The pattern of Internet use for information management by architectural practices in the UK

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Doctor of Philosophy

BY

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Part A
Main Text

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Abstract

In recent history, architects have experienced problems related to the use and management of new innovations. The Internet presents one such challenge. It offers considerable expansion in types of communication and sources of business information and connects people and businesses around the globe. As is argued in this research, these services could play a positive role in architectural practice.

This research examines the use of the Internet by architectural practices in UK in order to reveal how aware they are of the opportunities it presents, the extent to which they are taking advantage of them, and the problems they are experiencing.

A field study was conducted of two types of practices: RIBA private practices and local authority practices. A number of research tools were used to inspect how these practices are using the Internet to manage various types of information that used and produced in the practice, namely: the acquisition of web information, the exchange of the practice’s information through the web and the presentation of the practice’s information on the web. Explanations for the results were sought by correlating variables from the questionnaire study, using simple statistical tests.

The field study shows that many Internet services are unpopular among architects, and that practices have problems in adopting and using the technology. The pace at which the Internet is being absorbed and accepted by practices is slow. The study suggests that possible causes are: the little knowledge of users’ about IT, the poor resources of the practice, and old or imperfect Internet installations and the absence of the Internet support to the architect’s activities. The research argues that there are a number of links between these negative factors which make the practice unable to utilize the Internet and to manage the practice’s information through the Internet.

To break these links, the research suggests that practices should adopt a specific management strategy to promote more utilization of Internet services in the office and to manage information. Practices need to make certain changes to the way they manage the Internet and work with it, if they plan to integrate the Internet more successfully into their practice. The research discusses techniques for improving practice management which would help practices to digest Internet technology and to use it more effectively in the practice.
Acknowledgement

This research is an attempt to record how the UK architects react towards the new communication and information technology i.e. the Internet. And to address some potential problems in the way that architects deals with this medium.

Such research needs a careful guide-ness, an endless patience, and a deep awareness of what would really benefit and enrich the research and this what Dr Mike Fedeski provided throughout the long and uncertain periods of this research. He continuously encouraged and motivated the author to think hardly about how to develop the research ideas. He was quite enthusiasm with the ideas that have been presented to him. He took them further and implemented his time and effort to add and to improve them. During the research period, the meetings were recorded. Each meeting notes describes the discussion of the meeting, links the results to the previous research stage outcome and set a conclusion of what has been done and which route is the best to follow in the next stage. These notes link the research stages and were very useful to be used in the subsequent research stages particularly during the writing-up stage.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to his invaluable contribution to the research and his continuous motivation to the author to produce meaningful results.

My special thanks also to Professor Bryan Lawson, Dean of the Faculty of Architectural Studies, the University of Sheffield for his advice on how to provide a further focus in dealing with the research problem.

During the research there were technical problems related to the programming of the on-line research tools, and the statistical analysis of the survey results, but thanks to the staff at computer help desk, school of Mathematics at Cardiff university and also to professor Gamble at University of surrey for their advices of how to sort out these problems. Staff at Welsh School of Architecture were brilliant at supporting the research with views and research materials. I would like to thank all of them for this marvelous support especially the former CAD laboratory manager Dr Jeff Jones and the senior librarian Mrs. Sylvia Harris.

The field study benefit from the information that UK architects have provided to the author. They generously contributed their own time to provide the author with a feedback which enriches the research data. My gratitude should go to Local Authorities and private practices that accepted to participate in research activities, in Cardiff and south Glamorgan, and in the other regions and counties of the UK.

