



Figure 14.6
Possible relationships between
the three views of the design
process

For example the unsynchronised practices or aspirations states make an organisation difficult to collaborate with. When practices are unsynchronised other design team members are trying to relate to the published intentions but finding actual practice does not match this. By contrast an unsynchronised aspirations state leaves an organisation in internal difficulty with staff constantly unhappy with practice which may be slavishly following intentions. Such a state suggests a top-down management out of touch with its workforce. Our work suggests such a state to be disturbingly common in large organisations. Again by contrast the unsynchronised intentions state suggests an organisation that is happy with its practice but publishing information likely to mislead those who would collaborate with it. Preliminary studies suggest that the values of the members of organisations in turn influence these states. Designers seem in general themselves not to be too worried about having unsynchronised intentions. Indeed it seems quite common, perhaps almost normal, to find members of architectural offices explicitly recognising that they work in what they would regard as more relaxed and flexible ways than their own published conditions of engagement specify. By contrast, large client organisations more often tolerate unsynchronised aspirations. Again it is common to find staff in such organisations bemoaning the rigid way in which

practice is made to follow intention and how this leads to unimaginative or inappropriate solutions.

So what state represents a virtuous design organisation? Again it is unlikely that any one state is always the best for all organisations at all times. Logically it would seem sensible for any organisation to be aiming to be totally synchronised. However is it virtuous to remain totally synchronised? In a changing world, such an organisation might be seen to be complacent, resistant to change and unable to adapt. As conditions change it may well be that those closest to the action tend to see the need for change first. If so then an organisation is likely to move from a totally synchronised state to have unsynchronised aspirations. Probably a good organisation would recognise this and attempt some change.

One course of action here might well be to try to persuade those whose aspirations do not reflect the organisational intentions to change their views or leave. John Outram's comments earlier in this chapter about the need for his staff to understand 'the game they are expected to play' suggests this position. However the management of a more responsive organisation may try to learn from the asynchronous aspirations of the staff and change either the intentions or practices of the organisation. Whether it is important to change the intentions or practices first may depend on the situation. Research is needed into how design and design-related organisations actually behave and change. We know from our work that some are highly adaptable and some are not, some learn much more than others and can transfer knowledge more easily from project to project. The field of design research is now maturing and beginning to be able to deal not just with processes but with the management of those processes in complex organisations.

One other lesson to be drawn from all this is that developing a learning design organisation demands that some effort be put into the sort of reflection we have begun to indulge in here. That is to say a design organisation should try to transfer knowledge gained from the projects it completes in order to develop its processes. Such an effort, it transpires, also offers the opportunity to transfer knowledge about problems and solutions from one project to another. Our research suggests that although this would seem very obvious it often happens far less than seems sensible in actual practice. The ideas discussed earlier in this chapter used by the architects Ahrends, Koralek and Burton represent one possible way of achieving this more effectively. There is a rather delightful paradox here. Many other kinds of organisations have recently been studying the 'project' as an extremely effective management tool. It offers a