

University of Massachusetts
Graduate Program in Dispute Resolution

Creating New Space in University Settings:
How to Promote Effective Teamwork in the Face of Conflict

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August 4, 2009

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Running Head: Conflict and University Space

I investigate how to improve teamwork on building design projects on university campuses by exploring how conflict is experienced by team members during the course of a project. My investigation is informed by interviews with nine professionals who play typical roles on a building project – architect, planner, and engineer, as well as my own experience as a university planner. I consider literature which describes the nature of architectural practice as a form of negotiation and draw from dispute resolution theory and practice to analyze team interactions and suggest alternative ways of relating. What emerges is a list of conflict patterns which can be used by team members as a kind of early warning system to assess the potential for conflict. By providing labels and categories for conflict patterns, I bring what is often considered background noise into the foreground so that team members are better prepared to develop strategies to insure a successful project.

Acknowledgements

In the Fall of 2005, I tried out a class in the Dispute Resolution Program to study something I thought mattered and to experience what it was like to be a graduate student. I am grateful to Professor Susan Opotow for teaching that first class and demonstrating how writing can be such a satisfying form of thinking which can help us discover what we *do* care about. Her class convinced me to enroll in the program, and I repeatedly evoked the spirit of the *Reading Log* in order to produce this project.

I want to thank Professor John Forester for agreeing to evaluate this project. His own work provided a model for me on how to share what can be learned from practitioners' stories, and I am very grateful for his helpful and encouraging critique. I also want to thank Professor David Matz for his matter-of-fact coaching and his willingness to make time to read drafts or meet to talk. He was always able to convince me I was making progress.

The success of this project depended on the willingness of building design practitioners to share their stories with me. I appreciate their generosity of time and the thoughtfulness with which they considered my questions. I also want to acknowledge Linda Snyder's leadership of the Office of Physical Resources and Planning and her fundamental commitment to continued learning and discovery in the work we all do. With her support, I was able to adapt my work schedule to achieve what I needed to do as a student and as a planner at Harvard. Lastly, I want to thank my daughter Mackenzie who kept track of the weeks and then days until I could declare myself "done" with my homework (I have yet to explain to her that none of us are ever really done).

A work of architecture is a social artifact arising from a great number of transactions in which conflicts are resolved.

(James Ackerman, 1974, p. 239)

As individuals and groups, human beings are not well equipped to deal with important differences among themselves and others, and they often engage in behaviors that make the situation worse, unless social processes and institutions are available to them to manage their incompatibility effectively.

(Ronald Fisher, 2000, p.167)

Most buildings on university campuses are built to address a problem or to resolve a conflict – over insufficient resources or inadequate facilities that fail to support what the university deems are its priority activities. Sometimes the effort to reach a decision to build a new building has taken years of planning, documentation and persuasion. Sometimes the decision emerges more quickly, prompted by a donor's interests or a new leader's desire to make his or her mark decisively, in physical form. But no matter the process which preceded it, no matter to what extent the proponents and intended beneficiaries breathe a sigh of relief that finally they will get the resources (the space) they need and think their hard work is done, the start of a building design process opens the door to a new cluster of potential but predictable conflicts which wait in the wings for their cue as the design process unfolds.

I have watched the building planning and design process from a distance and as a hands-on participant for close to twenty years while working as a space planner at Harvard University. Writing this paper is a way of examining my work experience. I wondered if I could develop shareable recommendations for how building design teams can work together more effectively using dispute resolution theory and practice as a

framework for analysis. It seems to me the human interaction challenges of a design and construction project are not sufficiently acknowledged. Earlier in my career, as I participated in increasingly complex projects, I was amazed more than once how seemingly haphazard the communication process was: for example, how many decisions get made by junior architects back in the office whom the clients never meet, or how obtuse a multi-headed client can be about how their internal competition over defining what's important impacts the ability of consultants to do a good job. And there have been times I've been astounded that consultants don't know how to tell the client what they need to know from them, so constrained by their expertise that they've forgotten how to talk to people outside their field. This can lead to major miscommunication, very unproductive meetings, and lots of wasted effort. I imagine good buildings have emerged out of such chaos, but I certainly don't believe that building success is facilitated by these challenges. I suggest there is too much at stake in how we approach the treatment of our environment and use of resources not to do what we can to improve the process of a building's creation.

The working assumption which motivates my inquiry is that the process of creating a building affects the quality of that building. I do not attempt to prove this is true. For the time being I am willing to assume that it is, and I focus my attention on bringing to the foreground for examination the range of conflicts that are often experienced during the course of a building design project. I wanted to understand how others experience conflict. What problems did they encounter and what strategies had they developed to deal with those problems? This paper is an analysis of what I learned from those conversations. In order to discuss building quality as something building

teams affect, I will offer a working definition for what I mean by a “good” building, in particular a good building within a university context. A good building: 1) supports the day-to-day activities of the people who need to use it, 2) is a working part of a well-designed system, whether that design has emerged organically or through deliberation, and contributes aesthetically and functionally and ecologically both in its internal arrangements and in its relationship to the campus context, 3) has "good bones" and can be adapted in the future for uses not yet imagined. Currently missing from this definition is an acknowledgement of whether building costs were within budget. The up front financial cost of a building compared to the budget is relatively easy to measure and is certainly a measure that will be applied to judge the building’s merits in its initial years. Whether or not a building came in under budget is a criterion that fades in importance over time, at least in terms of the assessment of that building. Whether the building represents good value for the money is a more enduring judgment and my intention is that the three criteria suggested above offer a way to assess that.

Participants on a building project tend to have narrower criteria for building success than what I suggest in the definition, shaped by their particular accountabilities or immediate space needs. Even the best run project is challenged by the seeming incompatibility of the different interests each participant has at stake, whether they be architects, engineers, consultants, building users, university deans, or facilities staff. Criteria range from whether the building is on time and on budget to whether the building wins an AIA award or whether the new space serves to attract the faculty and students the university are seeking. Given that most project teams must navigate these different aspirations as well as a host of other challenges brought about by miscommunication and

other forms of human error, it's a natural next step to consider what the dispute resolution field may be able to offer in the form of tools or theory to inform better practice.

Defining Conflict

I interviewed nine people who play a range of roles that are found on most teams: planner, project manager, architect, and engineer. At the beginning of the interview I offered a definition of conflict borrowed from Kolb's and Putnam's discussion of conflict in the workplace. In Kolb's and Putnam's words (1992), "Conflict may be said to exist when there are real or perceived differences that arise in specific organizational circumstances and that engender emotion as a consequence" (p. 312). Kolb and Putnam contrast their discussion of organizational conflict with the "public, the formal and rational face of conflict" and assert that the "private, the informal, and non-rational aspects of disputes" deserve attention as well (p. 319). I agree with the authors that conflict in this sense is often unacknowledged, subtle and hard to pinpoint or describe. It is the background noise that people in work settings may have become used to, but which can be draining and stressful and lead to avoidance rather than engagement with important issues that have real consequences. The kind of conflict I am considering falls more in the private and informal realm, but it is important to point out that in the construction context the formal structure of litigation is readily available as a way to settle unresolved issues. I do not assume that rational and formal are necessarily linked, as is implied by Kolb's and Putnam's articulation of what forms of conflict are worth attention. As one of my interviewees, an engineer, put it, "Whenever we've ended up in court on projects it's sort of for random things. Often times it's not the project where you

had the biggest screw up... It's often ...people are mad and so then they go out and figure out what to sue about".