A number of practices and organizations which provide training and help to the author during this research. I would like to thank all these practices and organizations and in particular Westlea Housing Association WHA. Without this practical knowledge, I would not be able to understand the rich and unique culture of practicing architecture in the UK.
## Contents table

### Section A
The background to the research

### Chapter One
1.1 Introduction ............................................. 1
1.2 The need for the research ................................. 2
1.3 Research aim and objectives .............................. 3
1.4 The scope of the study ................................... 4
1.5 Research methodology .................................. 4
1.6 Description of thesis chapters ........................... 5

### Chapter two
The architectural profession’s response to historical change

#### 2.1 Introduction ............................................ 7

#### 2.2 The architect’s management of the practice .......... 7

#### 2.3 The features and types of architectural information .... 12

#### 2.4 The pattern of use of information by architects ....... 13

#### 2.5 Discussion ............................................. 14

#### 2.6 Conclusion .............................................. 17

### Chapter three
Internet services

#### 3.1 Introduction: Internet history and evolution ........ 19

#### 3.2 The Internet infrastructure ......................... 20

#### 3.2.1 Internet service providers ........................ 21

#### 3.2.2 Access to the Internet ............................ 21

#### 3.2.2.1 Wired connections .............................. 21

#### 3.2.2.2 Wireless access ................................ 22

#### 3.3 Acquiring information services ....................... 23

#### 3.3.1 Information retrieval services ..................... 23

#### 3.3.1.1 Information Search services .................... 24

#### 3.3.1.2 Gateways & databases .......................... 24

#### 3.3.1.3 Useful Building and construction Sites .......... 26

#### 3.3.2 E-procurement and e-commerce sites ............. 29

#### 3.4 Exchange of information or communication services . 30

#### 3.4.1 Asynchronous services ............................ 30

#### 3.4.2 Synchronous services ............................. 33

#### 3.5 Presentation of information on the web ............... 35

#### 3.6. Software applications on the Internet .............. 35

#### 3.6.1 General office management applications .......... 36

#### 3.6.2 Computer Aided Design (CAD) applications ....... 37

#### 3.6.3 Project management applications .................. 38

#### 3.7 E-Business applications ............................. 41

#### 3.8 Benefits of the Internet .............................. 42

#### 3.9 Problems & limitation of use ......................... 43

#### 3.9.1 Security problems ................................ 43

#### 3.9.2 The Internet limitations ........................... 47

#### 3.10 Discussion and summery ............................. 48
Chapter Four
The use of the Internet by architects
4.1 Introduction 54
4.2 The use of the Internet by architectural practices 55
  4.2.1 IT use in other countries 55
    4.2.1.1 The use of the Internet by US practices 55
    4.2.1.2 The impact of information technology on Canadian AEC industry 58
    4.2.1.3 CMCD use in Australian practices 60
    4.2.1.4 The use of IT in Scandinavia 62
    4.2.1.5 The use of computers by design practices worldwide 63
  4.2.2 IT use in the United Kingdom 65
    4.2.2.1 The adoption of information systems (IS) by small practices 65
    4.2.2.2 The use of on-line mailing lists and forums by the building industry 66
    4.2.2.3 The adoption of Information Systems (IS) by small practices 68
    4.2.2.4 The use of information systems 71
    4.2.2.5 The use of computers and Internet services by architects in the UK 71
    4.2.2.6 The exchange of information in construction industry 73
    4.2.2.8 The use of The Internet for presentation 74
4.3 Summary 75

Section B
The research methodology

Chapter five
The research design
5.1 Introduction 78
5.2 Understanding the problem 79
5.3 The use of the Internet for information 80
5.4 The choice of research method 81
5.5 The research techniques 83
5.6 The practices’ population 84
5.7 Sampling 85
5.8 Panel and trend studies 86
5.9 The survey on Internet use by practices 87
5.10 Statistical tests of the data 92
5.11 Conclusion 94

Chapter Six
The pilot study
The Internet use by Welsh practices
6.1. Introduction 96
6.2 The preliminary survey of some Internet influences 97
6.3. The pilot survey 98
6.4. Discussion of the interviews’ results 100
    6.4.1 The influence of practice environment on Internet use 104
    6.4.2 The influence of outside world on practices use of the Internet 105
    6.4.3 The influence of the Internet on practices 106
6.5 Conclusion 106
### Section D

