

*Things that have been taken for granted for a hundred years . . . such as the need for a vast infrastructure of roads and railways designed to get . . . commuters to their desks every day at the stroke of nine—are hangovers from our industrial past.*

munity generated. Seventeen of the cases (40 percent) are examples of adaptive reuse of structures originally designed for entirely different purposes, such as warehouses, industrial sheds, and old houses. These buildings have obviously been chosen because they have what might be called “character”—big volumes, striking roofs, interesting detailing which creative tenants have enjoyed converting to bring them into business use. Strong architectural features, so often lacking in developers’ conventional high-rise rent slabs or low-rise tilt-ups, seem to be attractive because they make good team spaces or can be used to enhance staff mobility.

Only five of the cases (11 percent) are fit-outs in what are clearly older but more or less conventional rented office buildings. The least number of cases (three, a mere 7 percent of the sample) are fit-outs in the newer kinds of speculative offices that the property market finds it convenient to supply today.

There is a message here for the property industry. This exercise could indicate that supply-side inertia, not lack of user demand, is responsible for the industry’s failure to anticipate what seems to be a radically different pattern of demand. Developers, real estate brokers, architects and designers, as well as building systems and building product manufacturers, and last but not least furniture manufacturers, have an urgent incentive to reexamine what may be in danger of becoming an obsolescent range of products.

Three additional British case studies, drawn directly from recent experience, illustrate in a little more detail what changing user demands means for the design of the office. The circumstances of the three projects are quite different. The new head office of a retail pharmaceutical firm, Boots the Chemists—the British equivalent of Walgreens—is the largest. The client’s objective project was to create a unified corporate center. About 2,800 people from five different sites have been brought together in an entirely new office building linked by a major internal street to a totally refurbished Skidmore, Owings & Merrill building dating from the 1960s. The Grosvenor Estate example is much smaller. Grosvenor is a major London-based developer and landowner with its origins in the eighteenth century. In this case a mere 200 people moved to a new office in the West End of London. Their journey, in another sense, was somewhat longer: from offices which would not have been out of place in the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, from a picturesque warren of more or less disconnected, eighteenth-century houses into a single, brand-new office building. Egg, an entirely new