Kolb's and Putnam's linking the presence of emotion to conflict is useful, and I think emotion plays a role in conflict whether it's public, formal, private, or informal. Emotion means that participants care about what's occurring, that the event or interaction has triggered something within them that is linked to something they value. Caring about something is what motivates action, and in this sense, could lead to constructive engagement with the issues raised. Emotion is often used in the sense of "irrational" or "lacking perspective" or "out of control" and is a signal that trouble is brewing. The definition of conflict I'm using may include that aspect of emotion as well but I suspect it's often a difference of point of view rather than a fundamental qualitative difference. In other words, how one person reacts to a situation makes sense given how she or he has interpreted what's at stake but may well be baffling to onlookers and labeled as "irrational". Calling someone "irrational", however, also serves as an excuse not to deal with the situation; it provides permission to ignore. That tendency makes it less likely that the parties will come to understand each other's point of view. In almost any mediation situation, a key strategy for promoting a collaborative problem-solving relationship between the parties in disagreement is to encourage perspective-taking. Among mediation practitioners, it is assumed that an agreement that maximizes the benefit to each party while minimizing the cost can only be achieved when there is a mutual recognition between the parties that the other's concerns are legitimate and are worth considering. In this sense, then, the presence of emotion thwarts mutual

understanding. That condition plus real or perceived differences is what creates or sustains conflict.

The interviews provided an opportunity for me to examine the kinds of design team interactions that lead to conflict, especially those that are unacknowledged or accepted as part of the way things are done. It was particularly helpful for me to learn how each of my interviewees would describe a “good” client. On the assumption that a good client elicits the best work from the consultants it hires, helping Harvard be a good client is one of my main objectives. Two kinds of checklists emerged from the interviews: a) a checklist for effectiveness – what is a good client, what makes for an effective team, an effective architect, an effective consultant. It is helpful to know what your project team members hope you will offer because often these hopes or expectations are not articulated directly; if you can’t fulfill those criteria, then you minimize disappointment or the danger of false expectations by discussing that up front; and b) a list of conflict patterns and examples of the different ways those conflicts can manifest themselves. The list can be used as an early diagnostic tool to highlight circumstances that could encourage these kinds of conflicts. Team members then have an opportunity to make adjustments before serious harm is done. The discussion of conflict patterns and project team experiences which follows can serve as a new starting place for discussion about how to improve team work on building design projects.

Literature Review

The material that I have found most useful falls into three broad categories: architectural practice, organizational conflict, and models for multi-stakeholder decision-making.

Architectural Practice

In an article from 1974, the architectural historian James Ackerman discusses the professional responsibility of an architect in terms of public and private interest and the moral values by which architecture should be judged. His ultimate purpose was to justify using moral criteria in the criticism or assessment of architecture. In the process he provides the reader a succinct overview of the various stages of a building project and points out the numerous points of conflict. During the first stage of planning and programming, the client generally needs the assistance of the architect to develop a program to the level of detail needed for the architect to begin design. "According to their respective principles and personalities, architects may involve the client in every step of this process, urging him to define his needs and intuiting his unexpressed desires, or the architect may impose his own conception on the client... There are no clear rules to guide the relationship. Conflict between the client's and the architect's vision of what a building ought to be is inevitable" (p.232-233). Ackerman further observes that "this [conflict] can arise from the [architect's] commitment to personal interest and career...or from his orientation to conflicts of interest between the client and the intended users, neighbors, etc...Such conflict can be minimized only when the architect seeks to represent exclusively the interests of the client who pays the bills and to ignore any incompatible interests of those who are to use or be affected by the building" (p. 233). Later stages of the process require a new series of negotiations as the architect adjusts the design and materials to the expectations, skills, and practices of the contractors and trades people on whom the architect and client rely to see the project through to fruition, while

parallel negotiations are likely occurring between client and funders; and among client, architect, and city regulatory organizations.

Ackerman makes the point that conflict during the design and construction phase of a building is inevitable. He also suggests that conflict avoidance is often achieved by suppressing or ignoring the voices of stakeholders who don't control the funds. He describes the architect's choice about whose interests to consider a moral one and asserts that that choice must be judged along with the aesthetics of a building. Although Ackerman focuses on the architect's role, it is not just the architect who must choose whose interests to privilege. University administrators will likely describe a decision-making process which is more or less inclusive and will present that process as a condition to the architect. In many cases, the architect has no idea whose voices are being ignored or to what extent the scope of work that the client describes is controversial. The definition of conflict I'm using for this paper doesn't get at these issues unless a spokesperson for the concerns emerges and forces a response. My conception of what constitutes a good building does encompass the notion of accountability for building impacts both in the present and in the future, but accountability to future generations was not an issue that surfaced during my interviews. So, although I think it is a deeply worthwhile question who has the right to build and who can merely react, that will not be a focus of this paper.

Dana Cuff (1982) describes architects' relationships with clients as an ongoing negotiation in her ethnographic study of architectural practice. Cuff spent six months observing and sometimes participating in work interactions at three different architecture

firms. She highlights many characteristics of typical architect and client interactions which pose challenges for the relationship. These include: a) the influence of the myth that the “ideal” architect is an independent artist whose artistic integrity and moral obligation is threatened by responding to what clients say they want. Cuff describes the convention of artistic independence as “awkward and stifling” and observes that in practice, the interactions between architects and client are more collaborative (p. 74); b) ambiguous accountabilities among client, architects, consultants, and contractor, both in terms of who’s responsible to complete certain tasks and also in terms of who’s liable for mistakes or miscommunication; c) confusion over what constitutes a decision, no matter whether it’s from the client, architect, or other consultant. For instance, if a client fails to comment on an aspect in the drawing, should that be interpreted as an implicit agreement? Given that the client is usually the representative at the table least equipped to understand or interpret the tools used to document design progress - the floor plans, sections, and elevations – the decision-making process is fraught with the potential for misunderstanding. Beyond just architect/client interactions, this kind of confusion can occur within the team as a whole. Cuff explains, “For instance, when an engineer claims ‘The refrigerant line cannot extend more than 50 feet from the air conditioning unit,’ it may not be clear if this is a ‘scientific fact,’ a calculation, the only alternative, inarguable, or if there are tradeoffs that could make another solution viable” (p. 131-2). If this “fact” imposes design constraints that obviously hinder what an architect is trying to do, then perhaps the architect will challenge the engineer’s assertion and discover that there are tradeoffs. If at that moment in the overall process, it is not clear that meeting this requirement will cause harm to design objectives, then it could well be that the statement

will be accepted as fact and the design will be informed by that constraint. Only later, when the implications of a given series of decisions (or non-decisions) can be assessed in built form, the participants who have no memory of deciding may feel misled. A building is ultimately shaped by hundreds (thousands?) of such interactions over the course of design and construction. “The meetings and the interactions between participants are themselves design problems...Negotiation is part of the creative act of design, not only as a tool, but as a context for the emergence of buildings” (p. 23-24). Cuff’s overall thesis - “By labeling and making explicit the negotiations in architecture, we can also observe more carefully certain phenomena that contribute to the design process” (p. 233) – captures the spirit of my own investigation.

Conflict in Organizations

A design and construction process requires the creation of a new organization – composed of client representatives, architects, engineers, contractors, and other specialized consultants. My analysis has been informed by work about organizations, in particular Schein’s discussion about uncovering the cultural assumptions in an organization and Kolb’s and Putnam’s discussion of conflict in organizations, especially behind-the-scenes conflict. Schein (1990) defines culture as follows:

Culture can now be defined as (a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 111).

