

Offices and evolving work practices

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Our Research

CASES

10 London Offices

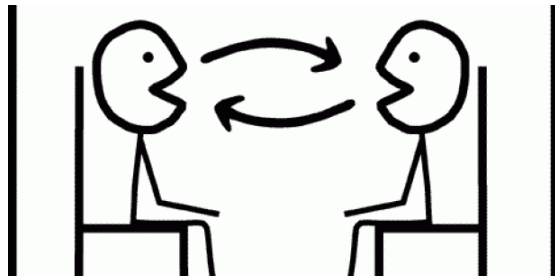
- 6 New Builds;
4 Refurbishments
- All developer-led;
1 pre-let
- From 3,000 sq/m to
23,000 sq/m

DATA

49 interviewees

- Architects (15)
- M & E (11)
- Developers & Agents
(14)
- Consultants etc (9)

The work practice – office design disconnect



‘So how do you take account of what people do in offices?’



‘Any consultant will move from them [market standards] at their peril”
(Letting Agent)

We don't know how will work in the building

We listen then reconcile that with what we 'know' is needed



Market Standards:

Maximum provision is the new minimum

Parameter	BCO Guidance
Occupational Density	1 person per 8-13m ²
Thermal conditions	Not to exceed 25°C for more than 5% occupier hours
Fresh Air	12-15 l/s/person
Lighting	300-500 lux
Small power	20-25W/m ²

Parameter	'Grade A' feature
Symbolic spaces	Double height receptions; large atria; roof terraces
Cooling systems	4 pipe fan coil; Hidden behind suspended ceilings
Glazing	Full glass when possible
Lifts	Limited wait time is priority
Aesthetics	White, bright, uncluttered

Standards & Institutions

‘Need’ & Quality’

- Standards represent user practices

“you have these standards and those standards are seen to be acceptable and appropriate and adaptable” (Architect, case study 2).

‘Legitimate’ and ‘Marketable’

“You wouldn’t design a building to less than BCO standards... it’s a huge cross if your building doesn’t meet BCO standards”



Knowledge diminution

Standards reduce complexity (‘black boxing’)

- But...rather than ‘amplify’ knowledge (Latour, 1999), market standards lead to diminution: worst-case scenario for all

“a tendency to cater for the highest densities across the whole space: providing for the worst-case scenario, everywhere, from day one” (BCO, 2013: 6)

Standards as the focus of attention

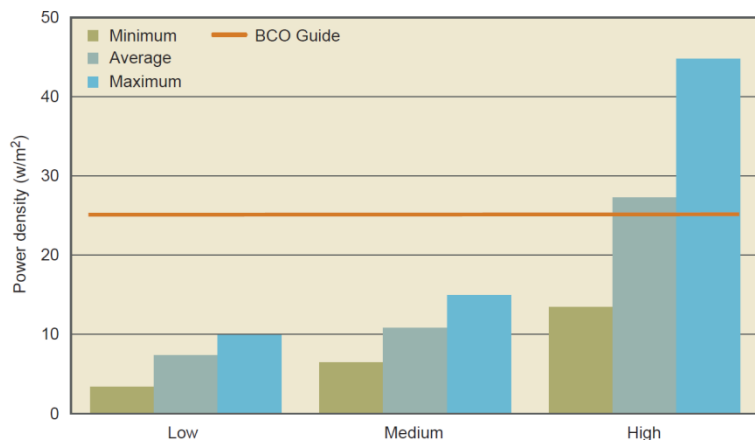
- Devaluing the knowledge and judgement of the architect
- A new form of governance contributing to heteronomy

“people go by those standards and I think most of the time they don’t really know what they mean. It’s a kind of a bit of a catch all...you’re not looking at what it means and you’re not necessarily thinking ‘but is some of that relevant to what you want? Is there something else better than that?’” (Occupier, case study 4).



Knowledge diminution effects I

Ignoring what people do and when they do it

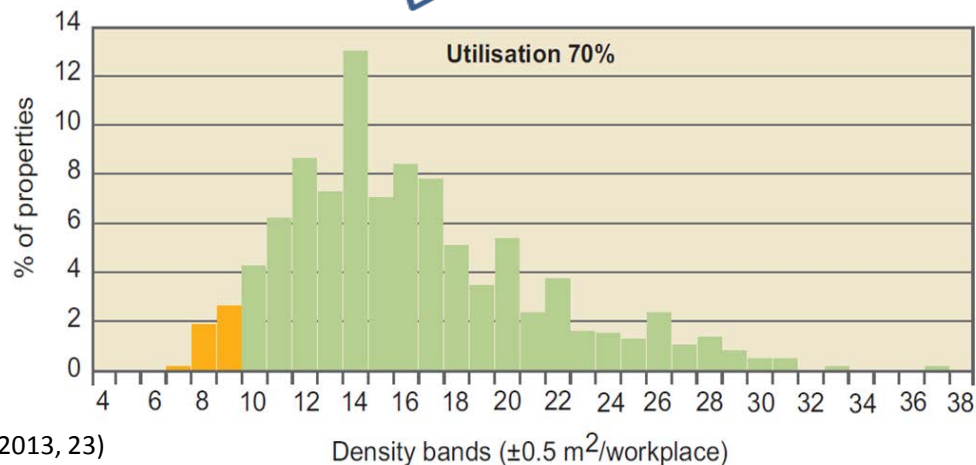


BCO (2014, 12)

