

FROM THE EDITOR

The authors of this Perspective argue that ASID and IIDA should go beyond “collaboration” and move forward expediently to create a single organization in order to preserve and advance the profession of interior design. I encourage you to read the Perspective and submit your thoughts on the topic to the Letters section of the next issue of the *Journal of Interior Design*. Of particular interest to the authors are thoughts about the Interior Design Educators Council and how fits with the concept of a single professional organization.

A Single Interior Design Professional Association: The Time Is Now

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Introduction

The grassroots plea for the formation of a single interior design professional association in the United States is not new. History reveals concerted efforts to formulate a single voice with the goal to establish credibility, continuity, and prestige to the interior design profession (three known attempts from the 1990s to present have failed). The 1995 hypothesis as reported by Harwood (2006) called for the formation of a single voice representing the profession. The 2006 update of the 1995 hypothesis reported that the formation of a single voice had only been partially fulfilled (Institute of Business Designers, Council of Federal of Interior Designers, International Society of Interior Designers merged into International Interior Design Association; American Society of Interior Designers [ASID] and Interior Design Educator's Council [IDEC] remained separate organizations). Harwood (2006) presented six new transformations for 2015 including once again a call for the formation of a single professional organization. As stated by Michael Bourque (Harwood, 2006):

*If I could only contribute to achieving one good thing for this profession, what would it be?
If the answer is anything but "one single professional interior design organization" then the
profession is doomed to continue losing prestige and influence.*

The plea for a unified single voice appears evident in the ASID and International Interior Design Association (IIDA) boards' recent commitment to collaboration between the two organizations. In an October 2008 press release, ASID and IIDA announced they "will maintain a collaborative approach to joint initiatives that support the profession of Interior Design, and continue their dialogue about expanding opportunities for increased interaction." (IDEC, 2008). Furthermore, ASID has announced a symbolic shift to hold its next annual conference in conjunction with NeoCon (IIDA has long held its annual conference simultaneously with NeoCon), suggesting that ASID and IIDA have taken steps toward the recently announced commitment of collaboration.

The authors of this perspective will argue (as have others) that ASID and IIDA should go beyond "collaboration" and move forward expediently to create a single organization in order to preserve and advance the profession

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of interior design. While we three authors are each a previous, current, or future president of the IDEC, it is important to note that this article represents our own thoughts on the unification of ASID and IIDA, and not those of IDEC as an organization.

With respect to the historic and repeated calls for a unified organization of ASID and IIDA, perhaps the infamous tag line by Nike, Inc. “Just do it”. is now in order. However, it is important to present a grounded argument that offers objective and viable reasons that unification is necessary at this point in time and leaves no room for excuse or emotion. Therefore, this perspective will argue in favor of the immediate pursuit of forming one organization for the purpose of advancing the profession, effectively addressing internal and external issues, and serving the needs of interior designers across North America.

The Framework: Justification for a Unified Voice Representing Interior Design

Many organizations have struggled with defining the best way to deliver needed services to their constituents. One proven and often-referenced procedure is defined by Bolman and Deal in their 2003 book *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, now in its third printing. Bolman and Deal’s theory of organizational success forms the foundation for this article’s exploration of unification. This strategy emphasizes “reframing” as a useful procedure for organizations that face new challenges, confusion, and/or complexity.

The Bolman and Deal (2003) framework describes four points of reference organizations should consider.

- **Structural**
Structural is how to organize and structure groups and teams to get results.
- **Human Resource**
Human resource is how to tailor organizations to satisfy human needs, improve management of human potential, and build positive interpersonal and group dynamics.
- **Political**
Political is how to cope with power and conflict, build coalitions, hone political skills, and deal with internal and external politics.
- **Symbolic**
Symbolic is how to shape a culture that gives purpose and meaning to work, stage organizational drama for internal and external audiences, and build team spirit.

