

Original Article

Interior Design Scope of Work in China Practice: Problems Explored

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Abstract - Experienced interior designers are skilled in the business and scope of interior design work and are a reflection of their competence. The job duties of an interior designer affect the outcome of the entire interior design project. The scope of work and the level of knowledge involved are significant. This study explores the problems regarding the scope of work of interior designers. However, based on the survey according to the platforms, with pre-interviews with experts, it is still a rather vague area. The scope must also be in the interior design project to reflect its specific scope of work. This is where this research paper needs to explore the issues and the implications of the problem and, thus, establish the scope of work. It is also the focus of the study's purpose.

Keywords - Architectural interior design, Interior designer, Project delivery, Standarization, Construction in China.

1. Introduction

To live a high-quality lifestyle, people nowadays need every area to be both aesthetically beautiful and comfortable. Despite that, there are issues with interior design that must be resolved. The objective of interior design is to create an orderly, harmonious, relaxed, and characterful interior environment that meets the needs of its occupants and reflects their tastes and lifestyles. Those design requirements for comfortable vibe places demand an excellent interior project delivery method and process.

During the design process, interior designers need to consider the functional zoning of the space, the choice of furniture and decorations, the matching of colors and materials, and light and ventilation, amongst others, to create a functional and aesthetically pleasing interior space. However, realizing this process can easily lead people to think the designer is only responsible for the decorating role. The work of an interior designer is to assist in the realization of the whole project, indicating that the designer becomes an essential player in the entire interior design project. Their work is not only about design but also about the coordination and management of the project, which is the scope of work that the research article will concentrate on and explore.

2. Current Status of the Interior Designer's Scope of Work

2.1. Responsibilities of Interior Designers

Incorporating the Cerf et al. (2022) knowledge system with the requirements' practice section, it delineates the

interior design profession's knowledge concerning human environment needs, laws and regulations, products and materials, communication, work experience, and other pertinent aspects of the designer's content, beyond their drawing skills. These include communicating with clients, providing them with design intent and ideas, signing contracts, measuring on-site, choosing materials, supervising, accepting results, and possessing other comprehensive capabilities.

China's National Occupational Standard for Interior Decoration Designers 2023 Edition (2023), revised content, has six occupational functions: conceptual design, program design, preliminary design, design implementation services, design summary and training guidance, and construction drawing design. Interior designers in China have the following standards from the beginning of their licensing duties, where the requirement to practice professional knowledge is a must. This is where the notice on the Pilot work of reviewing and certifying the technical position competence of National Interior Architects (China Interior Decoration Association, 2004) can be found. It was released in April 2004 by the China Building Decoration Association and lays out specific evaluation standards for determining the design qualifications and grades of pertinent personnel working on interior design projects across the country. The requirements for academic qualifications in the certificate examination are as follows:

2.1.1. Skill Requirements

The standard notes that the qualifications needed where candidates for interior design positions must possess a



particular level of engineering expertise and experience in addition to being able to finish the program's design skills, knowledge, and budget quotes.

Art Skills

Basic painting abilities are among the art skills required by designers. It also stated that significant analysis is needed during the design phase, and hand drawing abilities are unavoidable.

Design Skills

With the passage of time, computer and software functionality has become ubiquitous. Training is another way to grasp the impact of technology on performance completely. The note states that to get this skill, one must execute at an exceptionally high technical level.

Market Awareness

For market awareness requirements, an interior designer should perform a successful design which requires an understanding of the market, the customer's preferences, their cultural background, and the surrounding conditions.

Basic Norms for Interior Design

The Construction (2011), the code for the Management of Construction Projects No. GB/T50326 (2017 - 2018), the Contract Law of the People, Republic of China (1999), the Bidding and Tendering Law of the People, Republic of China (2000), the Fire Prevention Code for the Design of Building Interiors (2001), the Residential Decoration Engineering Construction Code No. GB50327 (2001), and National Unified Consumption Quotas for Building Decoration and Renovation Engineering No. GYD-901 (2002), to name a few, are among the regulations that are inclusively engraved into the current building decoration regulations.