#### Chapter twelve

Discussion of section C conclusions

1. Introduction 220
2. The influence of the Internet use on the practice 221
3. The influences on Internet use 222
   1. Influences on the use of the Internet to manage information flow 222
   2. Influences on the use of the Internet to manage office processes 223
4. Barriers and constraints of Internet use 225
5. Discussion 228
6. Conclusion 229

#### Chapter thirteen

Recommendations

1. Introduction 231
2. Recommendations 231
   1. Development of human resources 231
   2. Management of the Internet system 233
   3. Management of Internet use 233
      1. Management of the decision to adopt the Internet services 233
      2. Management of the practice use of the Internet 234
   4. Controlling the change of the practice 238
3. Development of Internet system 239
4. The role of the universities, the UK government and RIBA 240
5. Further research 241

References 243
List of Figures

Figure 2.1: the RIBA plan of work map of the design process 10
Figure 2.2: Type of use of information at each stage of the building project 15
Figure 2.3: The managerial tasks that should be carried out at each stage of the project by the practice 16
Figure 4.1: Types of Internet usage and access policy in US practices 56
Figure 4.2: The use of Computer Mediated Communication tools in US practices 56
Figure 4.3: Types of architect’s access to the Internet 58
Figure 4.4: Comparison of the use and access to the Internet by construction industry firms in Scandinavian countries 62
Figure 4.5: Number of messages that sent to each discussion topic on Build Talk forum site 66
Figure 4.6: Percentage of architectural practices with access to the WWW 68
Figure 4.7: frequency of architect’s access to the Internet 70
Figure 4.8: Internet tools that are used by respondents 70
Figure 4.9: Which route is preferred by architects to find specifications 72
Figure 4.10: Types of Internet services that are used by architects 73
Figure 5.1: Influences on use of the Internet services and influences of the Internet on the practice 79
Figure 5.2: Panel and trend studies and suggested samples for the proposed study purposes 88
Figure 7.1: The components of practice environment: the users’ knowledge and attitude, the Internet system, and the practice setting 112
Figure 7.2: The office processes through the Internet and the influences on these processes 113
Figure 8.1: The present and intended use of the Internet for the listed purposes in private practices 138
Figure 8.2: The present and intended use of the Internet for the listed purposes in local authority practices 139
Figure 8.3 How strongly the listed factors influence the smooth running of the Internet in private practices 140
Figure 8.4 How strongly the listed factors influence the smooth running of the Internet in local 140
Figure 8.5: The influence of the Internet on the practice as seen by private practices 141
Figure 8.6: The influence of the Internet on some aspects of practice as seen by local authority practices 142
Figure 8.7 Types of project information that used by private practices through the Internet 146
Figure 9.1: Staff knowledge of IT in practices crosstabulated with the proportion of respondents who use these Internet services 152
Figure 9.2: The exchange of information format types by practices which have short and long Internet history 167
Figure 9.3: The use of Internet services by CAD & computer & IT technicians in more and less networked practices 174
Figure 12.1: The influences on use of the Internet to manage information 223
Figure 12.2: The influence of the practice environment (the headings) on Internet usage for project purpose variables 224
Figure 12.3: Negative feedback loop. How several barriers to Internet use found in the research could combine if found in one practice to reduce future use 227
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Architectural-product-management 11
Table 2.2 Architectural-process-management 11
Table 3.1 The theoretical pattern of Internet use by architectural practices 50
Table 4.1: Percentage of specialist staff who have e-mail addresses and access to the Internet 59
Table 4.2: Number of messages that sent to each discussion topic on Build Talk forum site 66
Table 4.3: Comparison of the use of mailing lists 67
Table 4.4: Summary of the interviews’ findings with senior partners and an associate 70
Table 4.5: Reviewed use of the Internet by architectural practices in the UK 76
Table 5.1: The research method types, characteristics and prospective outcomes 82
Table 6.1 Observed approach for Internet use by architectural practices that participated in the pilot study 108
Table 7.1: The stratified random sampling that was used to extract private practices sample 111
Table 7.2: The number of valid and invalid responses from local authority and private practices 119
