

Often, the biggest culprit stems from an inherent problem in the plan that requires the team to reorganize some of the basic planning requirements. Do you ever find that no matter what you do to fix the problem or how you reorganize the requirements, something just isn't working? For design development to run smoothly, the plan needs to be near perfection, to account for as many elements of the space and its projected use as can be anticipated. If your planning has a flaw it will quickly begin to curtail your development of the design. It is best to find a solution for a flawed plan; if it remains flawed, it may continue to undermine your development of other aspects of the project. A flawed plan usually goes back to an approach or decision which may have appeared like a good or workable idea at the time but, in fact, was not. Some common examples are:

- *Asking too much of a space—for example, insisting on fitting ten conference rooms into a space where it is clear that only eight will fit.*
- *Creating circulation confusion—for example, where public and private paths cross when they should in fact have a clear separation; circulation confusion places a burden on security and way finding.*
- *Assuming that functions can be shared—when in fact duplicating the function can greatly simplify cross-traffic and improve efficiency within the daily workday.*

Sometimes, a flawed plan may actually stem from a project directive. For example, consider a directive for flexibility in multifunctioning spaces: all conference rooms should be able to be opened up to permit “all-hands” meetings. The notion is that such a specification will give the space ultimate flexibility. Yet a conference room has a completely different set of requirements compared to an all-hands gathering, and the cost and aesthetic challenge of making an acoustically appropriate conference room and then transforming it into a party space requires attention to detail that is often beyond the goals set for the project. It is important that designers learning such a concept should not just be accepted as a given; it can be challenged, and since design development is the place where a design begins to become real, this is the phase where notions such as “multifunction” need to become reality—or to go away.

PULLING A DESIGN ALONG IN LAYERS: FOCUSED MEETINGS

To make problem solving easier

To make problem solving easier in the design development phase, designers can employ a powerful organization tool, the weekly design team/consultant coordination meeting. This meeting is a time to coordinate the design work with lighting, electrical, and mechanical consultants. On a large, complicated job these meetings may be divided by discipline. If there is a particular area of difficulty, then a special meeting involving key participants is called to engage in a very focused discussion, related to a specific issue. The idea here is to have all parties buy into a direction and then move their respective team forward, discipline by discipline, and always together with a clear vision in mind.

The real work is to keep all of the layers of the design related and connected to each other; they must be brought along together. Earlier I mentioned that design development was about pulling the design together, but the layers of the design must also be brought along together. This “bringing along” process is a bit like painting a wall: when you paint, each coat of paint goes over the entire wall; you do not put all three coats on one area and then move onto another section of the wall. In design development, when the team manages layers of development, in equal percentages over all aspects of the project, the team will go a long way toward ensuring that each element of the design makes sense in its own area and as a component of the overall design hierarchy.

Treating design development as a project involving interacting layers can be difficult. Designers often find themselves trying to “buy time” for two reasons. Understandably, some elements of the design require more time than others to work out. In addition, not every aspect of the design is required at the same time. On a fast-track project, it is not uncommon during design development to issue early packages for construction. When this occurs, the “we still have time to work it out” attitude quickly vanishes. All of a sudden, the design becomes real—really soon, often too soon. The team needs time, or rather its ideas need time, to develop. In a longer-term project, if the overall schedule requires that the team issue long lead-item packages to allow advance purchasing while the project is still in the design development phase, the fast-track “it’s happening now” approach will not work.