

# Ethics in Architectural Practice



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# Foreword

Following the publication of the 'UN Sustainable Development Goals in Practice', earlier in 2017 and the creation of the RIBA Ethics and Sustainable Development Commission (approved by Council in July 2017), the RIBA has undertaken three case studies which look at the idea of 'ethical practice' within the architectural profession.

The aim of these case studies is to explore how ethics features in current architectural practice, to highlight some of the ethical issues facing the profession and to provoke debate with a view to sharing information and ideas.



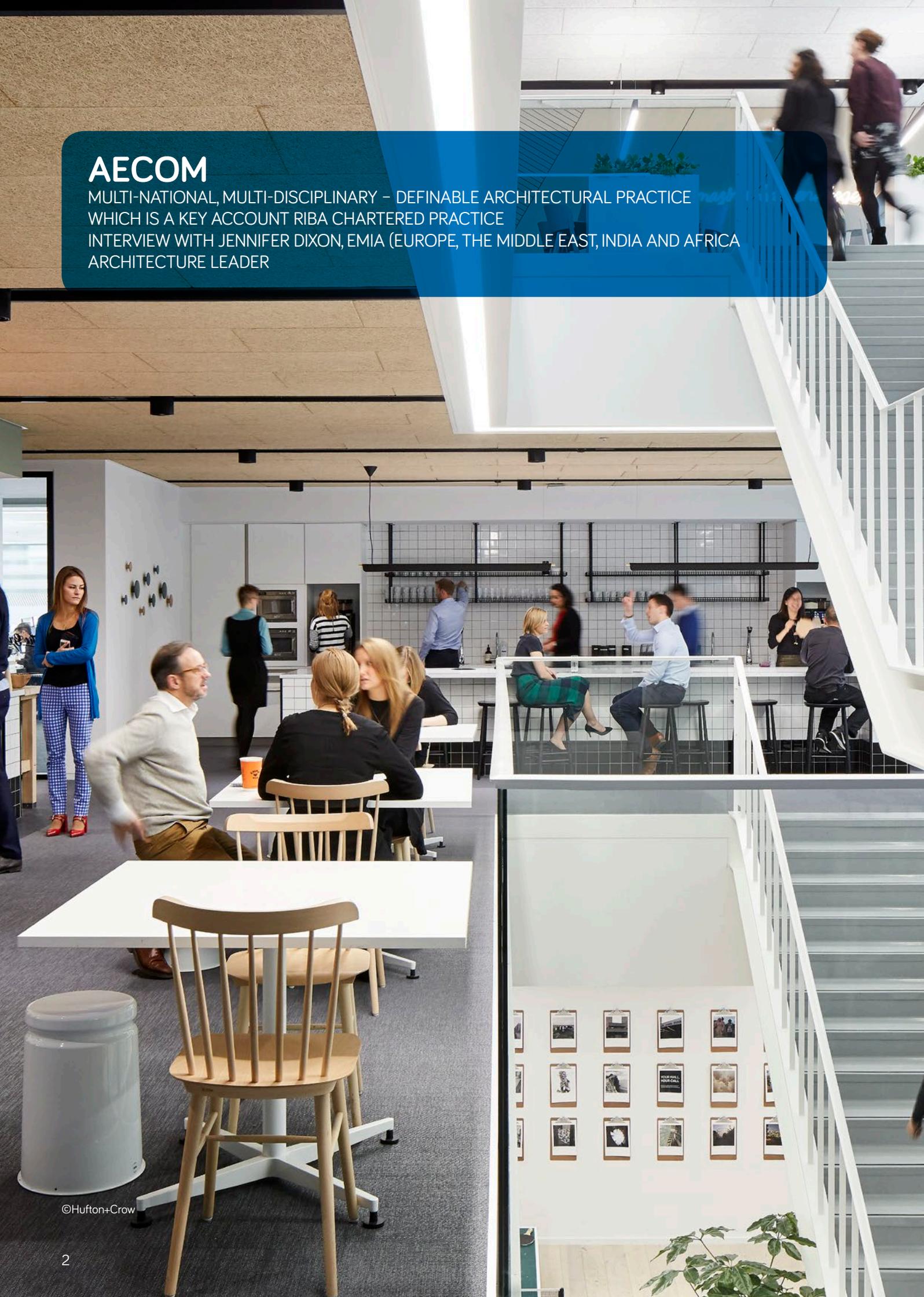
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# AECOM

