Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

- Paper / Proposal Title:
Let's define the relationship: Employees, communication, and the built environment

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- Abstract (300 words):
The complexity of the current workplace calls for ongoing research into a perennial dimension of organizational success - employee communication. This study was inspired by classical Allen Curve research conducted at MIT, which empirically showed a relationship between the physical proximity of employees and level of communication (Allen, 1977; Allen, 2007; Claudel, Massaro, Santi, Murray & Ratti, 2017). This research needs to be reexamined today, with a sample that goes beyond a predominantly male, engineering population to interdisciplinary workforces, and also considers the plethora of new communication tools existing that teams of architects, engineers, and interior designers use to communicate daily.

There is much that remains to be uncovered about interdisciplinary, intergenerational workplace communication, particularly in the realm of design. Therefore, this study aspired to gather employees' insights on communication methods related to the built environment and information transfer within a large interdisciplinary design firm in the
southeast United States by considering: (1) How do an employee’s characteristics influence their patterns of communication within this design team? (2) How does the design of this workplace impact patterns of communication?

To answer these questions, an onsite focus group was conducted to understand employees’ perspectives of workplace communications, including aspects of the built environment that may impede or enhance communication. The study also explored the role employee characteristics such as generational cohort, educational background, and proximity to the type of communication including face to face, desk phone, instant messenger, and email.

The findings identified emerging themes relating to the function of the workplace, preferred communication method, and barriers to communication. These results will inform a larger study that includes additional workplace locations and involves communication mapping analysis, self-reported employee communication survey, and focus groups. Focus groups will be organized by key study variables including the addition of gender, team role, and organizational tenure.

* Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Lindsey is a workplace strategist and interior designer at Little Diversified Architectural Consulting - Orlando. Professionally, Lindsey’s strategy and design projects range from small corporate clients in Orlando to master planning for one of the largest nonprofit health care organizations in the United States. Lindsey is involved in developing processes to understand space usage, analyze quantitative, and qualitative aspects of an organization’s workplace and coordinating user research. In addition, Lindsey is pursuing a Ph.D of Design, Planning and Construction at the University of Florida. Her current research focuses on exploring psychosocial and behavioral attributes, design features (including spatial layout and proximity within the workplace), and social factors (organizational climate and employee demographics) to understand employee communication. Her past research investigated the application of interior design using evidence-based research strategies focusing on intergenerational relationships and knowledge transfer in a commercial environment. She earned a B.S. (2013) and M.F.A. (2015) in Interior Design from Florida State University. Lindsey is LEED Green Associate, WELL AP, and a FitWel Ambassador bringing innovative wellbeing and sustainability strategies to her ongoing pursuits.

In the UF College of Design, Construction and Planning, Meg Portillo has been Department Chair and now serves as Associate Dean with responsibility for research oversight and strategic initiatives across the college’s schools, departments, centers, and institute. As a researcher, Meg draws on mixed methods—including narrative inquiry—to explore the human dimensions of the design experience, creativity, and color planning. Meg enjoys working closely with Ph.D. and MID students who are advancing the knowledge base of the field through innovative research. In 2010 and 2018, she was delighted to receive the William R. Jones Outstanding Ph.D. Mentor Award from the Florida Education Fund. Another career highlight was her tenure spent as Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Interior Design (2006-2015) and role as guest editor for the JID Special Issue on Narrative Inquiry. In recognition of a significant and sustained record of research,
she was honored with a University of Florida Research Foundation Professorship. Meg also values being involved in service to the profession. She has been an invited juror for the IIDA Pacific Northwest and Mid-America Design Awards. Additionally, Meg led the 2017 CIDA standards development project, and became the 7th recipient of the Keith Hooks Volunteer Excellence Award.