Structural Framework: Opportunities for Efficiency

According to Bolman and Deal (2003), “a structure is more than boxes and lines arranged hierarchically on an official organizational chart. It is an outline of the desired pattern of activities, expectations, and exchanges” among the members of the organization and their clients (p. 46). The evolution of any given structure should

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reflect the organization's goals and fit its circumstances. An analysis of the two professional organizations (ASID and IIDA) reveals significant structural similarities. For the interior design professionals who pay dues, some to both organizations, the two structures could easily be perceived as redundant and, thus, inefficient. Aside from the basic structural similarities (e.g., executive board structure, dependence on volunteers, and chapters/city centers), the following discussion focuses on a comparison of the activities, expectations, and exchanges that occur within ASID and IIDA.

Mission statements explicate the purpose of an organization, often by listing its values (Campbell, 1997). A quick analysis of ASID's and IIDA's mission statements demonstrates that the very core of the two organizations share significant goals.

ASID Mission: ASID inspires and enriches its members by promoting the *value* of interior design, while providing indispensable *knowledge* and *experiences that build relationships* [italics by author].

IIDA Mission: The IIDA works to enhance the quality of life through excellence in interior design and to advance interior design through *knowledge*, *value* and *community* [italics by author].

The similarities are striking. Both ASID and IIDA have identified essentially the same three values: knowledge, community, and value of the discipline. Knowledge reflects the organizations' belief that they offer a specialty service defined by a body of knowledge. Community suggests the need for their members to find other individuals who share the same passion. The implication is that there is an advantage to numbers. The third value recognizes interior design as a legitimate profession the reason for the existence of both organizations in the first place (Martin, 2008). From these values, ASID and IIDA offer professional services to the public and professional development opportunities for its members (knowledge), provide a communication network (community), and strive to advance the profession (value). The following section addresses each of these core characteristics of ASID's and IIDA's missions as a means of demonstrating their similarity, and thus, redundancy.

Knowledge

Knowledge sharing occurs at numerous levels through activities and communication for both organizations. Perhaps the most significant touchstone for knowledge sharing is the annual conference. Each organization dedicates a significant amount of resources to bring the membership together *en masse* to learn from each other or outside professionals in other disciplines. Between these annual gatherings, ASID and IIDA have created additional means to meet the expectations of professional development through publications (*ICON* and *Perspective*) and a wide range of local events sponsored by Chapters or City Centers. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are a popular offering. IIDA has created a "Knowledge Center" on its web site to act as a depository for research and a resource to locate CEU offerings. ASID has a section on "Design Knowledge."

In all of the "membership benefits" listed above, there are countless similarities with some idiosyncratic differences. However, on the whole, the two organizations essentially attempt to offer the same information. The question is "at what cost?" At a time when financial expedience is on the minds of all Americans, the duplicative efforts of ASID and IIDA appear inefficient. In the coming months, if not years, those professionals who belonged to both organizations may have to choose one over the other. An even greater concern should

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be the message these two web sites communicate to the public. The information is similar, but not identical. One offers links to web sites for research centers and government agencies, and the other offers presentations from individual researchers and practitioners. Both are extremely valid, but why are they not the same? Perhaps it is because there are two organizations trying to promote the same information, but in a manner that is somehow different from the other.

Community

Individuals often join organizations to be part of a community. They want to interact with others as a means of justifying their common interests, gaining new knowledge, and simply knowing that they are not alone. The existence of networks (ASID) and forums (IIDA) indicates the desire for even further specialization. The more people an organization can bring into its community, the stronger the community is perceived to be by both its own constituents and the public. Consequently, size does matter. However, when two organizations with essentially the same mission vie for the same individual, competition inevitably arises. Accordingly, ASID and IIDA foster the appearance of a divisive community. Nowhere does this issue manifest itself with as much frustration as in student clubs on college and university campuses across the U.S.

