

# Simplifying the Flooring Installation Process Can Save Time, Money and Headaches

BY ROB HOFFMAN







The successful selection and installation of commercial flooring, which is typically one of the last elements of a commercial construction project to be addressed, can be a detailed and complex endeavor often conducted under the time pressures and tight budgets that represent today's fast-track construction environment. The recurring issue for architects, designers, specifiers, contractors, facility managers and building owners is how to simplify the complexities of choosing and installing commercial flooring in order to reduce demands on their time and budgets.

A valuable asset to them can be architect, designer and facility (ADF) consultants affiliated with some of the nation's leading distributors of flooring and flooring installation products. These professionals, who are generally available free of charge, add value because they are a "one-stop shop," with the expertise to evaluate a flooring project in its entirety and to identify and troubleshoot technical and logistical problems that may occur. They are knowledgeable about a wide range of flooring and flooring installation products, enabling them to recommend those best suited for a specific project.

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Many ADF consultants have access to warehouses stocked with materials ranging from flooring products to the tools necessary to install them. They can provide a valuable service to architects, designers and others by ensuring that products required for a flooring installation arrive at a job site at the right time and in the right order.



High moisture content in the substrate compromised this installation of rubber flooring tiles. ADF consultants can offer advice on both preparing substrates for flooring installations and remediation techniques when flooring is installed on poorly-prepared substrates.

There are five distinct ways an ADF consultant can simplify the flooring installation process.

#### **ONE: DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FLOORING INSTALLATION**

An ADF consultant can create a well-conceived plan that examines every aspect of the flooring installation, beginning with the condition of the substrate and ending with an effective maintenance

routine once the flooring is installed. The return on investment in the planning process, which should ideally be completed several weeks before the scheduled flooring installation, can be significant in terms of time and money saved, ensuring the continuity of the project and greatly reducing the odds of a compromised flooring installation.

The most successful flooring installation plans typically begin with an

on-site, information-gathering meeting among the ADF consultant and relevant decision-makers, such as the architect, interior designer or project manager and others as appropriate. They will walk through the phases of construction, discuss flooring design efficiencies in depth and consult on the interior design. Additionally, they can share their perspectives on the ultimate recyclability of the flooring options, which is increasingly important given the growing

emphasis on sustainability and sustainable products by end users.

The ADF consultant will be seeking answers to many questions. What is the scale and scope of the project? What is the timeline? Is the job negotiated or will it go out for bid? Who has been selected to install the flooring? And most importantly, what are the behaviors and expectations of the people who will be spending time in the space once the flooring is installed? The best ADF consultants will have the people who will be using the space continually on their minds.

Critically important to the flooring installation planning process is the condition of the substrate, which is often determined by whether the project is new construction or a renovation. The ADF consultant will focus on whether the surface is smooth, level and free of dirt, oil, curing compounds, asbestos or any bond breakers.

Evaluating the substrate also includes determining the amount of moisture in it. ADF consultants are highly conversant with respect to moisture problems and can factor into the plan an appropriate testing method to ensure that the moisture level is acceptable to the floor covering manufacturer.





Hands-on training with manufacturers gives ADF consultants valuable insights into the strengths, weaknesses and nuances of a wide range of flooring and flooring installation products. This training helps inform their product recommendations.

as it is important. A great deal of this learning comes from working directly with manufacturers to understand the strengths and nuances of their products.

### THREE: ENSURING TIMELY DELIVERY OF FLOORING PRODUCTS TO THE JOB SITE

The success of a flooring installation during fast-track construction often rests on the timely delivery of materials in the proper sequence from a variety of sources, some of which may be overseas. Managing these product delivery logistics can be a nightmare, given that it is not unusual for some flooring installation projects to include numerous floor coverings and as many as 20 or more products that are required to install them.

ADF consultants typically add value by removing this logistical burden from the architect, designer or project manager, greatly simplifying the process and reducing the risk of disruptions to the installation timeline. The consultant's advantage is their ready access to manufacturers to check the availability of specific products, determine a delivery date for them and track the shipment until it arrives at the distributor's warehouse. The ADF consultant also has access to the warehouse personnel and most importantly, the

### TWO: PROVIDING PRODUCT OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVERY ASPECT OF THE INSTALLATION

Armed with the information from the on-site evaluation, the ADF consultant can begin researching the best flooring and flooring installation product options for the project. This is an endeavor where consultants working for major flooring product distribution firms have distinct advantages.