2.2. Project Management for Interior Designers

Based on the understanding of interior designer responsibilities, the interior design project delivery method is equivalent to the project management process. The four main duties that comprise design project management are planning, organization, supervision, and control. These are similar to those of architectural project management.

Piotrowski (2013) discussed in detail the professional knowledge interior designers need, including architectural principles, building systems, material science, ergonomics, regulations, and codes.

Rengel (2011) examined how knowing construction principles and architectural details is essential for interior designers to guarantee high-quality design execution. This project approach is then based on an appropriate work scope. It is also necessary as a guide to ensure that an interior design project is completed smoothly and to the satisfaction of the client.

3. Current Status of Work in Interior Design in China

As Irvine (1995) emphasized, the scope of work in interior design necessitates that designers work across disciplines and consider multiple factors to meet client needs. Similarly, Ching (2021) stressed the importance of the scope of work for interior designers, highlighting the need for a wide range of knowledge and skills. Unfortunately, interior design project management is often neglected in the industry, leading to overlaps and oversights in the scope of work, creating problematic conflicts. Victor (2023) mentioned that more and more clients expect interior designers to provide design solutions and manage the whole project fully. She suggested that designers should receive more training in project management.

Ching (2012) noted that interior designers often focus more on the design process and less on project management and implementation, resulting in projects that may not go according to plan or meet client expectations. Victor (2023) mentioned that more clients expect interior designers to provide design solutions and manage entire projects. She suggested that designers should receive more training in project management.

3.1. Interior Design Project Management about the Designer's Scope of Work

The book analyzes the working relationships of interior designers based on knowledge of the PMBOK (2008) phases of the project management process. There are 4 phases highlighted in PMBOK (2008):

Pre-project, where designers have to communicate fully with the client to meet the functional requirements of the client's design, allocate resources to the team, design services, and collect adequate design information. The interior design project manager is responsible for the reasonable allocation and management of resources (including workforce, materials, and equipment). Designers need to make rational decisions in the design process, considering the limitations of available resources.

Project initiation: It is stated that after the start of the project, the team needs to carry out a reasonable division of labor, a site survey, the progress of the drawing, the communication of the effect, strict and complete design drawings, the configuration of the material, the effect of the confirmation of the contract agreement signed. Before the construction phase, the project handover process involves several critical steps, including the project department's organization and remittance of drawings.

Project process: This is where the designer needs to communicate effectively with the project management team, architects, engineers, and other relevant parties to ensure that

everyone understands the design objectives and requirements. Designers are required to identify the critical elements of the project process, such as the construction program.

Notes stated on project cost control: In order to manage project costs, allocate materials effectively, gather feedback from clients, and ensure project quality, designers must be able to recognize possible risks early on and take appropriate action to mitigate their effects. They have to make sure that the project delivery quality meets the required requirements. In order to guarantee the integrity and quality of the design solution, designers must actively participate in quality control. Designers also have to make sure that interior design projects are finished in a timely, cost-effective, and superior manner. Together, the project management team's planning, directing, and supervising skills and the designer's artistic and technical know-how ensure that the project is completed successfully.

Post-project: In this phase, the designer's tasks are to participate in quality control inspections at each project node and deliver quality acceptance, information archiving, and client after-sales feedback. As well as determine the designer's scope of work in the delivery of interior design projects.

3.2. Realizing Problems in Managing Interior Design Project

This research article represents a follow-up to earlier research conducted in Malaysia. In the beginning, Mustapha (2018) conducted preliminary interviews in Malaysia with twenty-one project managers from the construction agencies involved in Malaysian projects; the youngest respondents had

eight years of experience, while the oldest had 28 years. This interview is taken and converted into a simple table format. The interviews reflect problems at different project stages and their solutions to other issues. At the same time, their management logbook was sampled with the corresponding problems (Mustapha, 2018).

According to the findings of the interviews in Table 1, the scope of work and the construction process are the most problematic. When it comes to factors like cooperation, building development, contracts, requirements, clients, project managers, suppliers, and other issues that may arise from conflict, designers play a crucial part in project management and can not be disregarded.