ASID and IIDA court students, the wellspring of their future membership, by offering significantly lower membership fees and access to resources that will help them develop as new professionals. They compete for students through discounted memberships that coax these young members to transition from student to professional. Across the country, faculty advisors struggle with explanations as to why there are two professional organizations, and worst of all, which one to choose. Some clubs have experienced rifts because of diverse opinions on which organization to join. Students are abandoning the use of either professional organization in their name for something more generic, such as the Student Interior Design Club, which is a lost opportunity for the profession to further cultivate and instill its identity into the public consciousness. It is here that ASID and IIDA's coexistence is truly a disservice to the profession as a whole. Instead of ushering the new interior designers, the future of our profession, into a single community, they are superficially segregated into two camps—and for no logical reason.

Value of Interior Design

For the vast majority of members of ASID and IIDA, the most powerful expectation of their organization is the promotion of the value of interior design both internally and externally. This value lets others know that “what I do is meaningful.” This need for awareness lies at the core of legislative efforts across the country and instigates many activities and exchanges for ASID and IIDA. Both organizations spend significant resources on activities to support legislation and educate the public about the profession, but when the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing, is it efficient or effective? Bolman and Deal (2003) state that “coordination and control are essential to effectiveness” (p. 48) and yet there appears to be little coordinated effort between ASID and IIDA on activities such as legislative efforts. For example, in 2008, several disparaging diatribes about the interior design profession appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and on Fox News.com. ASID responded to each on behalf of ASID and posted their responses on their web site. IIDA may have responded, but has not made its responses as public as ASID. In these instances, the two organizations did not collaborate, which weakens the persuasiveness of the response (regarding the value of interior design) for the opposition,

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the public at large, the membership of the two organizations, and the students eagerly watching this drama unfold right before their eyes.

Even with the previous failed attempts for unification, all of the major professional organizations within the interior design discipline realize the need for some level of coordination. One indication of this is the existence of the Issues Forum that acts as a temporary structural mechanism that permits the leadership from ASID, IIDA, Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), IDC, IDEC, and the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) to discuss both opportunities and threats. While some effective initiatives (development of a body of knowledge) and strategies (task force to address Interior Design Continuing Education Council [IDCEC] issues) have developed during these meetings, the single most threatening topic—potential regression in the area of legislation—evokes guarded responses and comparatively minimal conversation. All three authors of this Perspective have sat at that table and witnessed the lack of concrete action with significant disappointment. While the Issues Forum is a necessary vehicle for the disciplinary organizations to meet and address issues, it has heretofore failed to produce many meaningful outcomes beyond a semipublic display of goodwill. In our opinion, its existence should by no means be considered a substitute for a unified professional organization for the United States.

The Structural Framework advocates for unification based on the principles of efficiency and effectiveness. As the discussion above suggests, ASID's and IIDA's missions are virtually the same. Each has identified a structure that offers similar activities, expectations, and exchanges. The organizations are fully aware of the duplicity and have begun to share resources through web site links. The Issues Forum allows the professional organizations to strategize as one, but this opportunity is rarely seized upon. All things considered, the structural similarities—with regard to activities, communication, and expectations—should not remain a major hindrance, as the good of the whole should outweigh issues of perceived ownership or territoriality.

Human Resource Frame: Fulfilling the Needs of the Membership

Bolman and Deal's (2003) premise for the human resource frame is that organizations exist to serve human needs. The relationship between the organization and its members must be a good "fit" to effectively benefit both the organization and the membership. With regard to interior design, we feel the win-win philosophy illustrated through the human resource frame justifies the argument for a unified interior design organization.

The Need for Effective Management of Personnel and Resources

The human resource frame states that an organization should use individuals who hold the organization's philosophy as their primary mission (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Both ASID and IIDA describe explicitly their close relationship with the people they seek to serve. ASID describes its identity as "a community of people driven by a common love for design and committed to the belief that interior design, as a service to people, is a powerful, multi-faceted profession that can positively change people's lives (ASID, 2009)." Similarly, IIDA "works to enhance the quality of life through excellence in interior design and to advance interior design through knowledge, value and community" (IIDA, 2009). ASID and IIDA hold similar missions and philosophies (as discussed in the structural framework), and therefore likely use similar staff and volunteers to uphold their mission, goals, and objectives. By merging the ideals from the two organizations,

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the emphasis is upon human resources as an investment for the betterment of the future of the profession.