MULTI-NATIONAL, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY – DEFINABLE ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE  
WHICH IS A KEY ACCOUNT RIBA CHARTERED PRACTICE  
INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER DIXON, EMIA (EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST, INDIA AND AFRICA  
ARCHITECTURE LEADER



## ABOUT AECOM

AECOM is essentially an 'engineering design firm', bringing together the collective expertise of architects, engineers, designers, planners, surveyors, scientists and project management professionals. It serves clients in more than 150 countries worldwide in markets such as: transportation, facilities, energy, the environment, water, and oil and gas. Of the 85,000+ employees worldwide, approximately 1500 operate as architects on a day-to-day basis. Nearly 500 of these architects practice in EMIA, under Jennifer Dixon's professional leadership.

## WHAT ETHICAL PRACTICE MEANS TO AECOM

In its own words, the history of AECOM is a group of employees working in the built environment who 'shared a dream of creating an industry-leading firm dedicated to making the world a better place'. Now that the company has evolved into a '[G]lobal network of experts', that vision has crystallized into a commitment to 'unlock opportunities, protect our environment and improve people's lives'. AECOM's view is that built environment professionals generally, and architects in particular, are in a position always to secure a better outcome; indeed, they have a responsibility to do so. Becoming an RIBA Chartered Practice in April 2017 was seen as an important underwriting of the quality and integrity of the 'product' AECOM's architects offer to the end-user as well as the client, a product that withstands scrutiny in an international context.

## MAINTAINING ETHICAL PRACTICE THROUGH CHANGE

AECOM's past commitment to ethical outcomes has been demonstrated over the course of the four consecutive years that the influential Ethisphere Institute rated the practice as one of the world's most ethical companies. Radical changes to the practice have occurred since, including the appointment of a new CEO in 2014 and the acquisition of URS Corporation. That period of change is ongoing, with all units of AECOM currently being integrated internationally and professionally, a root-and-branch re-building, and the setting of a consistent culture and standards.

AECOM's relatively young architectural practice in EMIA has gained maturity from the company's other areas of operation and specialism, transforming it

from a small unit (with a focus on sports stadia and projects in Madrid and the UAE) to a comprehensive and truly global architectural service, delivering high performance buildings, large infrastructure projects and resilient communities. As the A in AECOM grows, there is an opportunity for it both to influence and be influenced by the ethics of the organisation as a whole. Underpinning the root-and-branch re-building of the practice is the ambition of AECOM's CEO, Mike Burke, to make this global company the single best provider of a fully integrated 'Design, Build, Finance and Operate' offer – with the interests of the client and the professions, including architecture, firmly in mind.

## ENABLING THE PROFESSION TO THRIVE

Although the architectural practice has taken on AECOM's new culture and consistency, it retains a sense of ethical responsibility to support the profession as a whole. As a means of enabling the profession to thrive, AECOM promote the broad role of the architect, as lead designer and co-ordinator, to clients and architects alike. Core to the current day 'master builder' role is an evidence-based approach including accurate reporting and reliable execution; avoiding over-selling and underperforming.

## ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT CLIENT INTERACTIONS

There is a natural tension when a large multi-national and multi-disciplinary enterprise seeks to provide a bespoke service to clients. AECOM's architectural practice, like the rest of the company, cannot rely on the more 'traditional' methods of fostering good relationships with clients. Personal relationships with clients and other practices based on private understanding and recommendations – which smaller architectural practices may take for granted – are potentially open to being misconstrued by other stakeholders within the industry and must be avoided.