Figure 3 – Average power density for 1 person per 10 m²

“you get built to an industry standard ... to appeal to a wide range of tenants. So ... if a tenant comes along and says ‘I want a massive internal gain’ [due to high occupancy rates and small power provision]... you can deal with it” (Consultant)

“what you tend to find is there’s some enormous peaks which dictates the choice of your systems...that is going to define your AC system and lo and behold you then have all of these hundreds of fans put in, grossly over-sized” (M&E consultant)



BCO (2013, 23)

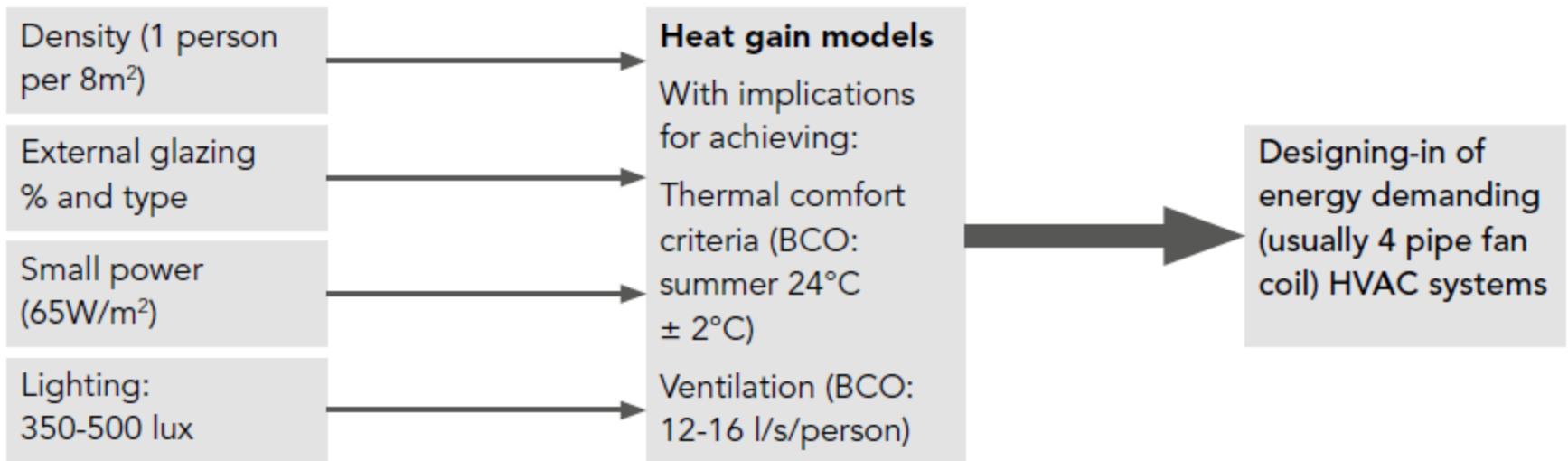


'BCO+' by developers: "So building regs for fresh air is 10 litres a second, but BCO recommends 12 litres to 16 litres...the client said 16 litres plus 10%. And on cooling loads it was plus 10%" (M&E engineer)

