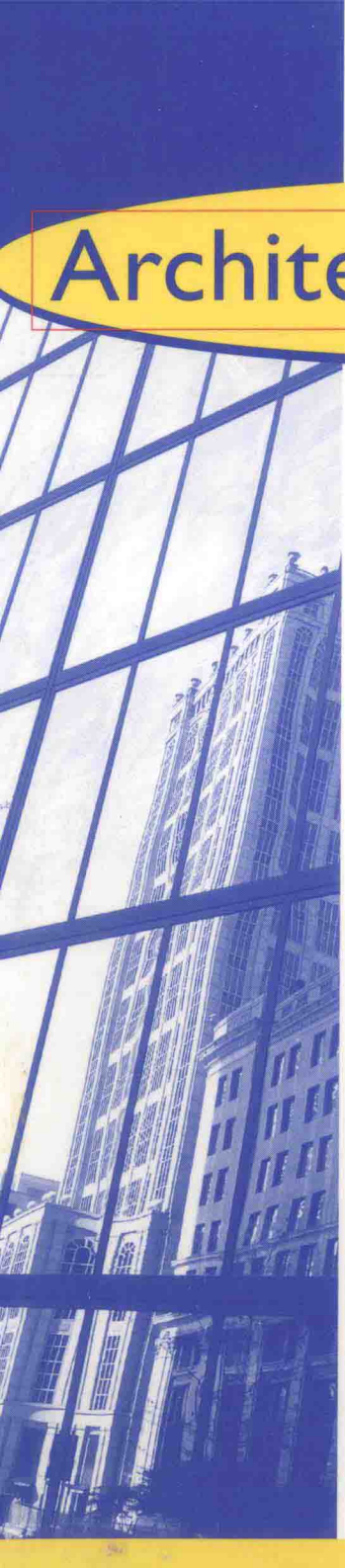

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

Architect's Essentials of Professional Development

- Step-by-step guidelines to establishing an in-house professional development program
- Includes worksheets and questionnaires to help implement customized professional development goals and strategies
- A continuing education strategy that hones your competitive edge

Jean R. Valence

Architect's Essentials of Professional Development

Jean R. Valence

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To Phil, who changed my life.

Foreword

Professional development, or continuing education as it is commonly labeled these days, has become a very distinct and important part of an architect's daily professional life.

Over the last few years, the architecture profession has witnessed a proliferation of confusing and disparate continuing education requirements; and we have all participated in a wide variety of educational activities: courses, magazine quizzes, seminars and tours, some of excellent value and others very disappointing. Fortunately, in *Architect's Essentials of Professional Development*, Jean Valence brings structure and rigor to various systems for professional development across North America.

For those architects still skeptical of the need for a structured system of continuing education, this book will convince them. Valence does not dwell on the establishment of continuing education requirements by regulators to ensure the architecture profession remains current and competent in matters of health, safety, and welfare. Instead, she argues that professional development provides a "competitive edge" for firms and individual architects. Professional development is simply good business!

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This book is an indispensable guide for architecture firms that want to establish a coherent and structured program for professional development. In addition, it is helpful to others, such as owners and developers involved in delivering and maintaining building projects, AIA/CES providers, and Canadian provincial associations that develop and deliver continuing education to architects. The book also provides suggestions geared to individual architects, as outlined in the intriguing appendix to each chapter called "Mavericks and Sole Proprietors."

In order for a successful, permanent continuing education program to flourish, it is necessary for any organization to develop a strategic plan to guide the program. *Architect's Essentials of Professional Development* outlines the steps to take, from strategic principles through implementation and evaluation, in order to make such a program happen. Valence's clear, sequential guidance, chapter by chapter, is reinforced by the inclusion of "learning objectives" for each chapter—a device to motivate readers to think in the right direction about professional development.

Valence is a management consultant, who has also chaired the AIA/CES Awards jury. I was fortunate to work with her as a member of two of these juries. At first I wondered how she could evaluate professional development for architects; I soon discovered that she brings a refreshing "organizational" perspective to the topic of professional development. As chairperson, Valence was able to guide the CES Awards jury toward the appropriate recognition of excellence in continuing education *systems* for architects. Valence's ability to seek out and find excellence is also demonstrated in this book, in which we learn

what many outstanding architecture firms are doing in this realm. The book contains numerous examples; several award-winning architecture firms describe how they implemented a professional development program. The book also contains numerous case studies, examples, and quotations that demonstrate the validity of Valence's theories. These examples ground the book and provide the reader with a sense of reality.

This book deserves the attention of all design professionals, especially those involved in the establishment and regulation of professional development programs.

Jon Hobbs, MRAIC, Assoc. AIA

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I am greatly indebted to the resourceful and visionary people and firms that were among the first to create powerful learning programs for their organizations and to the thoughtful "mavericks" who contributed to the development of this book.

I thank Thom Lowther, Ed.S., director of the AIA Continuing Education System, who has crafted a remarkable organization for professional development and knowledge-sharing for AIA members. In addition to sharing a little of his considerable expertise about the "Architect's Educational Universe" in this book, Thom introduced me to innovative firm leaders and education specialists, and encouraged me to test many of my planning models in the CES Leadership Summits.

