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BIM should be the catalyst to your project, not just an add-on - by Kara Gruss

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Prior to attending the Construction Institute's October 18 BIM Council Breakfast, entitled "Are Contracts Holding Us Back From Innovation, Collaboration and BIM Adoption?", I thought the A/E/C world understood what Building Information Modeling (BIM) was and what it was used for. However, after attending the discussion, facilitated by Rebecca McWilliams, Esq, AIA, McWilliams Law, I'm not so sure.

The definition seems simple enough: "BIM (Building Information Modeling) is an intelligent 3D model-based process that gives architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) professionals the insight and tools to more efficiently plan, design, construct, and manage buildings and infrastructure." - Autodesk.com

So, why aren't we using BIM efficiently and from the beginning?

As technology develops we are forced to change the way we do things but change is hard for most. We hear comments and see memes all the time about the resistance "but we've always done it this way," "don't try to fix what isn't broken," and so on. However, if we want to stay competitive and relevant we are forced to work in ways we never could have imagined, often dragging our heels, and sometimes, even kicking and screaming. "There's an App for that!" has become one of my favorites and I think evidence of the driving forces pushing smart and innovative ideas as a larger call-to-action on how we are evolving.

BIM cannot exist in a vacuum but that's how it seems we treat it. For all of its intentions to be forward-thinking, integrated and collaborative it is used as an add-on or afterthought rather than the catalyst. And for the purpose of this discussion, I would like to focus on how BIM can and should drive the contract, set expectations, mitigate conflict, and create something that everyone can truly use. If we accept that it is a road map to a successful project then why don't we make it "the" road map?

Let BIM drive the contract. Contracts ultimately govern every project. Make sure that BIM is outlined

in the contract, specifically. Who owns it, who's paying for it, at what level should it be detailed and will it be passed off to a third party for construction administration and facility maintenance? Identify "standard of care" in the region by project type including Level of Development (LOD) and educate the client on what that means.

Set expectations. Share the contract with the team and help them to understand it. Have your project managers weigh in and be a part of the process from the beginning, after all, they are the ones that need to execute the terms. "Binding decision-making authority is imperative. If you don't have the right person in each seat then you are not ready for a team BIM meeting." – Rebecca McWilliams, Esq, AIA, McWilliams Law

Mitigate conflict. Take the time to vet your language and that the entire team, including technical staff, understands it. Once you establish guidelines for your specific process the team will be able to carry out the contract to its fullest intent, which in turn makes it a document that will stand up in court, should a conflict arise.

Create something that everyone can truly use. Make sure the entire design and construction team understands the role they play in the process. Insist on a BIM execution plan and continue to keep it current, it cannot be static. Have someone dedicated to managing the documents throughout the project. "Just like with writing the meeting minutes, if you write the execution plan, you own it and therefore control it." - David Barkin, chief architect, State of CT.

If we collectively put into practice what was emphasized: Let BIM be the process that drives the project, set expectations early, and above all "With technology, you leave digital fingerprints on everything you touch. Always tell the truth!" said McWilliams.

I believe the industry will be better equipped to embrace change in the name of efficiency, through BIM.

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