

zation's culture and practices, all of which help define the environment. Designers must understand and apply knowledge about people: how they react and respond to spatial cues; how they use tools in their activities; what behaviors are deemed acceptable or not. Designers also need to understand and apply knowledge about the organization: their goals and strategies for achieving those goals; how work gets done and the nature of teams; the financial impacts of our recommendations in the context of that corporation's structure and economic situation. And the industry itself, its relative maturity and health, must also be understood systemically. Lastly, designers must consider the capabilities of those who would change and manage any program that is developed.

Systems thinking requires understanding the relationship between all these elements and how a decision in one area will affect another. If the designer encourages customization in individual work environments, will it create an unmanageable inventory of space and furniture components? If the designer discourages personal choice and control in the physical environment, will management's initiatives to empower (and even retain) their workforce be undermined?

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INTERIOR DESIGN PROFESSION

If we accept the premise

If we accept the premise that designers use their skills and knowledge as designers to produce "outcomes" for their clients, then we can conclude that designers are in the service business. The designer's job is not to produce drawings, or oversee construction sites (although these are often necessary parts of the process); nor is it to get published, or enjoy the envy of colleagues. Designers' "shared vision" should be to bring about the result that serves the client best.

The trick for designers is to *manage* the client relationship and experience—to bring to bear their personal mastery, compare and clarify their own and their client's mental models, create a shared vision of what this project might or should accomplish, form and nourish an integrated team to achieve the vision.

The challenge is to embrace these principles and develop these disciplines. The result will be better, more satisfied individuals, designers and professionals. Professions and professionals are defined in part by the unique body of knowledge which informs them, which they apply, and to which they add. Interior design is no different. And, like other professions, interior design can only be improved by both expanding the boundaries of knowledge and committing to its life-long acquisition. Doctors are better healers when they integrate humanity with science, mind with body. Lawyers bring not only other legal precedent but also subject expertise to bear to argue a point of law successfully. Interior designers serve their clients best (and therefore increase their perceived value) when they master the theoretical and practical body of knowledge that defines interior design, and effectively integrate information, facts, and intelligence about the related topics that form the context of a given assignment.

Design professionals must expand their ambitions and commit to acquiring knowledge and understanding throughout their careers—so that they can integrate and apply what they learn to the act of designing, with the goal of improving the other three components of design: to hone their personal skills and become more facile in the entire process of design; to inspire and nurture the creative act; to increase their ability not only to satisfy the expectations of their clients, but to exceed them—and do so repeatedly and profitably.

Notes

1

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2

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3

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