



Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community



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CALL FOR ENTRIES: AIA RFP Research Grant Proposals Due April 16

The AIA Board Knowledge Committee is seeking proposals for research projects to be completed in a seven-month period, beginning in May 2008.

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Embracing the "Dilbert" School of Leadership

By Dennis M. King, FAIA, Chairman and CEO, Harley Ellis Devereaux

I regularly think about our business. Not simply because it's my job to do so, but because I'm intrigued by the frenetic pace of change in society and how it impacts what we do on a daily basis. After all, shouldn't every organization that is trying to prosper be focused on finding new ways to achieve a competitive advantage? Common business knowledge suggests that if you're not trying to get ahead, you're really falling behind. However, the engine that propels too many company's unending search for the answer to success is not fear of failure. Rather it seems that it is their pension for the Holy Grail of corporate life, the big score!

The shelf life of the latest solid business concept seems to be about six months. Surrounded by great fanfare and a "drop what you were doing and try this" attitude, management concepts burst onto the scene, grab your undivided attention, and have vanished when you next look around. It even seems that our favorite comic strip character, "Dilbert," has managed to make every thoughtful improvement initiative seem petty and ill conceived if not downright laughable.

So, what's an architect to do?

I'm certainly not suggesting that new ideas are a waste of time. In fact, creative change is the only way to leapfrog your competition. So, what is the road least traveled? Well, it seems that we've made some of our most dramatic improvements once we developed a clear strategic vision and a spirited organization to embrace it. The real solution to success, I believe, is a well-defined, properly communicated, and sustained focus on aligning and empowering the human resources of our organization – creating an invigorating and nurturing corporate culture.

There are significant rewards that result from an organization that is working in harmony. First and foremost are high levels of design quality and service provided to our clients. That leads to client loyalty and an increased share of the market for our firm. Most importantly, a clear corporate culture creates higher morale, less conflict, more innovation and less bureaucracy. The challenge is to inspire the supportive and voluntary efforts of our people, and to constantly assure ourselves that such a "leap of faith" will have positive and sustainable benefits for the organization. The pursuit of excellence is a journey, rather than a destination. This we have found to be an absolute truth.

100 Years and Counting

Although our firm was founded in 1908, Harley Ellis Devereaux began this focused quality "journey without end" in 1991. We established, and achieved, an initial ten-year goal milestone for significant, valuable and visible change. Reinforced by quality industry "gurus" such as Deming, Juran, Crosby and Scholtes, superfluous processes were eliminated, and the corporate structure was flattened and turned "upside-down." Since our people are on the front line with our clients, extensive training and skills programs for all staff were launched and have been maintained. The firm's Principals articulated the vision, values and mission of the firm. Along the way, we achieved registration to the international ISO 9001 quality system.

Through the regular improvement of all systems and processes, our firm continues to be an industry leader in the application of modern quality management theory to professional services for the built-environment. I'm often surprised, and usually pleased, when I look back across the miles of paper and emotions we have experienced to arrive at where we are today. And where are we? We are in the middle of an increasingly harried pace of business. With an ever-shortening view of the future brought on by the accelerating pace of integrated practice, our journey has been nothing if not the teacher, and real value can be drawn from a review of the trip.

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Leadership Lessons

The best leaders know where all great companies start. It's with your people. Today's work force, including the "Baby-Boomers," the "Generation-X'ers," the "Generation-D'ers," and the emerging "Millennials" are, through sheer force of numbers, requiring the corporate world to quickly move in new directions. The challenge is to glean the available benefits for the organization from this new order. To succeed, leadership has to find its role in the society it serves. Management style is, of course, a personal thing. But to succeed, you must lead in a manner that ensures that today's workforce feels empowered, productive, and fulfilled. Unfortunately, there is no single formula to help people feel good about themselves. While senior management may more easily appreciate the need for such transitions, a more serious challenge usually exists among middle management. To embrace both the necessity and the value of this transition, people with middle management responsibility often need to move past a sense of loss arising out of change. This process is similar to the traditional stages of grieving.

So our greatest achievement has been sticking with the commitment to make change and live with it as a permanent life style. While the "return on investment" was not always easily quantifiable in the short term, real accomplishment was achieved by shrugging off the failures and continuing to move toward that point on the horizon where the lines converge.





