

Pacific Rim Real Estate Society (PRRES)

Conference 2005

Melbourne, 23-27 January, 2005

OWNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY ASSETS: MANAGING CHANGE PROCESSES IN STRATEGIC LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORPORATE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Replacing and upgrading community assets raises issues of perceptions of 'ownership' of facilities. Strategic local government Corporate Property management aims to meet organisational objectives, not necessarily those of vested sectional interests. Being corporate suggests the development of multi-purpose facilities to replace outdated existing single purpose facilities. Such proposals challenge 'ownership' perceptions based on the old facilities, and create opportunities to shape different senses of 'ownership' for the new facility.

This paper discusses the issues of 'ownership' within the context of a new multi-purpose Library-Community Centre. Three forms of 'bad' ownership are identified. 'Good' ownership also has three aspects that are desirable for the organisation, tenant groups and the wider community

Processes used in managing these changes in 'ownership' are elaborated. As the project is not due for occupation until mid-2005, this research investigates only the project's pre-design and design phase processes. 'Ownership in-use' of this community asset must be future research.

Keywords

Change management, corporate real estate, local government, perceptions, facilities.

Acknowledgments

The research is supported by an Australian Research Council Australian Postgraduate Award (Industry) (APA (I)) with the City of Glen Eira in Melbourne as the industry partner.

Introduction

The Corporate Real Estate (CRE) literature has argued for the adoption of strategic corporate property management (Roulac 2001, Roulac 1986) and the alignment of operational property strategies with organisational strategies (Nourse & Roulac 1993, Joroff et al. 1993, Roulac 2001).

The management of such corporate operational property (Corporate Real Estate (CRE)) encompasses a large range of potential activities (Varcoe 2000), one of which is managing the provision of new facilities. In many instances this provision involves replacing obsolete facilities¹. Where existing use (service delivery) transfers to the new facility this may raise issues of *ownership* for users involved in the transfer. This is especially so when dealing with ‘political’ operating contexts, such as for local government Corporate Real Estate.

One of the greatest hurdles to overcome ... has been the “ownership” of the spaces by the groups to which they are allocated (Frederico 2002).

This paper’s authors have previously argued that there is a human dimension to strategic local government (Heywood et al. 2002). Small (2003) has similarly argued that Western conceptualisations of property be expanded to include anthropological and spiritual human dimensions.

This paper provides another perspective on property’s human dimensions engaging with psychological dimensions in strategic operational property management in Australian local government. Consideration of this dimension is rare in

¹ Facilities may be considered a conflation of building and service delivery (uses) (as noted by Brackertz & Kenley (2002) with a further addition of site and context – location, physical, political, and the like. Obsolescence may be triggered by changes in any of the four elements.

CRE management, (Inhalhan & Finch 2004a & b) being rare examples.

Aim

This paper aims to identify the nuances in the psychological dimensions of *ownership* in local government CRE management.

In the process of nuance identification a project delivery process is illustrated that managed *ownership* to create a new *ownership* sense in a new multi-purpose facility.

Method

The paper is an output from a naturalistic enquiry (Patton 1990) into aspects of strategic operational property management. Green (1996) notes the overlooking and importance of naturalistic enquiry to research in the management of the built environment (in Green’s case – construction management, but equally applicable here). Within this enquiry a psychological based orientation sub-enquiry (Patton 1990) was adopted as an explanatory mechanism to account for the heat often seen to flow from operational property decisions. No heat in this case, begs the question, ‘Why not?’

Case study is the principle research method as this is most suitable for naturalistic and context embedded research (Churchman & Ginosar 1999).

This paper draws on interactions with the research industry partner over several years; participant observation in consultation meetings; time as a municipal resident; and interviews with Council service delivery and project management staff (including the external design team).

The resulting textual data was analysed with thematic coding methods (Miles & Huberman 1994). This paper draws on data thematically coded for *Ownership*.