Schein describes culture in terms of adaptation for survival and as a continual negotiation, so culture is not monolithic or unchanging. Within any given organization's culture, there can be multiple sub-cultures. These sub-cultures emerge in part because different groups within an organization may have different criteria for survival (how their success is measured within the organization as a whole and within their group in particular, and what organizational needs prompted the group's creation and justifies their ongoing operation). Schein refers to the design of physical space as one of the secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms of the culture (p. 115). In that way, space is not only a resource that supports the functioning of a given group, but it is also a message or symbol about the nature of the group and its role within the organization. It is easy to relate this general description of organizational culture to the university setting.

The university itself will have a particular culture shaped by its history, its role within the community, and its overall governance structure. The university is generally composed of different sub-cultures in the form of schools and academic as well as administrative departments. The university community is comprised of individuals grouped within cross-school categories: tenured faculty, junior faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and staff. These role categories, another expression of sub-cultures, form a different aspect of the governance structure since membership in a particular group gives any individual more or less power to influence how decisions are made about issues which affect them. Since any given person will play a certain social role (student, faculty, staff) as well as be a member of a specific department (academic department, administrative department) within a specific school, multiple allegiances are possible and can shape negotiations over any conflict. Competition over who gets what

space or who benefits from capital expenditure to create new space is a likely source of conflict in the university setting.

Schein points out that it is impossible for an individual within a given culture to fully understand or describe that culture (1985; 1990). The culture can only be revealed through explanations in reaction to an outsider's questions and corrections to an outsider's interpretations. He further describes culture as shaped by "underlying, taken-for-granted assumptions" (1985, p.127). This understanding of culture highlights challenges in the design process where the client (insider) doesn't know what assumptions should be made explicit to the architect in order to insure an approach to the task that truly matches the need. In this case the architect is an outsider with deep training in issues of building design, but not necessarily in the analytical skills which Schein's "outsider" brings to the task of deciphering culture. The latter's goal is to understand the culture in order to correctly diagnose the problems and offer appropriate recommendations for change. An architect may be viewed (and feared) as a change agent but the task they are asked to fulfill is more one of filling a prescription. The client has already diagnosed its problems and determined that they need more space. Sometimes that space is meant to foster a culture change and that is explicit in the program documents. But the client and architect don't always understand that a joint investigation of the current culture is still needed to support this new work they are about to undertake.

Multi-Stakeholder Decision-Making

Lawrence Susskind offers a practical model for how to implement consensus building approaches in any multi-party planning and decision-making situation, and certainly the task of planning and designing a new building falls into that category. In his

book, *Breaking Robert's Rules* (2006), he offers a succinct description of the recommended steps: 1) Convening, 2) Assigning roles and responsibilities, 3) Facilitating group problem-solving, 4) Reaching agreement, and 5) Holding parties to their commitments (pp 169-187). Each of these steps is broken down into subset tasks that clarify what should get accomplished at each stage and suggest specific approaches. I have borrowed steps from this guide in the work I do as staff to faculty space committees or when managing a feasibility study to examine options for resolving space issues. I never explicitly call the process consensus-building and therefore cannot claim that I'm exploring the full potential of this model for seeking agreements, but I adapt it in ways that seem feasible and useful. For example, under "Convening", an important early task is "Assessment" involving confidential interviews with stakeholders to document their issues of concern. The interview process ideally uncovers a broader list of issues and other stakeholders than was understood at the start of the project and can be used as a way of educating the Dean or other senior staff about the real nature of the project they want to take on. Interviews are also a tool for building a proposed program for a new building. An open, transparent process, with shared information leading to common understanding, is the foundation for many of the steps Susskind articulates. Therefore, the assessment document is shared as a draft with all who participated so that they can offer corrections, but also so that they can learn from this broader framing of the issues and begin to engage more actively in the collective endeavor. In Susskind's model, the assessor is described as a neutral. I adopt the role although I am not officially neutral as I am accountable to support the Dean's interests. So long as I am honest about my role and accountabilities I have not found that to be an impediment. In my own experience,

transparency as a goal encourages a disciplined attention to the quality of all interactions and communications in a setting where careful calibrations of confidentiality are often assumed to be the norm. Assuming one's words and written information will be shared holds one to account for a kind of accuracy and nuance which confidentiality does not.

The final task under "Convening" is "Make sure that those in positions of authority agree to the process" which is followed by a series of tasks clarifying team members' specific roles and responsibilities, meeting processes, and the ground rules for interaction (p. 172). One of my interviewees talked about how every project team needs a manager who has mastered the art of "managing up and managing down", and these series of tasks in Susskind's model fall within that realm. The interviewee was referring to an ongoing quality of communication which insures that the team's activities are aligned with decision-makers' expectations; careful attention at the start to building a common understanding of the scope and process of the project lays the necessary foundation for successful project management in this regard.

John Forester (1999) discusses case studies of planning practitioners. They are design professionals, some trained as architects, who use many of the same tools – sketches, plans, elevations – that are employed among the design team participants for university building projects. Also like the university setting, these design professionals are working with a variety of stakeholders, some of whom have no experience with the tools and language of the design profession. In the literature I considered, Forester's approach differs from Susskind's because it is grounded in stories rather than systems. Like Ackerman, Forester focuses on the moral choices that design professionals must make but his attention is on planners rather than architects. "The point here is not to

celebrate planning, but to encourage its more politically astute and ethically critical practice” (p. 8). And like Ackerman’s and Cuff’s descriptions of architects, planners’ work can be framed as an unfolding series of conflicts and response to conflict: “Because planners and designers work in the midst of many interested parties, they inevitably work in the face of conflict. To do that, they need to improvise creatively and proactively; they must often act as both negotiators seeking desirable ends and mediators managing the conflictual planning or design process itself” (p. 61, and cites Susskind & Cruickshank 1987, Rivkin 1977). I interviewed an architect who said he needed to become a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” in order to address the aspirations of building users within the guidelines imposed by facilities staff and the political challenges of the design review process. He was a wolf who meant well, and who worked hard to acknowledge the voices of those whose influence would otherwise be stifled by the power structure in place, so in fact the metaphor is misleading. Architects often have to contend with the suspicions they arouse in members of the client community - as outsiders and agents of change that can’t be controlled. So, ultimately, part of their job as designers who must also be negotiators and mediators is to reassure the project stakeholders that in fact they are not wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Many of the concerns, observations, and strategies which Forester’s practitioners discuss and which Forester highlights were echoed by the people I interviewed and they offer a way to consider my own experience. Three themes are of particular interest: 1) how time is used and valued, 2) the role of emotion, and 3) what kind of organizational structures promote collaboration and discovery.

Forester points out:

With little time and facing the multiple and conflicting goals, interests, and needs of the populace and their more formal clients, planners have to set priorities, not only in their work programs but every time they listen to others. They cannot get all the facts, so they have to search for the facts they feel matter, the facts they judge to be significant and valuable. So whether they like it or not, they are practical ethicists; their jobs demand that they make ethical judgments – judgments of good and bad, more valued and less valued, more significant and less – continually as they work (p. 31).

Everyone on a design team assesses tasks and time in their own way. Members of a university community do not measure time in billable hours the way consultants do, and that in itself is a fundamental cultural difference. Once consultants are hired, the clock is ticking in a way that faculty and others often find constraining or baffling but which project managers must manage.

