The design education system and design firms succeed in properly preparing and mentoring future professionals when they fully address *each* of these elements, beginning with "process." This process of design—concept, design, development, testing, and deployment—is generic enough to describe virtually every design activity, from software to soft drinks, and yet fluid enough to change with every project and each client's needs. The concept of "fluidity" is critical. Without it, control of knowledge in design, as in any other profession, can mean "telling" a designer who is not capable of interacting fluidly with a client may take up a preset solution and go in search of a problem to which to apply it. For interior designers, process is neither "asking" nor "telling"; rather, it is all the parts in between, and their *integration*. Much like the players in a jazz ensemble, who can't improvise well without having mastered the basics and agreed to a structure of rhythm and chord changes, the most innovative interior designers rely on the basic structure of the design process. Just as jazz technique should provide the means and process to resolve any musical question, design should provide the mindset, the means, and the process to address *any* problem.

Design practitioners contribute to and strengthen the profession when they expand the body of knowledge that defines interior design. These knowledge areas can include such "soft" areas as human behavior or ethnography, or "hard" sciences, such as financial analysis or the management of information technology. The "softer" subjects provide insights into the needs of the users of environments in all their complexities, while the "hard" topics provide parameters and metrics to evaluate the merits of any given solution.

An understanding of creative abilities—how we acquire and enhance creativity—is also crucial to the design process. These abilities are vital not only to design practices, but to the outcomes provided to clients. This is especially true in the corporate and health-care arenas, where the environment can positively (or negatively) influence the performance and satisfaction of its occupants, or the level of patient care. As designers expand their understanding of the creative process and those environmental conditions that support creativity and effective problem solving, they can place this knowledge in the service of their clients.

- **output: *n*.** 1 the product of a process, esp. of manufacture, or of mental or artistic work. 2 the quantity or amount of this. 3 the printout, results, etc., supplied by a computer.[1]

- **outcome:** *n*. a result; a visible effect. Result, consequence, end, aftereffect, upshot, development, outgrowth, aftermath, follow-up.[1]

The last key element of the design process is the realization of an *outcome*. When the goal of designers is to realize particular outcomes for their clients, they harness the possibilities of design and demonstrate its benefits. This is particularly important today, given that designers are often engaged in turf battles with factions of the architectural community. Designers struggle to demonstrate the relevance and value of interior design to those that they would serve, and to improve the educational preparation for those entering the profession. A focus on outcome reminds clients and other design professionals of the value and scope of interior designers' services.

Outcome and output differ in important ways. When designers provide mere output, their services are a commodity; when they achieve beneficial outcomes, their services add value to the project—and become more valuable to the clients. Outcome means translating vision into strategy and strategy into delivery. To provide outcome, designers have to discover, interpret, and document the links between the client's intents and their materialization. The pursuit of outcome fosters dynamism and organizational learning among design professionals and their client participants.

## THE NEW CONTEXT OF THE DESIGN PRACTICE

It is hard to know whether life is getting more complex or we are just getting better at seeing the complexities that were always there. Either way, much has been written in the popular press about the way we each experience life's complexity. On a personal level, we lament high levels of stress and the increased pace of life. Some celebrate the dismantling of the old loyalties between employer and employee, while others feel betrayed. We decry the erosion of the nuclear family even though statistics confirm that the "normal" two parents-with-children household actually has long been the exception rather than the rule. We struggle to balance work and our personal lives.