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ISO 9001 at Kieran Timberlake LLP

by Christopher MacNeal, AIA

KieranTimberlake Associates is a mid-sized architectural firm recognized for the quality and originality of its design, and for the research which informs its work. In 2003 we used an AIA Latrobe Fellowship grant to study forward-looking design and fabrication processes employed by the automotive, aircraft and shipbuilding industries, with a focus on lessons for the building construction industry. One of the things which struck us about the manufacture of cars, planes and ships was the use of ISO standards to provide a consistent approach to quality assurance in design and fabrication processes throughout the complex supply chains of these industries.

We know from direct experience the difficulty of quality control in the multi-party enterprise of building design and construction. For many years, the approach to quality control in our office was informal but effective, relying upon close involvement in all aspects of projects by partners and senior staff. However, as our firm grew and the size and complexity of our projects increased, the risks posed by inconsistent practices and lack of built-in checks multiplied, requiring us to seek a more structured approach to quality management of our working processes. Drawing on our investigation of quality assurance in the Latrobe research, three years ago we decided to pursue ISO 9001:2000 certification as a way of managing quality within our firm.

ISO is an international federation of national standards organizations which aligns the structure and requirements of many constituent national standards. One of the most widely used standards, ISO 9001, establishes requirements for quality management and assurance systems within an organization. In this context, 'quality' is defined simply as efficiently meeting client and regulatory requirements. ISO 9001:2000 (the current version) consists of an outline of requirements for the scope and operations of an effective quality management system, with sections which address management responsibility, resource stewardship, product/service planning and realization, performance measurement, analysis and improvement. Though originally developed for manufacturing industries, ISO 9001 is a generic management system standard in that it can be applied to any organization which produces products or services. The focus on quality as the outcome of process meshes well with the operations of creative service professions like architectural design and engineering, among which ISO 9001 is beginning to make significant inroads.

ISO 9001 is based upon a 'process approach' to implementing a quality management system. Attaining and maintaining certification requires that an organization: 1) define the processes by which it conducts work in a manner which facilitates analysis and improvement; 2) structure these processes so they build in quality assurance practices which are measurable and recordable; 3) deliberately monitor the way it works to ensure that the defined processes are followed and incorporate the quality measures identified as necessary and important to its practice; and 4) adjust the processes as opportunities for improvement or correction are discovered. This "Plan, Do, Monitor, Learn" cycle, integral to the concept of continual improvement, operates at multiple levels within ISO 9001. We felt at home with the Plan and Do steps of this cycle; our challenge was to ingrain Monitor and Learn into our firm in a way which wouldn't stifle the creativity of our design process, the open culture of our workplace or the originality of our designs.

The first step we took toward ISO certification was documenting a management system for our practice—a comprehensive description of the way that we work. With the assistance of John Broomfield, a systems consultant, we defined normative processes for the key work interactions within the firm, a total of 41 processes covering project management, design resources, administration, business operations, IT, HR and quality assurance. These descriptions are developed as flow charts--generalized road maps conveying

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the key roles, steps, decisions, checks and records involved in managing the firm and the design projects we undertake. We defined these processes as they usually occurred rather than as we thought they should work, recognizing that they may be imperfect, but can be examined and improved upon. The ISO 9000 standard intruded into one corner of this activity, introducing quality assurance processes to address internal auditing, corrective and preventive actions, and management of our QA/QC system.

We also assembled the forms, formats and instructions developed for managing and standardizing our work, and established a control system to identify these documents, indicate whether they are current, and link them to our process descriptions where relevant. We named the resulting creature KTMS, which could stand for KieranTimberlake Management System, but also served as admonition to Keep Things Mighty Simple.

With KTMS in place, we drafted a quality policy for the firm, with measurable goals and specific priorities. Our quality policy requires that we monitor our work and make improvements to the way we work based upon what we learn—activity governed by quality assurance processes defined in KTMS. During the following nine months we introduced KTMS and our quality policy to the office staff, conducted a cycle of internal audits of our working practices, identified many issues requiring attention, and initiated corrective actions which involved the entire office.

Verifying an ISO compliant quality management system involves external auditing and certification by an accrediting agency. We choose Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance (LRQA) to review our system and audit the firm for compliance with ISO 9001. The audit sequence consisted of a preliminary document review, an in-depth accreditation audit, and annual surveillance visits during the three year period of the certification. Our relationship with LRQA is valuable, providing unbiased feedback on our quality practices and producing mutual respect. We attained certification in January 2006, and are coming up on our third surveillance visit this summer.