Forester describes how a Planning Director uses sketches to ask questions and clarify stakeholder issues. One of his questions, “What is really burning you if you look at this sketch?” highlights the value of emotion as a tool for engagement (p. 76). Forester explains:

[I]f we can learn about what is ‘burning’ someone, we are likely to learn more about what really matters to them, more about what else they may care about, as well as what they are likely to fight to protect or resist.....learning through emotion, we can learn about aspects of solutions and options that might yet be changed, fine tuned, altered, and re-designed (p. 80).

This discussion supports the utility of the Putnam and Kolb definition of conflict incorporating emotion as a marker. Paying attention to this kind of conflict, then, is a form of learning that should lead to better designed buildings.

I have framed my investigation of conflict as an inquiry about how to promote effective teamwork. Forester poses a related question: “What organization or social structural designs can enhance or obstruct, support or hinder, these forms of deliberative learning?”, where deliberative learning means “deliberative conversations about value – about the interpretation and aptness of goals and means” (p. 129). He argues that such learning is an “inescapable [aspect] of practical action” (p.117). It is important to remind ourselves that when we embark on a new building project we don’t know what choices will emerge nor what’s most important: the project is one of mutual discovery.

Architects and other building professionals are usually evaluated based on what they know. As consultants, they learn to radiate a CAN DO confidence that is meant to reassure. But the sheen of expertise can dull the spirit of inquiry and the ability to learn. Practicing how to learn becomes the first task of this new building team and looking for what is “burning” becomes a good place to start.

Data Collection Methods

I interviewed nine people with professional experience related to the building design process to explore the different ways conflict may be experienced by members of a building design team and in interactions between team members and other stake holders in a university setting. Those interviewed range in age from 44 to over 70, six men and three women. Two are planners, one who worked within a university and another who

has worked both as an in-house planner and as a consultant; three are architects; two are project managers, of which one spent the majority of her career as a staff member within an institution and the other works for universities as a contractor (this is a role sometimes referred to as client representative, the person in charge of negotiating contracts and overseeing the implementation of the project through construction and occupancy); and two are engineers although one now works primarily as a sustainability consultant. All of these professionals except one work out of offices in the Boston area. One architect has worked primarily in offices in New York City and Philadelphia. All are people I have either worked with in the past or know through family contacts or professional associations.

The interviews ranged from one to somewhat over two hours. I relied on a semi-structured script (attached) and conducted the interviews as one-on-one conversations. The interviews were confidential and were recorded and later transcribed. The purpose of the interviews was less to test any particular hypothesis than to consider the design team experience from multiple points of view.

The other major source of data is my own experience. I began keeping a journal of my work experiences in June 2007. My entries follow the trail of decision-making for different projects, make note of interpersonal tensions, observe my own motivations, and imagine what's at stake for others. I write about whom I trust and whom I don't and what I do about it. Most of my work since 2007 has been in the pre-design phase of projects, usually working with an architectural consultant, rather than in the design stage. My journal entries include observations about how those projects unfold or record other

departmental dramas. Members of my department are often battling what they see as unreasonable or self-centered demands that put at risk something they value and feel charged to protect – whether it's a building operations budget, who has the right to schedule the new meeting rooms, or the design integrity of a new building now threatened by renovation requests.

University Culture – How it Shapes Conflict

I've been working as a planner at Harvard for twenty-three years so my understanding of university culture from personal experience is not broad. My interviewees discussed projects at multiple universities and I draw from my experience and those conversations to suggest general characteristics of universities which will impact the kinds of conflict that arise during building design. Perhaps the most important is the multi-headed nature of most university clients. One architect commented, "You can't develop a patron relationship in a university setting since there are so many constituencies involved." Another consultant said, "I think the biggest thing that you see in a university setting is that you often have a multi-headed client and you're not sure who you should be listening to." A third explained, "Some Deans, for instance, are very hands-on, some Deans relegate it to their administrative staffs. Some just let the physical facilities folk do it...so that's...not a well-defined dynamic. Even when people tell you what it is you have to wait and see." Given the multiple constituencies, one of the important early tasks is to strategize how far to take a design before sharing it outside the more hands-on client team for reaction. The answer will depend on what authority or influence each individual (like the Dean or President or donor) or group (like the Board of Trustees) has or is expected to wield. For instance, one interviewee with a project

management role complained that they shared a well-developed design with the Board of Trustees and learned that the Trustees expected the building to be traditional brick. The Board hadn't been described as decision-makers in this case, but now the team was sent back to the drawing board. "So, you know, should we have brought the trustees in sooner? Maybe, but without a design..." She summarized her frustration with the process, "There's no CEO to say, 'Screw you all. This is how it's happening.'"

An important component of being multi-headed is an ambiguity around how decisions are really made. There may be someone whom everyone recognizes as having the authority to make the larger scale decisions, those with the biggest impact on the institution, but questions still remain as to how this person will be informed of the issues and measure value. In the June 2nd issue of our student newspaper, there was an opinion piece written by a faculty member in Anthropology entitled "What Harvard Has Taught Me." He wrote this article as a kind of farewell as he is leaving to chair a department at another institution, having been at Harvard as an undergraduate, graduate, and then faculty member. He discussed ambiguity of decision-making with respect to what fields of study to encourage. This kind of academic prioritizing is what eventually emerges as an argument for new or different space. He wrote,

Universities are often assumed to be a space separated from power, as a precondition of the genesis of objective knowledge. At Harvard, I have learned that, in fact, universities are funded by government, foundations, alumni, and other private donors who often thereby determine which forms of knowledge are useful and prestigious. (Matory, 2009, p. 2)

He describes an example of how power is expressed:

[Deans] control the appointment procedure to a degree that faculty-members fear to oppose them. In department meetings, professors spend a lot of time guessing about how to satisfy the ego needs, idiosyncrasies, and disciplinary biases of the deans, who distribute the resources that make departments grow or wither.

Lacking tenure, the career administrators themselves constantly trade rumors about who needs to be in the favor of whom in order to survive or get anything done. (p. 2)

A building project design team is always seeking clear instructions and timely decision-making. What becomes clear is that there are challenges to providing this kind of clarity in a university setting.

A university also has strong group divisions of faculty, students, and staff and distinct ways of defining hierarchy within each of those groups. There is something in particular about the difference between being senior staff (even with a doctorate degree) and being tenured faculty that may play a role as building projects unfold. These staff have authority to direct or circumscribe or thwart activities by these faculty, but there is some kind of superiority the faculty can refer to simply by being faculty, some claim to being more purely at the heart of the scholarly enterprise. I think one form of defensive reaction that senior staff have is to consider the faculty as an undisciplined group that must be managed, so the impetus to constrain becomes a pre-existing condition of the relationship.

Observing our own client dynamics as a staff member, I've been struck that the various staff who play roles in the operations, planning, and capital project activities at the university will often articulate their accountabilities in terms of service to institutional

interests – whether that is expressed as goals for the new building which address wider campus infrastructure issues or support reduced energy use; the imposition of standards related to room sizes, configurations, or furnishings to ensure equity among academic departments; or adherence to the pre-established budget. Individual faculty may criticize these restrictions and, rightly or wrongly, claim that they threaten harm to the research or teaching enterprise for which they are the natural spokesperson. Within an academic department, although the faculty collaboratively define the teaching enterprise (what do students in this department need to know?) they are encouraged to define the research enterprise on their own terms (even if what they can do is presumably influenced by where they can get funding). The end result is that staff may be left feeling that they have the accountability to protect institutional interests on behalf of the very same people, the members of the faculty, who are most likely and able to threaten it. I should make clear that I don't discount the influence of ambition or self interest in the staff's framing of specific issues as institutional concerns. It's just that staff can't appeal to other than departmental or institutional values in making their case, whereas faculty and students are expected to articulate what they need as individuals. The main point here is that the difference in roles and authority between faculty and staff contribute to how conflicts related to space are framed.

