ABC Architects Model System Structure
by Charles Nelson

This paper describes the structure of the quality management system that Building Technology Pty Ltd originally developed in 1992 for a group of 23 practices in Canberra. It is by no means the only way to organize the information, but it works for those who use it.

You can see that all administrative procedures are grouped together, as are project procedures. This is because most staff just need one set or the other. There is little point in providing them with documents they don't need. The administrative procedures become, in effect, the firm's "office manual".

You can also see that Project Procedures are in sequential order, except for *Other Services*, which are short procedures for services other than design, and *Quality in Service Delivery*, which applies to all project procedures. There is no reason why they have to be in sequential order; it simply is more familiar to design professionals.

ABC Architects Administrative (Non-Project) Procedure Structure

A Management Responsibility	F Resources
A1 Responsibility & authority	F1 Consultants register
A2 Verification resources & personnel	F2 Technical library
A3 Quality manager	F3 Master specification
A4 Management review	F4 Proformas
B Quality System	G Document Control
B1 System structure	G1 Information & communication
B2 Implementation	G2 System document control
C Internal Quality Audits	G3 General document control
C1 Audit scheduling & procedure	H Quality Records
C2 Audit forms	H1 Maintaining records
D Training	H2 Document security
D1 Training	H3 Archiving records
D2 Personnel records	I Practice Management
E Quality Improvement	I1 Time management
E1 Review, evaluation & feedback	I2 Personnel management
E2 Preventing nonconformities	I3 Business planning
E3 Client communication	I4 Financial management
E4 Responding to change	J Marketing
	J1 Marketing policy & research
	J2 Promotional materials
	J3 Project assessment

This structure is ISO 9001 - compliant, which accounts for certain headings, such as N5 and N6 below. However, it goes well beyond ISO 9001, as it makes provision for many practice-related activities that are NOT required by ISO 9001. Examples are *I: Practice Management* (except I2) and *J: Marketing*.

Some aspects of quality management apply to both administrative and project activities, and (at least with ISO 9001 systems) there is the tendency to lump them together. Document control is a good example.

Responses to the *ABC Architects* model were generally positive, but a significant number of users have found it too complex and daunting. This brings up a couple of points that every person who tries to document a system will bump up against sooner or later:

- It is harder to develop tighter systems and shorter procedures. The fewer the words, the more important each one becomes, and the more situations they have to accurately describe.

- Only experience in using a system will tell you what you can leave out in improving it. The process of system design tends to be inclusive; to cater for all situations.

ABC Architects Project Procedure Structure

K Project Control	**O Contract Documentation**
K1 Project setup	O1 Documentation setup & controls
K2 Project planning	O2 Production
K3 Project quality plan instructions	O3 Coordination & checking
K4 Project quality checklists	O4 Completion & acceptance
K5 Project cost plan & program	**P Bidding**
K6 Project document control	P1 Bidding process
K7 Internal cost control	P2 Bid evaluation/contract negotiation
K8 Partnering	P3 Contract award
L Agreement & Brief	**Q Contract Administration**
L1 Expression of interest	Q1 Administration setup
L2 Client/architect agreement	Q2 Administration
L3 Preparing the brief	Q3 Completion & payments
L4 Updating the brief	**R Quality in Service Delivery**
M The Consultant Team	R1 Resolving discrepancies
M1 Consultant needs assessment	R2 Resolving nonconformities
M2 Agreements & recommendation	**S Post Completion**
M3 Briefing, input coordination & progress monitoring	S1 Post-occupancy services
	S2 Post-occupancy evaluation
M4 Subconsultants' output verification	S3 Facilities management
N Design	**T Other Services**
N1 Design input	T1 Service planning
N2 Design process	T2 Input coordination
N3 Design output	T3 Output verification
N4 Design review	
N5 Design verification	
N6 Design validation	
N7 Design changes	

The ABC Architects model is, obviously, only one of an almost infinite number of ways of structuring a QM system. However, you can use it as a starting point for thinking about the way your practice works. Look at the list again. Cross out any headings and subheadings that don't seem to apply to your firm's activities.