The cost of this effort has been significant. In addition to a year of preparation, maintaining ISO compliance of KTMS occupies a third of one associate's time for managing ongoing audits and improvement activity, and adds responsibility for record keeping and feedback to project managers. The benefits to the firm are gradual but profound. It has enabled us to correct some long-standing deficiencies and standardize best practices, without becoming too procedural or bureaucratic. It has helped us maintain a balance between analytical rigor and creative intuition.



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CMMI's Approach to Quality Management Including Schedule and Budget Management

by Robert P. Smith, AIA
President, CMMI

CMMI is a mid-sized design firm, focused on the hospitality industry. We believe the control of quality, schedule, and budget is a matter of process, attitude, and experience. From the day a project commences, we collaborate with our client to lead an active decision-making process. Since that process frequently involves tradeoffs among project scope, cost, or time, we prefer to engage the contractor and/or a cost consultant as early as possible. These members of the project team are brought in either under our direction or by direction of the client.

Our project team is always led by a highly experienced project architect, who is primarily responsible for meeting the client's program requirements. Additionally, through the active project involvement of studio principals, each project architect can access very high-level design and construction expertise when the need arises. This high degree of senior coverage strengthens our firm's ability to implement design and value analysis decisions that optimize the relationship among quality, time, and cost.

DESIGN AND DOCUMENT QUALITY MANAGEMENT

CMMI's approach to design and document quality management relies heavily on appropriate team composition, staff continuity, regular coordination reviews and independent expert peer reviews. CMMI employs a project team model for project delivery. Project staff consists of seasoned, experienced professionals, supported by senior studio leadership who offer many years of strong and diverse hospitality design experience.

Key members of the project team remain with the project from start to finish. The experienced hotel planners, architects, and interior designers who establish the project concept are the same people who execute the construction documents and ultimately deliver construction administration services. CMMI's project team model provides strong continuity throughout the design, documentation, and construction process, helping assure that our client's objectives are well understood and implemented as the project's various phases unfold.

To track progress and for general coordination purposes, the project architect leads periodic project meetings involving all key team members. These sessions generally take place monthly, but can occur on an 'as needed' basis if more frequent sessions are required by the project schedule. These meetings provide a regular forum at which all parties can properly discuss challenges, coordinate ongoing activities, and efficiently plan upcoming work. No later than three days after the coordination meeting, CMMI prepares and distributes meeting minutes containing specific action items assigned to individual project team members.

At regular, pre-planned intervals during the project, our project team implements formal, structured internal reviews of coordination and quality. The project architect is responsible for checking and coordinating related civil, structural, MEP work, and other disciplines. During these activities, the team employs structured checklists to assess:

- Compatibility with standard technical practices
- Exiting requirements; code compliance
- Material applications
- Drawing completeness and clarity
- System Coordination
- Public safety

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At key project milestones, the project team also undertakes peer reviews conducted by either a very senior technical professional from within the firm or, as circumstances warrant, an out-of-house "Independent Quality Reviewer." These peer reviewers are never day-to-day members of the project team, thereby achieving a fresh perspective and unbiased review of the project documentation.

Following these reviews, the project architect meets with the peer reviewer and additional team members, as appropriate, to address the review comments. At this time the project architect, in collaboration with the studio principal, determines what changes are required to make the documents ready for issuance and how those changes will be accomplished.

BUDGET MANAGEMENT

Working closely with our client and, in many cases, either the contractor or a cost consultant, we undertake an early evaluation of the project requirements to establish a baseline budget as a practical target for the design team. Costs are managed, and mitigated if necessary, by frequent project team coordination sessions and problem solving activities that have minimal impact on the project schedule.

We use the following approaches to manage the project budget:

- Establish realistic contingencies at project inception
- Identify early the big ticket items to be reflected in initial pricing
- Careful attention to program requirements to maintain planning efficiencies (no scope creep)
- Careful planning to eliminate expensive components, such as the elimination of inefficient and redundant circulation; inefficient building systems for MEP, and other features that do not bring value to the project or generate revenue for the owner

We regularly monitor and update estimates, both monthly and at the end of each phase, as the project moves into the later stages of design and construction documentation.

SCHEDULE MANAGEMENT

After an initial analysis of the client's program and project goals, CMMI develops a decision-making matrix, also known as a differentiation document, to allocate roles and responsibilities among project team members. We identify critical program, budget, schedule, and site considerations, as well as life safety regulations, governing authority regulations, and any other information or constraints provided by the client. CMMI accepts responsibility for defining which tasks are to be performed by which member of the project team and when those tasks are to be completed.