It is for this reason that AECOM emphasises the need for every decision on any project to demonstrate integrity – to be as objective as possible, based on facts and figures, and able to stand up to scrutiny. Accountable decision-making is: for the benefit of clients who know that the professional advice and representations being given are reliable, for the benefit of fellow architects who can work with AECOM

in an open and transparent manner, and for the benefit of AECOM as a business gaining a strong and respected reputation in the industry.

### **DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING**

The driving force behind the transformation is a move from basing ways of working and reputation on anecdotal evidence, story-telling and general brand awareness to data-driven decision-making, and reliable and accurate reporting. It is essentially a shift away from a subjective approach based on past relationships and recommendations. This is demonstrated most clearly in the process for procuring the teams of architects that will design and deliver a large proportion of the projects AECOM leads. In the past, the more subjective approach resulted in a limited pool of architects and contractors, lacking in diversity, as well as risking exposure to kickbacks, bias and favouritism.

AECOM's procurement team is now pioneering a rigorous evaluation system whereby AECOM's architects (as 'expert procurers'), advise engineers and quantity surveyors throughout the procurement process. Selection for any given project is based on objective criteria, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, supported by the use of databases, scorecards, industry surveys and other 'hard' information. The only subjective part of the procurement process is a detailed and more targeted interview, focused on the technical capabilities of the architects in question in relation to key elements of individual projects, such as their commitment to digital transformation. The starting point is selecting architects who are right for the project and who will secure a better outcome; the broader aim is for the project to secure the best, most fair, ethical and reliable outcomes for all stakeholders.

AECOM applies a system of ethics which, where possible, takes personal involvement out of decision-making and instead relies on objective information to advise clients and procure sub-consultants, for example.

### **EMBEDDING ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR THROUGH FORMAL POLICIES AND TRAINING**

Ethics are embedded in this transformation through comprehensive written standards – a Global Ethical Business Conduct Policy and Code of Conduct.

This comprises 'behavioural requirements' alongside compulsory leadership training and testing on ethical conduct, involving practical scenarios and dilemmas facing construction industry professionals, which is challenging, thorough and difficult to pass first time!

The values in AECOM's Code of Conduct call on their architects to 'inspire', to 'anticipate' and to 'dream' while also focusing on the need to 'safeguard'. More than aspirational words, these calls to action go to the heart of the manner in which AECOM operates as an employer. This includes its management of balanced working hours, the offer of competitively paid internships, an extensive mentoring programme (focusing on equality, diversity and inclusion) and its creation of 'psychologically safe spaces' for employees to raise and discuss concerns.

AECOM seeks adherence to certain behaviours through rigorously worded policies and ethical conduct training. This is supported by AECOM's employee appraisal process, introduced by the new CEO in 2015, which places at least an equal focus on behaviour and values as on performance. Focusing on key behaviours has already seen dramatic results. Engaging formerly low scoring employees with clearly articulated expectations at each career grade has transformed them into 'high scorers', for performance as well as behaviours. This has contributed to the continued success of the company and a stable future.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the small details, such as setting up an ethics hotline, to the big picture – including becoming a signatory of the UN Global Compact – AECOM's architectural practice has a clear ethos and a clear plan: supporting its employees, setting high industry standards and supporting and promoting the architectural profession as a whole in order to secure better outcomes for all.

### **QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES**

AECOM applies a system of ethics which takes subjectivity out of procurement decision-making and seeks to establish certain behaviours through policies and training. This approach raises various questions and challenges for AECOM (and other large, multi-disciplinary practices): Can ethics exist without personal or subjective involvement? Where are ethics generated and by whom? How are ethics defined?



