

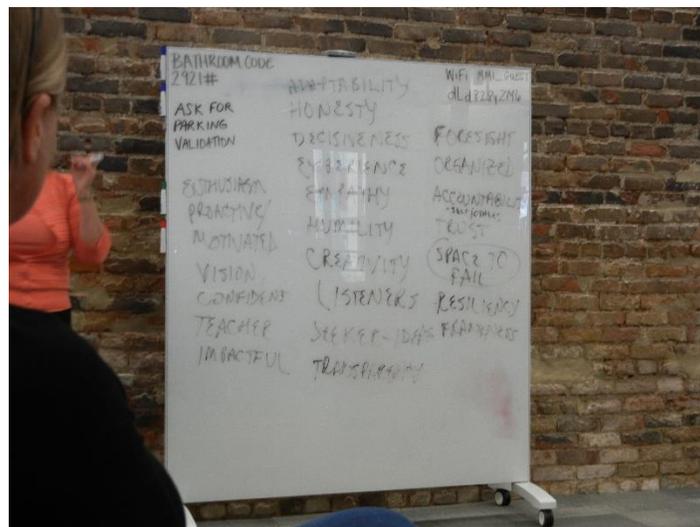
The Art of Decision Making was organized by Will Stanford II and Jared Serwer, and hosted at the Mannington showroom on the Westside. The session’s key topics allowed the scholars to assess and understand their leadership personality traits, study the history of modern architectural practice to inform the future of the practice, and gather insight from principles of varying firm sizes/structures regarding business and professional decisions.

Presentation #1 : Navigating the Paradox of Leadership

*“People are situations to manage, not widgets to fix; people are not a problem to solve.”*  
 – Dr. Megan Neyer



The first presentation, Navigating the Paradox of Leadership, was conducted by Dr. Megan Neyer, and highlighted her career in optimization of systems and groups. She stated that optimization is about energy management, and as leaders, you are dictating the system and it needs to work effectively toward a vision. The group brainstormed on different qualities that respected leaders possess, and assigned those traits to one of two cornerstones for job performance: Suitability (behavioral competence) or Eligibility (technical competence). Overwhelmingly, most traits were identified to represent Suitability. Even if all Suitability and Eligibility qualifications are met however, 85% of performance is typically dictated by the external systems.



Next, Dr. Neyer presented the Four Dimensions of Leadership, which consist of Vision, Reality, Ethics, and Courage, and then initiated another activity: the Polarity Management Exercise (Paradox). The paradox results from contradicting statements or concepts in which both opinions may be held true simultaneously. How can you optimize the paradox? Use opposite energy to find common ground. Do not choose one side of polarity, but instead “work in the and” so that you get the best of both while avoiding the limits. The psychological ecosystem needs a balance within the paradox to function successfully, by navigating the relationship and managing the polarity. Dr. Neyer closed her lecture with an overview of the Harrison Leadership Competencies Assessment, which aims to inform the subject of his/her successes and derailers that determine competency. Will and Jared had their assessments (anonymously) evaluated before the group. For more information: <https://www.applyjobfit.com/assessee/assessment.do?id=2f24dqt9egg6>



## Presentation #2 : The Evolution of Practice

*“What is natural is death.” – Jim Cramer*



The second presentation was conducted by Jim Cramer, and explored his career as a consultant with the Greenway Group, as well as his years of experience and publications concentrating on trends and projections in the architectural profession. His writings include *Design Plus Enterprise*, and *Lessons from the Future*. In his opinion, we really need to

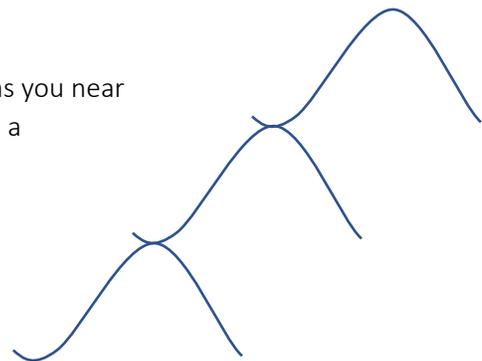
study success and case studies, and take our practice to the next level. One of the most important tasks an Architect can do is keep a record of data and change. Mr. Cramer presented some interesting statistics for the architectural practice:

- Average architecture firm made 13.2% profit in 2017
- The Top 20% of firms made 22% profit, generating wealth for the profession and stimulating the economy
- The average Architect annual salary is \$102,000
- The average Partner's salary is \$195,000
- The average salary of a Partner in a 500-person design firm is \$1,000,000

Supply and demand is playing to the advantage of Architects and Engineers, but he notes that in next 2 to 3 years, the environment will change. A few things will always remain however—clients love their architects for bringing beauty and health to the environment, while overall making the world better.

### *Strategic Renewal Chart*

This depicts the trajectory with which to progress one's career forward; as you near the peak of one phase/stage of professional development, you must take a leap to the next level to avoid a decline. Strategic renewal can be painful, but architects tend to have strategic optimism.



