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By Stephanie Clemons

asic

COMING TOGETHER

Complex problems require interdisciplinary solutions.



Designers today are being asked to solve increasingly complicated problems. Whether planning for office space that encourages healthier behaviors or integrating multiple generations in one home, we must create spaces that are right today and relevant tomorrow. The urgency to solve today's complex building and design problems is making an interdisciplinary approach more important than ever. Ensuring that we have all the practitioners at the table—from designers to architects, engineers, and facility managers—is increasingly critical.

That was one of the key findings from the first “ASID Think Tank Challenge” gathering, held in Washington, D.C., this spring—which brought together thought leaders from leading firms and a variety of disciplines. The participants told us that the problems interior designers are tasked with solving are far more intricate than ever before, and design is becoming more multifaceted as a result.

Designers of educational spaces, for example, must deliver optimized learning environments with technically sophisticated lighting, acoustics, durability, materials safety, code compliance, technological accessibility, connectivity, and resiliency. They must do so on tight budgets, while protecting the environment and preserving the mental and physical health of future occupants. As is the case with all other design disciplines, there's a lot on the line—so failing in any of these areas can have real consequences.

We can't do it alone. We must stop thinking of buildings as siloed, separate components that are the domain of a single profession. Instead, we should continue to adopt a systems-thinking methodology that looks at the building as an interconnected, interactive whole. Complex challenges like these and other more vexing problems require technical knowledge in a variety of disciplines, ranging from architecture and design (interior, graphic, landscape) to an array of engineering specializations (structural, industrial, mechanical, acoustical, electrical, systems), and even fields like psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

To address these needs, design firms are pulling together teams using in-house talent and specialized consultants. The best design solutions come from a holistic approach that pulls on varied expertise from the very beginning of the process. Waiting until later just doesn't work. The Think Tank participants acknowledged, however, that executing a truly interdisciplinary design process can be the exception rather than the rule, because tight timelines and budgets usually don't allow for it. But when it



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