

In truth, the workplace is the icon of the new millennium. It's the pivotal place for uniting a divided industry around the common cause of design. Never was design more critical in integrating components of the built environment . . .

design environments around work. But the challenge is to find them and mine the vein for its riches before it ossifies. Ossification is the unintended consequence when we leave “well enough alone.” Ossification consists of feeding and sheltering these work-arounds, and before long the work-arounds become the real work of the firm. People start to focus their efforts inwardly rather than outwardly on the customer. These work-arounds can become so intricate that eventually its inventors have to create a set of procedures just to manage the catacombs of information paths. All too often, untrained facilities managers must navigate these.

Only experts can steer near great barrier reefs and only experts should treat bureaucracies. Bureaucracies are just like coral reefs. Built on dead or dying procedures, a monstrous structure is created from layer after layer of dead cells of inefficiency until it changes the cultural ecosystem around it. These bureaucracies are an ossified testimony to years of continual misappropriation and misalignment. Over time, these bureaucracies become like barrier reefs—beautiful but dangerous—dangerous because they are hard to change and yet they shape our future. Ironically, solutions are inside a bureaucracy, albeit invisible, intangible, and tacit, residing in the last place someone like Henry Ford may have thought to look—inside people. That’s because old-economy firms traditionally define and value capital assets, like elevators as tangible and measurable and workplaces as nothing more than closely packed Dilbertian cubicles carved out of a facilities budget as a hard fixed cost. New-economy firms recognize that their most important asset is not the elevator; rather it’s what goes up and down in it and perhaps doesn’t even need to be in the elevator at all. If firms can’t value their people as assets, then they will never understand how a built environment will retain them.

HUMAN CAPITAL

A multitude of forces have changed this old economy. Industrial-strength economies are geared to capital assets and human costs (bricks and mortar); the new economy is wound around human assets and capital costs (clicks and mortar). However, the greatest capital assets in the world don’t mean a thing if you cannot retain the best people. New business models are based