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## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Ethical Practice:** built environment professionals, and architects in particular, are in a position to secure a better outcome and have a responsibility to do so.
- **Maintaining ethical practice:** change is an opportunity to integrate a business, e.g. internationally and professionally, and to have a root-and-branch re-building – setting standards and a consistent culture.
- **Enabling the profession to thrive:** the broad role of the architect, as the modern-day ‘master builder’, is best supported and promoted through an evidence-based approach, accurate reporting and reliable execution, which inspires confidence in the client.
- **Accountable and transparent client interactions:** accountable decision-making, which demonstrates integrity, is crucial for building a strong reputation.
- **Data-driven decision-making:** a rigorous and largely objective procurement process can prioritise fair, ethical and reliable outcomes for all stakeholders.
- **Embedding ethical behaviour through formal policies and training:** placing at least an equal focus on behaviour and values as on performance can transform employees, and thereby build a better business with a more stable future.

# WOODS BAGOT

MULTI-NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE –  
RIBA INTERNATIONAL CHARTERED PRACTICE PILOT SCHEME  
INTERVIEW WITH NIK KARALIS, CEO AND RICHARD FENNE,  
PRINCIPAL AND STUDIO CHAIR – DUBAI



## **ABOUT WOODS BAGOT**

Woods Bagot describes itself as ‘... a People Architecture Company Invested in Global Communities and Local Culture’. It is led purposefully by CEO Nik Karalis and his team of Regional Directors and studio Principals, including Richard Fenne in Dubai.

## **WHAT ETHICAL PRACTICE MEANS TO WOODS BAGOT**

Woods Bagot comes across as highly collaborative, passionate, acutely business-minded and eager to invest in people, as well as being diverse and ethical. At Woods Bagot, ethical practice forms the link between the company’s aim to invest in communities and culture and the personal goals of employees. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not an ‘add-on’, but a crucial part of an architectural practice in which employees are highly invested, and which has an overarching goal to make a positive contribution to society and the environment.

CSR is in constant development across the firm, with an intention to achieve a more formal and coherent approach that is informed and honed through a regular business-wide survey.

## **ALIGNING BUSINESS INTERESTS WITH REGIONAL ISSUES**

Woods Bagot’s CSR policies are developed through a careful alignment of business interests with regional issues brought forward by the staff.

For example, in response to higher than global average building energy use in the Middle East (40%+), Woods Bagot became a founding member of the Emirates Green Building Council, to which staff also give their time for free. As part of this initiative, employees are analysing building typologies to determine what environmental improvements can be made, and the practice is at the forefront of creating a portfolio of energy neutral villas.

While some issues are regional, others are more global. With 50% of the world’s population expected to live in cities by 2050, urbanisation raises broader areas of concern including the need for housing, and medical and technical advancements. Woods Bagot is proactively searching for, supporting and creating local initiatives and projects with staff resources and knowledge to address these issues throughout the regions in which it operates.

## **GIVING BACK TO COMMUNITIES**

Employees of Woods Bagot are encouraged and assisted to undertake pro bono work that ‘gives something back’ and has tangible outcomes for the communities involved. They give time and expertise to grass-roots projects which vary from studio to studio and continent to continent, but which all arise out of concern for people and the planet. Different studios approach this in different ways, trying to engage with the local community through various routes. For example, the studio in Dubai is deeply involved in local academic establishments, with employees involving students in community-based projects, sharing knowledge, mentoring and providing life-fulfilling practical experiences.

## **EMBEDDING ETHICAL POLICIES IN DAILY PRACTICE – DUE DILIGENCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

While day-to-day operations at Woods Bagot are largely regional and local, the practice aims at standards that are global and consistent. Their global policies and committees give way to ethical considerations that are embedded in daily practice, and risks to ethical practice are identified and resolved at an early stage. As a large and expanding architectural practice, Woods Bagot must remain in control of any risks it takes in order to protect and strengthen its brand and reputation. One such initiative is its Global Country Risk Register – an externally managed register identifying countries of operation and the potential risks of such operation – allowing key decisions to be made about proposed projects. Other ethically-focused global governance tools include probity policies, an anti-bribery and corruption plan, client assessments and an ethical plan for each individual project, which draws together corporate plans, standard policies and information from the risk register into a single tailored project plan.



