that many creative partnerships eventually break up. A highly individual talent may be nurtured and initially nourished by a group, but, rather like a child growing up, such an individual seems to find a moment when it seems inevitable that he or she must leave. Alternatively such a member may continue in the group, but by departing from its norms, eventually become rejected by the group. This can often puzzle those of us outside the group who admire what it has done. At its most extreme such a phenomenon can be seen in the very public splitting of pop music groups such as the Beatles. For years their admirers may totally fail to understand how they could apparently throw away such a productive relationship, and hope they will team up again. Such groups rarely form again, for the conditions which brought them together can never really be recreated. Design partnerships often seem to split up over the most apparently trivial issue and, rather like marital divorcees, become quite antagonistic and publicly critical of each other. Such is human nature, and whilst we can often describe it and sometimes explain it, we can less often control it. Occasionally we can harness it, possibly only for limited periods, to generate what is perhaps the greatest satisfaction we can achieve: creative and productive group work.

Design practices

Design groups are special in a number of ways. They are usually purposive, committed and have pre-defined leadership. Indeed one of the jobs that the principle of a design practice must undertake is to decide how to construct the social organisation of the practice. In a study of the design practices of a number of leading architects, several quite different patterns of organisational structure were observed (Lawson 1994). Perhaps one of the most important issues here is the relationship between the most senior level in the practice and the individual project teams. Of course some design practices have only one single principal while others have three or even many more and may become very large organisations. Where the practice has more than one principal the basic structure can take a number of quite different forms. The principals can effectively operate as semi-autonomous but federated practices each served by their own set of staff. ABK seem to operate generally this way with Peter Ahrends, Paul Koralek and Richard Burton each working with their own groups and on their own projects. Obviously the partners

here will still share the infrastructure and discuss and exchange ideas, but they act in a fairly independent way. At the other extreme can be found the famous architectural practice of Stirling and Wilford. Until the untimely and tragic death of James Stirling, he and Michael Wilford shared a room, which in turn looked onto the general office through a large and normally open doorway. These two partners both worked on the same projects and hardly divided at all, even overhearing each other's telephone conversations and discussions with other staff. The practice of MacCormac, Jamieson and Prichard displays yet another structure, which we might think of as a corporate model. Here each of the partners plays a particular role, with Richard MacCormac 'initiating the design process', Peter Jamieson looking after 'technical and contractual matters', and David Prichard being 'very much a job runner'.

All of these practices are highly successful and produce much admired architecture, so all the organisational structures that they represent appear to work. It seems therefore to be largely a matter of personal management style which determines the overall pattern of the design practice. Virtually all the architects in the study knew how big their ideal practice was. The numbers varied but there remained little doubt in the minds of those asked. It almost seems that most designers have their own feeling for how many people they want to be responsible for and to manage. Ian Ritchie advanced the argument that design teams need to be 'about the number of people who can basically communicate well together'. He favours design teams of about five people, and has an ideal practice size of five of these groups.

The principal and the design team

Clearly design depends upon both individual talents and creativity and the group sharing and supporting common ideals. Controlling the balance between individual thought and group work is likely to be crucial. We can see the design team as having both individual and a group 'work space'. In particular there is also the individual work space of the practice principal most concerned with the project. The relationship between the principal and the design team seems at its most critical in the single principal design practice. Here the practice is quite likely to be named after the principal and it is his or her personal reputation which must be defended. The need that this individual titular principal has to find