The CMMI project team develops the preliminary project schedule in a collaborative environment with the client, and – if available – the contractor. By working together, project team members establish a true sense of 'ownership' in the project which translates into 'accountability'. As the project unfolds, CMMI monitors design and construction schedules carefully and discusses schedule matters routinely with our clients, taking corrective action when required.



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Body of Knowledge for Design Quality

By Danny Kahler, PE, Bridgefarmer & Associates

The ASQ Design and Construction Division recently initiated an effort to define a Body of Knowledge (BOK) for Design Quality Management. For many years, stakeholders in the construction industry have been modernizing the practice of construction quality, incorporating the modern science learned from manufacturing applications. However, practices in design quality have often remained static, primarily relying on the review of paper plans. When errors are discovered they can be corrected, but often the root causes of the errors in the design process are not corrected, and many errors and omissions go undiscovered until it hits construction.

This situation is not surprising. Most design professionals have little formal training in the design process quality. They have traditionally gained experience going from project to project, picking up ad-hoc skills for specific design problems. There are few programs that teach the design process as a system. The Design and Construction Division hopes to contribute to the improvement of this situation by providing design managers with a basic framework of the fundamentals that influence design quality. While this initiative can't solve existing design process deficiencies on its own, it could provide these design managers with a set of goals to help them establish improved skill training for their professionals.

This proposed Design Quality Management Body of Knowledge (DQMBOK) will focus on the design of the built environment; the Architectural, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) Industry. While design quality is an important part of product delivery, this BOK will focus on the quality of *project* delivery. Projects in the built environment have a unique character based on several factors; large size, long lifecycle, custom designs only used once, construction done by a separate organization, local regulation based on location, and professional licensure of the designer. This BOK will be developed in such a way that is useful to all licensed design professionals; engineers, architects, landscape architects, and interior designers.

Because project design is both a science and an art, adapting the scientific principles of quality management to this area will be difficult. Fitness for purpose in design can have many definitions. While engineering performance might be objectively measured, determining stakeholder satisfaction can be elusive. How do we rate the quality of a bridge with no errors or omissions if it also has architectural treatments that the public doesn't like? There is some material out there to help us, such as the writings of Herbert Simon, who proposed a draft curriculum to teach design as a professional skill.

A body of knowledge may have to be benchmarked from many other creative activities, such as software development, concurrent product development, advertising, and medical research. Even if a final outline for a DQMBOK is slow in coming, the very activity of trying to define it may produce basic guidelines that can be used by professionals to begin improving design quality

The DQMBOK initiative was introduced to the American Society for Quality members at the 2007 ASQ World Conference for Quality and Improvement in Orlando, Florida. The goal of the Design and Construction Division is to have a rough draft of the DQMBOK compiled by the end of 2008. Once a draft has been completed, it will be presented to various ASQ members and AEC sector stakeholders for review and feedback. The eventual goal is to develop this BOK into a new specialty ASQ certification that will compliment the Quality Manager certification in the same way that the specialty Biomedical and HAACP Auditor certifications compliment the Quality Auditor certification.

An effective body of knowledge and certification program in design quality will provide a reference point for both owners purchasing design services and firms providing them. The availability of certification programs tailored for the

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AEC community will provide an important benchmark to help large design and construction programs define their goals for project quality, particularly those with contractual requirements for full time design and construction quality managers.





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Finding and Using a QM Consultant

By Charles Nelson, AIA, LFRAIA

In the examples provided in this issue of the Practice Management Digest, both Harley Ellis Devereaux and Kieran Timberlake used specialist consultants to help them create their quality systems. There is no doubt that using expert help makes it easier for practices to "get it right the first time" – saving both time and money. However, it is also a fact that significant experience in the specific industry is important component in selecting the right consultant. This poses a real problem for US-based design practices. Certified practices are so few that there are, therefore, very few US-based consultants who have any in-depth experience working with architects.

The consultants with heaps of experience in other industries will tell you that this is not a concern; that they can adapt the principles to any business. Be careful about that advice. From my own experience of 15 years of helping more than 200 Australian design firms get achieve certification, I would suggest that industry-specific experience IS very important in developing easy-to-implement quality management (QM) systems. If you can't find that, at least find a consultant who has worked extensively with developing systems for other consulting-based service industries, such as accounting, law, etc.

