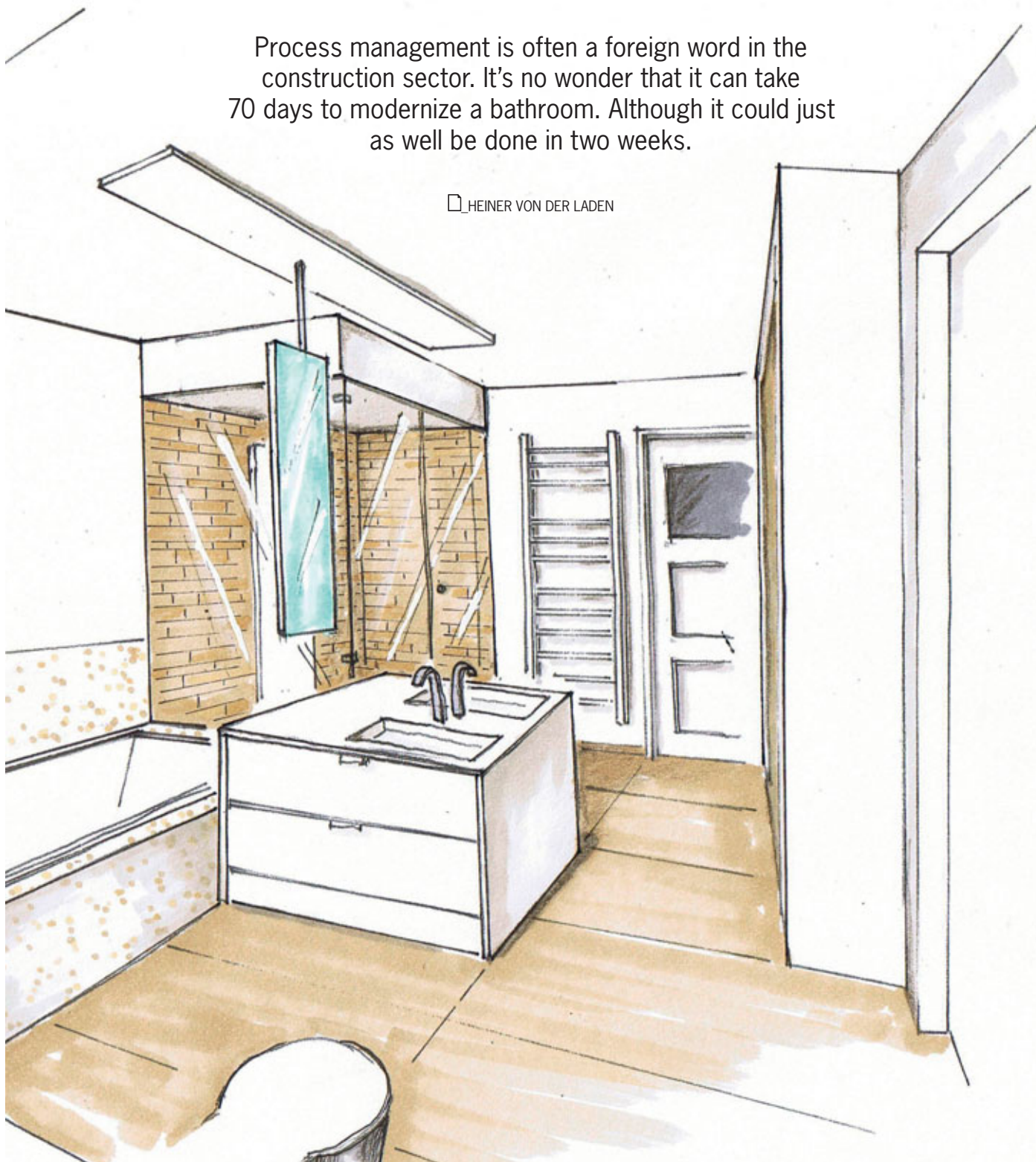


# Rapid Bathroom Renovation

Process management is often a foreign word in the construction sector. It's no wonder that it can take 70 days to modernize a bathroom. Although it could just as well be done in two weeks.

□ HEINER VON DER LADEN



ILLUSTRATION\_NICOLA STAMMER PHOTOS\_VEREINIGUNG DEUTSCHE SANITÄRWIRTSCHAFT

**T**he German sanitation sector gets a lot of business from bathrooms. After two or three decades, many households need to have their bathrooms completely redone.

But all too often, these households fail to take the crucial plunge—not for financial reasons (the target customer group is often over 50 years old and does not lack funds) but rather because these customers are reluctant to deal with the inconvenience: namely, long construction periods, material bottlenecks, noise, dirt, and above all, poor coordination of the different types of work required. “What we need is a comprehensive way to manage bathroom modernization,” says the Iserlohn-based businessman Andreas Dornbracht who chairs the German Sanitation Industry Association (VDS). Porsche Consulting presented him with an astonishing analysis of his industry.

Construction experts on the Porsche Consulting team analyzed all stages of full bathroom modernization projects on-site, and clocked a throughput time of a good 70 days. Fourteen weeks for a new bathroom? It could go much faster—the consultants think that seven to twelve days should suffice. The prerequisite for this, however, is eliminating waste throughout the entire process chain. But that in turn means that everyone involved has to be ready to rethink their routines: The traditionally function-oriented approach has to be replaced by a strongly process-oriented system.

It starts with the manufacturers of tiles, tubs, sinks, fittings, shower stalls, and so on. Unstable production processes, high supervisory costs, poor ability to meet deadlines, and long throughput times guarantee that time (and money) have already been wasted before workers can even get started. Because sales in the sanitation sector generally take the classic three-step form, the role of wholesalers should also be taken into account when examining how products get to workers. Typical ways in which efficiency is lost here include a high level of manual labor, long throughput times from offer to contract, and uneconomical buffers due to delayed deadlines. Taken together, this can add up to 43 days.

Things don't look any better at the actual construction site. For all modernization proj-



**Construction work in homes generates high stress levels for the residents. When bathroom modernization projects stretch on for weeks, people can lose their cool. With a bathroom modernization manager, companies can substantially improve speed, quality, cost-effectiveness, and customer satisfaction.**

ects analyzed, workers needed an average of 27 days to handle everything from removing the old bathroom furnishings to completing the project. Doing without a bathroom for more than five weeks, or at least in effect living at a construction site—what customers are ready to accept this, especially if they are investing substantial sums?

These time periods are also uneconomical for the companies doing the work. The analysis revealed that only slightly more than half of the time spent working on site actually adds value. Frequently the lack of clear agreement among the different trades slows down progress at the site. If electricians, plumbers, tilers, masons, and painters do not work hand in hand, mistakes and duplications are practically ensured.

While there are contractors who work together with the different trades to offer “everything from a single source,” perfectly running processes are often not the standard with them, either. The construction specialists from Porsche Consulting therefore recommend that employees of these companies undergo a further training program in bathroom modernization management. They can then play a crucial interface role and concentrate on running the complete modernization projects. Using structured project management, they can ensure that cross-company processes are standardized and that work proceeds according to the planned takt (pace and coordination). And of course, bathroom modernization managers also have to be ready to provide immediate solutions to any problems that might occur.

As an aside, the contact and trust that bathroom modernization managers build with customers can also raise the latter's satisfaction and loyalty levels. Overall, the construction period could be reduced to five to ten days if companies work according to the recommendations from Porsche Consulting. For their part, wholesalers should be able to make the necessary materials available within two days.

This sporty tempo would also make it easier for customers to make a decision. And the sanitation industry could benefit from lower costs and higher capacities. ←