Table 1 Mustapha (2018) shows that the most common problem in delivering interior design projects is the Scope of Work (SOW), which has the highest frequency, followed by project management, expertise, knowledge, teamwork, and communication. In addition, the communication category of problems is also rooted in the need for a proper scope of work for project team members to refer to. She highlighted that the interior design industry is trending and rising as the demand in the construction industry nowadays grows and technology advances. Up until recently, people enjoyed "living" in their homes on Facebook and TikTok, and we saw interior trends in publications and online. This desire is a reflection of the growing number of people who have a strong interest in interior design and who want their ideal places to be realized by designers Mustapha (2018).

Table 1. Frequency of interior designers managing interior project problems from the interviewer's perspective in Malaysia (Mustapha, 2018)

Nos. and Roles of Respondents	Concern of Interior Designer Lacking in Managing Interior Design Project							
	Integration	Teamwork	Communication	Coordination	Negotiation	Technical Knowledge	PM Knowledge	SOW / SOP
4 ID as consultant	2 agreed	2 agreed	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed	NA	3 agreed	2 agreed
11 ID as project manager	2 agreed	3 agreed	9 agreed	1 agreed	4 agreed	6 agreed	6 agreed	8 agreed
1 M&E Engineer	NA	NA	NA	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed	NA	NA
2 Architect	NA	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed	NA	2 agreed	2 agreed	2 agreed
1 Project Manager	NA	NA	NA	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed	1 agreed	1 agreed
1 Quality Engineer	NA	NA	1 agreed	NA	NA	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed
1 QS	NA	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed	NA	1 agreed	1 agreed	1 agreed
21	4	7	11	5	5	12	13	15

In addition, the work of interior designers is becoming a specialized process of gaining experience IDBOK (2008). The project has several overlapping and conflicting issues regarding the work scope and procedures.

Furthermore, interior designer responsibilities and division of work are intrinsically linked to these issues. They are also the most significant problem left over from the gap in interior designers' responsibilities (Piotrowski, 2012).

4. Research Method

This research started with the findings adopted from the previous research as the main reference for the problems in interior project delivery. The main method for this research is qualitative, using semi-structured interviews with professional designers and managers responsible for their projects and selected interior design projects.

Delivering an interior design project involves a number of procedures and workflows. It was necessary to follow and trace the project's process and flow narratives from the respondents who had been specifically selected for the interview. According to Karatsareas (2022), this technique was frequently applied in ethnography research with the aim of obtaining the rationale for the narratives. Ten (10) respondents were identified and purposely selected to be

interviewed. Those respondents were selected based on their high positions in companies, organizations, and institutes, all of which have tremendous track records in the field.

Furthermore, the interviews referred to 21 interior design projects in the China Province of Nanning, some of which were recently completed, and some are in the final stage of work. The interviews were video recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The results and findings were highlighted in the table form. On the other hand, literature collection is carried out from various platforms. Compare and summarize the problems in the literature and practice projects, and organize information about the areas of responsibility related to interior design.

5. Impact of Missing the Standardized Interior Design Project Scope of Work in China

A survey of interviews carried out in China included ten interior design respondents who work in the field were interviewed for the survey. Based on the current situation, expert interviews with ten personnel were carried out, and each expert discussed the issues related to the delivery of interior design projects, as shown in Table 2. These interviews were focused on the Interior Design Scope of Work (IDSOW), problems arising and working experience throughout all stages of interior design project delivery.

