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Three keys to attaining quality with design-build projects

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Association: Design-Build Institute of America-Upper Midwest region

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With any construction project, there are three major concerns for those involved: cost, schedule and quality. One way to address these concerns is by using the increasingly popular design-build construction method. Design-build is a process where the design and construction of a project is delivered through one contract between the owner and the design-build team. While the design-build team may include subcontractors, the major single contract between the owner and the overall project team encourages collaboration and fosters the creation of a better product.

Based on numerous studies, including several by the Federal Highway Administration, the design-build construction method completes a project faster and more cost effectively than traditional building methods while maintaining an equal or higher level of quality. Design-build projects are becoming more popular for large and complex construction projects where time is a concern. Examples are bridges and transportation projects, sports and health care facilities, office buildings and even complex restoration projects.

In my experience as a quality manager, I've found there are three keys to producing a high-quality design build project: having a strong plan, enforcing quality checks and maintaining a degree of flexibility. Each project is unique with its own set of challenges that will require adaptability and flexibility to overcome.

The first key to design-build project success is to have a quality plan tailored to the specific needs of the project. This plan needs to address the specific concerns that both the contractor's team and owner's team may have regarding key aspects of the project, including how to maintain or maximize quality during the design and construction portions of the work. This plan will also define and establish the expectations for quality for those involved with the project. Once a plan has been established, it is important that the parties "buy-in" to the plan prior to work. Successful project teams tend to have a "quality attitude" that contributes to the project's overall success. Encouraging team members to take on this attitude may involve special training sessions and other initiatives created to increase awareness of the impact every person has on the project. Additionally, a quality plan also helps facilitate communication between project designers, contractors and owners, which can result in a higher quality end product.

The second key is to properly define how quality will be encouraged and enforced throughout the design-build process. Most design and construction activities have a quality control, quality assurance and an owner review component. The quality control activities help the project team determine if quality standards are being met. The product or project is then checked again by an independent reviewer during the quality assurance phase before being reviewed a third time by the project owner. Multiple quality review activities can identify problems early in the construction process, meaning issues can be caught and addressed early in the process.

Lastly, with design-build projects, it is essential to maintain some degree of flexibility and adaptability. As with many construction projects, issues with materials or processes can occur, which would need to be documented, addressed and mitigated so the same problem will not reoccur. Albert Einstein said that insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." This is also true with the quality program. If requirements are not being met then the process needs to be changed.

Ben Dzioba is a registered Project Management Professional and a member of DBIA. He is currently a senior engineer at Braun Intertec. He can be reached at bdzioba@braunintertec.com. If you are interested in learning more about the design-build process, the Design-Build Institute of America-Upper Midwest Region has a breakfast program at 7:30 a.m. Jan. 19 at Midland Hills Country Club in Roseville. Registration information for this program can be found at www.dbia-um.org.



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