This month's highlights

Architects are hard-wired for change. Enabling rapid material change is, after all, their role. But it is sometimes hard to remember that encouraging positive change in everyday working relationships is just as important. At Cambridge University Sebastian Macmillan is leading a course in Interdisciplinary Design. A key element is teamwork and this month he kicks off the practice pages explaining how putting energy into the team can pay off. Michael Mason on page 82 shares his experience as a deaf architect designing and managing everything from housing to airports and urges architects to go beyond the regulations in the workplace as well as in design. If you want to do just that see the RIBA's guidance on finding CPD around providing better access. And you can catch up with the legal issues of employing disabled staff on page 79, while Gerard Burke continues his series of articles on establishing a business with some advice on how management practices need to adapt as the practice grows and its needs change (p75).

Teamwork

All for one Collaboration key to good design, argues Sebastian Macmillan

How do we harness skills that lie beyond the span of the individual or even a single discipline to build better buildings?

Broadly, there are two models: baton-passing and integration. In the baton-passing model, a complete brief is prepared, the architect designs the built form which is then passed like a baton to various engineering and other specialists to make it structurally sound and environmentally habitable. Rarely does this approach use the full expertise of the design team.

At the other end of the spectrum is integrated collaborative working. Here, a deliberate attempt is made to bring together the key disciplines required early in the process so their expertise is available when it can have the most beneficial influence. But few professional disciplines are trained in the principles of effective teamwork, and simply throwing people together in a group does not necessarily lead to it. Interdisciplinary teams are easily undermined by lack of organisation, misunderstanding of the task, poor communication and inadequate participation.

The principles of good teamwork are well-known, if not widely practised. They include careful attention to the selection of the participants, inspired leadership, the sharing of tasks evenly across the team, co-ordinated effort, clear communication, and open exchange of information. Well-organised teams develop a shared vision and take joint responsibility for its delivery.

Selection of team members can be critical. Typically those who are prepared to explain their assumptions, negotiate options and are flexible enough to accept suggestions from others, work better in teams than those who prefer to operate individually. Similarly, those who put the interests of the team before their own, and accept that the outcome is the result of a joint effort rather than the achievement of an individual, function better in teams.

Good leadership involves ensuring the team is well resourced, helping the team to identify shared objectives, keeping participants focused, and creating opportunities for all members to contribute to the team as a whole. Leaders also need to be aware of participants' organisational loyalties, to act fairly and impartially, to avoid blaming individuals, and to be willing to share credit across the team.

Effective communication and active information sharing are essential if team members are to make best use of their pooled knowledge. Open communication helps members to anticipate what they can expect from one another and when, eliminates unwelcome surprises, and promotes trust and familiarity. It provides an environment where team members feel they can question and challenge other team members without undermining them.

Team members bring differing expertise, experience, values and priorities, and identifying and resolving divergent views is a necessary part of the team process. At best, divergence should be treated not as a source of unwelcome conflict but as an opportunity for creative problem solving. Much apparent

conflict arises from poor collaboration or differing assumptions, and can almost always be resolved by clear communication and open negotiation.

Finally, teams often focus exclusively on the task at hand, and only rarely on the 'process' of teamwork. Yet there are benefits to be gained from reviewing periodically how the team is working, whether it has a shared vision, whether communication is open, whether team members believe they have the opportunity to participate fully, and whether the team's collective energy is being fully harnessed.

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Mature attitudes
Embrace change as you grow your business urges Gerard Burke

Many owner managers wrongly assume that a larger business will look pretty much the same as the business they started – it will simply have more people, bigger premises and more equipment. In fact, just like a child on the path to adulthood, a growing business will pass through various different stages of maturity. At each stage, the business faces different management challenges and needs different leadership approaches.

Any business starts because somebody has an idea for a product or service for which they believe there is demand. In the early days, the founder holds the business almost in the palm of their hand. Assuming the business is successful, there comes a time when the founder with their creative ideas and personal, informal style of operation can no longer cope effectively: where they used to provide all the drive and ideas, and made all the decisions,

they now find themselves overloaded with administrative detail and operational crises. Unless the founder can put in place some structure and a management team, the business will not be able to grow.

At this point, the founder often needs to adopt a strong leadership style to make tough decisions about priorities and provide clear, single-minded direction and sense of purpose. Ideas which the founder used to carry in their head now need to be formalised, policies need to be evolved, key people need to be appointed with specific roles, and teams need to be built.

As the business continues to grow and mature, a directive, top-down management style becomes counter-productive. Others in the business will acquire more expertise in their particular role than the boss and not surprisingly, they will want a greater say in how the business is run. Such people either struggle to be heard or become demotivated and leave.

The only solution is to delegate even more responsibility to more people in the business. The problem is that most owner managers hang on to too many jobs, mostly out of a belief that nobody else can do the job as well as they can. Of course, not all people who could take direction in the previous stage are capable of taking part in a bottom-up process that is dependent on high-quality input. So, the selection and recruitment of staff becomes an even more important challenge.

Once these more capable managers are in place, they begin to make their own decisions as well as the ones which have been delegated to them. In time, the business can become fragmented and uncoordinated.

This can be overcome by combining the directive and delegation approaches. Decision making (and power) is still delegated, but in a systematic and regulated way, with accountability becoming key. Strategic planning of some sort will be put in place, systems and policies will be developed to regulate the behaviour of managers at all levels, communication is vital and a culture will start to take shape giving all staff a feel for 'the way we do things round here'.

Sometimes, these rules and regulations, designed to bind the business together, result in red tape, leading to missed opportunities and stifled initiatives. Approaches to avoid this include team-based working, sub-dividing the business into manageable units with their own

separate objectives and management, and an even greater emphasis on personal development for individual members of staff.

Gerard Burke is programme director of Cranfield's Business Growth and Development Programme. Find out more at www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/enterprise/credo

Sound systems
Keith Snook on how a RIBA toolkit can help improve quality control

The RIBA Chartered Practice Scheme requires all chartered practices to adopt a quality management system, which is based on the size of the practice:

● Small practices (up to 10 staff) are required to use the RIBA Quality Management (QM) Project Quality Plan, or equivalent, on each project.
● Medium practices (11 to 49 staff) are required to use the RIBA QM Toolkit (incorporating the RIBA QM Project Quality Plan), or equivalent, on all projects and for office procedures.
● Large practices (50+ staff) need to have an externally certified BS EN ISO9001-2000 quality management system in place.

Practices can use their own QM system, as long as it meets the minimum requirements above and covers the same points as the RIBA QM Toolkit. Practices may already, or wish to, exceed these requirements.

The RIBA Quality Management Toolkit was originally developed in 1998. It was later updated to accommodate revisions to the quality systems standard BS EN ISO 9001 2000 Quality Management Systems and made available on the members area of the RIBA website. It has recently been revised and reissued further in support of the requirements of the Chartered Practice Scheme.

The toolkit has been developed to assist architectural practices install a quality management system appropriate to their practice of architecture. It is in two levels and the full system is compliant with the