I am somewhat grateful to wonderful author Andy Pressman, FAIA, who suggested that I address this topic and who makes writing look painless, which indeed it is not. My thanks to John Wiley editor Margaret Cummins, who invited me to write about professional development for *The Architect's Essentials* series and who guided me with patience, humor, and grace. I am indebted to educator Jeffrey Valence, who translated scribbles into 13 clear fig-

ures; and grateful to Gary Moyer AIA, for creating a coherent timeline from a pathetic fax. I thank Bonnie Sloan, FSMPS, whose editorial suggestions were, as usual, excellent. I thank Phil Valence, my husband and Blackridge partner, for his support, advice, and feedback on this book, and for covering for me with our clients as deadlines approached.

Above all, I thank the design professionals with whom I have worked for 25 years. I admire the way they think, the things they do, and the way they get things done for the benefit of us all.

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Competitive Edge

1

"When I received my architectural degree, I regarded it as a license to learn. I still do."

So stated Charles Redmon, FAIA, a principal of Cambridge Seven Associates in Massachusetts, responding to a question posed at a brainstorming session at the Boston Architectural Center (BAC). One of the nation's oldest and largest schools of architecture, the BAC was hosting a board of directors' planning retreat, and the inquirer wanted to know what architects liked best about professional practice.

Whether architects begin their careers with a powerful curiosity and appetite for knowledge or whether they acquire the taste through the experience of serving clients and completing a range of commissions, most design professionals share Redmon's attitude. Practice is dynamic. Every day architects acquire new insights during the process of serving clients. The desire to enhance people's physical surroundings, and the responsibility for protecting the public health, safety, and welfare, demand professional growth. New information and ideas continually surge through professional practice.

In recent years in America, consciousness among architects about continuing education has heightened, as a result both of a wave of state initiatives requiring continuing education for architect registration and of the American Institute of Architects' (AIA's) adoption of a continuing education requirement for all members. Combined with a preference for knowledge and a need to address ever-changing client needs, this new sense of urgency has riveted attention on lifelong learning.

From the perspective of both the individual practitioner and the design firm, the most beneficial place for the professional's continuing education is professional practice itself. Architects seem to prefer organic learning that is acquired in the context of practice, particularly during projects, and to rely on firms as their primary source for learning (Price 1997). Firms are quickly learning what corporate America has known for a long time: that staff development is good business.

Former Royal Dutch/Shell executive Arie de Geus was a pioneer in organizational learning, and his work inspires organizational experts, Peter Senge among them. During his career at Shell, de Geus and his colleagues became intrigued with long-lived companies, particularly those not family-owned. Pulp and paper manufacturer Stora had begun as a copper mine in the 1300s. Hudson's Bay Company, Canada's largest department store retailer, hails its 300-year-old fur trading origins. Two centuries ago, Du Pont was making gunpowder.

De Geus's observations about businesses that survive for centuries, "living" companies, seem particularly appropriate for architecture firms. As he explained in his book, *The Living Company* (1997),

people who want their organization to thrive should imbue it with four capabilities: "the ability to learn and adapt," "the ability to build a community and persona for itself," "the ability to build constructive relationships with other entities, within and outside itself," and "the ability to govern its own growth." All of these capabilities emerge from learning.

Research conducted by the American Institute of Architects in its AIA Firm Survey 2000–2001 shows that almost 30 percent of design firms provide in-house continuing education for staff. Almost 75 percent of firms with more than 10 people have internal continuing education programs. Even sole practitioners are capturing the learning potential of practice, with 7 percent reporting on-site professional development (American Institute of Architects, 2001).

The purpose of *Architect's Essentials of Professional Development* is to help registered architects design their own professional development approach and program, because tapping the knowledge wellspring of practice enhances practice itself. Firms, or individuals, that adopt a deliberate approach to learning sharpen their competitive edge in the marketplace for the long term.

Key Point

Firms, or individuals, that adopt a deliberate approach to learning sharpen their competitive edge in the marketplace for the long term.

Competitive Edge and Professional Development

Design firms constantly compete with each other for projects and people, and the ability of a firm to demonstrate its unique contribution to clients and staff is critical to its success. A professional development program, designed by and for the firm, can and

should advance the firm's distinct attributes. It should:

- Feed the firm's accumulation of knowledge.
- Stimulate business excellence.
- Inspire innovation and fresh ideas among its staff.
- Reinforce the firm's culture.

Bright Idea

In *The Professional Service Firm 50*, Tom Peters states that he wants everyone in a service firm:

- "To be on a path to personal mastery.
- To be engaged in a calling.
- To be devoted to learning new stuff . . . by hook or by crook . . . every day.
- To eschew complacency like the plague.
- To take enormous pride in an expanding arsenal of skills and knowledge.
- To take the word *research* very seriously."

(Peters 1999)

Accumulating Knowledge

Learning is such an integral aspect of the design process that architects are typically unaware of the remarkable amount of qualitative and quantitative information and insight they accumulate during each project. Over and over again, architects study a client's world, conduct research, and synthesize data and ideas so that they can create a solution uniquely appropriate to a purpose and place. Unfortunately, architects are such agile learners that they take this capacity for granted and often miss extraordinary opportunities.

An opportunity is missed simply by confining learning to the project at hand. Architects have historically relied upon the project delivery process for learning. In fact, "most incremental changes in practice involve learning embedded in ongoing projects" (Price 1997). The operative word here is "incremental," with information taking years to accumulate, be connected and interpreted, and eventually used. It's little surprise that, in spite of the amount and type of information to which the entire design team is exposed on every project, the profession is often spoken of as belonging primarily to its most senior members. "Architecture is an old man's profession" is an unfortunate cliché in part because it presumes

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