Bolman and Deal (2003) further argue that organizations should be comprised of varying viewpoints to reframe themselves in light of changing times, new challenges, and/or directions. The unification of ASID and IIDA combines similar missions while simultaneously broadening diverse thinking. By merging the two organizations, individual members come together, potentially creating new synergy and vision, thereby addressing new challenges that face our profession. Given that long-standing members of the profession of interior design embrace the argument for a single organization (Harwood, 2006), it is difficult to argue *against* merging ASID and IIDA together as the human resource frame suggests. Unification will maximize effective management of personnel and volunteers for the common good of the interior design profession.

In order for organizations to successfully reframe themselves, they must understand that the workforce is their major investment. Organizations should view their workforce as an *investment* rather than a cost. In the case of ASID and IIDA, the workforce also includes their volunteers. Unifying two organizations into one does not have to mean significant cutbacks or one organization losing out to the other. The answer to unification may not be downsizing, but rather redefining responsibilities, expanding leadership opportunities, and turning attention to new endeavors. Bolman and Deal (2003) state, that downsizing hinders loyalty and often results in loss of talent. Therefore, the merging of ASID and IIDA may not result in “downsizing” but rather “upsizing” to reframe effective management to create an organization that provides power in numbers, a single voice, a common message, and opportunities to address issues on a global scale.

The plea to ASID and IIDA to formulate one organization appears to have the support of long-standing members of the profession (Harwood, 2006). The call for unification also appears to be at least anecdotally supported by the membership of the organizations (conversations at local and regional meetings). Failure to envision a new organization (in this case unification) can result in rebellion, resistance to existing organizations, and eventual withdrawal from membership (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The Volunteer: The Significant Human Resource

In his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Block (2008) states that today’s organizations must rethink an individual as *the* leader and focus upon a community of leaders. Furthermore, Block (2008) believes that today we must move to the membership as integral citizens in the organization and that each member plays a role in the leadership of the organization. Revisioning a single interior design professional organization may lead to a structure of an umbrella of leadership roles.

Volunteers for ASID and IIDA are a significant resource for both organizations. It is this fact that brings to bear another point favoring unification: to maintain the commitment of volunteers to an organization, the individual must find satisfaction and meaning in the organization. In turn, the organization profits from effective use of individual talent and energy. Conversely, if the meaning of an organization is lost, the individual member loses interest and potentially discontinues his or her association with the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). By forming a single organization, the energies of the individual may become unified resulting in a clear, meaningful message and more effective management. One specific volunteer area that comes to mind in this regard is the pool of CEU course reviewers of both organizations, who, by their own admission, struggle to maintain and manage.

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Managing External Factors

The human resource frame not only speaks to internal issues such as effective management of volunteers but also to considering external influences on an organization. By addressing external influences, an organization builds positive group dynamics both internally and externally (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The profession of interior design is under scrutiny, in particular, by external opposition groups. This fact is pertinent here, as the human resource frame argues that organizations must shift from a product-intensive mentality to an information-intensive world. That is, communication and accurate information to the profession and world is the key (Bolman & Deal, 2003), and at this time it is critical for the interior design profession. External voices such as Institute for Justice and others hone in on the fact that there are multiple organizations for interior design resulting in confusion via mixed messages and lack of a unified voice. The lack of this unity, as Bourque stated, results in diminished prestige for the profession (Harwood, 2006). In short, a highly motivated membership of interior design professionals is a powerful and competitive advantage. To this end, a unified organization may enhance the attitude of solidarity among interior designers. The ability to state a single, unified statement to external contingencies not only projects cohesiveness, it also gives the single interior design professional association control and the ability to directly face the opposition. Given that both ASID and IIDA are served significantly by volunteers and that their membership depends upon the organizations as a resource of information and credible voice to the public (human needs), it is the moral, ethical, and practical obligation of the two organizations to come together as one organization.