Table 8.1: The Internet information services that are used by the architectural practices 127
Table 8.2: The frequency of using external information services and other services in local authority and private practices 128
Table 8.3: The use of Internet information services by staff in Private & Local Authority practices 129
Table 8.3.1: The use of external information services and other services by each specialist section in private and Local Authority practices 129
Table 8.4: Type of Internet sites that visited by staff at the observed practice 130
Table 8.5: The Internet communication services that are used by the architectural practices 131
Table 8.6: The frequency of using Internet services in local authority and private practices 132
Table 8.7: Types of file formats that are exchanged by private and Local Authority practices 133
Table 8.8: The use of Internet communication services by staff in Private & Local Authority practices 134
Table 8.8.1: The use of external communication services by each specialist section in private and Local Authority practices 135
Table 8.8.2: The use of asynchronous and synchronous services by each specialist section in private and Local Authority practices 136
Table 8.9 Phases of the use of the web site by private practices who has web sites 137
Table 9.1: Summary of tests No. 1, 2 & 3 results 150
Table 9.1.1: Breakdown of the test 1; the correlation between IT Staff Knowledge as evaluated by respondents and other variables 151
Table 9.2: Summary of the tests No. 4 results 155
Table 9.3: Summary of the tests No. 5 & 6 results 156
Table 9.4: Summary of the tests No. 7, 8& 9 results 157
Table 9.5: Summary of the tests No. 10 &11,12 results 159
Table 9.6: Summary of the tests No. 13&14 results 161
Table 9.7: Ease of use of the Internet services as seen by the interviewees (raw results) 162
Table 9.8: Summary of the tests No. 15, 16 results 162
Table 9.9: Summary of the tests No. 17, 18 & 19 results 165
Table 9.10: Summary of the tests No. 19 & 20 results 166
Table 9.11: Test No. 21 results 168
Table 9.12: Test No. 22 results 168
Table 9.13: Summary of test No. 23 results 170
Table 9.14: Summary of the tests No. 24 & 25 results 171
Table 9.15: Summary of the tests No. 26, 27 results 173
Table 9.16: Summary of the test No. 28 results 175
Table 9.16.1: Breakdown of test no. 25; cross tabulation between type of network in the practice at present variable and the influence of the Internet on design information quality & quantity variable 176
Table 9.17: Summary of the tests No. 29, 30 & 31 results 176
Table 9.18: Summary of the tests No. 32 & 33 results 178
Table 9.19: Summary of the tests No. 34, 35 & 36 results 180
Table 9.19.1: Breakdown of test 34, 35; cross tabulation between the frequency of use of a number of Internet services with other variables 182
Table 9.20: Summary of the tests No. 37, 38 & 39 results 183
Table 9.21: Summary of the tests No. 40 results 185
Table 9.22: The influence of the practice environment (the headings) on Internet usage variables 191
Table 9.23: The level of support that the Internet could provide to the practice at present and in the near future as seen by the interviewees 196
Table 10.1: A comparison between the results of this present survey with other surveys’ results 199
Table 10.2: Comparison between the trends of using Internet communication services in private and Local Authority practices 200
Table 10.3: Comparison between the trends of using Internet information services in private and Local Authority practices 201
Table 10.4: Comparison between trends of the exchange of information file format types with people outside the practice in private and Local Authority practices 202
Table 10.5: the frequency of Internet services usage in architectural practices 203
Table 10.6: Comparison between the trends of using security arrangements in private and Local Authority practices 204
Table 10.7: Comparison between the trends of access to the Internet policy adopted in private and Local Authority practices 205
Table 10.8: Comparison between problems experienced by private and Local Authority practices throughout the period of Internet use 205
Table 11.1: Reasons for conducting the follow-up survey 208
Table 11.2: the significant relationships between the options: usefulness of the Internet and the required cost saving for each potential Internet service 212
Table 11.3: the significant relationships between the options: usefulness of the Internet and the required cost saving for each potential Internet service 213
Table 11.4: the significant relationships between the options: project value and project distance for each potential Internet service 214
Table 11.5 Potential uses of the Internet as evaluated by the architectural practices 217