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What Woods Bagot does exceptionally well is to anticipate, not only the changing trends within the architectural profession, but also possible risks and ethical challenges such as the human rights record of a particular client or government, the anti-corruption legislation in operation within given geographical areas, or the approach of a contractor to environmental sustainability issues. Through rigorous due diligence – thoroughly planning and mapping out each proposed project, checking the political stance of countries involved, checking the applicable legislative and policy frameworks – Woods Bagot is able to assess whether any risks highlighted can be safely overcome and make informed decisions about whether and how to continue with the proposed project.

This approach to risk assessment and management inspires confidence in clients but also protects the value of the brand – which the CEO and his Principals recognise could easily dissolve as a result of poor decision making or unethical practice.

### **CHANGING CULTURE AND BEHAVIOUR THROUGH KNOWLEDGE, TRAINING AND AWARENESS**

Woods Bagot believes that ‘old behaviours’ – including expensive client trips, informal personal relationships with clients, trading on stories and favours – do not translate to modern practice. The biggest ethical challenge is to raise awareness and change the culture within the industry.

The commitment of the practice to supporting professional behaviour (including on the use of social media) is being achieved through staff training and well-considered practical policies, covering topics such as corporate gifts and hospitality; where a fairly spontaneous trip to Milan to meet a client for dinner may have been commonplace historically, it now has to be more carefully considered and justified in light of environmental and ethical concerns.

Increasing ethical awareness, training and formal policies may not be universally popular – some employees

may be disappointed to be refused travel to a particular event or a client trip – but these changes are clearly for the greater good of the practice. Woods Bagot recognises the need to remind its staff that they work for a large, international organisation on very high value projects, often with government clients, which give them the opportunity to influence major decisions, but also the responsibility to exercise such power wisely and with awareness.

### **COLLABORATING IN AN ETHICAL SUPPLY CHAIN**

Woods Bagot has a strong focus on robust procurement processes particularly in its Dubai studio. The practice wants to distance itself from the broad criticism of unethical construction practices in the Middle East, widely commented on in the general media. The Dubai studio works with major developers and government organisations, operating within very strict corporate governance structures – which extend to not naming products and manufacturers in the selection process – meaning that the studio must instead rely only on performance specification. To avoid complicity in unethical labour practices in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as negative press, the Dubai studio always works with Tier 1 clients who have in place stringent labour policies, and Tier 1 contractors who enter joint ventures with local companies; this allows for standards to be upheld, while also involving local skills and resources in major projects.

### **THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT – INFLUENCING ETHICAL OUTCOMES**

The architects at Woods Bagot recognise that they are not always the key decision makers on a project, but that they may instead hold a key role as ‘influencers’, both on practical matters and in respect of ethical considerations. Their aim is to be aligned with the clients’ interests while demonstrating ‘international best practice’.

This is a broadening of the role of the architect, a new phenomenon, which has come to the fore as they have become involved in larger logistics and infrastructure projects. In projects such as the development of a new metro system and the de-carbonising of existing transportation services, the architect is critical and is in the best position to guide infrastructure projects to deliver on a social consciousness platform – involving community input and engagement.

Woods Bagot believes that, as the custodian of the idea and the final product, it is crucial that the architect is involved throughout the life of a project and that there is an ethical obligation on architects to influence those around them to secure the best outcome. This approach is an emanation of the personal experience of Nik, who was involved in a project where he outlived three political leaders!

### **SECURING AND LEVERAGING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

Woods Bagot has seen a whole new awareness amongst graduates – of equality, diversity and inclusion, of ethical considerations and of environmental sustainability. As a result, there has been a shift in the dynamic of the studios, as the practice seeks to engage these professionals in a way that enhances business.

Woods Bagot has 47% female employees and still recognises there is work to do to improve equality and diversity at senior levels. The aim of securing a more balanced leadership team is taken seriously by measuring attrition rates, conducting exit surveys, using resources such as Glassdoor, and measuring the impact of events such as Brexit and the UK and US elections on diversity. The practice recognises the need to provide a strong and engaging training programme for employees, providing them with both opportunity and career development, continually educating and nurturing the talent within the practice. This is supported further by a mobility policy that allows and encourages talent to remain within the business even as circumstances change and evolve.