Mr. Cramer focused the end of the lecture on his research, and what the data he has compiled has revealed regarding foresight, trends, and the effect of everything we do. For his research, firms were interviewed and questioned about each trend, in each market sector. Trends create the future operating environment. There is a strong need for the application of design thinking within business models of marketing and operating. Architects can do an even better job with the monetization of value by illustrating expertise (like hand drawing and use a scientific calculator). He stated it is important to note the impact of the migration of value. A new Deltek report was published with average performance numbers from architecture/design firms, and the health of a firm can be deduced from its backlog. The prediction for the future of the practice is unimaginable change. Money isn't a motivator, but we need to respect money. In closing, he asked what self-confidence and self-respect do you have for the profession? You have influence, and your limiting beliefs can become toxic and infect the performance of the industry. If the phenomenon of change is moving faster outside of the firm than inside of the firm, the firm is becoming irrelevant.

### Group Activity : Case Study Problem – Decision Making and Prioritization

The group was split into three teams, each representing a different sized firm (small, medium, large). Prior to the session, each scholar had completed a worksheet to assign priority to steps/phases in firm staffing and project management for a hypothetical new project. Once the teams were assembled, each had to collectively arrive at a single sequence. The scoring was calculated by adding the deltas of each step relative to the "ideal" sequence. The team representing a medium-sized firm scored the lowest/best, revealing the effects of too many voices, or maybe not enough.



Presentation #3 : Firm Strategy Roundtable Discussion with Guest Principals

*“What’s it all about?” – Sean McLendon*



*Participants included:*

*Sean McLendon (SM)*

*David Yocum (DY)*

*Cheryl McAfee (CM)*

*Scott Sickeler (SS)*

*Jim Cramer, Moderator*

The panel kicked off with opening remarks by each principal, discussing history and personal perspective.

- SM: A partner at Cooper Carry; one of 25 partners in different cities
- SS: Formerly at TVS, left to start BLUR; key leadership attributes for him personally are Communication, Empathy, and Dialogue

- CM: McAfee<sup>3</sup> Architects; from Kansas, left practice in Boston in move back home and work with her family. Big clients include MARTA and Hartsfield Jackson Airport
- DY: Small practice (BLDGS); 2 partners with 2 to 4 employees, also a professor at GA Tech

The following is a transcript that captures key statements made by the panelists:

SM: Working for developers became a new market. In the mid-90s Cooper Carry decided to diversify. Decision making for growth came from new leadership. But during the recession, survival became the growth model. Cooper Carry kept capacity through recession.

DY: A project starting is no indication that a project will finish. Client demand pressed into adaptive reuse and they became experts in the industry. You have to know when not to take a job. If it doesn't fit into the firm's vision, and if it's not worth the investment, it is important to say no. Part of business is taking a calculated risk. Larger projects are handled through strategic teaming.

SS: Large learning curve and time commitment to partner a firm.

CM: Know your strengths and weakness, know your partner's strengths and weaknesses. Hard decisions, payroll, taxes, and "who's gonna bump and run, and who's gonna stay." You don't know how you will respond under stress until it happens. How someone team builds or cocoons under stress – it is important to be able to manage that stress. You set the example of leadership and your staff will follow you.

Project type: how to decide what to go after?

SM: It's usually less about the work and more about the client – do visions align? The annual marketing budget for Cooper Carry is about 6% of projected revenue.

DY: Fee calculations are figured on man hour projections, then we negotiate with ourselves and then with the client. Know your overhead and direct personnel expense.

SS: Check similar project for comparison.

SM: Be sure to budget for technology.

SS: Some variables for the team to consider – GC, clients, consultants.

SM: Consider also Revit/Technology and the time spent on the model and not drawing execution.

CM: % of construction, compared to man power and profit. Engage in institute and policy. Educate yourselves on how to put the building together. Importance and significance of Architecture in society. We failed to take the importance of environmental design to the community so LEED came out. We must be proactive in industry/institute in a way to get policies in place.

SM: Is the technology leading you or are you leading technology? We can easily produce impressive, provocative imagery, but is it good architecture?

What Personality trait do you seek in candidates:

DY: Perseverance, clear priorities that lead to trust. Can I imagine them standing in front of a client?

CM: Willing to take risks, be versatile, be on the front of exploring new methods. Talent/Drive. "You will get licensed"

SM: Talent acquisition, developing future leaders, identify natural leaders – listening, team management, conflict resolution. “I’m assuming you know how to run Bluebeam, Revit and are a great architect, but that’s not enough.”

DY: Embrace uncertainty, it is fundamental to what we do. Uncertainty creates leverage for decision making. You will face multiple sources of scrutiny.

CM: Be all in and fully committed.

SS: Parallel paths – what you want to happen and what you are prepared to have happen. Preparing for the best and the worst outcome.

Jim Cramer’s closing remarks:

Strategic optimist – know why you are positive and be ready to defend it.

Health and Energy – exuberance, high energy, give it your best. High professional energy at all times. Don’t forget your human skills.

#### Additional Reading:

- Getting to Yes or No  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/0b677755ac1e009b42cb7990e4aeced4>
- Prime Decision Making Delivered Amazon Style  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/0b6c069cac1e009b42cb7990aa11eda2>
- Combatting the Bias Monster  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/0b764638ac1e009b42cb7990b20f8b68>
- Understanding the Ikea Effect  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/25c1990aac1e009b7297c8b90bdf4ec7>
- Overcoming Decision-Making Pitfalls  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/25cd16d7ac1e009b7297c8b99e40c769>
- The Nominal Group Technique  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/57e8c7e2ac1e009b63b76bcd10ec60ec>
- The Stepladder Technique  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/57ed537eac1e009b63b76bcd67798820>
- 4 Steps to Making Better Decisions Faster  
<https://www3.blueoceanbrain.com/article/60226d0d0a252b946b17d74202807692>