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A change in approach with the Integrated Design Process requires free flowing communications

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There are always challenges in designing successful projects which meet a program's goals within its corresponding budget and schedule constraints. Now add the current economic climate and resulting financial burdens - challenging to say the least. As owners are pressured to create a successful program with finite resources (more with less is now the standard) the design professional is called upon to develop designs that respond to this need. This ever increasing pressure to consistently focus on the cost of virtually every single design aspect of a project can be daunting. This is especially true in those cases where a project is large and/or complex, and subject to design variables as the program evolves.

Once a project has been conceived as viable from a market standpoint, the design team is challenged with realizing the project's vision by creating plans that will translate this vision to reality. The owner is challenged not only with bringing the project to fruition within the confines of his project's budget, but with bringing together a myriad of professionals possessing disparate skill sets to achieve a common goal. How to unify these professionals and achieve this common goal within the cost confines indicated previously? Enter the Integrated Design Process.

The Integrated Design Process or IDP is not a specific design methodology, but rather a collective project approach that centers around consistent collaboration between a project's key stakeholders and all members of the design team. This collaboration is the key to IDP. It is truly different than the "traditional" design approach where the basic layout of a program is dictated to the design team, and each professional is tasked with deriving their design to dovetail with the base program. Even though periodic "collaboration" may take place, most projects don't actually structure their design process to realize the benefits of IDP. The "collaborative design" often spoken of usually occurs in the form of periodic exchanges of information and draft designs at project milestones.

To contrast, IDP creates the framework of a design process in which true collaboration is the norm. With IDP, collaboration begins very early in the design process, so the team as a collective unit makes design decisions near the front of the process as opposed to the back half as is normally the case. This is beneficial because as a project evolves, the opportunity to make changes decreases significantly and the costs of changes exponentially rises.

For IDP to be successful, owners must select a design team that buys-in to the process. IDP requires free flowing communications and a willingness to actively engage across the team. In this sense, it is a circular, not linear process. Additionally, the IDP concept must be consistently fostered throughout the design process. The design team needs to collectively practice and reaffirm the process agreed on at the outset. Without this, it is easy to resort to business as usual and let the "traditional" design approach replace a well-conceived IDP simply because it is more familiar and comfortable.

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