



Q2 INFLUENCE: RESPONSIBILITY

Downstream Effects



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What do we owe those we're not contracted with? MBJ's Jerod Hoffman explores limits on industry productivity

Day after day, we strive to make our clients happy. We put systems in place and guide our teams to ensure we are doing everything possible to serve our clients. In many cases, we do this even after having spent our fees or seeing the project services exceed our agreed upon scopes. We do this for good reason, to serve our direct client — the entity that hired us to secure the holy grail of consulting survival: repeat business!

But what about those downstream of us? What do we owe them, the parties we don't have contracts with? How should we treat them? What level of effort do we ask our teams to expend into providing fair playing fields and opportunities for profitable work for others on the project that have little to no influence on us getting repeat work with our clients?

In the design profession, the common design, bid, build delivery method sets up this self-limiting, adversarial discussion for many of us. If you are a design professional creating construction documents as deliverables, how do your documents impact subcontractors? Does their lack of clarity and completeness cause subcontractors to underbid and miss their chance to be profitable?

Should we continue to issue minimally detailed information on our drawings under the protection of specification minutia and general notes? Are profitability, life safety and securing repeat clients of the firm the only important aspects to focus on?

Most of us didn't become design professionals to practice in transactional modes. We wanted more — excellence and higher-level, longer-term goals specifically. Nonetheless, I have witnessed an unreasonable amount of incomplete "product" still being delivered by firms routinely. I see this every day in the work we do as engineering subconsultants to subcontractors in delegated structural work. The majority of the drawings issued as 100% construction documents by the engineer of record require significant Requests for Information (RFIs) and meetings simply to complete the subcontractor's work, especially in delegated submittals. This condition puts a financial burden on subcontractors and can create delays, both avoidable. Most Codes of Standard Practice describe what is required in contract documents, but these guidelines are often not completely followed by design professionals. However, on the bright side, I've seen great improvement in communicating delegated items on more progressive forms of delivery, including design-build, IPD-lite and connected model deliveries. These and similar delivery advancements can help bridge the gap of the otherwise pervasive issues in traditional design, bid, build delivery.

The long-standing rap on the construction industry is that we have the lowest rate of innovation and efficiency growth when compared to other industries. The impetus to accelerated change is missing. Why? Could it be that our myopic focus on contracts and doing less is constraining opportunities for innovation and acceleration in design industry productivity? Perhaps our slow

rate of productivity growth is driven by low profitability or the lack of capital for R&D investments. Or maybe it's just short-term thinking.



Here's a point of beginning. Let's pause and reflect on how we may be contributing to this issue. Let's self-audit our footprints in this important area and lead with action. Retracting to merely complying with contractual requirements has hardly served us well. It's time we think beyond ourselves and consider helping others.

Accelerating Change? Look Beyond

Whatever the reason, we need to improve our leverage. How can we accelerate our rate of change? What can you as a firm leader do about this? Are you ready to apply the Golden Rule to the “others” on your projects? Do you want to help the industry advance? If so, here’s a point of beginning. Let’s pause and reflect on how we may be contributing to this issue. Let’s self-audit our footprints in this important area and lead with action. Retracting to merely complying with contractual requirements has hardly served us well. It’s time we think beyond ourselves and consider helping others. That’s what differentiates leading firms. That’s how we’d like to be treated. That’s what makes clients come back. What do we owe? Plenty. Beyond our contracts, as leaders, we owe things like vision, action and empathy in our quests to change the business we love.

By looking downstream, as well as to the horizon, we can better serve our debt to those we lead and serve.

Jerod Hoffman, PE, is managing director at Meyer Borgman Johnson (MBJ) a national structural design firm. Hoffman is one of three executive team members of MBJ, where a decade ago he pioneered and continues to lead one of the largest delegated connection engineering practices in the U.S. He also directs MBJ’s overall construction engineering services, including erection engineering, BIM to FAB integrated steel processes, connected model delivery and connection engineering. Committed to sharing his experiences with others, he has spoken at national and international conferences about his construction engineering experiences.