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'The Next Architect: a new twist on the future of design'
By James P Cramer and Scott Simpson; published by Ostberg
Library of Design Management. ISBN-10:0-9755654-8-6
Book Review

At the 2008 American Institute of Architects Convention this slim book was promoted in the bookstore and referred to in several seminars. It encapsulates in about 70 active pages a shift in the philosophy of some of the profession towards the rethinking of the role of the architect and the process of design. Cramer and Simpson are, respectively, a management consultant for design firms and the head of The Stubbins Associates (now Kling Stubbins), a major practice. They see management skills as the enabler of effective design.

The authors welcome the swing to constructor-led, integrated team-working. They see the master-builder model returning, to the advantage of architecture and architects, but principally to the advantage of clients. Design is becoming a team game, facilitated by the architect, with the client as central. "The client may not draw the lines, but they draw the conclusions". The next architect has skills in understanding clients, users and other stakeholders, communicating in their own language and leading the whole team towards defining and delivering the right value proposition for the need. The roles of client, architect and constructor change to give architects a prime task in unearthing and defining the proposition and proposing how it can be met, with the constructor there from the start to ensure that the solution meets the cost plan and is buildable. The design fee is mainly invested in getting to what the client needs and not, as today, principally in creating documents for tendering and construction where the consultants know less about the technology than those who will make it. Documents, in the form of a shared Building Information Model, emerge from the team as a whole. The new, parallel process is inherently fast and less wastefully iterative. It is well suited to lean thinking, design for whole-life value and meeting sustainability goals.

This philosophical stance is a challenge, not only to conventional practice but particularly to architectural education. It challenges practice to stop resisting the trend and start to exploit it, to improve their skills in pre-project consultancy and briefmaking and to master the information technology which can transform communication and teamwork. Understanding that we create value for clients and community in many senses, not only in the aesthetic

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sense, opens up new ways to make the case for good design and to be rewarded. Above all, it calls for emphasis on leadership abilities in architects.

For education, it suggests that courses which relegate practice matters to something learned after graduation are now teaching less than half the subject. Architecture as a practical art is defined in part by how it is achieved. A much closer connection between academe and practice is needed now, reversing the trend of the last 50 years towards separation. Educators are preparing 'The Next Architects': they would do well to read this book and ponder the abilities and course structures they should be developing to give their students the power to make architecture in the next decades.

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