While true of many practices, the key difference is Woods Bagot’s willingness to actively look at issues and respond to feedback from employees and consider how the practice can improve their employment offer in line with the broader business aims and ethos. Diverse and inclusive employment is seen as vital to the success of the practice, with an understanding that traditional architectural practices which do not change will evaporate. This self-awareness undoubtedly makes Woods Bagot a more dynamic and resilient business.

## NEXT STEPS

Woods Bagot recognises two transitions occurring within the architectural profession: one is a move from closed, isolated architectural practices to a more open, transparent and collaborative environment; the other is a move to greater commerciality, confidentiality and data protection including the growing use of Non-Disclosure Agreements. The extent to which these transitions and trends can be reconciled in due course will have an impact on the ethical considerations of architectural practices.

Woods Bagot considers the principal challenges in the future to be: retaining relevance; anticipating shifts within the profession and the market, and remaining at the forefront of any transitions. They are committed to achieving this by researching and investing, by thoroughly training and engaging a diverse workforce, by upholding standards globally, by influencing others, by collaborating and by continuing to recognise and understand the ethos of the local communities who consume architectural space – placing the social needs of cities and user groups at the very centre – and ultimately by developing a residual built environment legacy for the community.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Giving back to communities:** pro bono work that ‘gives something back’ and has tangible outcomes for the communities involved builds relationships locally and regionally.
- **Embedding ethical policies in daily practice:** anticipating changing trends as well as possible risks and ethical challenges together with implementing robust due diligence and comprehensive risk management processes protects and strengthens brand and reputation.
- **Changing culture and behaviour through knowledge, training and awareness:** raising awareness of ethical issues will change the culture within the industry.
- **Collaborating in an ethical supply chain:** robust procurement processes help to avoid unethical labour practices while also providing opportunities for local skills and resources.
- **The role of the architect – influencing ethical outcomes:** the architect is critical and is in the best position to influence others on key ethical issues.
- **Securing and leveraging equality, diversity and inclusion:** diverse and inclusive employment, together with a willingness to change and adapt is vital to the success of a practice.
- **Next Steps:** the key skills of a resilient practice are retaining relevance and anticipating shifts within the profession and the market.



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# RED DEER

SMALL, UK BASED, RIBA CHARTERED PRACTICE

INTERVIEW WITH LUCAS CHE TIZARD (DIRECTOR), LIONEL REAL DE AZÚA (DIRECTOR),  
CIARÁN O'BRIEN (DIRECTOR) AND LINDSAY FALLER (PRACTICE MANAGER)



## **ABOUT RED DEER**

Red Deer is one of many small RIBA Chartered Practices. Set up five years ago, the Shoreditch-based practice comprises (at the time of writing) three directors, a practice manager and two architectural assistants; the three directors and practice manager were interviewed for this case study.

## **WHAT ETHICAL PRACTICE MEANS TO RED DEER**

The directors understand the term 'ethics' to mean the provision of a higher quality of life or creating a certain standard of living for people. The main reason for articulating ethics in this way is due to the serious consideration that the practice gives to the materials used on the projects they design – materials are central to their approach and are both ethically sourced and made to last. As a small practice, Red Deer are aware of the opportunities they have to grow their business on an ethical basis, and to influence client decision-making, particularly overseas.

Although ethics and sustainable development usually engage huge overarching (and often global) themes, it is essential to understand that these broad goals require proper foundations from within a practice.

## **INVESTING IN PEOPLE BEFORE PREMISES**

Having practised from an archetype of the young (London) architectural office – working out of a warehouse in East London – Red Deer recently rejected the concept of 'office', following a huge concentration of effort in the highly praised and publicised 'Luz' project: they let go of the warehouse and instead embraced a shared space and a practice manager.

Streamlining the business in this way was an important development for the practice, enabling it to be more sustainable, dynamic and client-focussed. The freedom gained through this agility complements their eclectic and self-testing style of work (they deliberately have no manifesto) and is integral to their ethics.

