let alone sensitivity or concern. If this is true, as it seems to be in Silicon Valley, where no one has time any more to think creatively about real estate, it is even more likely to be the case in the far-flung, complex, and expensive-to-manage networks of international offices.

Meanwhile, the attitudes of ordinary international corporate real estate executives are changing. Centralized control, on the military model, is certainly on its way out–probably because it is an inherently labor-intensive and expensive way of doing things, whatever triumphs of penny-pinching have been achieved along the way. Under current circumstances everyone on the international circuit in corporate real estate seems to be overstretched, even more starved of time and resources than their colleagues in the United States. Where once hundreds of project managers serviced a large corporation's properties spread across, let's say, the whole of Europe, today the same workload is handled by half a dozen overworked people, always buttonholed, constantly on the move. In these circumstances, and especially given spectacularly rapid growth in certain sectors, attempts to control corporate real estate centrally are liable to be easily ambushed by local practices in brokering, design, and construction.

A related but even more important crisis is the increasing tension between corporate real estate and user interests. Real estate management structures, under the severe pressures described above to cut costs and to outsource wherever possible, are finding it extremely difficult to cope with increasingly empowered users. The French are no easier to deal with than the Germans, and why should the Japanese be any easier than their colleagues in Hong Kong? Economic, demographic, and technological changes are all converging to create a new kind of office workforce, with an entirely different profile, whose expectations of the working environment are increasing and whose potential to create trouble, if not always to effect change, is very much on the increase.

It is interesting to compare European international real estate practice with North American procedures: European businesses operating in the United States have been generally reluctant to import their own standards and procedures and are far more likely to adopt local customs than their U.S. counterparts operating in Europe. This may be partly because of a longer tradition of corporate real estate practice on that side of the Atlantic. It also has to be said that it has been noticed that North American office users are prepared to accept environmental conditions that are much poorer than those to which ordinary office workers have become accustomed in the last two or three decades in Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands (but not, incidentally, for different reasons, in the UK, France, and Italy). American readers may not be aware of how homogenous American corporate culture appears from the European perspective. Despite the federal system and a vast geography, 200 years of a common culture and 100 years of Taylorism have made all U.S. offices–not to mention much of the rest of the paraphernalia of American life–look very much the same wherever they happen to be. Americans, perhaps without realizing it, tend to assume that uniform office design standards *ought* to prevail everywhere in the world, just as they do at home. If they don't find consistency, they impose it. Europeans, from long experience of big cultural and linguistic differences, are much more tolerant of diversity.

CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONAL CORPORATE REAL ESTATE

Two fundamental problems

Two fundamental problems facing corporate real estate in the international context remain intractable. These are, first, how to deal with potentially ballooning user demand for better-quality working environments that are strategically related to business purpose, and, second, how to reinvent corporate real estate delivery so that it can keep up with the accelerating rate of change.

The same fundamental economic and technological pressures are working everywhere, although at different rates and on different time scales, depending on relative national wealth and faster and slower rates of technological development. What makes a controlled international design response difficult is that these economic and technological pressures are overlaid by three further levels of complexity–international differences in wage levels and occupancy costs, differences in culture, and differences in the organization of professional services. Architects and designers who wish to work internationally must be prepared to respond to wildly different wage and cost structures, to very different national–and indeed regional–cultures, and to different, and sometimes illogical and contradictory, regulatory systems and modes of practice.

There are five different ways in which international corporate real estate can currently respond to these challenges. The first is to ignore the problem, simply adopting local working practices, more or less in the European way