2.1 Do I really need this?

The central issue for all *professionals is not how successful you are, but whether or not you are prepared to strive for* greater *success.*

David Maister

Perhaps longer versions of the chapter title question could be, "Will reading this book be worth my investment in time and money?" or "Will the ideas in here actually improve my design practice, or is this just another management fad I should ignore?"

Ten case studies (five original and five new are included in this edition), describing how practices have applied principles of structured quality management to reduce errors and risk, increase client satisfaction, break into new areas of practice, increase profitability, improve staff retention, and – dare I say it – actually *change* the culture of their practices.

Eleven Key Resources, each an authority on some aspect of design quality in his or her own right, join me in creating this 'one-stop shop' of practice knowledge. Their full contributions are on the book's web site.

This book provides the links to more detail, as well as to the Key Kesources' web sites and other resources, should you want more information on any topic.

Generic management books are generated by the ton each year. Generic quality management books are generated by the hundreds. But books on managing quality that are specific to the design and construction industry are generated very rarely.

Does one or more of the following situations describes your practice?

- Our services seem to be treated more and more as a price-based 'commodity'.
- Sometimes we lose the next project for a client, even when we've done a great job on the previous one.
- We probably do a lot more rework than we need to, but we don't know because we don't measure it.
- Our designers never know when to stop designing, and it impacts on the time to complete the project.
- Scope creep is a constant problem, and it's hard to get increased fees for it.
- We are expected to manage the rest of the project team, but find it difficult to get paid for doing so – and our people aren't very good at keeping the rest of the team on schedule.

These, and a lot of other situations that frustrate principals, are in fact ***quality*** problems in disguise.

The goal I share with my colleagues is to provide readers with useful ideas and examples from successful design firms around the world, presented in a no-nonsense, practical way. Based on my experience with other firms, I believe that using these ideas *will* improve design practice.

More than 80 short chapters tackle these issues in a holistic, integrated way, using the principles underlying the international quality standard as a baseline for a practice-wide program for lifting performance.

So, do you *really* need this? If the bullet points above are irrelevant to your practice and your life, probably not!

2.2 What is 'quality' in architecture?

God is in the details.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

This book is about managing quality in architecture, in the traditional meaning of the word; in the design and managing the construction of the built environment – including buildings, engineering works, interiors and landscape architecture – and in the provision of all the services that these activities require.

And, as every designer knows, so is the devil.[1]

And so is quality. Indeed, the traditional (and prevalent) view of quality is that it is all about details: error-free documents, checking cross-references, interdisciplinary coordination, and so on. This view of quality is appropriate for a 'manufacturing' view of architecture, which sees the results of design as a 'product' – a building, a bridge, a park.

The 'in the details' view of quality, however, is inappropriate, incorrect and inadequate for a perspective of architecture that is about *service*, and that sees products as *outputs* of service. If you are in the service business rather than the product business, then your perspective on quality will be fatally flawed if it is restricted to finding the devil in the details.

A service perspective of design means that quality is a key component of all service functions, such as communication and client relationship management. This is the 'Big Q' view of quality,[2] and it sweeps across every aspect of design practice.

What is quality? The current, official definition[3] is "the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements". "Requirement" is defined as "need or expectation that is stated, generally implied, or obligatory".

Put these together, and quality is "the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils stated, implied or obligatory needs or expectations". "Obligatory" means compliance with all laws, statutes, codes, and regulations. "Expectations" means that requirements are also defined by the "customer", which in architecture means, besides the client, the end users and the public, and sometimes even financial institutions.

In short, there is very little, if anything, about design and construction industry output that doesn't come under the umbrella of 'quality'. All of this can be modified by adjectives, such as 'poor', 'good' or 'excellent' (the *degree* to which the *set of inherent characteristics* – read 'design' here – fulfils these diverse requirements).

Clearly then, a program of 'quality' in architecture means *improving* the degree to which design fulfills needs and expectations.

Managing such a program involves three main activities at the project level: