion, the key value driver of Fondazione Mazzotta is a permanent educational section in the organisation that stimulates team working and offers a training driver for each human resource involved in the organisational process of a cultural event.

The second museum is GAMEC (Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea). With the foundation of GAMEC in 1991 started in Bergamo an organic cultural project, aimed at integrating research and training institutes and exhibition places specialized in the contemporary, modern and ancient art. The project, supported by the city council of Bergamo, led to the start up of the Galleria in order to create a new area in the city completely dedicated to art. The project of the Galleria was prepared by Studio Gregotti Associati International. Galleria is located in the neoclassical building of Pinacoteca, which derives from the restoration of the ancien Monasteri delle Dimesse e delle Servite. Credito Bergamasco, a most important bank in Bergamo, supported the project and it renewed a big area dedicated to exhibitions and administrative offices of Accademia Carrara, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea and Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Association. Actually, the exhibition rooms are ten, shared on three floors, climatised and controlled. There are also some areas

dedicated to welcoming visitors. Between 1994 and 2000 Vittorio Fagone was the director of the Galleria. He promoted an articulated program of exhibitions dedicated to visual arts of the 20th century (e.g. Joe and Gianni Colombo, Carlo Carrà), tested video reviews, and many events linked to deepening 1930s culture. He also organised an international network of collections, gifts and loans. Since 1998 the Galleria has been promoting the Sergio Polillo's International Award of Literature and Art, a strong signal of interest in 20th century relationship between visual art and literature. From June 1999, the permanent collections have a big exhibition area reserved to famous Italian and international artists (e.g. Boccioni, Balla, Morandi, Campigli, Casorati, Savinio, De Chirico, Kandinsky, Sutherland, Manzù). In 2000 the Galleria Association was founded to develop many activities to value artistic assets of Accademia Carrara with a particular emphasis on the 20th century. To support the events, an educational service is available to schools and adults. Flexibility is the key value driver of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (GAMEC) in order to compete successfully in the sector of museums. In GAMEC, like in many museums, there is not a continuous and planned training for human resources. This gap is partially due to the lack of alternative efficient educational programs such as postgraduate courses or MBAs. The permanent school of training in cultural goods management seems not to fully match the complexity which characterises the role of cultural manager. GAMEC is managed by a small team composed by ten people, with a part-time contract. The scientific committee is composed by scientific direction and educational areas and it is more focused on cultural aspects than on administrative ones. The most important human resources in GAMEC are the following: the director, two secretaries, caretaker (concerning the public side); the director, the general business manager, the administrative manager, communication and promotion manager, educational services manager, the modern and contemporary exhibition area manager, the warehouse manager (concerning the private side). In the museum there is a volunteer interested in art, who is also a collector of medals. Motivation and training are his skills. There is also a caretaker with a low level training who gives information to the visitors and who could become even more fundamental to understand their needs. In GAMEC delegation is developed together with a balancing centralization of key responsibilities by the director. GAMEC is similar to a flat organization with a high speed decisional process thank to the relation with operations. The museum director shares and develops knowledge and new competencies across the whole organization, stimulating employees' involvement. The general business manager developed his managerial training through the system of delegation, through the interactions with people inside and outside the organization and through the opportunities

offered by the flexibility of the museum. Stageurs can also benefit from such a managerial system; as a matter of fact they do not take part into limited projects but they immediately share the complexities GAMEC and they are given responsibilities. They can therefore perceive the organization as a whole. To sum up, flexibility, on-job training and responsibility-delegation represent the key points of a successful organization, such as Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea. Anyway companies and institutions still need to improve their interchanges, drawing on the associative system of management.

Conclusion

The research outlined in this paper sought to examine the role of management and development of human capital in both public (GAMEC-Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea) and private (Fondazione Mazzotta) museums, interefed in the assessment of quality, the essential foundation to be successfully. In further research, it should be valuable to measure the impact of training and recruitment on museum performance. For instance, this study has indicate the importance of management and develop human capital to be successfully. Elaborating this concept in order to see and measure what aspects of management of human capital that are most important and the mechanism of their influence on museum performance.

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