It's important to acknowledge the dynamic between junior faculty and their senior, tenured colleagues. In the course of my work providing staff support to faculty planning committees who are charged with articulating their future space needs, I sometimes work with junior and senior faculty groups but more often with committees composed only of senior members of the department. The department chair generally

determines the composition of these committees in consultation with the relevant Dean. In a recent conversation with a department chair about an upcoming planning effort, he commented that he's not sure how to include the junior faculty so that they can feel free to participate openly. In the newspaper article to which I referred earlier, Matory wrote, "In the cult of expertise, [a faculty member] is encouraged to say nothing outside one's expertise and nothing that is threatening to power before one receives tenure" (p. 2). I do not know why in some departments junior faculty participation in discussions about space needs is considered important and less threatening to their well-being than in other departments, but these decisions do impact the data-gathering effort involved in developing an accurate space program and testing priorities. A university planner described the importance of considering the needs of the junior faculty:

Our institutional research people who had experience with ...laboratory-based departments, knew that if you wanted to insure that the building was going to be successful you talked to the youngest members in the department. And also you talked to them in terms that they understood and you got them to talk about... where their research was going, and then that information got fed back, so that that building is equipped with animal quarters that it never would have been equipped with if we had only listened to the senior members of the department ... And we know now, post-fact, the department knows that if we had not taken that initiative they would have been in the deep soup in terms of their ability to support the work of their younger faculty members, and they would very likely have lost them.

Universities build for the long-term and university projects are often contrasted positively to developer projects where the focus is on making a profit within a defined period of time. For some consultants, that makes universities an attractive client:

University clients...are building for a very long term. They're building for their own personal values and identity. It's a reflection of who they are...and they're going to take much greater care. They're going to be with this building for 100 years potentially so I think the values that university clients have are just ideal.

I sometimes think universities give themselves too much credit for being a desirable client. Despite the long-term fact of the building, decisions are often driven by immediate needs and constraints; we may be willing to spend significant money on specialized, experimental labs (addressing a currently identified need to support a new faculty member or research direction) but balk at the price tag of the better mechanical system even though the long-term effect on occupants' comfort and the operational headaches which ensue will long outlast the reasons for the cost-cutting decision.

Another interviewee pointed out that university representatives often say:

Well, we don't want you to build this like a university project, we'd like you to build it like a developer project", except then they impose a lot of extra requirements on top of that so that it turns out it's nothing like a developer project. They just think that if they say "developer project" it will be cheaper and quicker.

We often don't acknowledge our idiosyncrasies or the mixed-signal challenges we present for the consultants we hire.

What I Learned from the Interviews

Conflict Patterns

I will start my discussion of the interviews by sharing some of the conflict patterns that were discussed. What I mean by pattern are the kinds of conflicts that

individual interviewees described as being patterns in their experience, rather than conflicts that were necessarily common across the interviews. The conflicts fall into the following categories of behavior:

1. Miscommunication
2. Unrealistic expectations
3. Conflict avoidance
4. Not making decisions
5. Failure to respect architect/client scope boundaries and accountabilities
6. Discontinuity
7. Failure to build effective working relationships

I've listed these categories with accompanying short descriptions and illustrations in Table 1. The list can be interpreted as early warning signals, a way to recognize when the project is threatened. By providing labels and categories, we bring what's often considered background noise into the foreground so the level of threat can be evaluated directly. I don't mean to suggest that all conflicts are worth fussing over. As one project manager put it:

If there's some little skirmish going on I think that's it's like a small fire that burns itself out, I would let it burn out rather than put resources in it. It's like, there are too many people on a big job like that to try to resolve conflicts all the time... I usually let them do their thing, let them speak, let them get angry, let them get pissed off, and then if they can't resolve it I'll step in, but I don't feel that everyone needs to be at the table singing Kumbaya or something.

But he clarified that he's paying attention, that he assesses the conflict for its effect on the project and by doing so invites other team members to do so, too: "Not everything weighs

the same, not every issue or conflict has the same risk to the project, both financially, aesthetically ... That's something I say all the time."

Miscommunication. As human beings, we are dogged by miscommunication every day. It's the stuff of comedy and tragedy and irksome missteps. It's so ever-present, it's easy to discount its effects, but it's worth pausing to consider more carefully what those effects might be in the course of a building design project. A university planner discussed the challenge of being understood when the tools for communication between the architect and client are 2-dimensional floor plans and sections:

There are very few people who have not been trained in the design professions who can read a 2-dimensional drawing and convert it to a 3-dimensional image...and, in fact, not only should no one be surprised but you should expect that they, if you lay out a plan, you ask them to sign off on a plan, that they don't really know what they're doing.

It is likely that many members of the client team, especially the potential users, but also senior administrators who may be the final decision-makers, will not know how to translate these depictions into a form they can truly assess. Especially in a group presentation, no matter how carefully the architect explains what to look for in the drawings, it is challenging for audience members to know at what point they should ask questions or to what extent they actually need to understand what the architect is saying. What is the punch line? If there are several people in the room and no one is asking questions, then individuals sit back and wait until it is clear what is expected of them. It is easier when the architect presents contrasting options because then they know to focus on the differences and ask questions to insure they understand what those differences are.

But embedded in all the options there are probably assumptions which the architect has made and which might go unnoticed, let alone unchallenged. This only matters if the assumptions are false or prove to be limiting. The architects may not think to point out these assumptions because they themselves don't always know what's important. If the work has been preceded by efforts to insure the architects understand the client goals and are alert to issues related to university culture, then it's more likely that the important issues will get presented as questions.

In larger universities, there are usually staff members on the client team who are trained in reading drawings, either because they themselves are architects or because it's a medium with which they've needed to become familiar in the course of their education or work. These staff then can serve as translators for the building users and decision-makers, as well as being the insiders who may be able to discern false assumptions. The same university planner quoted earlier said it was the responsibility of the planning staff to insure that their clients, the faculty and other building users, were educated in the overall design process before the consultants are brought in. He also described the planners as responsible for protecting building users from hasty decisions.

If the planning team is doing its job, it can be the continuing educator/translator/...and intelligent converser that makes sure that at every step of the way, and without embarrassing anybody, because I mean I've seen many, many faculty members clearly intimidated by a design activity... They [the architects] throw up you know all kinds of fancy drawings ... or so on and so forth, and they [the faculty] don't really know... You know, "here's this and here's that, you know, which one do you like?"...And so you really have an obligation to them to train them to be able to understand what it is that they are seeing or what they will see or how to evaluate the drawing or never to allow

themselves to be placed in the position of making an instant judgment... Instead say, "We will look at your drawings and we will evaluate them and then we will come back to you." Now that takes time and that's always a discomfort to the architect. It also says to the architect, you're not really in control.

