

Should culture affect the design of your office space?

 By [Linda Trim](#)

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Today work is across many countries, many provinces and many cultures. We are all widespread. Globalisation has taken over and work is 24/7 across various time zones. Work never stops or shuts down. Somewhere, someone is always at work.

Companies are faced with the question as to whether culture should be incorporated into the design of office space. Should offices have a worldwide standard or should they be slightly altered per country they are based in to suit local needs and requirements?

Many international companies merely replicate their offices worldwide, not taking into account culture. However, workers' behaviours, preferences, expectations and social rituals at work vary vastly based on culture and country code. Should office spaces assume a global image with globalisation or should they remain rooted to the countries they are in? It's the big question crossing workspace specialists desks at present.

Many studies are been carried out on how cultures affect the workplace. This link is a good example: <http://geert-hofstede.com/south-africa.html>.

Based on hierarchy and how people feel with regards to their space affects, for instance, how people cope moving to open-plan workstations. Open plan is great for some countries and cultures but certainly not all.

Driven by competition, achievement and success

South Africa is also considered an individualistic society where people are good at working as an "I", not necessarily a "we". People in South Africa are used to looking after themselves, not needing people to take care of them. South Africa is also seen to be a country driven by competition, achievement and success.

The global local question is one we face often at Giant Leap when dealing with international companies.

Often products are specified that are not suitable to the local market and need to be adapted or re-specified to tie in locally.

The way in which we perceive and use space is a vital and culturally variable dimension. Examples of differences are air, noise, lighting as well as the way we build offices.

Carrying a theme through offices worldwide is, however, important so that a global thread is carried throughout and whether

I walk into the Johannesburg office or the New York office I feel in touch with the brand I work for and can relate to my international colleagues I chat to regularly over Skype or videoconference.

Understanding the local culture and drawing strengths from each location helps organisations build a corporate culture that's works around the world. Culture greatly effects how people communicate with one another, how private they are and how they collaborate.

Globalisation does extend one's knowledge and learnership, continually meeting with foreign colleagues and interacting on a work level with other countries throughout the day.

It is really important for workers to feel trust in their environments and the companies they work for. The only way that this trust is gained is for their cultural needs to feel respected.

Today's interconnected economy requires extensive knowledge of the markets in which businesses operate. Understanding how the cultural issues translate into the workspace helps organisations to leverage the physical environment in their efforts towards global integration.

Workplaces that can balance local and corporate culture can expedite and facilitate the process of global integration.

ABOUT LINDA TRIM

Linda Trim, director at FutureSpace, a co-working joint venture between Investec Property and workplace specialists Giant Leap.

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