Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

Frank Duffy
Three Inter-related Phenomena

The Challenge of Sustainability
  - Preserving the Planet for our Children’s Children

The Opportunities Provided by Information Technology
  - Universal, Instantaneous Inter-connectedness
  - Increasing mobility within and between workplaces

The Tyranny of the Supply Chain
  - The Consequences of Taking the Status Quo for Granted
Five Decades of Unfolding Epiphanies

- 1963 - 73
  *Learning from Europe*

- 1973 – 83
  *Learning from North America*

- 1968 – 93
  *The Computer Escapes from the Computer Room*

- 1993 – 03

- Global Perspectives

- 2003 – 13
  *Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World*
The Evolution of the Office Building

Three generic types of office:

• The Taylorist Office: the consequence of the Nineteenth Century invention of ‘Scientific Management’

• The Social Democratic Office: the consequence of post Second World War social and economic reconstruction

• The Networked Office: made possible by robust, reliable, ubiquitous Twenty First Century information technology
Taylorist

The Larkin Building, Buffalo

Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright
Date: 1904
Taylorist

The Larkin Building, Buffalo

Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright
Date: 1904
Taylorist

Seagram Building
Architects: Mies van der Rohe & Philip Johnson
Date: 1958
Buildings & Time

Shell, Services, Scenery, Sets

Site, Structure, Services, Scenery, Sets, Stuff
Buildings & Time

Expenditure on an office building over its lifetime i.e. Architecture is a Branch of Interior Design
The Evolution of the Office Building

Below, the street is the essence of the plan—the place where everyone meets. Outside each cluster of individual, glass-fronted office rooms is a common area for group activities.

SAS, Stockholm, Niels Torp, 1988
The Evolution of the Office Building

The Social Democratic Office, SAS Stockholm, Niels Torp, 1988
The Evolution of the Office Building

The Networked Office
New Temporal & Spatial Conventions

New Real Estate Strategies

Allocating space on the basis of work pattern
New Temporal & Spatial Conventions

Mobile working is not new
New Temporal & Spatial Conventions

The late William Mitchell, Director of the MIT Media Lab, argued that neither of the two iron laws that have shaped the Workplace since the Industrial Revolution:

- Synchrony
- Co-location

remains valid today.
New Temporal & Spatial Conventions

Synchrony

Co-location
Richard Sennett’s Critique of Modern Architecture

Gross Scale
- Larger and simpler; bigger and cruder

Over determined forms
- Self indulgent, exchange driven, brittle

Erosion of Public Space
- Centripetal projects which omit or neglect interstitial spaces
Architects Who Can’t Say ‘No’

Too Much In Love with What We Do
  - Serial Purveyors of New Buildings

Always Pleased to be Asked
  - Can Do, Supply-side Dominated, Never Looking Back

Doing What We Are Told
  - Failing to Ask the Obvious Questions:
    What are Buildings For? How Well do they Work?
What’s Wrong with our Office Supply Chain?

1. Unidirectional
2. Unstoppable
3. Mono-functional
4. Minimal – sometimes zero - feedback
The Evolution of the Office Building

Three generic types of procurement:

• The Taylorist Office: developer led; leased buildings; standardised designs; exchange driven

• The Social Democratic Office: purpose built; highly specific buildings; long term ownership; socially driven

• The Networked Office: as much about the provision of services as space; responsive to customer demand; paid for by the hour; value adding; output driven
The Networked ‘Demand Chain’

Not a Supply Chain but a Demand Chain

1. End Users > Demand Led Criteria > Services Paid for by the Hour

2. Corporate Operators > User Facing Criteria > Property Owners behaving like Hoteliers

3. Long Term Owners Responding to Demand > Profiting by Managing What Exists > The Model of the Great London Estate
Buildings don’t do anything on their own on their own

They are inert.

It is how they are used that matters.

Utility can be measured in terms of business purpose.
Office buildings can be more or less:

- **Efficient**, doing the most with least resources;
- **Effective**, adding value through clever design;
- **Expressive**, broadcasting values and aspirations.

Of the three capacities, expression is the most important.
An Evaluative Framework

- Finance
- Business Process
- Customer
- Human Capital
An Evaluative Framework

**Business Imperatives**
- Finance
- Business Processes
- Customer
- Human Capital

**Design Potential**

**Efficiency**
- eg. Cheaper

**Effectiveness**
- eg. More Connected

**Expression**
- eg. Better Service, Stronger Brand
- eg. Attracting and Retaining Staff

**Performance Targets and Measures**
Efficiency: Office Space is Underused
Efficiency: Most meetings are small and short rather than big and long

Size of meetings in banking/financial services companies
Percentage of all meetings observed that were of each size

Data from 175 meeting rooms each surveyed hourly for 10 days, in 13 buildings in the UK belonging to six banking / financial services companies
Effectiveness:
Stockland
Effectiveness: Genzyme
Expression:
Google
London
Expression:
Google
Paris
Expression: Google Munich
Expression:
Google
Amsterdam
The opportunity

Use the design, construction and occupancy process to reinforce and, if necessary redirect and revitalise organisational culture.
The design of the process is critical:

- Leadership
- Systems Thinking: integrate IT, HR and Space
- Data: Targets and feedback
- User communication and involvement

are necessary to get the most out of any office project.
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

A Cisco Telepresence Room
Imagine a totally virtual world with all the convenience of complete and perfect virtuality.

In this perfect world a virtual genius lights upon the idea of **place**.

What arguments would this genius have to use to convince his (or her) fellows of the value and utility of place?
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

**Memory**: Association, Resonance, Recall

**Chance**: Serendipity, Non linearity, Surprise, Open-endedness, Co-incidence

**Sociability**: Networking, Choice, Potential to Withdraw

**Meaning**: Subtlety, Expression, Beauty, Pleasure

What Lewis Mumford called “The Culture of Cities”
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

Central London

Manhattan

Dense, Multiple, Overlapping Networks
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

Nolli’s Map of Rome
Permeable, Semi-permeable and Private Space
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

Canary Wharf

Soho
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

Soho Restaurants
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

Canary Wharf Security
Justifying Place in an Increasingly Virtual World

The Bank of England
Reversing Richard Sennett’s Critique

Appropriate Scale
- Smaller, cheaper spaces that complement larger buildings
- More choice, more complexity, more diversity

Buildings that can learn
- The capacity to accommodate growth and change
- Buildings that get better over time

More permeable public and semi public urban spaces
- More interactive space within buildings
- More interactive spaces between buildings

Buildings and Cities measured by the Ideas they Stimulate
A Warning

Unless we are prepared to rethink the office supply chain we will fail to take full advantage of information technology advantage to create sustainable cities appropriate to the Twenty First Century knowledge economy.
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