

*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.*

mentioned above. The second is to throw large project management resources at the problem in an attempt to impose an external order, in the old-fashioned American corporate way. The third is to outsource, which means, in practice, running faster and faster, attempting to deal with problems as they arise. The fourth is to explore ways of providing seamless international delivery packages through unions of developers, realtors, designers, furniture manufacturers, and construction companies. The fifth is to go even further in the direction of outsourcing, relying on specialist providers like Regus and HQ that treat office space as if it were a hotel accommodation in which services are paid for by the minute instead of the real estate way of paying for square feet by the year.

None of these possible responses is likely to be good enough for emerging, knowledge-based businesses, especially given the pressures that are already building up today at the crucial interface between real estate providers, whose power is weakening, and end users, whose power is tending to increase. Designers and architects are accustomed to working at the interface between the supply-side industries—property, construction, and furniture—and the demand side, that is, the people who have to put up with office space every day of their lives. Too often people responsible in house for corporate real estate, and indeed facilities managers as well, are being forced to resist, even to deny, user pressure as if they are now merely a powerless extension of the supply chain. In this situation the designers in the middle, mediating between the suppliers and the customers, have the opportunity to become much more inventive—provided they are prepared to understand, and to become involved with intricate, sometimes passionate, and always risky organizational politics.

Within international corporate real estate departments the pressure toward central control, standardization, and variety reduction are stronger than ever before, largely because of diminishing resources. However, the administrative imperative to control and to simplify is being resisted by even stronger user pressures toward cultural and operational diversity. Everyone who has worked internationally for corporate clients will be very well aware of the classic and ongoing conflict between corporate headquarters and national and regional offices. “I’m from HQ and here to help,” is an ancient joke. This ancient managerial turf war is currently being exacerbated by the major structural changes, already mentioned above, in the profile of employee expectations. As all organizations move, in some sectors and in some countries, perhaps more rapidly than others, to shedding low-level clerical staff,