It is some time since we last wrote an editorial. Journal production and publication methods have evolved over recent years into increasingly digital modes. Continuous publication whereby individual articles are published when accepted and later grouped into particular issues, arguably render issue editorials less relevant. Certainly, as editors there seem fewer compelling reasons for writing them. Having said that, after discussion we have decided that annual reflections by way of an editorial in the first issue of a volume could be a useful way of reflecting on recent advances and challenges in the field. Therefore, this is the first of what we plan to be annual reflections and prognostications on corporate real estate and workplace.

The year 2020 will be forever marked by the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and ensuing COVID-19 global pandemic. This has profoundly affected corporate real estate and workplaces, and we look forward to our pending special issue on COVID-19 guest edited by Marko Orel for more detail on those effects. For many people, their experience of 2020 and corporate real estate is “banishment”, or periods away from their physical workplaces to find “just-in-time” spaces at home which are then mediated by digital means. This provides yet more evidence of the interrelationship of physical and digital work infrastructures. It is an open question as to whether these just-in-time spaces constitute “corporate” real estate because they are beyond the reach of the corporate employers, or at least partially so. One of the questions from 2020 for corporate real estate is ‘How long before corporates take full responsibility for these distributed work sites, or how will they benefit from, or even exploit, the ‘free good’ of their employees’ homes? For others in 2020 at the frontline of the medical emergency their workplaces have become ones of danger and potential harm. These workplaces have required rapid changes to accommodate changed delivery of health care both in their physical configurations and in their management practices. The corporate real estate and facilities professions have had vital roles to play in these transformations.

It is clear that there have been immediate effects from COVID on corporate real estate and workplaces and the longer-term effects are being speculated on. Many questions abound. Questions like “Does this mean the end of the office? or physical retailing?” If not, “What are the long-term effects?” “Is this a flex-point in the history of corporate real estate and workplace, or just a hump in the road to be negotiated before resuming life as it used to be?” Many industry advisers have gone into print in 2020 as they attempted to make sense of events for themselves and those they were advising. While no disrespect is intended to these efforts, which have been useful in helping to make sense of what is occurring while it was occurring, we still need rigorous, peer-reviewed research to establish the scientific body of knowledge on these matters. There remain very many opportunities to research corporate real estate and workplaces, if we can use this editorial as a “call-to-arms” for the scientific community.

One comment informed by observing the 2020 discourse on these matters is that while corporate real estate and workplaces has often been discussed it has been in terms other than “corporate real estate”. Words like “the office”, “working from home” “shops” have been frequent. These are reasonable and legitimate words and conceptualizations for these things though they are disembodied from the scientific conceptualization of “corporate real estate”. This means that it is possible or even probable that the research called for above will occur without explicit location within the corporate real estate and workplace Body of Knowledge. We do recognize that we are probably unduly biased towards seeing corporate real estate and workplace is ‘the answer to the meaning of life, the universe, and everything’

(After D. Adams *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* series) but it does tell us that there is much more to be done to establish corporate real estate and workplace as a central plank in the real estate universe. It is probably as true today as when corporate real estate was identified as the hidden “Fifth Resource” way back in 1993, that, to a large degree, it remains “hidden in plain sight”. This is despite what is now decades of research and professional work in corporate real estate and workplace. There remains plenty to do in 2021 and beyond.

Christopher Heywood

*Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne,
Melbourne, Australia, and*

Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek

*Real Estate Management and Development Group, Eindhoven University of
Technology, Eindhoven, The Netherlands*