Where firms develop their own system, the most common result is that the first pass through creates a giant, unwieldy, paper-heavy monster that is just too hard to implement. So the whole thing gets abandoned, and "quality" gets another black eye. Many times I have seen cases where tons of time and money were spent to create a system, which was then thrown out, and a new, far simpler and better (really useful) system was built that actually worked. You want to avoid that double process if possible!

In my book *Managing Quality in Architecture* (Elsevier, 2006), I present some guidelines for the practice that decides to search for a consultant to help them create a quality system. The rest of this article is a reprint of that chapter (2.11).

With every perceived shift in the relationship between a services industry and the public, another new industry of helpful entrepreneurs springs up overnight. Some professions (notably accountancy) see themselves as men and women for all seasons, and add every new fillip to the range of consulting provided. This situation sometimes creates confusion for users of these services. Busy professionals who recognize they need assistance in coping with the relationship shift have to assess widely varying claims about how much, and what kind of, help is appropriate, and what it should cost. There is almost nothing written about finding the right help.

There are a number of questions to be resolved in engaging quality management consultants:

- Is it better to do everything ourselves, rather than rely on consultants?
- If we use consultants, will there be a problem of 'ownership' of the resultant system?
- How important is it that a quality system be unique to our practice?
- If we decide to employ a consultant, how should the brief be structured?
- What should we watch for in interviewing prospective consultants?
- Are there any key points to be included in a contract for consultant services?

There are other related questions that are of concern to some practices, but if you can get satisfactory answers to the above six points, your chances of a good consultant relationship will be greatly improved. Let's take the questions in order.

Q1: Is it better to do it ourselves?

There are two main determinants to whether or not you should engage

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consultant help in designing and/or setting up a QM system:

- Firm size: Small firms rarely can afford the down time of a senior person to become educated about QM, design a system, and structure its implementation; whereas larger practices can.
- Time: The more in a hurry you are to get results, the more important it is get someone on board who knows what he is doing. It usually takes 12 to 24 months to get from start to a fully operational QM system, and can take a lot longer when the people planning it are also starting from point zero.

There are other issues related to this question, pro and con:

Advantages:

- If the consultant is any good, he will bring to the firm the best ideas of dozens or hundreds of other firms, and your practice will be enriched in the process.
- The outsider will always have an objectivity, a perspective, that is extremely difficult for management to gain.

Disadvantages:

- There is an 'ownership' issue (see next question).
- If you make a mistake in picking the consultant, it will cost you a lot of time and money to get back to the point of re-starting.

Q2: Is 'ownership' of the system an issue?

The answer is: it depends. It depends on how fully the consultant appreciates the ownership question and guides the entire process so that the system really belongs to the practice every step of the way.

I have heard it said that if a consultant really does his job well, the clients will believe all the ideas were their own. I believe this, and think it particularly apt in this situation. Unfortunately, I have seen some quality consultants push (in the name of quality management) their own concepts of how firms ought to practice. The result is that they create systems in their own likeness, not that of their client.

There always comes a 'handover' time in a client-management consultant relationship where the client should be taking over from the consultant; transferring the responsibility in-house. The actions and meetings leading up to that point are crucial to the successful transfer of ownership, and demand a certain amount of skill on the part of the consultant.

Q3: Do we need a system unique to our practice?

This question is closely linked to the previous one. I've seen a tremendous range in the desire for unique system design. Certainly this interest isn't a function of firm size; some tiny firms believe everything they do must be unique, as do some very large offices.

Nor does this interest appear to be particularly related to the firm's design ethic, e.g. the 'uniqueness' with which it approaches design problems. It appears that design firms are more similar (at least compared to other professions) than most design professionals think.

We design professionals have a mobile work force. Designers and draftspersons float from office to office and, in most cases, 'slot in' to the new environment very quickly. They know what to do when they get there. Why? Because the way design firms work is so similar, not only across the country, but around the world.

As a QM consultant working with the earlier, more prescriptive versions of ISO 9001, I responded to this differing need by supplying a 'model' system to those with a low index of need for uniqueness, and advising them on how to adapt it to their practice, while helping those with a greater need for uniqueness to develop 'one-off' systems.

What was interesting is that almost always, the system design and development process saw those with a greater 'need' for uniqueness lose some of that 'need' – it rarely stands up to scrutiny; it was just an idea they had.