How can ASID and IIDA come together to create a visionary organization that follows Bolman and Deal's (2003) human resource frame? As a profession, we have command of the design process, a procedure that will be of use in this situation. We are trained problem solvers who can design an innovative model that benefits the membership of both organizations. Thus far, the structural and human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2003) provides a persuasive foundation as to why a unified organization should be formed. Equally important are the political and symbolic aspects of a single organization.

Politics and the Current Context of Interior Design Professional Organizations

Despite the negative connotations of "politics," the political frame is central to decision making for organizations, according to Bolman and Deal (2003). The political environment that an organization occupies can, in fact, be an asset to organizational action. We feel this frame presents both opportunities and hazards for interior design organizations.

Politics is defined as the "realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 186). With regard to the political landscape, surely scarcity and divergent interests characterize the climate in which interior design professional organizations operate. Perhaps more than mechanical engineering or landscape architecture, interior design is marked by a vast diversity of practice type (e.g., residential, office, and hotel) among its practitioners and concomitant variety of qualifications, procedures, and priorities among its constituents. It is also a relatively small field compared with its peer professions. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates 72,000 interior designers (BLS, 2008a) in comparison to 132,000 architects (BLS, 2008b) and 227,000 mechanical engineers (BLS, 2008b). When viewed in situations of comparative professional advocacy, this situation can have implications for power and influence wielded by the interior design profession.

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Bolman and Deal (2003) explain that political ability to affect change and maintain status is closely related to the power that an organization possesses and maintains. ASID and IIDA's power sources are generally established in their legacy (though, we feel, of limited influence beyond their membership) and punctuated by both long-standing and recent activities as they both seek to be the premiere voice of the American interior design community. For example, both organizations have developed and nurtured rich networks of bottom-up chapters and forums that ensure broad buy-in to their missions. Similarly, both organizations have made gains in their control of meaning and symbols as witnessed by the respect for their professional members' appellation (i.e., John Smith, ASID) that these members have earned the right to display. However, it is significant that an organization's power is also dependent upon its constituents' continuing satisfaction. As introduced above, we note that three grassroots efforts to urge unification of ASID and IIDA have occurred within the last 20 years. By the accounts of some involved in these previous negotiations (all fellows of ASID, IIDA, or IDEC), the reasons for failure were diverse and some were politically related:

...the details of the business of running the various groups seemed to have bogged down the process. -Charles Gandy, FASID

...small-mindedness got in the way of doing the right thing. -Michael Bourque, FIIDA

...power struggles occurred over previous agreements and deliberations.... Shirley Singer, FIDEC, ASID (Harwood, 2006, pp. xviii-xix)

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Political Expediency: Unification and Its Implications

Political forces continually influence organizations and their priorities, and these forces can sometimes conspire to prompt actions such as unions among similarly missioned entities. Bolman and Deal (2003) explain that a coalition forms because of interdependence among its members. Typically, this decision becomes necessary when their need for one another exceeds the diversity of their separate interests. Such moves can actually harness the energy of their conflict, pooling the organizations' efforts to effect real change and establish a stronger, centralized voice for their constituents. From the political framework point of view, one by-product of a permanent coalition is growth in necessary power to achieve its ends, which can, in fact, bring visible, "real results" (Foucault, 1975, p. 12). Surely there is no time like the present for United States interior design organizations to take action to strengthen their power, given the array of voices that oppose interior design licensure.

A union of ASID and IIDA will not occur without effort and sacrifice. Leaders will have to create value for both organizations, finding a win-win strategy grounded in joint problem solving that "pulls people together for meaningful purpose despite the thousands of forces that push [them] apart" (Kotter, 1985, p. 11). Negotiating the creation of a single organization will be particularly delicate given the relatively small size of the interior design professional community—little will be gained by "upsmanship" if one must continue to work with the same people. However, both ASID and IIDA have their roots in the unification of organizations that preceded them, as do other United States professional organizations.¹ History is seemingly on the side of success for interior design organization mergers when the political times demand such action.