Table 2. Problems during interior design project delivery (2023), China's interior project delivery practice

Expert	Expert Career Background	Main issues
Respondent 1	President of Guangxi, China Interior Architects Association	Interior designers have always had varying levels of responsibility in project delivery. This is especially true for different project operations. The larger the project, the more the designer's scope of responsibility is considered. It is also one of the issues that the industry still needs to be able to standardize. However, a sense of project work experience underpins the entire scope of work.
Respondent 2	Director, Guangxi Academy of Building Research	In project delivery, retrofitting and new projects require sensitive financial outputs to adjust budgets and programs, with firm capacity control, while new construction projects have much simpler responsibilities. So, the scope of work is different.
Respondent 3	President of Guangxi Decoration Association	The designer's delivery responsibilities have yet to be defined clearly, but each enterprise also has its mode of operation to develop the relevant. The basic process is the same. However, these are more of the designer's subjective initiative, the project's autonomy, the ability to understand, and the ability to control the central control.
Respondent 4	Member of China Association of Interior Architects, Enterprise Home	Public decoration covers more issues than home furnishing project delivery; different designers have different educational backgrounds, and work experience determines the designer's initiative and ability to cope with the delivery process.
Respondent5	17 Years Decoration Company Manager	The designer's role in project delivery involves the designer from start to finish, and their crucial role cannot be ignored. The scope of work is controlled according to the project. In short, the interior designer's overall control needs to be included. Work experience supports the scope of work more.

Expert	Expert Career Background	Main issues
Respondent 6	Manager of a decorating company for 14 years	Designers in project delivery and the designer and construction project personnel are considered to connect the inertia and control of the design intent. It cannot just be a staged job.
Respondent 7	Manager of a decorating company for 17 years	The designer plays a 90 percent controlling role from the project's opening to the end.
Respondent 8	15 Years Decoration Company Manager	The original responsibility of the interior designer is to make the project delivery smoother, the function through which to play a more significant role, but to say that the specific responsibilities of different companies still have a distinct division of labor in existence.
Respondent 9	16 Years Decoration Company Project Manager	As an interior designer is the main person in charge of the project, from the program to the implementation, less control thereof, the delivery of the project is affected because he is from the end to the end of managing the amount of process, not just the stage of the job responsibilities.
Respondent 10	Project Manager of Decoration Company	The project can be done without an interior designer. However, the final result may be off, so the result is always the purpose of control, and the interior designer has a big responsibility. The scope of work is also significant.

The ten (10) expert respondents' feedback from the interviews highlighted the interior designer's highly important position in project delivery, with a project-specific scope of work and a high degree of responsibility. This requires more experience in the project to cope with the scope of work responsibilities. There is a major impact on the project's management. Nonetheless, standardization is still required. Still, experience serves as a guide. Due to the fact that only a small number of designers possess the necessary experience

in showcasing project outcomes, there is a chance that issues will arise, and the project may ultimately fail.

6. Analysis of the Impact of Project Issues

Using the project stages of 21 interior design projects in China as the selected independent variables, an extended method from the interviews was conducted, where the issues and problems were analyzed to identify which concerns could be recognized at each stage of the project delivery process.

Table 3. Impact analysis of project issues

Stage	Key Problem	Cause	Effect
Pre-project, mid-project, post-project	1. Programme communication issues with clients due to the root cause of not having proper SOW.	1. The designer's professional ability is insufficient; not be able to provide a complete guide to the client 2. Problems caused by communication generally include designers needing to allow clients to understand the project process, specifications, etc, fully Designers do not have timely and effective communication with customers to explain the project problems.	1. The client will need to be better informed throughout the project. Clients may need to be better informed, leading to misunderstandings and poor project delivery. 2. Communicating promptly can lead to extended project lead times or delays.
Pre-project, mid-project, post-project	2. Disclosure of construction projects (construction techniques, processes, standards) issues	1. The designers' and project managers' own professional knowledge and work experience lead to 2. Designers and project managers work negligently without strictly implementing the norms.	1. Resulting in the construction of the site is not in place, rework, over-budget, quality problems 2. Resulting in penalties, customer complaints, and other phenomena
Pre-project, mid-project, post-project	3. Contract issues	1. Contractual loopholes and failure to reasonably enforce liability	1. Loss of client information, termination of cooperation, or unsuccessful project implementation.