## **BEING CONSCIOUS OF EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

Although set up by three white men, Red Deer are establishing themselves as a first generation equal, diverse and inclusive practice. Since becoming employers, gender equality – that rare attribute in the construction industry – has been in full force. Achieving a 50:50 gender split was a conscious decision, although the women now employed were also the best candidates for their roles. As a previously all-male practice, the tone and mood of the workplace had become 'unreal'; the directors are certain that the subsequent change has improved the business. The self-awareness and positive decisions of the all male founding directors will create opportunities to achieve greater balance at senior level as the business grows.

Additionally, eight nationalities are represented in this small practice (with some individuals comprising more than one) and numerous languages are spoken. The effect on business is very positive, greatly broadening the potential for acquiring and managing work, and therefore also for growth. This has attuned the directors to the benefits of broadening the diversity of their team as it expands.

## **LEADING FROM THE SIDE**

Even in a small practice, the leadership style sets the context and tone for the business. Equal treatment in the workplace is always high on the Red Deer agenda, with the emphasis being on the notion of 'apprenticeship' and leading from the side (rather than the front), sharing ownership of a project with architectural staff and encouraging them to test themselves. This dynamic has been a great asset to the business, as staff have invariably become more committed to a project's – and the practice's – success.

## **LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE – INFLUENCING ETHICAL CLIENT DECISIONS**

Many small practices attract interest from overseas developers. Red Deer's experience of seeking to maximise the positive impact of projects in different and difficult ethical contexts has been instructive. During the contract proposal stage for an art installation project in Dubai, the practice stipulated that local architecture students should be involved in developing the design so that some educational benefit would be drawn from the project for the community. Although this project did not ultimately go ahead, Red Deer's

approach to using local resources has remained consistent and a new project for a restaurant in Dubai has given them the opportunity to find and work with some small scale fabricators based in the outskirts of the city – again making sure all elements are locally sourced and using the right accreditations.

During the early stage of discussions with a restaurant client in Kuwait, the practice considered (in-house) the approach to be taken with regard to the use of labour. Although the project did not go ahead, Red Deer had developed a design strategy and procurement approach addressing their concerns about the use of labour that they can use and adapt for future projects.

A new brief for three projects in Nigeria – townhouses, a mixed use co-working space and a private new build family home in Abuja and Lagos – will require the practice to develop their approach in a new setting, aiming to maximise the positive benefits of construction and secure safe working conditions by drawing on past experience and gaining a clear understanding of the context.

The Nigerian clients are already deeply aware of the practice's ethos of working with people as equals, engaging with local craft and ensuring a good quality of life for all workers on the construction site.

Red Deer's methodology, despite being digital and global in perspective, finds its balance in being able to shake the hand of every carpenter and labourer on site. The projects in Nigeria will be no different in this respect.

Research of the local context and materials are key. Nigeria, although one of the world's biggest producers of hardwoods, exports 80% of it to Europe and the United States. Red Deer intends to disrupt this value chain by using the discarded waste hardwoods and showing what can be done with the materials – something that seems to have been forgotten as the use of concrete has increased.

### **MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY**

Difficult issues also arise in a UK context. The offer of “kickbacks” from collaborators and suppliers occasionally feature. The directors have been exposed to the temptation small practices face, particularly

when financially at risk, to accept unethical financial inducements; but the integrity of the practice always prevails. The decision in such circumstances rests not only on the professional context of practice (for example, the need to adhere to a Code of Professional Conduct/Practice) but also, and more clearly, on the strength of the practice's belief in the value of its work and its brand and reputation.

### **DIRECTLY ENGAGING IN CHARITY WORK**

The directors appreciate that not everyone enjoys a good standard of living and so it is important that architects also engage with projects where architecture (and design) is a necessity. Red Deer sought to do this in their early days of practice – for instance, assisting a charity in finding solutions to bedding and accommodation problems in refugee camps. There are significant challenges to getting involved in pro bono work – such as insufficient donations to execute the project, as well as the imperative to survive as a business. More recently, their volunteer time has been given to community-based installation projects. However, now that the practice has greater business stability, the directors are re-invigorated and keen to engage in direct action charity work on a regular basis as part of their general portfolio.

