

The impact of human capital on museum performance

Abstract

Notwithstanding the increasing attention on museum performance, its antecedents are still unclear, while their investigation appears as one of the most compelling issues to analyze (Paulus, 2003; Zan, 2000).

In recent years, the reform of Italian public sector has determined pressures for increasing financial and managerial autonomy in public organizations, including museums (State Law 112/98). In this renewed context (Moretti, 1999), human capital (HC) and HR configuration (Hitt et al., 2001; Lepak and Snell, 1999) may be considered a key factor for understanding how museums gain competitive advantage and why they vary in performance.

This article uses the lens of the resource-based perspective (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1994) and the related stream of research in strategic human resource management (SHRM) (Becker and Huselid, 2006) to examine the relationship between HC, HR configuration and museum performance. Based on this research, we argue that HC embodied in the museums critical roles (the director, the curator and the responsible for educational services) influence positively museum performance and that this performance effect of HC is even stronger, when museums also use long-term relationships to manage them.

This article contributes to the development of research about the performance effect of human capital and its fit with other dimensions of HR configuration. Moreover, this research has implications for museum management since it will highlight the role of museums' human resource attributes in contributing to the museum performance. Our results will also be valuable for cultural policy decision-makers who have to decide whether to increase investments in HC and HR management or not.