cultural significance of the office environment becomes very clear when the late twentieth-century North American office is compared with its contemporary Northern European equivalent. The physical consequences of the prevailing social democratic culture on the offices of Northern Europe—particularly Germany, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands—are strikingly different. Individual office rooms, all exactly the same size, are provided for everyone without regard to hierarchy. Everyone enjoys direct access to daylight. Everyone expects to be able to open his or her own window and control his or her own environment. The design of office buildings and office furniture reflects a huge respect for the rights, the individual comfort, and the well-being of every office worker. Ergonomics is elevated to a very high level of respect and influence. Adjustability for each and every individual is taken for granted. Statutory negotiations in Workers Councils about the quality of working life have resulted in low, narrow, highly cellular, naturally ventilated office buildings equipped with many individually operable windows, personally adjustable furniture, and superb staff amenities. Of course, the typical environment of the conventional corporate North American office is very different.

Speaking globally, however, it is the highly corporate and conventional North American model of the office, rather than its much less widely diffused social democratic, Northern European counterpart, which has become dominant. Cities all around the world do not consider themselves proper cities unless they build high office buildings in the manner of Chicago or Dallas or Atlanta. Business parks, worldwide, are based on North American prototypes. Big, deep, simple, American-style office floor plates are what most global corporations still want, wherever they happen to be. Construction practices invented in Chicago are everywhere. American furniture manufacturers have become world leaders in a globalizing industry—hence the ubiquity of American space planning techniques, space standards, and floor layouts. In fact, so deeply rooted has the conventional, late-twentieth-century North American office become in the practice not only of architects and interior designers but of the entire property and construction industries, including that relatively new but highly conservative profession, facilities management, that change has become almost unthinkable.

This observation would be a matter of academic interest were it not for an acute sense of a growing contradiction between what the conventional office

has so long represented in terms of business values and the very different kind of work culture of the emerging economy of e-commerce. This is not simply to argue that the conventional North American model of the office is inferior or that the Northern European model is superior. Both have been created, entirely legitimately, in different economic and cultural environments. The point is that neither is absolute, neither is permanent, neither is the perfect solution. It no longer makes sense to choose between them. *Both* are likely to become obsolescent for exactly the same basic reasons—irresistible technological, social, and cultural change.

This chapter is about the architectural and design implications of these changes. Our first premise is that all office buildings everywhere must reflect and also support—and certainly not contradict—the spirit of their age and of their place. Our second premise is that, because of the impact of information technology on society, work cultures, in different ways in different places, are all about to change to a degree not experienced since the end of the nineteenth century. New ways of working, unprecedented networks, and completely novel work cultures are beginning to be realized. Change can be expected everywhere. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the likely manifestations of technological, social, and cultural change and to make some practical predictions about the consequences of such changes on the office environments that will be necessary to support the emerging knowledge-based economy.

THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Information technology makes innovation in workplace design entirely possible. Economic drivers make change in workplace design absolutely necessary. These drivers operate at three very different levels—the business imperative to increase efficiency in space use, the business potential to use space to enhance organizational effectiveness, and the business advantage inherent in using space as a powerful medium of communication that can stimulate and accelerate organizational change. To take advantage of all three drivers in the design of offices demands a very different design process