



## Managing Quality in Architecture

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Integrating BIM, Risk & Design Process

### Case study: Client-centric in action

Peter Whitelaw

Chapter Reference: 7.2

These Case Studies show how a client-centric approach works in real life. They support and extend Peter Whitelaw's MQIA Chapter 7.2: Building Client Centricity.

An office design and fitout firm was feeling the pressure of strong price competition and fickle clients. It seemed that every time they were asked to quote on a job the prospective client had talked to several fitout firms and was looking for the lowest price. Their contract-to-quote ratio was gradually declining despite there being consistent growth in the industry.

The partners had reviewed their operations and trimmed their costs where possible, but were unwilling to compromise on the quality of materials used or workmanship. They saw these as cornerstones of their past successes.

An analysis of past contracts showed that, over several years, the numbers of new clients were increasing while repeat business with existing clients had declined. They attributed this to their concerted sales efforts over the same period.

They decided to engage a client research organisation to conduct an in-depth study of a random selection of their clients – both previous and recent clients.

They were not surprised when some of the results in the report were quite positive. They had always imbued their staff with a strong sense of client service. Staff were accessible, helpful, solved client problems and delivered what was promised.

What did surprise them were the scores indicating that their clients did not feel valued by the firm, nor did they feel they were 'partners' in the solutions or that the firm was innovative in providing unique solutions. The results showed overall low scores on client loyalty and a high propensity to defect – both for previous and recent clients.

This realisation prompted the firm to conduct an assessment internally of the entire staff, including partners. They responded to an extensive questionnaire that revealed much about the firm's culture.

Again there were some good scores – their people were strong on collaboration, empowerment and strategic alignment all indicating that they were working well together inside the business.

However, their weaknesses were revealed in areas such as client insight and competitor insights. Their business was product-focused and their relationships with clients were primarily transactional.

What they decided to embark upon was a Client Centricity Program that included these elements that are aimed at understanding what the clients really want and what competitors are offering:

- ◆ The partners and team leaders committed to a Customer Immersion Program
- ◆ They initiated a Competitor Intelligence Gathering Program

- ◆ They conducted a Value Proposition Workshop to review their products and services
- ◆ They implemented a Voice of the Customer through Employees program
- ◆ They commenced a series of Cross-Functional Innovation Workshops with clients included

This program led to a range of initiatives including new services such as integrated premises fitout, client removal, and make-good of previous premises.

The partners are extremely pleased with the outcomes and now have client retention as one of their KPIs and have committed to a regular re-assessment of both client opinions and staff client-centricity capabilities.