THE COMMERCIAL ARCHITECT

Systems:

Project Costing Systems: Which one?

Well, there is no answer, and in truth that is not the purpose of this special edition.

In reality, it's far more important to talk about the culture of the business, and the impact, either positive or negative that a system can have on a Practice. And, how a new system can be a catalyst for change and growth.

In the good old days, when clients always paid on time and beer cost 'sixpence', many Practices had a herd of support staff to manage such trivia as to how much a project cost. The systems were thus suited to support staff who's constant interaction with the system allowed it to become complicated and difficult to use.

Today we are in a different world, the days of the Project Accountant are gone, Project Managers now have, or should have(?), responsibility for the commercial delivery of a Project not just its design quality and delivery. Senior staff now expect to understand and become involved in fees and claims, to understand resources and the financial implications of design decisions. This does not mean that design is dead. A good Practice will not always allow financial considerations to overrule design intent, but it will be a considered and conscious decision rather than an inevitable outcome.

So why now? Well we have already discussed system 'userblity' and staff growth, but the technology has also allowed for greater control and visibility. The advent of true cloud hosting allows Principals to access project

performance graphs and data on their phones and iPads anywhere in the world. This also allows for the of delegation of responsibility without the loss of control. Additionally, many Principals see this as a 'slow-burn' exit strategy allowing for a smooth handover period from one generation to the next.

So how is this achieved? How can a culture shift, initiated by a system, be successful? The answers are easier to state than to action, but can be achieved.

☑ Consultation

Ask why, question everything and don't assume the legacy processes are wrong. Ask for views, not just from senior staff but junior staff as well. Hold staff interviews, make it a formal process and it becomes important.

☑ Communication

Keep everyone informed, let them know timescale and expected outcomes.

☑ Engagement.

This is not a Finance system or an IT system, it is a system for the Architects to help them in running their projects. They should be an essential part of the team.

☑ Adoption.

Identify your early adopters, they will be the spearhead for change. Understand the latent adopters, they will eventually change and disregard the few non adopters, they will never use any system anyway.

☑ Quick wins

Identify quick wins along the way, even if of little actual benefit, they will aid adoption and communicate progress.

☑ Manage Expectations

Don't allow for disappointment, be honest with areas of challenge, timetable some contingency time and only release the system when it's fully functional.

☑ Keep up the momentum of progress.

There is a honeymoon period to any implementation, the period when its acceptable to say, oh, this data or function is not available yet. The honeymoon period does not last long, use it well and don't allow progress to slip.

Or, as I like to remember it, CCEAQMK - catchy !!

ASC have implemented systems in such firms as: Hawkins Brown, Grimshaw, PDP, Michaelis Boyd, Quattro Design and Eckersley O Callaghan. To discuss your requirements call Joe Emanuele on 07974 083199 or email j.emanuele@asconsultancy.org