

Internet bank set up by the British insurance company, the Prudential—no relation to the U.S. firm of the same name—did not even need to move. Its converted high-volume industrial shed in Derby accommodates the 1,000-member staff of an entirely new call center for an e-commerce bank that, typically, did not even exist three years earlier.

Only one of the three examples, Grosvenor's own speculative building, is remotely like a conventional North American office building. Of course, UK developer standards are higher—for example, the building is equipped with a full access floor of the kind that has been standard in the UK for 20 years but, for some reason, is still rare in the United States. Good as the building is, it was extensively modified during construction for Grosvenor's own use.

All three new offices have been specifically designed to increase business efficiency by driving down occupancy costs. Workplace standards, in each case, have been simplified. The waste inherent in paper storage has been attacked. Cableless phone systems make it possible to intensify space use. In two of the cases (not in the call center, where the operational needs are different), the information technology infrastructure that makes it possible to share workplaces, although not yet fully exploited, is already in place.

More important is the way in which the three businesses have used design to add value by stimulating more effective ways of doing business. Improvements in effectiveness have been achieved in various ways. In the Boots the Chemists project, a long continuous, multilevel street runs from end to end of the complex, linking a chain of immediately adjacent social and service spaces. These have been designed specifically to enhance serendipity and to maximize the potential for interaction among thousands of people in the diverse parts of what is by any standard a very large organization. Grosvenor's nonhierarchical, open plan, so very different from the offices the company inhabited before, is an architectural way of encouraging communication across disciplines and between levels. In a completely different business culture, the cheerful colors and the stimulating environment of Egg is an obvious architectural means of attracting and retaining staff in a particularly competitive business. All three examples clearly demonstrate the trend toward an increasing proportion of the space budget being taken up by shared, collective activities—project rooms, meeting spaces, rooms for training and meetings, touch-down spaces, social areas, etc.—spaces that are increasingly necessary as settings for complex interactive knowledge work.

The obverse should also be noted: the relative, and indeed frequently absolute, decline of the area devoted to individual workplaces. As mobile working and home working increase, these trends will certainly accelerate.

The messages that design can communicate about business strategy are critically important in all three cases. These three businesses are doing far more than simply accommodating themselves—they are using building projects to accelerate programs of business and cultural change. In Boots the Chemists, every design detail, every step in the design process was used to drive home vitally important messages to every member of staff at every level about the importance of better communications, better team working, better thinking. Grosvenor's design iconography is a carefully judged program to express to staff and visitors the importance, for a highly progressive, international property company, of maintaining continuity with its values and its history. The company is deliberately using its new space to communicate a sophisticated message to the world about its corporate intentions. Egg is using its space not just to attract and retain key staff but to demonstrate to staff and customers what e-commerce is all about.

Common to all three projects, and to the increasing number of similarly innovative office projects round the world, is something quite new: the purposeful and considered use of innovative design to stimulate change. This is a long way from corporate real estate's habitual view of office design as the cheapest way of accommodating as many people as possible in the smallest possible workstations. The big difference is that design is now being used with strategic intent.

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## CHANGES IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

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The chief reason, however, for drawing attention to these three projects is not just that they exemplify how office design is being used to improve business performance, but also to illustrate how the process of office design is changing.

What is essential to understand is that, although the physical design of the new office is critically important, innovation in physical design is literally