Because their firms do business with large numbers of manufacturers, they have the ability to freely compare a range of products within a given product category. This enables them to recommend those that are best suited to remediate a specific problem or meet an end-user's specific needs.

Consultants representing some of the leading flooring distribution firms can also rely on the results of rigorous in-house product testing to guide their product recommendations. For

example, Fishman Flooring Solutions, which distributes adhesives produced by several manufacturers, tests the strength, the working characteristics and the value of all of the adhesive products it sells.

In addition, ADF consultants are paid to keep abreast of the steady stream of products, remediation solutions and installation techniques that are introduced into the flooring marketplace each year—a task that can be as tedious and time consuming

## REMEDIATING A COMPROMISED FLOORING INSTALLATION

**T**he perils of installing flooring in a commercial facility without first engaging an architect, designer and facility (ADF) consultant were illustrated by a U.S. government-owned medical center on the East Coast. The hard flooring the medical facility had installed in its 5,000-sq.-ft., multi-purpose community room, at a cost of \$35,000, was buckling less than a year after installation. The buckling posed a trip and fall safety risk for everyone using the room. The facility director contacted an ADF consultant at Fishman Flooring Solutions, which was not

involved in the initial installation, to evaluate the problem and suggest remedies.

The consultant's evaluation revealed a litany of missteps when the flooring was originally installed. Relative humidity testing was not done and there was a high level of moisture under the flooring. A moisture mitigation system designed for carpeting—rather than hard flooring—was used. And the substrate was neither smooth nor level when the flooring was installed.

Several steps were required to remedy the situation. The hard floor covering was removed and the substrate was allowed

time to dry. The adhesive was then removed and shot blasting was used to clean the slab. A moisture-control system was applied, followed by a coat of primer, followed by a self-leveling underlayment. Finally, sheet vinyl flooring was installed using the proper adhesive.

What was the price tag for making the ill-advised flooring installation right? Approximately \$80,000 or more than twice the cost of the initial installation. It was a needless expenditure that could have been avoided if an ADF consultant had been involved with the project from its inception.

truck driver, helping ensure that the order is complete and correct and arrives at the right place at the right time.

### FOUR: PERFORMING TRIAGE WHEN UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS OCCUR

There are a number of frequently-occurring yet often unanticipated problems with slabs. Slabs can have high moisture content, which will cause the flooring installation to fail. Asbestos or old adhesives are on the slab surface. Curing compounds and moisture mitigation products are mixed with the concrete before it is poured, trapping moisture in the slab. Slabs can crack or curl or be damaged during the construction process.

When time to repair the slabs is at a premium and

budgets are tight, ADF consultants can add value because they are well-versed in how best to identify and address specific slab problems and they have an in-depth understanding of the most cost-effective remediation products on the market. Importantly, they will have immediate access to these products from their distributor's warehouses.

### FIVE: PROVIDING DECISION MAKERS WITH TECHNICAL DATA, WARRANTY DETAILS AND OTHER CRITICAL INFORMATION

Gathering technical information and other data on all aspects of the flooring installation, getting it into the hands of the right people and ensuring they understand important details is

time consuming, thankless and vital. An ADF consultant can facilitate the process of collecting product specification sheets, manufacturer warranties, safety data sheets and installation and maintenance instructions and conveying them to the appropriate parties.

### SIMPLICITY IS KEY

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication," said Leonardo da Vinci, and that rings particularly true with respect to installing commercial flooring. The goal of the ADF consultant is to simplify and expedite the flooring installation process, ensuring that it flows seamlessly from concept and specification to completion, even in the face of unanticipated problems. The payoffs for architects, designers, contractors,

facility managers and building owners who partner with ADF consultants are time and cost savings, fewer headaches for everyone involved and, ultimately, satisfied clients and end users. **ft**

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