

Taking the Long View

The Secret to Delivering the Best Capital Project Management Service Happens After Occupancy

By Mandi Hoskins

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The road I took to capital project management and workplace strategy started in residential design. With a Master's in architecture, I have always been fascinated by form and function – how design (both good and bad) impacts the way we live and work. Even as a child, I'd imagine the perfect playhouse, complete with cathedral ceilings and a loft for overflow guests.

Working in residential design presents opportunities to learn a lot about the client experience. The decisions people make in their homes are extremely personal, and often tied to their life savings. One must learn the art of listening and patience, along with the ability to translate to the homeowner tactfully how a decision they may make in one area of the design of the home could have cascading implications for other aspects of their vision. While relatively simple in scope, it is complex emotionally. People often compare residential designers to marriage counselors for a good reason.

While the types of spaces in a home are relatively common, with places we all have experience in (cooking, living, dining, sleeping, working, playing), what makes a space function successfully is extremely specific to the individual. Therefore, even if I was able to get feedback from clients after their home was complete (or an invite to dinner to see the space in use) that feedback would not always provide direct value to the next client.

Now that I'm in the commercial office space world, I find people are still passionate about design – while a bit removed financially. If we exclude the current collective experience of working from home during a pandemic, people typically spend at least as many waking hours of the day in their office as they do in their homes. The workplace needs to be conducive to productivity, but also reflect the personality of the company. From a project management perspective, the capital investment is exponentially more significant and the moving parts far more complex. The design doesn't just need to fit the needs of one family, it needs to fit the needs of a diverse workforce who may all use the space differently or have differing expectations. While the project type requires consideration of a greater number of users, it also offers more opportunities to co-inhabit the space and observe the project post-occupancy.

In my four years working with a large and ever-evolving technology company, I had the opportunity to work through a multitude of capital projects from start to finish. In doing so, I had the benefit of being embedded with the company and therefore got to stick around after each project was complete to see how people actually used the space. Did it meet the goals we set forth to accomplish? Were there assumptions about working style we made in the design that did not bare out in the execution? How could we have made this space work even better to maximize the potential of the people working in it?

Having that “after the fact” perspective has become invaluable and, in my mind may be the most important service that a good capital project manager can provide. Those lessons allow me to challenge assumptions on other projects because I’ve seen a wide array of approaches tested, tried, and modified.

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Let’s take a recent project with a leading creative agency in Seattle. Upon renewal of their lease, they engaged us early on with clear ideas on budget and goals for a renovation.

They had grown significantly over the years and the office space they currently occupied was a sea of desks, a couple conference rooms, and a kitchenette. As a creative company, they knew they wanted more collaboration and creative space, but they didn’t want to sacrifice the large desks where people would currently hold impromptu meetings and eat lunch. The perspective was that people loved their individual desks. The reality was they had no choice but to use their desks for these other functions because alternate space was unavailable.

It was in challenging their assumptions about the desks and changing the perspective of the goals that we were able to unlock new opportunities. Shrinking the desk sizes allowed us to create an ideation room with abundant white boards and charette space. We also developed a big break out space with a huge dining table for collaborating and eating together. Now, they wonder why they didn’t make these changes sooner and can’t wait to move back into their office.

The advantage of perspective only comes from having completed projects and the benefit of feedback and observation. The more one can see how people function in a space after the project is complete, the more acute that ability becomes to challenge assumptions and realize new opportunities.

As capital project managers, we are at the heart of every major project – managing the details from project initiation through closeout and occupancy. When brought in early, we help select the best team of designers, contractors, and vendors to help clients develop a vision and bring it to life. In other instances, we may be engaged after the design is complete to help manage the construction process, allowing our client to focus on their core business. In either case, we drive the project forward with an eye not only on the budget and timeline, but also with past experience and perspective to share. We stand at 30,000 feet with the ability to see the big picture and ask the “what if” questions, while also getting into the weeds to make sure it all gets done.

Whatever the design, it needs to focus on the people first and how they will be able to realize their potential in the space. The best way to implement that vision is with the experience of witnessing countless completed projects and truly understanding how people engage with the decisions and assumptions that were made along the way.



About Mandi

Mandi Hoskins has more than 15 years of experience in architecture design and project management. Well versed in multiple industry design and construction methodologies, she is an expert on systems furniture, and is passionate about workplace strategy and the future of work. Mandi considers herself a “maker” and is passionate about cooking, knitting, and sewing. She is currently working to build her sewing skills to transition to a fully #memade wardrobe and uses her professional skills to manage her growing fabric and pattern stash. Mandi can be contacted at mandi.hoskins@pacificpmg.com.