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Responsibility to the Public and Others: The Representative Political Agent

The political frame also dictates that organizations recognize their responsibility to effectively represent their constituents to the larger public. We feel that ASID and IIDA should be commended for the civility of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public that is implicit in their goals. Such efforts reflect the highest levels of moral reasoning, or “positive politics”—meaning those actions that result in the greatest good for the greatest number of persons (Burns, 1978). However, offering duplicitous services that cost unnecessary money may counteract these good intentions, as does offering a fractured face of the profession that only serves to confuse the layperson. Furthermore, the new terrain of the global environment is increasingly concerned with sustainability and social justice—goals we suggest multiple organizations are less equipped to address with clarity, speed, and financial muscle than could a streamlined, centralized one.

The new entity must also interface successfully with a wealth of exterior organizations and individuals. These include NCIDQ, CIDA, IDC, IDEC, and IDCEC, as well as other professional fields including architecture, engineering, and facilities management. Even more broadly, global vision demands commitment to good interprofessional relationships and collaborations with international agencies and organizations such as the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers. Surely a single entity could offer a more coordinated outreach to these various organizations than they could separately, offering a centralized, primary point of contact for the American interior design voice and identity.

Politically speaking, however, the issue most urgently confronting ASID and IIDA may be recent attempts by outside entities to derail legal recognition and jurisdictional licensing. As described above, entities such as the Institute for Justice and the Interior Design Protection Council are well funded and increasingly effective in making their voice heard. It is the opinion of these authors that the members of ASID and IIDA (and by extension, the status and reputation of the interior design profession as a whole) experience reduced effectiveness in their professions’ point of view due to the current variety of voices competing to represent it. While ASID and IIDA’s primary political strategy thus far has been to stay above the fray of these groups’ ‘noise’, the option of remaining silent may not always be the most successful choice, as John Kerry’s presidential campaign exemplifies when confronted with Swiftboat opposition groups. Given the significant financial backing of these outside entities, ASID and IIDA are understandably unable to match their economic punch. Logic suggests this situation is made even worse by a lack of a collaborative, unison voice raised to counteract these outside groups’ claims. Consequently, professional interior designers’ point of view remains largely silent from the public’s perception, and initiatives to change this situation are faint in the cacophony of the layperson’s attention (Chaney, 2007). Were ASID and IIDA to unify, they might offer politically unified clarity of message and enhanced economic wherewithal to rebut outside groups.

The Changing Terrain of the Political Environment and the Mandate for Adaptation

No matter what political persuasion an organization may embrace, “organizations are inherently subservient to the forces of their changing and turbulent environments. In the long run, they retain their relevance only through continual adaption to these larger societal forces” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 238). The phrase ‘change or be changed’ comes to mind.

For the interior design profession in the United States, the economic and sociopolitical terrain is shifting beneath professional organizations’ feet, and by both ASID and IIDA’s own admission, these are particularly

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“turbulent” and “difficult” times (C. Durst, e-mail, January 9, 2009; <http://www.asid.org>). Interestingly, in an e-mail sent to IIDA members on January 5, 2009, Cheryl Durst, Executive Director of IIDA, makes this point herself: “Over the years, we’ve all seen the Interior Design profession grow in stature and significance. In turbulent times, it is particularly important to seize every opportunity to act as a unified profession to continue that growth pattern.” She continues that “it is a crucial time to both think of ourselves as part of a distinctive profession, and to act collectively as a distinctive profession.” We could not agree more, and feel that a permanent union between ASID and IIDA would best activate this sentiment. Disappointingly, Durst’s e-mail continues by identifying the advantages of IIDA membership without further mention of organizational unification.

For many reasons within the political framework, the merging of ASID and IIDA into a new, stronger and centralized entity may offer benefits that the current diluted organizational landscape for the interior design profession cannot address effectively.