Similarly, many of those who started out working with a model system (so they could save money) ended up modifying it extensively to suit their practice. In other words, they had a fairly individualized practice, but never saw it that way until they started to compare their way of working to

standardized procedures.

Q4: How should we brief a quality consultant?

Most design consultants have relatively little experience with management consultants. For many practices, their attorney and accountant are the only model, and not one that is all that useful.

Let's say that you have decided to seek some help in improving your quality systems, and you want to write some kind of program or specification of the service, so you can 'compare apples to apples'. A good way to get at the issues here is to look at them from the perspective of your clients. If you are an architect, you know from experience that most clients of architects either don't really understand what architects do, or have significant, erroneous ideas about what to expect from an architect.

You know that you have to educate the client, and that it is wise to do so before entering into a contract. You are in the same situation as your client.

So, get yourself some free advice before you prepare that brief. Talk to several consultants and compare notes, and don't let yourself be talked into a deal before you are ready.

Here are some issues to consider when talking to the pros, and when writing your 'request for proposal':

- Do you want a generalist or a specialist? In this case, a generalist knows a lot about QM but not much about design practice. A specialist knows a lot about design practice and enough about QM. (My bias is showing here.)
- How deeply do you want QM to seep into the bones of your practice? This is a crucial question, discussed in Chapter 2.4 of the book. The answer may determine the generalist/specialist question.
- Do you prefer fixed fees with fixed scopes of work, hourly fees with estimates, or what? Design professionals deal with this question every day. From the other side, the issues are similar.
- How willing are you to let a consultant inside your practice? Do you have a fear about privacy? Do you think you have advantages that you want to keep from competitors?
- This cuts both ways. If you want a consultant to bring you the best ideas of all those other firms she has helped, then you have to be willing to share yours. If you want the confidentiality of a lawyer-client relationship, make that clear. But don't expect to have it both ways.
- How much of the needed resources can you bring to the equation? You will find that some tasks are best done by a consultant, some best done by your practice, and there are a number where it doesn't matter. But it will cost you one way or the other to get them done. If you elect to do them in-house, you must be prepared to allocate budget and time to see that they get done.
- Of course, you can get by without the helper. But it is likely to take longer and cost more, provided that you find a compatible helper. Many firms believe that a quality system should be, philosophically, 'home-grown', without reliance on external resources. The rationale is that the changes are more likely to 'stick', than if outside help was used.

There is a reasonable logic to this approach, but in some cases where I've seen it happen, one strong-willed individual tends to hijack the development process and create a system without adequate team consultation. As a result, others' noses get out of joint, and the project fails. Obviously, selecting your internal champion requires careful attention to personalities and firm dynamics.

Q5: Interviewing issues

These comments apply both to informal discussions while you are educating yourself on the consultant's marketing nickel as well as to interviews of short-listed contenders.

- Is the consultant a good listener? Does he ask more questions, or offer more opinions? Do you feel as if he cares more about your practice, or about his credentials?
- Is he a generalist or specialist? If a generalist, what is his awareness of your particular specialty? If a specialist, test his awareness of broad QM knowledge.
- Raise the 'ownership' issue and pay particular attention to the responses. How does he manage ownership transfer?
- Talk through the resources question. What are his strengths, his

weaknesses? Does he admit to any of the latter? What does he expect from you in the equation?

- Get a list of references, and talk to all of them. Raise the points made above.

Q6: Key points in a contract for QM consultant services

If you put yourself in your client's position, you will be more likely to get this right. However, there are some very important differences.

The most important product that the QM consultant produces is not pieces of paper with words on them, or flowcharts and graphs. Rather, a very intangible commodity: a truly workable awareness of the benefits of improving the quality of your services. And not just to you, the manager, but right throughout your practice.

The operative word here is workable. Do you feel it is workable? Do your staff? You can see that this is not so easy to measure, because you yourself are the greatest contributor to, or obstacle in the way of, the consultant's success.

Aha! You are in a partnership with the consultant. You both win, or you both lose.

Do not engage a quality management consultant you wouldn't be comfortable with as a business partner. In truth, for the duration of his employ, he will be – to some degree – your business partner.

System design and certification specialists

There are two kinds of specialists in the quality world: those that assist with system design and implementation, and those that perform compliance audit services. To do both for the same customer is unethical, and a conflict of interest.

Some organizations (including some international players) get around this little problem by having two companies, both owned by the same parent. All they are doing is obeying the letter of the rule and flaunting the spirit.