Stage	Key Problem	Cause	Effect
		2. Unreasonable terms and conditions in the contract caused the client not to accept the service	2. Economic disputes and project losses
Mid-project, post-project	4. Acceptance issues of construction quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Construction quality acceptance problems due to the pre-submission not being detailed and comprehensive. 2. The system is loose in the management process and is not strict 3. Management specification is not by the requirements 4. Materials unqualified 5. The construction process is unqualified 6: The construction plan is unreasonable 7: Budget out of range 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Construction cannot be carried out according to the requirements of the plan, and the effect is poor 2. Low efficiency and poor quality of work of construction executives 3. Construction projects are not standardized, quickly causing construction accidents 4. Poor delivery results, easy to cause rework complaints 5. Construction delivery has delayed crisis 6. Risk of not being able to settle and compensate
Pre-project,	5. Problems with building boundary treatments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inadequate site survey before the project 2. Not communicating adequately with the architect about the boundaries of responsibility 3. Inadequate internal analysis of design scope issues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resulting in design omissions and construction project omissions 2. Reworking of the project, impacting project delivery and increasing costs 3. Project omission will cause rework, additions, over-budgeting, and even more unprofessional designers.
Mid-project, post-project	6. Conflicting problems for designers and project managers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unclear scope of responsibilities of designers and project managers 2. Designers and project managers are doing overlapping work 3. Customers cannot find someone to solve on-site problems 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. leading to on-site project management loopholes 2. Overlapping work causes a waste of resources and delays. 3. Client problems cannot be solved in time
Pre-project, mid-project, post-project	7:Conflicting problems for designers and suppliers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Failure to communicate the client's material requirements, such as style, color, material, and price, promptly at the start of the project 2. Conflicts between the delivery lead time arising from the material customization process and the overall project delivery lead time 3. Differences in adaptability and installation in the field after changing materials 4. Coordination of final deliverables 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Phenomena that lead to uncoordinated project results and lack of client acceptance 2. Project delivery is not on time, causing customer complaint issues 3. Resulting in budget overruns and poor results, rework, and other problems 4. Uncoordinated results
	8: Post-delivery issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Failed post-delivery equipment tests 2. Failed post-delivery quality testing 3. Failure to rectify after delivery 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Risk of equipment re-installation 2. Rework, complaints from customers, etc. 3. The customer does not accept the project, has an unsuccessful settlement, has complaints, etc.

Table 3 shows the project issues and impacts summarised in the table form. Twenty-one (21) interior design projects were taken as the prior reference in the interviews and analyzed. These issues arose in the pre-, mid-, and post-project periods. The causes also validated the issues and impacts regarding project management, professional skills and knowledge training, teamwork, and communication. These impacts correspond to the emergence; perhaps in the early stage, problems are minor, but the issues not dealt with in the early stage hence, accumulate in the late stage. Infinite amplification will become impossible to deal with, thus causing the project delivery to affect the effectiveness of the project, the quality of the project, and the cost of the different impacts. This is where the need to clarify the scope of work comes into play, hence the need for further research and clarification. This will help to reduce the number of project issues and facilitate smooth project delivery.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to conduct a preliminary investigation into the problems that exist in the work of interior design in China. The results of the empirical investigation and the literature search indicate that the gaps in the content of the literature field and the existing literature only point out the current status of the project problem and mention the correlation between this and the scope of work. The expert's reference to the essential project management experience shows that the scope of work is neglected in daily practice. The analysis indicates that the scope of work in interior design is related to the designer's work plan and that

there are differences in the perception of the scope of work among interior designers with different backgrounds and work experience.

The scope of work affects all stages of project delivery. Piotrowski (2013) discussed the scope of work conflicts between interior designers and other professional disciplines, particularly with architects, engineers, and decorators. She emphasized the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities in multidisciplinary teams to reduce conflict and increase project efficiency.

Ballast (2021). Rengel (2011) noted that disputes over the scope of work can lead to legal enforcement risks. If responsibilities and contract terms are not clearly defined. Rengel (2011) discussed the potential impact of worker scope conflicts on project costs. Conflicts can lead to additional engineering and construction costs exceeding the project budget. This is where the designers' level of knowledge, project management, and other skills are needed as a guide to ensure smooth project delivery. It is also hoped that this research will help to establish a framework for interior design work scoping.

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