Symbolic Framework: The Power of Meaning

“The symbolic frame centers on the concepts of meaning, belief, and faith” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 253). While highly objective, these concepts lie at the core of the human condition as they relate directly to our motivations, decisions, and actions. They validate what we do based on a set of values developed throughout our lifetime. Symbols function as highly efficient means of communicating complex messages to both internal and external audiences. The missions of ASID and IIDA generate many of their symbols and consequently communicate the three major goals of knowledge, community, and value of interior design. Social gatherings, standardized examinations, and historical struggles for validation all carry significant symbolic meaning that sustains an organization.

Any time a group comes together, symbolism is in play. Who shows up, what they discuss, and events they participate in are all parts of a complex system of symbols. The gathering itself is a symbol of solidarity and can help stabilize the organization by reducing “anxieties and ambiguities, through consistent messaging” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 250). No other activity makes tangible the community and reassures individuals that they are not alone. This reconfirmation of purpose and meaning in one’s chosen career is truly powerful, especially if that career is being challenged by outside forces. Members of ASID and IIDA have yet to experience the synchronous effect of a shared annual meeting. So many professionals work tirelessly on legislative efforts on top of already demanding job schedules. They need the opportunity to be reenergized; they need to be able to sit with their peers as one.

The conference also symbolizes the body of knowledge and the necessity for the profession to improve itself to remain relevant within a vastly diverse global culture in which technology changes daily and information crosses the earth instantaneously. The number and diversity of presentations sends a message that much needs to be understood to practice interior design. Both the breadth and depth of information validates the need for continued research from the academy and the practitioners. CEUs are a symbol outside of the conference that communicates the profession’s value of not only keeping practitioners up to date, but also creating citizens that are lifelong learners.

Another seminal symbol that reflects the interior design profession’s standard for knowledge is the NCIDQ. Much like examinations in education, the NCIDQ is a symbol of achievement. Embodied within a certificate

The one symbol that is conspicuously absent from interior design is that of a single banner under which all of its members with shared core values can stand.

and appellation after an interior designer's name, NCIDQ validates the knowledge of individuals as having met the agreed upon minimal standards of their profession. Upon completion, the new certificate holders enter a community that shares their values of maintaining those standards. Furthermore, according to Martin (2008), examinations are a necessary requirement in order for a practice to develop into a profession. As a central component of all legislative activity, the NCIDQ as a symbol communicates to the public that the practitioner has demonstrated the competency to practice through a standardized exam. The NCIDQ clearly expresses interior design's knowledge, community, and value to the public. Whether or not other forms of examination should be accepted is a discussion for another time. As a symbol, the NCIDQ plays a central role in defining the profession; within the two organizations, it helps define professional membership.

ASID has been, and continues to be, a staunch supporter of the NCIDQ exam and requires the passage of this exam to be a professional member. IIDA, however, accepts the NCIDQ *or* the successful completion of the Architect Registration Examination (ARE) with "documentation of a minimum of six years practice experience in interior design above and beyond those areas tested by the ARE exam" (IIDA, 2009). Even though both organizations have architects as professional members, IIDA's requirements suggest that architects are equally qualified to be interior designers. They need only practice interior design. One might suggest that this devalues the interior design profession by communicating that the ARE and NCIDQ are fairly equitable; competencies not demonstrated through examination can be achieved through on-the-job experiences. One could also argue that IIDA's qualifications empower another discipline's symbol (ARE), which impacts the public's perception of the profession's identity. On the other hand, having architects within the ranks of interior design supporting legislative efforts could be considered an even more powerful symbol. The purpose of this Perspective is not to pass judgment on either of these positions—only to point out how differences in membership categories can impact the perceived strength of any given symbol when two organizations have, in this case, different qualifications for determining professional membership.

The one symbol that is conspicuously absent from interior design is that of a single banner under which all of its members with shared core values can stand. Consider the degree to which branding² has infiltrated American culture. Pop singers, computer giants, and local bakers spend significant human and financial resources branding their products to a public flooded with options. Some brands focus on the quality of service, others on affordability. All brands embed meticulously the values of the company in their products. The AIA uses its symbolic power as *the* organization for professional architects to oppose interior design legislation. Throughout its history, the AIA has created a set of values based on the well-being of its members and the mission of the profession. Their political strength, whether real or perceived, only further validates the significance of their symbol, which is currently just three simple letters. At a time when interior design is embattled in states across the nation, the power of a unifying symbol cannot be underestimated. The power of this symbol is so great that its absence is used against the profession in the struggle for licensure.