Translation and evaluation of consequences does take time. And the faculty are not always interested in dedicating the extra time. Inevitably, the staff called upon to be the translators will have to make a judgment as to when to intervene. In order to insure that I'm better prepared to make that judgment, I have often requested a preview of whatever will be presented. The architects are less likely to resist that request if they trust that my motivation is not to control or prematurely squash an idea but rather to insure the architects are fully briefed on political or functional issues an idea might raise so that they are better equipped to engage the audience in dialogue about what matters.

Unrealistic expectations. That clients expect a project will cost less than it does is almost a cliché. This is an arena where the multi-headed component of universities often makes a difference. A clash of expectations can occur when a budget number that was developed more as a back-of-the-envelope placeholder, perhaps as part of a multi-year budget projection, perhaps simply because a number was needed quickly, becomes the standard by which the real costs are judged as the project is more fully investigated. Financial office staff are always looking for more certainty than facilities staff are comfortable providing as the capital project budgets are developed. Unrealistic expectations are often the result of conflicting interests. A university planner or facilities director may be tempted to keep initial project estimates low, or in any case not cautiously padded, so as to insure a project remains on the list of projects that might go

forward. That person may be motivated to please a department chair or Dean who wants to see these projects realized and be willing to take on the job of managing to the budget should the project go forward (they may be known as a tough, get-it-done sort of manager who relishes such challenges), or they may have the luxury of passing the job onto others to execute. In any case, the end result is that architects often inherit an expectation of what the project should cost even before the project is fully defined. One of my interviewees described this as “a fiscally engineered outcome”. Architects discover they can design to the budget or design to the project scope, but not both. Until they are hired and have a chance to investigate for themselves, this pending dilemma may not be clearly understood. So the client, or at least some members of the client team, may have the expectation that by hiring the architect they have purchased the expected solution and feel cheated when that doesn’t occur. The architect may feel unfairly framed as the bad guy, the group that failed. Here’s how one architect articulated this dilemma:

Sometimes budgets get established really without a full understanding of what the program is and so budget might be a fiscally engineered outcome from a finance spreadsheet that says okay, well this particular department, uh well they get 10 million dollars because that’s what it says here. Some spreadsheet says that. And then separately, we as architects and designers are asked to meet with the user groups and what we find out is that there’s no way that we could design what they’re asking for, or even what they need, for less than let’s just say 12 million dollars. And all of a sudden we’re in the middle of a conflict because we’re seen as people who are unable to meet the budget. And that’s a really stressful place to constantly start a project. We’re always this sort of bringer of bad news ... more sophisticated folks may have had a CM do preliminary budgeting. It’s not in their interest to make it a high number either. Then we come in and we’ve got our own budgeting and it’s not in our ...for the project-specific CM ... they have no

interest to have a low number. So we have a low number as a target and a high number just as a safety net ...I would say that's a real challenge time and again.

Also, it is not always clear what the budget leeway may be. Sometimes that's a political reality waiting to be discovered, so that the university planner or project manager may suggest to the architect that there is more flexibility than there actually is. Alternatively, a client may declare a budget to be fixed as a tactic to insure the design team does their work with cost efficiency in mind, but the risk of that strategy is that imaginations are so constrained that the best solution never emerges.

Conflict avoidance. As a planner, I know that the challenges of developing a building program are related in part to conflict avoidance. People are often tied to a way of doing things and when you ask questions about future needs or probe beyond the initial answers they provide, they may interpret the inquiry as a threat to a status quo which suits them. So certainly it's easier not to ask, especially when dealing with faculty who may complain to the Dean. In my interview with a planning consultant, we discussed conflict avoidance explicitly:

I think a part of design is more characterized by conflict avoidance than it is by conflict resolution... And I would make a sharp distinction between those two. That actually you want to surface conflict so what happens as the design progresses through and at the end of the day, you know everybody's paid their money and they've got their building and they say, well this isn't what I wanted. I think that happens a lot in architecture. And I think the reason is that the process doesn't surface these differences... you actually need to find a way of bringing out more of the client. Architects would often like to impose a design on the client...because they think the client has no aesthetic subtlety so, but ... at the end

of the day you want the building to be an embodiment of some sort of human expression that reflects the client...

You know, the architect wins a lot of the time. Or alternatively, accedes to the client... Instead of doing what you're suggesting which is to find the underlying, to understand the conflict, and dig deeper into it. Which actually makes also for a more trusting relationship when you do that, because that's a memorable experience when that happens. Whereas the other thing is just a sort of residual frustration on both sides.

What caught my attention was the notion that the act of challenging, of pressing for more information beyond what's comfortable, creates a "memorable experience" which leads to a "more trusting relationship". I have written earlier in this paper about the value of emotion as a tool for engagement. Here it's framed slightly differently: willingness to risk generating an emotional reaction can be evidence of your commitment to creating a successful project. So an architect asking the client "Why do you want that? Why is that better?" risks being viewed as arrogant or crossing the line but the interaction may well prompt a deeper analysis that ultimately the client is grateful for.

The planning consultant also commented that architects "often like to impose a design on the client". When that happens, the client's version of creating a "memorable experience" might take the form of protesting or questioning that design imposition, holding the architect to account for demonstrating that he or she truly has understood the client's needs. When the client still feels misunderstood or ignored, that leads to a new conflict pattern that I discuss in the next section.

Failure to respect architect/client scope boundaries. Certain kinds of conflicts seem to arise when either architects or clients overstep their role and trespass into the

other's area of responsibility. The client's needs initiate the process. The client is responsible for articulating the problem to be solved and the goals to be achieved. They must work hand-in-hand with the architect to review the developing design and assess "does this meet our needs?", as well as provide timely feedback. Their understanding of their needs will be fine-tuned in a kind of exploratory dialogue with the architect as the architect highlights options and choices to be made. The architect's job is to design a building that will serve the client's needs. A good building, as I discussed at the beginning of this paper, must take into account other criteria, as well, that the client may or may not be explicitly requesting, but serving the client's needs is the instigating core of the exercise.

One of the architects I interviewed, I'll call her Susan, told a story about what she called a "communication disconnect" between the design architects and the client on a project. She had worked closely with the client during the feasibility stage and felt she understood what they were looking for. Once the project moved into design, she was assigned the role of project manager and a senior designer joined the team. The clients became frustrated because they felt the senior designer's work bore little relation to the ideas that had generated enthusiasm and a certain expectation during the feasibility stage. Susan felt caught in the middle:

And so the clients became increasingly frustrated ... She kept coming back to me and saying, "What's going on here, I thought we'd talked about this?" And I'd come back to the office and say, "Well you know you really can't do that". And I was told "Well, you know, this is what we're going to do, and we disagree with that, and we're going to show them that this is going to be better". And so time and again, it was really incredibly awkward for me because, and I was led to

understand... that you know, being a designer you have got to...not necessarily do what the client asks you to do because they may not know what they're looking for in design, and I agree with that. But there is a functional aspect to it, and also a history ... that people have expressed a desire for something. So I said, "That's fine, I understand that completely. If you're going to um.. digress or diverge from what the expectations were ... all I would ask is that we draw what they are expecting or what was discussed earlier, and if we have this really cool idea we think is going to change the world, then we draw that, too, but we can't not draw the first one. And the onus is on us then to demonstrate... and if it's a great idea, and frequently I thought it was a great idea, then we need to give them the choice. And there was a desire not to show them the first one and only show them our idea. Time and again the client would get upset. Time and again I predicted that they would be upset. And then they would come to me and tell me that we were giving them bad service. It was incredibly frustrating but it's a good example of what does happen in design firms and, this communication...not conflict but communication disconnect.