Despite the obvious disconnect from work practices

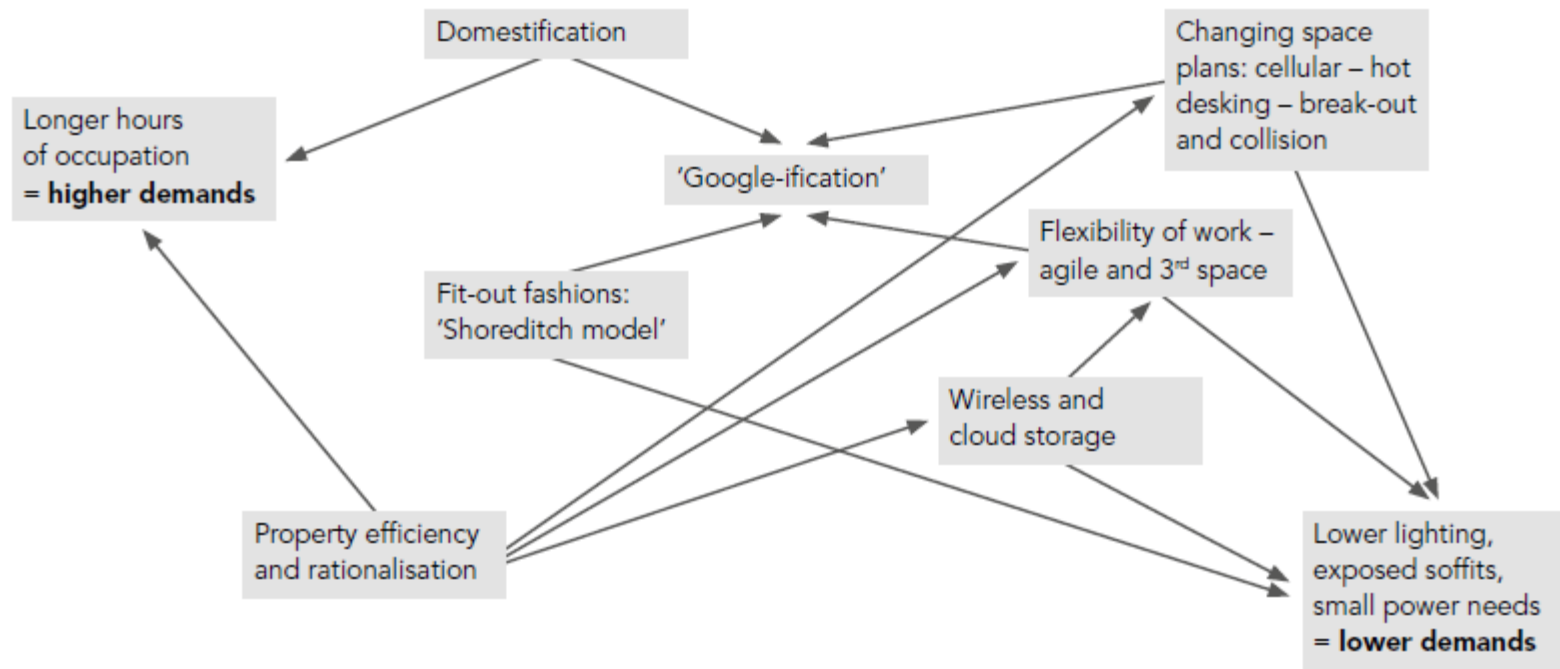
"the whole building was 1:10 but the fifth floor in particular you could fit 39 people on there if you did it 1:10. There are only seven people that are based there...So there were issues ... they were too cold because they had too much air coming in... in the summer time they were heating the space"
" (Engineer, case study 2)

Locking-in Air Conditioning



Knowledge diminution effects II

Ignoring evolution in office work practices





Challenges

Challenge 1: How to avoid over provisioning: making 'more realistic' standards and specifications acceptable?

Challenge 2: Occupant/tenant 'needs': how to close the feedback gap?

Challenge 3: 'Standards' blocking innovation – is there a new 'Grade A' model?



Recommendations to consider

Based on outcomes of Chatham House discussion at the Building Centre, January 2016

- Architects
 - M&E engineering consultants
 - Sustainable buildings experts
 - Developers and real estate managers
 - Letting agents
 - Department for Energy and Climate Change
 - Representatives of stakeholder organisations
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- Full report at <http://www.demand.ac.uk/key-findings-negotiating-needs-and-expectations-in-commercial-buildings/>



Recommendations to consider

Option 1: Refining 'standards'

- **Recognising BCO *guidance* to drive energy efficient design:** make differentiation clearer (by sector/location/other)
- **Valuing diversity:** new conceptions of 'Grade A' which value appropriate (sometimes lower) provision
- **Can 'loose fit' become associated with potential for tailoring:** rather than provide everything from day 1, provide the potential for tailoring to users at different stages in a building's lifecycle

The challenges

- Risk minimisation viewed as providing for anyone, any time in an average way
- Quality equals maximum specification
- How much do we know about what people 'need'?

Through consensus or regulation? Or both?

Recommendations to consider

Option 2: Redefining 'standards'

- **Output not input focus:** from specification to in-use assessments of appropriateness
- **Understanding office work practices and their diversity:** new research agendas
- Address energy alongside a range of other factors

The opportunities

- Would encourage appropriate provision that provides the space particular occupier groups value
- Would discourage average provision for all (which would be penalised and hence risky)
- Would encourage some sector specialisation, and/or loose fit that can be tailored (at refurbishment for example)

Through consensus or regulation? Or both?

Conclusions

Theoretically, the need for greater attention to the work of standards:

- Market standards as a form of regulation: powerful constructions of 'need' & 'quality'
- Governing the practice of architects: diminishing knowledge of office work practices
- Stabilising designs; inhibiting sustainability

In terms of policy & practice:

- The need for 'output' not 'input' market standards: performance in use
- The need for greater knowledge of office work practices
- The move to output standards: consensus or simplified compulsion?