An *Affective Lexicon* from Clore, Ortony & Foss (references below) was used as the

basis of coding the affective content of the language data. The lexical structure is based on the three psychological functions – affect, cognition and behaviour. Each of these may have ‘frames-of-mind’ (longer-term dispositions), ‘states’ (brief, temporally bounded conditions), and ‘state-like’ conditions (similar to but not explicitly states). Hybrid conditions, such as ‘affective-cognitive conditions, are also included (Clare & Ortony 1988, Clare et al. 1987, Ortony et al. 1987).

Language evidence is taken as a proxy of emotion in the absence of visual or neurological detection of emotion. Some words in the *Lexicon* have affective valence, but actually refer to a non-affective function, for example *cognition*. These affectively nuanced non-affective words are noted as being (*affective*) followed by the pertinent psychological function. Additional categories for ‘non-affective evaluations’, ‘other cognitive’, and ‘other behaviour’ have been added as they are absent from, but consistent with the lexical structure. Affective words are notated following the data quotations used below as illustrations of the psychological content of the quotations.

Case description

The case is a new multi-purpose Library-Community Centre from an inner to middle suburban Melbourne municipality, and is a current construction project. The project is a Level 1 operational property project (Kaya et al. 2004) as it addresses five Council strategic aims:

1. An Urban Villages strategy that supports local strip shopping centres and their urban renewal thereby supporting the development of a local community (City of Glen Eira 1999);
2. Local business development. This particular strip-shopping centre is very close to Chadstone Shopping Centre – one of Melbourne’s major high profile
3. Library Service delivery renewal from the replacement of an inadequate existing library facility (Library Consultancy Services Pty Ltd 1999);
4. Community development through renewal of several community support assets; and
5. A Corporate Real Estate (CRE) strategy that matches the property portfolio better with organisational strategic aims.

Notable events in the project delivery process to date include a Strategic Needs Analysis and *Performance Brief* (Smith 2002), and a series of extensive consultations during pre-design and design stages with Council stakeholders and community groups that added substance to the *Brief*, and provided feedback at stages during design. This paper reports on activities up to the completion of the design phase. The project is under construction and due for completion in mid-2005.

Conceptualisations of ownership in the data

The *ownership*-ness noted earlier does not equate to legal title, as this rests with either the Council as a corporate entity or the Crown with the Council being vested with management authority. The term does not even refer to the vesting of some level of control with occupants through tenancy or lease agreements. Frequently, and historically, Council tenant groups (semi-) exclusively occupied single purpose facilities specifically built for them (Frederico 2002), with little more than an unwritten agreement, or an exchange of

² This shopping mall was Melbourne’s first such mall constructed in the 1960s and expanded many times since to be one of the largest shopping malls in metropolitan Melbourne.

correspondence in some distant past, between the Council (as landlord) and the tenant community group.

This sense of exclusivity may be bolstered by Facility Management tasks undertaken by tenant groups. An example of this was a tenant group that provided the toilet paper supplies for their building. This prompted their perceived need for a large storage room in the new facility to accommodate the ‘truckload’ of toilet paper they had acquired at some point to provide for their needs. This need vanished when assured that the Council would be responsible for this service in the new facility.

Tenant group may further add to their sense of *ownership* through minor adjustments personalising the facility for their needs.

With the (one of the elderly citizens groups), for instance, they had their barbeque. And, it was very important to them, that ... one of them, or a couple of them were very proud that they had this barbeque up and running. They’d actually installed it.

(Project consultant interview)

‘important’ – (*affective*) *objective description*

‘proud’ – *affective state*

From a strategic CRE management perspective community tenant groups are not the only miscreants. Without a formal CRE management unit vested with corporate responsibility for facility assets these assets are, most usually, managed by areas responsible for carrying out Council’s functions.