Organizations are public symbols that speak on the behalf of their constituency. Sometimes the message is delivered verbally; other times the message is nothing more than the presence of a logo on letterhead. The one value that appears to be embraced by the majority of ASID and IIDA members in the United States is a "unified voice." Two organizations cannot have a unified voice, even if every communication were coauthored and cosigned. The existence of more than one professional organization communicates to the public that there is a difference. Perkins (2000), author of *Leading at the Edge*, supports the significance of symbolism offered by Bolman and Deal. He, however, emphasizes the importance of symbolic actions by the leadership during times of stress and discouragement. Perkins impresses upon his readers that such actions need to be "vivid and

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memorable” (p. 34) and that personal or group (i.e., organizational) sacrifice is often the line between success and failure. This is indeed a heavy burden to bear, but that is the role of a leader. A symbolic action by the leadership of ASID and IIDA would offer its members the greatest symbol of all—a unified voice.

Conclusion: Implications of Continued Fragmentation and an Alternative Reality

The framework system of organizational change, we think, points out the potential liabilities of plurality of United States interior design professional organizations. When viewed as a whole, the four frames paint a compelling picture of the need for change. As outlined above, the human resource frame causes us to note that the most important resources of ASID and IIDA—their personnel and volunteers—are likely not organized to best advantage when their efforts overlap. It is also worrisome that three historic grassroots efforts to unify the two organizations have not yet proved successful. The structural frame reminds us that duplicity of organizational assets simply wastes precious resources and emits a confused, scattered message. The political frame calls us to note that ASID and IIDA’s current respective autonomy likely reduces the profession’s power and prestige and lessens the opportunity to work strategically with outside national and global groups. And lastly, the symbolic frame reminds us that inconsistent messages promote anxiety and identity confusion—a most inconvenient state of affairs at this time of great change in the interior design profession.

This does not have to be our profession’s reality, nor its identity. While unification of ASID and IIDA will most certainly be a difficult endeavor, we feel the time is now to realize that the reasons for unity far outweigh any advantages to continued fragmentation. A reborn, unified organization might offer single-source research and learning resources from a centralized web site. Its focused message could establish and could positively and accurately portray the attributes of our critically necessary field, countering and, even better, anticipating opposition voices before they coalesce. This organization could also forge a coherent path for students and new practitioners, enhancing the potential that this next generation both enters the interior design field and moves its evolution forward. Lastly, this new organization could finally realize its potential to be a good global citizen, fulfilling its goal to be a steward of the public’s health, safety, and welfare through its own prudence, economy, and efficiency.

It is our hope that ASID and IIDA commit to the immediate formation of a task force that actively explores and finds solutions for this needed unification. It will require creativity and tenacity to overcome the many hurdles that will undoubtedly arise. However, we firmly feel that designers are uniquely armed for this challenge given their flexible, problem-solving abilities and the high stakes of this need. Functionally, politically, and symbolically, unification is a mandate if interior design is to continue its progression and adapt to meet its near future.

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Notes

- ¹ Other organizations, too, have borne witness to the utility of unification in an effort to codify its identity and strengthen its stature. The current American Planning Association (2009) was created from two previous, smaller planning organizations in 1975, a decision in part made in recognition of the "emergence of planning as a recognized profession" from its early roots in landscape architecture and civil engineering. Its model of a 'big tent' for everyone interested in planning also services those elite members who have passed the American Institute of Certified Planners examination. Its membership stands at 43,000.
- ² Bolman and Deal's framework closely resembles the concept of branding that is defined as "a collection of symbols, experiences and associations connected with a product, a service, a person or any other artifact or entity."