Susan's story recalls what Dana Cuff (1982) has called the conception of "ideal" architects as independent artists "who dominate clients in the best interest of clients, users, or both" (p. 69). Cuff observed that this conception of "ideal" can cause tension in an architects' office. "If an ideal professional is expected to dominate the client for the clients' *own good*, not to dominate then is to neglect the client morally. This interpretation, however, implies both a lack of respect for clients as well as minimal expectations from clients. Clients can take and be given some responsibility for their own buildings, and architects can recognize that listening to clients does not make them Hacks" (p. 75). Cuff wrote this thesis in 1982, twenty-seven years ago. There must be something in how architects are trained or how practice is socially structured and

perceived that encourages the persistence of this interpretation of an architect's responsibility. I admit that right now I have no theories or guesses about what that something is, but I agree with Cuff that we need to imagine alternative ways of relating. If we build on the concept that negotiation is the framework for the relationship between architect and client, then we can look to negotiation models that encourage joint problem-solving. Pruitt and Kim (2004) summarize the dual concern model (citing Blake & Mouton, 1964; Filley, 1975; Rahim, 1983, 1986; and Thomas 1976) which describes collaboration or problem-solving as what occurs when each party exhibits both high self-concern and high other-concern (p. 42). If a building design is a form of negotiated agreement, then in theory the most satisfying design will emerge when: a) the client insists that their needs be met but are open to considering approaches and design criteria which the architect views as important AND b) the architects explain clearly the design criteria to which they hold themselves accountable while also demonstrating they understand and can respond to the client's needs.

Clients trespass when they are tempted to dictate to the architect what the design solution should be. The motivation for trespass might be political, for instance, an assumption that if we can just squeeze in a meeting room with a big window *right there* then that disgruntled faculty member will stop complaining. Of course, in hindsight one often realizes there may be better ways of addressing that faculty member's concerns than the awkward insertion of a meeting room, but the imagined solution is often presented to the architect as an urgent instruction rather than an inquiry. The architect then needs to employ the skills of a negotiator to encourage the client to explain why they have come to the conclusion that this meeting room is needed. Ideally, the discussion

will shift to an exploration of what the faculty member is really disgruntled about which could then lead to a better solution, one which might be incorporated within the building design or have nothing to do with the building at all. That kind of conversation takes energy and the kind of skills which I'm highlighting as important.

Another motivation for trespass is distrust. Consider this architect's explanation:

There's a person there who is a frustrated architect and tries to design using you as his pencil. And so that doesn't work because we ...there are always these kind of dualities, so they know their campus very well. They can't imagine that anyone will actually come to understand their campuses, but the fact that we know fifty campuses is not a limitation for knowing theirs because that's what we do. So it's like you know, if they have a heart attack and I'm a heart surgeon I don't have to have been in their town, but if I'm on a plane, I know exactly what to do with that person. I can find out about them later, but we have that kind of range of insights. Sometimes, as you know, it takes the outsider to really clarify and understand. So, we have confidence in that and some people feel that that remoteness is not a positive, but it's generally with that person who thinks that they should be designing it.

The form of conflict this kind of competition might generate will depend on the authority of the "frustrated architect" to direct or review the architect's work. I can appreciate the instinct for caution and acknowledge it's easy for caution to slip into distrust. Every client wants acknowledgement of their uniqueness. That is simply practical - if the consultant can articulate what's unique about your campus it proves that he or she is paying attention and is less likely to make mistakes through presumption. So there's a balance to be sought. The architect should expect that caution will precede trust. They will need to prove themselves to more than just the people around the interview table in

order to be effective. This interviewee mentioned his outsider role, a description which recalls my earlier reference to Schein and organizational culture analysis. Schein's point is that it takes both an outsider and an insider to truly understand the nature of the problems to be addressed before developing solutions that will work. Even more pertinent, the architect needs the insider's assistance to insure that her or his skills can be put to good use.

A different version of client trespass arises when campus design standards are presented as a kit-of-parts from which the architect should select in composing the building. Sometimes design standards are vetted by senior leadership and reflect deep institutional values. That information is shared with the architect up front, usually in the Request for Proposal or interview process, because respect for those standards is one of the important criteria for evaluation. Conflict may emerge, however, when these standards come as a surprise:

We've had situations where the owner's rep, not the users but the facilities' guys, will come in with a stack of xeroxes and they say, 'These are the finials we want, these are the bay windows.' So that doesn't work well for us, for our firm...because they don't necessarily write the mission statement.

This anecdote also raises an important point about client representation and how delegation of architect oversight needs to be undertaken with care to insure that instructions to the architect are consistent with the project goals. Given the multi-headed culture of the typical university, this kind of monitoring might not occur unless there is recognition of the cost of not doing it. Monitoring might take the form of a kick-off meeting with all the client representatives in the room to review the history of the project

and the goals going forward, as well as a discussion of each person's role and how their activities will support those goals. Monitoring could also involve a periodic assessment of the design guidelines or space standards the institution has in place. Is there a common understanding about what those guidelines mean and how they should be applied? There should also be opportunities during the project where the client asks the architect and other consultants for feedback – Is this working? Are you getting what you need from us in order to do your best work?

Not making decisions. A design and construction project requires decisions to be made constantly in order for the process to continue. It might be expected that some less experienced members of the client team would not fully appreciate the significance of that responsibility, but any of the design professionals, whether architect or other consultant, knows that their work is intertwined and sequential. Since certain decisions must be made in order for the next stage of work to begin, it is natural that a failure to make timely decisions or share information when needed would emerge as one of the conflict patterns. My job, as a university planner, is to help insure that whatever group is making decisions is prepared to do so on the right schedule. Part of the task is figuring out who the decision-makers are, and then lining up a schedule sufficiently in advance so that the right people are available for a meeting or presentation when you need them to be. Because my colleagues and I understand this will be a challenge, it's also our responsibility to insure the design team understands this particular vulnerability and builds in time in the schedule to accommodate delay.

One of my interviewees talked about a project where the architects failed to give the engineering team the information they needed in order to stay on schedule. She

commented that she knew that they were way beyond schedule and she'd been hammering the architect for the information needed, so the architect certainly knew there was a schedule problem. But the architect didn't tell the client. Eventually the project ended up in litigation and the client, a museum, had to cancel a major show. There's clearly more to this story than we know, but from the engineer's point of view, the architect failed to share decisions which the engineers needed to move forward and there was nothing the engineer could practically do about it.

Discontinuity. Building projects often take place over many years and within that time period, people transition on and off the team. The university client may undergo changes, too, so that the criteria for decision-making or the premise of the project becomes subject to review in a way that was not expected. Challenges related to these kinds of transitions came up in six of my nine interviews. Many of these challenges took the team members by surprise, so it is worth considering whether there are ways to better prepare when personnel changes occur. Obviously, a team has no control over changes in leadership at the client institution nor is it immediately obvious what issues new leaders will choose to focus on. In one case, an architect shared a story about working on a project for a new school and being 95% through the drawings before a new Dean was hired. He commented, "I would never do that again." The architect worked with a committee of Deans from related disciplines and a Vice-Chancellor. When the new Dean joined the meetings, his interactions with at least one of the team members did not go smoothly:

I remember when the new Dean came in and he said, "Well John, you know, do you think we could look at a terrace here?" And I say, "Yeah, we've been

thinking about a terrace for awhile here. We certainly could look at that.” And the Vice-Chancellor said, “Tom, we already looked at that. We rejected it. Terraces don’t work here.” So this happened two or three times and it was pretty clear when the project went south.