The traditional picture in most Councils is that nobody owns the land, owns the buildings. That Recreation fiddle round with sporting ovals and pavilions. And, Aged Care fiddle around with senior citizens’ centre. And, a Librarian pretends to run libraries. And, basically, they’re not good at it (managing facilities).’

(Council manager interview)

‘fiddle round’ – used pejoratively acquiring an *affective* sense in doing so

‘not good’ – (*affective*) *subjective evaluation*

It is apparent that *ownership* has many senses – some good, some not.

Ownership of existing facilities

Before going on to examine *ownership* senses in relation to the new multi-purpose facility, application of the construct with reference to existing facilities needs to be further examined.

From the data presented previously it can be seen that ‘no-one’ owns them, and, confusingly, functional areas ‘own’ them too; often beholden to their tenant groups.

You have the tenant groups that ... consistently the most politically effective groups in the municipality are the sports clubs. ‘Cause they’ve been there for a long time. And, they’re utterly dependent on control of the ground. So, they are very adept, very effective at, basically, extorting money for ground improvements, and most of them are on a seasonal allocation, but basically, implying that it’s their ground.

(Council manager interview)

‘dependent’ – (*affective*) *objective description* amplified with ‘utterly’

Even when not so forcefully put, control and rights of access was an issue.

With all the groups to whom we spoke ... there was a real ownership issue there, and I think it’s reflecting community perception that, ‘Well, that’s our space. And, we’re the group that belongs in there. And, we should be able to come-and-go as we choose.’

(Project consultant interview)

There are communal expressions of *ownership*.

In our situation you’ve ... you’ve got the general public that sees the land as communally owned. And, here the Council just think that you own it.

(Council manager interview)

And, *ownership* (as legal title) is in perpetuity.

So, for example, if Council owns a ‘bit of dirt’. The starting point is that Council should always own that bit of dirt. And, this Council owned a whole lot of, for example, residential houses which were bought once upon a time on the off-chance that one day Council might do something with them.

(Council manager interview)

For strategic CRE management (CREM) there are three main points of ‘bad’³ *ownership* in these conceptualisations of *ownership*:

- Sectional groups having exclusive control;
- Perpetual, unquestioned holding of legal title; and
- No accountability for control as a consequence of the above two views interacting. This leads to senses of ‘no-one’ *ownership*.

New facilities *ownership*

For strategic CREM, a desired outcome from a process changing facilities is that the new facility is ‘loved’. This love is evidenced through:

... the more people you get using it, the more of that ownership and particularly that protection of the asset comes. And, ... they start to take pride in it. It’s not that pavilion down the road, it becomes our pavilion, or it becomes our library.

(Council manager interview)

‘love’ – *affective state*

‘pride’ – *affective state*

‘our’ – community as opposed to communal or sectional interests

Such a form of *ownership* is psychological in sense rather than having control, or legal title senses.

A first strategic CREM step was to vest *ownership* responsibility (for decisions about legal title) with a CREM unit (practical *ownership*). The unit acts as an organisational ‘landlord’ with all occupants considered as tenants.

We’ve been a wee bit radical in trying to concentrate all that in tenements, in saying to the Librarian, ‘You’re just a client. You’re a tenant. It’s not your building. What happens in the building will be determined by our Corporate Assets area, because they’re experts at it.’

(Council manager interview)

³ Itself an (*affective*) *subjective evaluation*.

But if strategic organisational ends are to be achieved from new facilities *ownership* needs to be shared.

(Corporate Assets’) approach is that the facility has to involve some sort of partnership. It’s no good him going off and developing a library, or a community centre, or any other kind of thing. And, then coming along to somebody like me and saying, ‘Well, here’s the keys. Off you go. There it is. It’s perfect.’

(Council manager interview)

Consequently, a degree of stakeholder *ownership* is vested in the built result.

We have had a greater degree of involvement, than I often see, or that I have seen sometimes elsewhere. But, then again, I think we also, feel a greater degree of responsibility, ‘cause, we won’t have a ‘they’⁴.