### **RESPONSIBLE SOURCING**

Describing their practice as ‘environmentally conscious’, the directors are aware of the obstacles to running an entirely environmentally neutral practice, particularly in a modern construction context. But sustainability is an inherent and well-integrated part of their business model, in particular using and re-using materials (including waste materials). With a care of selection and an eye to the distant future, the practice specifies materials that are designed to last and will no doubt outlive the projects that have utilised them, such as wood from a canal lock or a 250 year old carpenter's table.

Ethically sourced materials are also core to Red Deer's approach. A narrative emerges from materials which gives authenticity to the created space. Therefore, to properly understand a project or space there must be familiarity with the materials, the tools used to manipulate such materials and the people using the tools. Thus the Red Deer directors always visit materials and processes sites directly, including local fabricators and craftsmen if the project is overseas.



## CONCLUSION

An ethical approach in a small business is not without challenges, and there are a range of contextual issues which directly impact on ethical practice: the role of the architect in a changing construction environment (as no longer being one of 'master builder', but 'co-ordinator'); the absence of business and entrepreneurship teaching in the syllabus; and the financial risk architects face due to under-resourced fees and uneven cash flow.

Although these are issues which architects collectively (including the RIBA) need to address – broader changes can also be brought about by individual practices developing a clear ethical approach which strengthens their independence and authority, as well as enabling them to acquire greater commercial awareness.

The ethics of a small practice are an emanation of the principles of the individuals involved, and develop with their professional experience and business growth.

Although not yet fully formalised or enumerated at Red Deer (except through some broad written policies, which will no doubt develop with the growth of the business) their principles can be effectively applied in relation to the ethical challenges and opportunities they face as a small practice. Ethics in this small practice are necessarily a dynamic process – infusing their general approach and informing the whole process of making architecture.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Responsible sourcing:** taking care to consider where materials have come from, as well as the local context and craft, is inherently sustainable. As a general approach, being 'conscious' of environmental impact and having control over the materials and their sourcing can be effective. Red Deer are unequivocal that rigorous curation of their projects significantly improves their business offering.
- **Investing in people before premises:** rethinking 'office' as the people and work rather than bricks and mortar – which can be distracting and expensive – can have a very positive impact. It is important to consider what is actually needed to make the business an effective enterprise – a good practice manager can allow the emphasis to be on clients, the design process and the working culture.
- **Being conscious of equality, diversity and inclusion:** it is essential to continually evaluate equality and diversity as a practice grows. Being self-aware and open to conscious decisions helps to ensure that the right people are recruited for the job – the people who can offer a counter-balance to an existing working environment, ideas and approaches – and who can help to develop the practice.
- **Learning from experience:** an awareness of ethical issues that arise during the course of a project (whether nationally or internationally) can have gradual, but pervasive, effects on a practice's approach that may not be immediately obvious – such as a change in attitude leading to changes in project intake and outcomes, in turn leading to alteration of the brand and public perception.
- **Architects play an active role in promoting and securing an ethical approach to how an asset will be built and the context in which it will be built:** having in-house discussions early can be translated into suggestions or stipulations for briefing requirements which set the course for the project as it progresses.
- **Leading from the side:** an approach to staff which is based on principles of apprenticeship and mentoring not only creates a stimulating and engaging environment day-to-day, but also allows a practice to effectively develop a new generation of architects to support the future of the practice.
- **Directly engaging in charity work:** the Red Deer directors' desire to re-engage with charitable architectural or design work that meets an essential societal need demonstrates how pro bono projects can help to reinvigorate and develop the practice, as well as strengthening the portfolio and brand. Engagement with the local community has a similar positive effect.

**PRACTICE DEPARTMENT  
ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS**

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