



Elgin Estate Feasibility Study

## Architects That Invest To Win, Win More Business!

*David Miller Architects (DMA) is a forward-thinking, leading-edge architectural practice that has made significant investments in people, performance, and processes since its inception in 2000. The net result is improved client service levels and an unparalleled portfolio of repeat business.*

For the first six years David Miller worked alone, but then in 2006 he committed to grow his practice to service larger clients and to take on more challenging projects. With a long-term vision for growth and a well-developed 'emotional intelligence' (EQ), Miller embarked upon his search to recruit like-minded architects. *"Right from the start I looked for people with a certain temperament,"* he explained. *"The best practices hire great thinkers, great communicators, and team-players but I wanted more."*

Miller searched specifically for individuals with minds open for learning and an abundance of creative energy for problem solving in response to project requirements. *"These people are the real transformers of projects because they build enduring and trusted client relationships,"* concluded Miller.

According to author Daniel Goleman, this rare combination of abilities is common in architects with high EQ. For Miller, it is the primary reason for the unusually high volume of repeat business enjoyed by

his practice. Today the DMA team is 19-strong, having grown steadily to service its expanding portfolio of commercial, education, and residential projects. Throughout this growth period staff turnover has remained low. *"I consider it my job to make everyone on our team feel supported by investing in technology and processes to enable them,"* explained Miller.

DMA applied for ISO 9001 accreditation when there were only four people on the team. It quickly became apparent to Miller that when supported by good processes his team would be free to make decisions without deferring to him for approval. This approach nurtured and insulated new recruits in a way that quickly enabled their self-confidence to grow; giving them a greater sense of autonomy and achievement.

*"The whole practice found ISO 9001 to be very liberating and for the first time we were able to pitch for public sector projects that require ISO 9001 compliance from all consultants,"* commented Fiona Clark, Practice Director.

There was also a human benefit, as Clark explained. *“Younger people found it easier to increase their contributions to the team leading to increased efficiency and more predictable operations across all projects.”* Such positive outcomes quickly led to DMA applying for and securing ‘Investors in People’ recognition; placing them among the top 0.5% of architectural practices in the UK.

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**David Miller,**  
Director & Principal Architect

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, with an office filled with emotionally intelligent architects and designers with minds open to learning, the adoption of Building Information Modelling (BIM) processes, technologies and collaborative behaviour has also been successful.

The result; DMA is now years ahead of the curve for complying with the Government’s BIM initiative for all centrally procured projects to achieve Level 2 BIM status by 2016. As with other parts of their business, DMA approached the transition to BIM with an appetite for learning and a hunger to understand all aspects of the new collaborative workflows.

*“Ordinarily across the practice we measure everything so we can continue to improve,”* added Clark. *“We therefore committed to measure the cost of our BIM investment and compare it to the value we realised at the practice and project level.”*

As with ISO 9001 and Investors in People, DMA engaged external consultants to help measure their BIM performance. First they looked at DMA’s BIM adoption on a macro level using the American ‘National Institute of Building Sciences – Facilities Information Council National BIM Standards’ (UK standards were still under-development) and after they looked at DMA’s capabilities on a micro-level by assessing staff skills when using Revit, Autodesk’s BIM software.

To assess staff skills, DMA engaged the KnowledgeSmart team to identify individual Revit skills gaps and to plug those gaps using customised training programs. *“We hope to measure significant productivity and efficiency improvements...”* explained Miller, *“...but that isn’t our primary goal.”*

Indeed when each software license costs around £4,000 it makes little sense to use only a tiny fraction of the software. With modular training from White Frog, prescribed in response to an individual’s KnowledgeSmart skills-gap assessment, DMA can be sure that its architects’ design and project development skills are uninhibited by their software knowledge.

Miller continued, *“We first want to ensure that our BIM adoption is strong and the best way to raise the bar is to make sure our architects can achieve everything they need to achieve inside the BIM software environment.”*

#### **Key KnowledgeSmart Benefits to DMA:**

**Improve the quality** and effectiveness of training course material by benchmarking skills to identify knowledge gaps.

**Save money** on training by ‘filling’ knowledge gaps instead of ‘completing’ whole training courses.’

**Save time** on training by taking ‘little sips’ instead of ‘big gulps’ of training via ‘continuous up-skilling’ initiatives.

Sadly not all practice leaders believe in the value of training staff. Some even reject the notion of training on the grounds that the newly skilled employee will just up-sticks and leave for more money elsewhere.

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**Fiona Clark,**  
Practice Director

Of course, people don't always change jobs for more money, many move in search of greater job satisfaction. But as Zig Ziglar once said *“What's worse than training your workers and losing them? Not training them and keeping them!”*

It is common for employees to feel under-appreciated and un-supported by employers when they are passed over for training or promotions. As new talent joins a firm, with new skills in hand, the current staff can start to feel a little overshadowed. Causing them to seek out pastures new; this is highly disruptive to active projects as project-specific knowledge leaves the project along with the staff. According to Ben Franklin *“An investment in education always pays the highest returns.”*

Indeed, the longer the construction project the greater the chance of team members leaving. As many construction projects take a long time to complete, and as starting and finishing with the same

team in place is a sure-fire way to provide the best client service levels, retaining staff that are well trained and highly knowledgeable is likely to contribute more than anything else towards improved client service levels and project quality.

DMA constantly reinvests for growth. For example, R&D Tax Credits realised from their investment in BIM have been reinvested in its staff to assess and improve their individual knowledge and productivity. And this investment in practice performance is amplified at the project level where DMA clients are also able to measure improved performance.

Miller explained why this matters to DMA *“Our clients make no secret of their project and consultant performance measurement processes and we know that we score very well because they continue to give us larger projects.”*

As UK projects move towards more process-driven workflows DMA is ideally suited to further expand its portfolio of projects. Miller concluded,

***“...the real transformers of projects build enduring and trusted client relationships.”***

**David Miller,**  
Director & Principal Architect

*“Our continued investment in the practice, our people, and our processes is paying off. Clients have come to know that they will always enjoy a consistent level of output from DMA which greatly reduces their project risk. And I know that our achievement in that regard is a team achievement of which I am very proud.”*