(Council manager interview)

Such statements are evidence of ‘buy-in’ by Council functional areas. ‘Buy-in’ to a project is a very desirable achievement as it contains senses of ‘commitment’ and identifies psychological connection with the new facility. While not specifically noted in Clore, Ortony & Foss’s lexicon ‘commitment’ is an *affectively* nuanced word contains similarities to *cognitive-behavioural frame of mind* words such as ‘cautious’, ‘competitive’, and ‘purposeful’. It is also acts as an antonym to another *cognitive-behavioural frame of mind* word – ‘hesitant’.

‘Buy-in’ by community tenant groups often hinged on inclusion of items that aided valued activities in their present premises.

So, when they realised that they wouldn’t have to forgo some of those iconic little pleasures, or symbols, that they had, I think that they started to fall-in behind the project.

(Project consultant)

⁴ ‘They’ is used with reference to others deemed responsible for project outcomes.

I know we’ve been to places where they’ve had other developments done, and sometimes you hear people talking about, ‘They wanted ... , Oh, they wanted it.’ Who are ‘they’?

(Council manager interview)

These loved icons were (for the elderly citizens):

- The stage (for guest performers);
- The pool table;
- The souvlaki barbeque; and
- Smoking.

In the context of the overall project, inclusion of these items proved to be minor issues to accommodate.

And, again, I think, the issue of space, and the issue of a combination of some things that they're willing to share, and some things that they actually wanted to lock up, being their own. So, it was, I guess, it was in the detail rather than in the basic bulk of the building that tensions were.

(Project consultant interview)

To avoid these icons becoming triggers for *affective* outpouring, or a source of resentment (an *affective state*) that produced resistance to the change managers of project delivery adopted processes that accommodated human dimensions. These processes are discussed further below.

For a strategic CRE perspective there are three points of 'good' *ownership* that may be extracted from the data. These points all have psychological dimensions.

Firstly, there is *commitment* to the project by a range of Council and community parties in partnership with the project leadership of CRE management. 'Buy-in' provides an affective-connection through commitment (an affectively nuanced *cognitive-behavioural frame of mind* – as previously noted)

Belonging, while not owning, is a desired outcome. Belonging, meaning being 'rightly placed', and 'fit for a specified environment' (Pocket Oxford Dictionary) is a more diffuse form of psychological connection than assumptions of proprietorial rights of control. This was managed by including community groups' needs, while not promising exclusivity.

... we've, certainly, been at great pains to make sure that they are purpose-built to suit the functions of the elderly cits. (citizens), and the

other groups that have been identified. But still flexible, that when they're not there, and you put away all their bits and pieces, and whatever, they're still flexible spaces for the community. (Project consultant interview)

The converse of ownership. We want them enthusiastic and participating, but not excessively. Storage of their stuff is part of this mobility of their things. 'You can have anything you like, so long as you can pack it!' (Project consultant interview)

enthusiastic – *affective-cognitive state*

Belonging contains a *subjective affective* sense, even though not included in the *Affective Lexicon*. For occupants to belong to the new facility it needed to be demonstrated that it will meet *their* functional needs and provide an affective attachment through inclusion of the 'icons'.

Acceptance (an (affective) *cognitive state*) by the community was considered important for the new facility.

If you want to put a pavilion in the middle of a passive area of recreation just for a sporting club, you don't have much of a chance. But, if you put it in with added attractions for the local community ... and make it a bit more amenable to people, well you might at least (get) support for it

(Council manager interview)

I guess, the over-riding important outcome, is that people do come, and people do use it. All of my forecasting of usage figures and that comes true. That's the main thing. People do embrace it in the way that, I believe they will, and the other patterns of usage has shown that they will.

(Council manager interview)

attractive – (affective) *subjective evaluation*

embrace – (affective) *behaviour*

Acceptance is an even more diffuse sense operating more at the level of the municipal population. For local government service deliverers 'acceptance' is evidenced by use.