As the drawings were completed, there was an economic downturn and fund-raising was unsuccessful. The school decided to reconsider the scale of the project, downsizing their aspirations from a 138,000 gsf building to a 30,000 gsf building. The Dean chose to hire a new architect, to start fresh. The architect concluded, “it was clear to me that he felt we were really under the sway or beholden to that first committee, not to him”. This presumably was disappointing for the architect, and the cost to the client, at minimum, was the time and financial investment in the development of construction drawings for a building that would not get built. One can imagine a worse scenario –the project going ahead with in-fighting among the client leadership leading to last-minute changes in the design, budget overruns and finger-pointing, and so on. The most important lesson here may be to avoid undertaking a new building project when the primary stakeholders are not yet identified. That is a form of leadership discontinuity that can be predicted.

Another architect’s story picks up on the theme of jockeying for power raised above. In this case, a newcomer to a project appeared compelled to criticize the project in order to establish her own credentials:

We’d started doing kind of a programming/planning piece with the facilities director... an architect by training, ...we were kind of planning these new... kind of learning communities ... it’s a lot of fun, and it was very kind of not the typical numbers-driven program...it was a more philosophical approach. ...The [new] president comes in, and ... brings with him a good friend and colleague from his campus who now is the ... Campus Planner... So we’ve been doing this

for a couple of months, and this woman comes in and absolutely is very, is unnecessarily critical and blatantly negative about the work that we've been doing. Now we were hired by the facilities director. He was very happy with it. And we were near the end of our stint there. She comes in and was just really incredibly rude and condescending to us ... I kept thinking well, that's okay except that you're new and ... this is what we're doing and we're almost done. She was really, really incredibly nasty personally to me, which took me completely by surprise. And there ... didn't seem to be anything I could do about it. She just latched onto me as the problem.... Finally it became obvious to me that I was just a target... I suggested to my firm that I needed to be off the project. Because it was being totally unproductive. There wasn't anything that I could say or do that would be accepted... But I'm pleased to say that the program I had developed is what got built. It just needed to get built without me. ... I think part of it is that the new team was able to give her the feeling that she had impacted it in the way that she needed to because...they weren't there before she got there... It was much about power.

This architect assessed the deterioration of what had been a fun and engaging project. She could see that no matter how inappropriate and unfair the new campus planner's behavior was, the success of the project and, presumably, the reputation of the architecture firm was at stake. So she made a logical choice to remove herself from the project team. This story highlights the fact that no one knows at the beginning of a project what will be required to insure a project's success. This architect's choice put her own pride aside, and perhaps the urge to seek a more just accounting, in the interests of a more productive team process. This could be called conflict avoidance but in this case it was strategic and wise, assuming one accepts that the project's successful completion is the highest priority.

Failure to build effective working relationships. The last conflict pattern category that I identified has to do with the quality of the individual relationships that develop over the course of the project. It is probably not surprising that most of the people I talked with used words like “trust” and “respect” when they described effective design teams. Several mentioned the value of going out to dinner as a group. Others talked about the importance of good leadership and being treated fairly. Clients may inadvertently set the wrong tone when they focus all their attention on contract documents at the beginning of a project rather than building a sense of team. As one consultant commented:

If it's seen as a legalistic enterprise, then I think there's a sense that the architect is always trying to cheat you in some way and they're making out like bandits. Architects don't make a lot of money. You know, they're not trying to cheat you, but they are concerned if they see their fee being used up by excessive needling and arguments rather than a collaborative environment.

Project managers are held to account for keeping a project on time and on budget, but if their interactions with the architects are solely shaped by those themes, then people lose sight of why they're doing the project. “When you get very linear people on a project who are just saying... my job is to make sure this project is on time and on budget... then you sort of, your heart goes out of it. Of course I want to do this on time and on budget, but that's not *why* I'm doing it.” Several people talked about the problem of what was referred to as “funnel management”, where all communications from consultant to client or between two consultants from different disciplines are funneled through one manager. Sometimes that structure was inconvenient: “It just meant that we couldn't have a kind of friendly conversation to figure out what was happening.” In other instances it created real impediments: “Everything had to go through this very small

funnel. You had to get to him, you had to document endlessly everything. Everything was a piece of paper. And you would wait for his decision.”

One planning consultant reflected on a past project that was plagued by cost overruns. The university put a new project manager in charge who was instructed to “hold their feet to the fire.” The drawings were full of errors which led to lots of problems in the field and eventual lawsuits. He commented, “Of course, we blamed the architects and the contractors and the sub-consultants. We didn’t blame ourselves, but I think what we failed to do...was to build the working relationships...” He realizes now how counter-productive that approach can be: “I mean...in this office where we’re sitting, I don’t know how many projects we have going at the moment, let’s say there are 300 active projects in this office. Where do you think people put the greatest heart into the project?...the ones where they feel good about it.”

This comment from an architect summarizes the importance of team relationships:

When people come together they think they need to make people understand the importance of design and I do, too, but when you’re embarking on a planning or design project, in fact I know for certain that the relationships are more important. And as a confident designer and planner, I know that if I develop good relationships...then it gives us more flexibility in the design, it gives us more leeway. So I tell people all the time the most important thing is a relationship of trust and respect. Absolutely.

Cataloguing Effectiveness

As I worked on refining what I learned from the interviews, I created a chart summarizing the characteristics of good architects, good clients, and a good team that were explicitly discussed or could be inferred from the stories people told. There is

inevitably a good deal of overlap between this and the conflict patterns I've discussed, but the information is stated positively – What do good clients and good architects do? What are the characteristics of an effective team? I won't discuss the chart in more detail here, but I've included it as Table 2 at the end of the report and include a simplified version here:

Good Clients	Good Architects	An Effective Team
Understand their community	Are intellectually curious	Respects each members' work and each members' time
Understand how to insure effective decision-making	Balance art and craft	Exhibits a shared understanding of project goals
Let the architect be the designer	Are respectful of their consultants' time	Provides project specific skills and experience
Articulate clear project goals and concerns	Are able to surface conflict productively	Is right-sized
Are engaged in the project and accept their responsibilities for the process	Are problem-solvers	When problems arise, focus on what's beneficial for the project
Are motivated to find value	Can elicit creativity	Manages personnel transitions on and off the team
Insure that the project team members representing their interests fully understand the mission	Are respectful of clients' ideas	Learns from each other and with each other

Does it Matter?

Can we say that a better process leads to a better building? Some projects were deemed successful because the process went smoothly and the participants are rightly proud of the work they did together. Some projects were a source of pride because they turned out well despite the challenges; their success was a testament to certain individuals' efforts to turn a bad situation around. One architect commented about his building, "I think it will take another generation to appreciate it because the participants will be more aware of their battle scars than the project."

And yet I emerge from this effort of asking questions, listening, and sharing what I've heard ready to believe that paying attention to process, moment to moment interactions, can lead to profound change. Suggesting a better process leads to a better building is not the same as saying an easier process will produce good results. It's often easier to stifle debate, limit the number of recognized stakeholders, or otherwise narrow the considerations at stake which could lead to much worse buildings. Design team members who understand the forms conflict can take and recognize their own accountability in nurturing constructive conflict and thwarting its more destructive forms will be better prepared to insure our future is built with care.

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