A quality system design specialist should be able to recommend independent quality audit firms, and assist its clients in obtaining the right one for them. Stay well away from anyone who offers a package of both services.

At its best, the systems design specialist becomes functionally integral to the practice for a period of time, much as a lawyer or accountant would, knowing the firm thoroughly and helping it to craft solutions that are right for it. The auditor, on the other hand, must keep an arms-length relationship.

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Practice Management Digest

News & Best Practices from the PM Knowledge Community

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How to Say "Fini" to Substitution Requests

by Charles Nelson, AIA, LFRAIA

How would you label requests for substitution during the contract administration phase?

- A necessary evil
- A potential risk issue
- A compromise of finish quality
- A way for contractors to increase profits
- A time-wasting, profit-munching pain in the backside
- All of the above

YES! There is IS something you can do to tame this beast – in fact to just make it go away.

There is one (and only one) condition where you are obliged to process a request for substitution without getting paid for it, and the condition is one of the following: when you have specified a product that is (a) no longer available, (b) simply won't work as designed, or (c) cannot be obtained within a time period that won't delay construction. Of course, you should not do those things anyway but sometimes it just happens, especially when you are in the habit of producing fake specs.

It is theoretically possible that a most benevolent contractor has located a substitute product that really is better, and less expensive, than the one you specified. However, the incidence of this happening is extremely rare. If it does happen, you should gratefully review the request.

In the vast majority of cases, the request for substitution is labelled "all of the above" (in the quiz above) and, in particular, can lead to a diminution of finish quality, increase your risk, and cause you to spend unpaid professional time processing it.

Many practices have tried to banish substitutions by declaring in the spec that none will be considered. This strategy fails more often than it succeeds – contractors gleefully end-run it with a variety of tactics.

There are two approaches to sharply reduce the number of requests:

First: Add clauses to the Owner-Architect agreement that state that requests for substitution will be (a) referred to the client for review approval, and (b) if approved, be processed as Additional Services. The contractor still has some tactics here, and will try to show that the product you specified is not available in time, etc. etc.

You can up the ante on this strategy with a clause in the construction contract that provides that any requests for substitution (except where the architect has specified unavailable products) will be processed at a fixed charge, deducted from the contractor's retention as a deduct change order, and that this charge will apply regardless of whether the request is approved or not. The money saved can then be transferred to you by the owner under appropriate contract language. The contractor still has some tactics available here, but will think twice about lobbying cheaper products in your direction.

Second: There is a really great solution out there – one that I learned from Tulsa architect Charles Chief Boyd many years ago. His solution, which he gave me permission to distribute, requires the contractor to do about 95% of the work that processing normally takes. Chief Boyd developed a two-page form that must be completed in order to request a substitution. [Just click here to view a copy](#). You also need an enabling clause in your specifications, which is found on the third page.

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Letter from the Editor

Introducing QUALITY as a key Practice Management topic

Charles Nelson, AIA, Guest Editor

The AIA Practice Management Knowledge Community Advisory Group has decided to focus on "Quality Management" for his edition, and has asked me to guest-edit this edition. We have a diverse, interesting collection of papers for your review: Dennis King, FAIA, writes about his perspective on the quality journey at Harley Ellis Devereaux, a firm that has been certified to ISO 9001 for about a decade. Kieran Timberlake Associates share their more recent experience, including a description of the process of certification. Robert P. Smith of CMMI looks at QM from the perspective of a practice that has considered the ISO 9001 route, but has (like so many others) decided to craft its own approach rather than embracing the rigors of the quality standard. Danny Kahler, active in the American Society for Quality, writes about a new "Book of Knowledge" that ASQ is preparing for the design & construction industry. Finally, I've contributed articles on finding expert help in setting up QM systems and a "best practice" guide note on the specific subject of substitutions.

You can count the number of architectural practices in the US that have gone down the ISO 9001 certification path on the fingers of one hand (two hands max). This is in stark contrast to the rest of the world, where certification is far more common. Japanese architects will tell you frankly that they couldn't get commissions if they were not certified. In Australia, probably well over 50% of practices are certified (including almost all of the larger practices), and have been for a decade or two.

When I talk to US architects about QM, the response I hear most often is "Well, we haven't been sued in the last ten years, so we must be doing pretty well, and probably don't need that". Despite the prevalence of this attitude, it is simply irrelevant. Yes, there is some relationship between risk management and QM – but the point of QM is not to prevent lawsuits! There is a very long distance between "world's best practice" and practice so bad that clients feel they must sue you – and QM is all about where the practice wants to be on that continuum. Do you want your practice to be "better" than it now is (however you describe "better")? If so, then working on a formal quality program, whether or not certification is part of your goal, is the way to achieve that change.