Process and practices in managing affect

As noted in the *Case description*, above, notable project management events in this case include a Strategic Needs Analysis

(SNA) contributing to a *Performance Brief*, and extensive consultations during pre-design and design phases. The SNA provided a mechanism for aligning the aspirations of the various Council functional areas and achieving their ‘buy-in’.

What that did was then enable the Council to have a united view on what it wanted to present to the community, as of what it wanted to get out of the building.
(Council manager interview)

Council officer awareness of the importance of *ownership* issues is found in the *Performance Brief's* third strategic option – Community satisfaction strategy – where *integration, belonging, and community ownership* feature.

That the process was highly consultative was, in part, a consequence of the *Performance Brief's* need to gather additional data for design, and also because of decisions about project processes engendering partnerships formed around the facility, as noted above.

And, there's been a lot of consultation to make sure that the staff, at all levels, feel comfortable with all of that. And, again, embrace, embrace the project. And support it. Be enthusiastic about it.
(Project consultant interview)

‘feel comfortable (psychological)’ – *affective state*

‘support it’ – perhaps *cognitive-behavioural frame-of-mind*

‘embrace’ – (*affective*) *behaviour*

‘enthusiastic’ – *affective-cognitive state*

Consultation was also used to inform and educate community groups about changes in *ownership*.

We really tried to communicate, ‘It’s going to be different. You will be in a multi-purpose facility and with multiple users. And, you will no longer have ownership of that space. And, I think that was, that was a bit of an issue to try and communicate to people. I don’t know whether or not they fully appreciate that ...
(Project consultant interview)

‘appreciate’ – (*affective*) *cognitive state*

Overall, consultation was assessed as providing forms of *ownership* (desirable forms are implied) assuring stakeholders – community groups particularly – of their belonging.

(Consultation) – Well, it’s brought ownership. (by the community groups & Council officers)
(Council manager interview)

I guess the main thing is confidence that nobody’s going to be taken advantage of. That, people are going to have access to the facilities that they want, but it’s been designed with them in mind.
(Council manager interview)

‘confidence’ – (*affective*) *cognitive state*

Discussion

Ownership, seen as important by those Council officers managing this project, contains paradoxes for them. When tenant groups exercise a sense of *ownership* (as in control) it may be a *bad*⁵ thing. However, a diffuse community *ownership* (care or belonging without controlling) is desirable and *ownership* of the project (‘buy-in’) by diverse stakeholder groups within the Council functional areas is most definitely desirable.

This illustrates how multi-faceted *ownership* is as a construct in local government CRE management. In very few instances is there reference to the concept of legal title. Instead, the references are to other, usually, psychological connections with the facility – be that existing or proposed.

In local government CRE management space may be specifically provided as a free, or below economic cost, public good or service for individual groups. In any circumstance there is

The psychological assumption of proprietary rights is readily assumed where proprietary ownership is ambiguous and a specific ... group inhabits a ... (*space*) (Fried 2000, 193).

⁵ An *affective subjective evaluation*.

This is particularly so in conditions frequently found in local government CRE management where space is provided with particular tenant groups in mind. Making an assumption of *ownership* is even easier.

Furthermore, the ambiguity of psychological *ownership* is well illustrated by local government operational property, at any one time, simultaneously considered as owned by:

- No-one;
- A Council functional area;
- The Council (itself ambiguously council officers or Councillors as political representatives); and
- Communally.

Ownership ambiguity is accentuated by tenant community groups carrying out some (minor) management task of their own accord; an action understandable in the perceived absence of a responsive facility management function in the Council 'landlord'. The provision of toilet paper in the example cited is a survival response in the absence of anyone else being responsible for and effective in providing this hygienic necessity.

