

RIBA 

Handbook of Practice Management

Ninth Edition

Royal Institute of British Architects

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11.2.2 Resource-related risks

Risks that a practice can bring upon itself fall broadly into two categories – those associated with resources, and their adequacy in both quantity and quality, and risks associated with making mistakes during the performance of the services.

Upon being approached to undertake a new commission, the architect should ensure they have the necessary skills and resources available to undertake the services they are contracted to provide. Indeed the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct requires an architect to verify this before accepting the commission.

In order to assess this it is worth maintaining a register of the staff employed, and of their skills, qualifications and experience, recording such things as:

- architectural qualifications;
- other qualifications;
- skill and experience levels in different aspects of design and project management;
- skill and experience levels in different sectors;
- skill levels in different CAD programs and other software;
- specialist skills and experiences;
- training undertaken.

It is important that, having established a suitable set of records, they are maintained and updated to ensure that current information is available when needed. The establishment of such databases needs to be carefully thought through as over-complicating them will make them 'user-unfriendly' and lead to them not being properly completed or regularly updated by staff, or even not used at all.

These databases should be referred to when compiling CVs to be put into submissions for projects, but care should be taken to ensure that any individual whose CV is included in a project bid is available to work on the project should the bid be successful.

The other main staff-related risk is that individuals with a particular skill set or role in the practice can place the practice at risk should they decide to leave. It is any employee's contractual right to leave on completion of the agreed notice period, so it is important that the practice acknowledges this risk, and develops plans to mitigate it.

The risk of departure should, however, never be used as an excuse for failing to train all staff appropriately and adequately to enable them to perform their tasks.

Practices may sometimes sub-let a part of their services – having first obtained the client's agreement. In these instances the architect should check that the person(s) or practice(s) they will sub-contract the work to:

- have the necessary resources to perform the role;
- have the necessary skills and expertise to perform the role;
- have an appropriate level of PI insurance.

A formal sub-contract should be entered with the appropriate party on terms and conditions that are compatible with the architect's appointment with their client. It is particularly important to define fully and clearly the role that the sub-consultant is to perform, the deliverables that are their responsibility, and the timescale for performance of their part of the services.

11.2.3 Project-related risks

No matter how good the practice is, or how well it manages its risks, errors will occasionally occur, and the way in which the practice resolves these may determine the chances of a claim being made against it and its chances of securing future work from the client. As noted above, the practice is required to purchase PI insurance to cover any losses a client suffers due to the architect having failed to perform their services as required under their appointment. These risks can be minimised by the implementation of robust procedures that are applied throughout the practice comprehensively (see Chapter 10).

Particular attention should be paid to establishing a good document storage and retrieval system, which will make documents easy to find should suggestions of breach of duty be made, and that a clear record is maintained showing exactly what was issued to whom, and when.

Another area requiring careful planning and management is control over members of staff, and the checking procedures that are established to make sure that only carefully prepared and thoroughly checked information is issued. It is particularly challenging to keep control of this when the majority of information and correspondence is produced and issued electronically.

Particular attention should be paid to the performance of inspection services. It is critical that the architect's team, including site staff where appointed, understand their role, the scope of their authority, and the requirements that the form of construction contract places on them as architect. It is important that those inspecting the works on behalf of the architect are experienced in this, and have a thorough understanding of the contract documentation, and thus what should be constructed by the