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Reflections on the Future of Professional Practice

Reflections on Discourse

by R.A. Molldrem

Having recently attended the AIA Practice Management Knowledge Community conference in Washington, D.C., the general consensus seemed to be that our profession is entering changing and exciting times. I liken it to a roller coaster ride, less the extreme ups and downs. Some riders choose the very front, adventurous, accepting each new turn. Others choose the very back, seeing forward and what others are experiencing, hoping to buck the whiplash. The middle riders, with degrees of nearness to the front or back, can't quite see the immediate course, yet knowing the nature of the ride, have anticipations and prepared themselves. Some holler, some just grin, a few groan and get sick to their stomachs.

Attendance to this conference was relatively diversified. The majority of the attendees seemed to either own their own firm or are upper level architects within one. I am on the opposite end of the spectrum, only years out of school, but with equal curiosity and anticipation for the future of professional practice. My benefits from attending this conference are multiple: networking, perspectives on other firms and their work, BIM technology (applications and implementation), what is generally working for firms, and the recurring discussion of former methods of practice. The views of the 'good old days' I felt were interesting and important for me to witness. By understanding more clearly the frustrations and anxieties senior architects have, helps me to lessen my own similar feelings. This knowledge has the potential to help forge new mutually respected relationships within firm structures. Collaboration will strengthen if technology and the apparent evolution of the profession are met with cautious embrace, not skeptical reproach.

In college I had a professor who said, "We do our best work when we shed our 'pink bunny'". The 'pink bunny' is that one idea we continually attempt to bring back because it is both known and comforting. This past conference was a bit like shedding the profession's pink bunny. The former ways of practicing have been reflected on, the emerging methods have already begun. Some of us will holler, others will grin, and some may get nauseous. No matter our place on the roller coaster, we all approach the future of professional practice together. My greatest benefit from attending this year's conference is having the vision of our profession continuing to work collectively to create some of the best work in architecture.

Professional Practice: Creating a Brighter Future

by Melanie Hall, Assoc. AIA

Washington D.C., a place for classic architecture, historical monuments, cherry blossoms in the spring and acting host to the 2007 American Institute of Architects - Future of Professional Practice conference. As a recipient of the Practice Management Knowledge Community scholarship, I was honored to attend the conference. Along with meeting my fellow scholarship recipient, I was able to meet with experienced architects and gain a great wealth of knowledge and a better understanding of the industry.

Although this was my first time attending the conference, I soon realized that it was something extraordinary. I felt this because of the passion coming from both the presenters and fellow listeners. The presenters spoke with enthusiasm and dedication towards architecture that made the attendees, including myself, feel excited and alive. The architecture profession goes far beyond a set of working drawings. It is made up of individuals who collaborate and share ideas for the greater good!

After attending the conference, I now realize I am part of a community of

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believers with hopes of a better and more efficient tomorrow. Not only do architects share the hope of a brighter future, but we possess the ability to create it. From thinking more “green” to simpler documentation strategies to a better understanding of younger architects, the topics discussed at the conference will assist in generating a more promising future.

Several presenters spoke of the good old days of pencil and paper, while showing respect and appreciation for new technology. Though new technological advances, such as the computer, have changed the old ways, they have brought an excitement, challenge and liveliness to our profession. Many of the listeners were willing to share ways to adapt to the new technology making the conference experience much more meaningful. Sharing of experience and knowledge is what makes our community so strong and successful.

I have learned that it is truly an exciting time to be a part of the architectural community. I now feel like I belong to a group of individuals who are willing to step forward and approach the future of architecture with zeal. As I continue down my career path, whether it is project management, project architect or some other concentration, I will take my newly gained knowledge and better myself and my firm. Additionally, I have increased my confidence to pass along information to my peers, strengthening the architecture community.

By reaching out and stepping forward, we as architects are creating something extraordinary. The experience I have gained from the conference is only the beginning of my successful future. I am honored to have been privy to such a wealth of knowledge and community. I owe much gratitude to the Project Management Knowledge Community for selecting me as a scholarship recipient and giving me the opportunity to be part of an exceptional event. I look forward to this year’s conference and benefiting once again from the Practice Management Knowledge Community and AIA.