Psychological *ownership* is an expression of a primordial affective attachment sentiment to a local environment that is, at either ends of a spectrum – positive serving valuable social ends, or pathological providing the basis for ethnic strife over territory or the failure to leave a loved environment in the face of personally destructive disaster (Fried 2000). That attachment occurs is understandable in light of preference being affectively caused merely through exposure (Zajonc 2000).

Consequences for managers of change in local government CRE

Affective dimensions are evident in much of the data above in relation to expressions about existing and new facilities. Given that psychological *ownership* is about affective ties, management of change in

places with such ties (like local government operational property) becomes management of changes in affect.

Questions for managers in facility change processes then are: How to manage the assumption of proprietorial rights by groups inhabiting Council facilities? How to manage the presence of affective psychological processes in those proprietorial rights? And, how to create affective connections to the new facility?

Firstly, there is recognition that affective psychological expressions (as perceptions) exist, and are legitimate expressions by the humans met in CRE management. A more usual default position by managers of public assets is that these reactions are irrationally founded on ignorance and emotionally selfish attitudes, and are a threat to their technically rational plans (Luton 1997,321).

Adopting strategic CREM de-ambiguous legal *ownership* serving a communicative function about legal title and was a re-assertion of Council's right to manage that property to meet organisational ends (construable as 'practical *ownership*' by the CRE unit).

Adopting a partnership model of CRE service to meet mutually agreed organisational ends has been instrumental in this case achieving a shift of affective attachment from the old to the new facilities⁶.

We've got people actually ringing up who live opposite what is going to be a \$10million building. And, it's going to have a huge impact on their local environment, and their ringing up saying 'Well, why haven't you started?' (Council manager interview)

Extending partnership models from internal (organisation) to external

⁶ It should be noted that the old library is inadequate on every objective and subjective assessment of its fitness for purpose so expectations are coming off a particularly low base.

(community) groups through extensive consultation has implemented a project delivery model that has allowed space for as many parties that wanted to, to 'buy-in' and express what was 'important' to them. Anything assessed as 'important' will have an affective component, evidenced by the word's inclusion in the *Affective Lexicon* as an *objective description*.

The project team in this case were very good at noting what was 'important' and dealing with them in subsequent consultations; characteristically referring to a group's 'important' items when further consulting with them.

'Important' things were not always recorded but were mentally noted as they were seen in the feed-back in later consultations. An example of this was the souvlaki barbeque that was mentioned by every project team member interviewed. Most usually it was found to be quite easy to include these important items as they did not impact greatly on the overall facility. But, it made people happy⁷.

... its including people and suddenly you know when you get people on-side if they perceive that what they are getting is what they want, and what they have asked for. Or at least they've had input. And, even if their requests have been denied they understood that they'd been heard. They're much more willing to accept the end product, then you've got a lot less criticism of it.

(Council manager interview)

The consultations provided confidence for Council and community stakeholders that the process would deliver amenable outcomes and this was important in facilitating the transfer of attachment to the new facility by all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Strategic corporate operational property (CRE) aims to meet strategic organisational objectives with its property provision. In local government there are

⁷ An *affective state*.

many strategic objectives. These include service delivery, community development, quality of life and political objectives. Within this operating context, considerations of property assets' *ownership* are far from simple including many dimensions other than those of legal title.

An important *ownership* dimension in managing change from existing facilities to new ones, are psychological perceptions of *ownership*. With such perceptions having a affective basis, as shown in this paper, meeting local government organisational strategic ends may be about avoiding strong affectively based protest or, more positively, be about creating affective connections with the new facility through reshaped psychological *ownership* away from the 'bad' forms towards the 'good' forms discussed in this paper.

Highly responsive, consultative processes have been instrumental in managing affect in this facility change process and in achieving the transfer of affect to the proposed new facility. in the process the 'heat' frequently seen in facility change proposals have been avoided.

Future research

This paper reports on *ownership* in facility change processes up to the point of construction. Verification of the success in managing *ownership* to date continuing to *ownership-in-use* must await completion of construction in mid-2005.

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