

It will be hard, however, for corporate real estate to ignore a relatively new factor that is introducing a new dimension of diversity into international office design. This is the changing patterns in the use of space over time—daily, weekly, yearly—that are the consequence of ubiquitous networks of robust information technology that allow people, in effect, to invent their own timetables, wherever they happen to be. One practical consequence will be space use intensification in the office, as businesses realize how mobile people are becoming both inside and outside the office. Another practical consequence will be the renaissance of city life, as the importance of unscheduled social and intellectual contact is realized in an increasingly virtual world. Exactly what the new conventions in the use of time and space should be, we don't yet know. But we do know that they won't be as simple as the five-day week and the eight-hour day.

Three plausible, if somewhat cynical, conclusions may be drawn from all these observations. The first is that for corporate real estate purposes, what has mattered most is making the lives of those who deliver and manage corporate real estate internationally as easy as possible. The second is that, from a national point of view, what has mattered most in relation to international corporate real estate norms has been protectionism, i.e., manipulating the market to protect local suppliers. The third is that neither of these considerations should be allowed to have anything to do with designing the kinds of office accommodation that twenty-first-century businesses really do need today as they struggle to develop their international competencies in a period of very rapid change of every kind.

CULTURAL FLUENCY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PLURALITY

Recognizing that some similarities and differences in international real estate are legitimate while others are mere fabrications (smoke screens invented for selfish national or corporate reasons) is an essential step forward for designers who genuinely want to understand how they should best service such a complex market. There is absolutely no doubt that many design opportunities do exist internationally and that design imagination of the highest order will be necessary to satisfy what will certainly be a rapid increase in demand for innovative design by expanding global organizations and business networks.

Cultural Fluency and Design Sophistication

What North American designers particularly need to realize is that they have become accustomed to what has become a dangerously self-sufficient, inward- and backward-looking, conservative office design culture. The convenience of suppliers has been allowed to bear far more weight in office design than the needs of the users. The almost universal success of the homogeneous North American office model in the twentieth century has now turned into a serious problem for internationalizing design practices. Conventional off-the-shelf design solutions, weighed down with Taylorist iconography, are certain to be increasingly challenged in the twenty-first century. The challenge is likely to be felt with particular acuteness by practices hoping to operate overseas where the supply chain is under most strain and where the need for design invention to achieve strenuous corporate objectives is greatest. In existing international design practices, diverse forms of practice and alternative ways of doing things already provide a relativistic stimulus: differences *can* be legitimate; innovation *is* possible. New ways of working are likely to lead to further disintermediation of the supply chain and to yet more democratization of the design process. Neither the cookie-cutter approach of old-fashioned corporate design delivery nor the nationalistic shortcuts of prefabricated design solutions will continue to be tolerated. Users will demand more design imagination and more specialized design services. Hence the need in international practice for greater design sophistication and for far more cultural fluency.

Feedback is an essential component of success for both designers and user clients. Feedback implies infinite possibility for change and improvement. More measures of how well buildings perform in relation to business strategy will become critically important. And, important as measures of how well buildings have been delivered and maintained undoubtedly are, measures of how buildings can be used are even more important.

Standardization Versus Diversity

Given the choice in office design between standardization and diversity, there is no doubt that we now live in a more complex commercial world where greater diversity has now become very much more preferable—and is perhaps even the key to business survival. Standardization of components, layouts, and design elements is only a very primitive way of simplifying