

## Introduction and Purpose

The rapid proliferation of multinational corporations (MNC's) has led to a need for increased cultural awareness as companies learn to manage their human resources in varying environments. As the principal engines of globalization, the 63,000 MNCs worldwide are responsible for two-thirds of the world's economy and 80% of foreign direct investments (Pilger, 2000). The "21st Century Report: Reinventing the CEO", (Hambrick, Korn, Frederick, & Ferry, 1989) states that two-thirds of the world's CEOs expect to generate employment revenue increasingly from outside their firm's home country. These same executives believe that effectively managing human resources is critical to global success (Hambrick et al., 1989). These giant enterprises, operating across regional and national boundaries to function in widely varying societal cultures, are faced with an increased complexity of business operations. Indeed, the variations in national environments often have the greatest impact on the management of human resources (Adler, 2002). As one of the most pertinent topics of the 21st century, global corporations need to be sensitive to the societal culture of their human resources in different locations of the world.

One area MNCs can consider to improve the effectiveness of their human resources management is workplace design (Becker & Steele, 1995). Design of workspaces has been used by a number of organizations as a tactic to increase their overall competitiveness (Fredrickson, 1989; Wineman, 1986). This ability is attributed to the physical design of the workplace because of its purported correlation to employee behavior in influencing productivity (Uzee, 1999; Leaman and Bordass, 1993; Williams, Armstrong, & Malcom, 1985; Llozor, Love, & Treloar, 2002); communication and organizational learning (Sims, 1999); and high-performance team environments (Sims, Joroff, & Becker, 1998). The literature provides evidence that supporting the "corporate culture" plays a role in impacting worker behavior to

achieve business objectives (Moleski & Lang, 1986; Duffy, 2000; Linda & Lawrence, 2000). Recognizing this, corporations have been designing their workplaces primarily as a manifestation of their corporate culture.

However, *societal cultural* differences have also been linked to differences in organizational behavior and business practices (Hofstede, 1980b, 1984; Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program [GLOBE], 1999; Bjerke, 1999; Adler, 2002; Erez & Earley, 1993). Researchers have studied cultural differences and their relationships to areas such as leadership in organizations (Bjerke, 1999; GLOBE, 1999; Glinow, Huo, & Lowe, 1999), negotiating skills (Wilson et al., 1995), managerial values (Tan, 2002), and motivation (Hines, 1973; Crabbs, 1973; Trompenaars, 1993; Adler, 2002).

Since behavior is influenced by societal *and* corporate culture, as will be discussed, and the physical design of an environment has been shown to be linked with worker behavior, should not societal culture as well as corporate culture be a fundamental consideration in workplace design? This significant question guided this inquiry. Understanding the connections between culture, design, and behavior will better enable designers to create more effective workplaces. The following review of the literature with regard to the relevant concepts sets the stage for the case study, which provides a real-life example of the problems that can arise due to cultural clashes, solutions for such issues, and a general design paradigm to apply in designing workplaces. The study uses the narrative method to examine the design process due to its ability to capture data from subjective experience and identify personal insights into meanings, motivations, and intentions behind the actions involved.

## Societal Culture, Corporate Culture, and Workplace Design

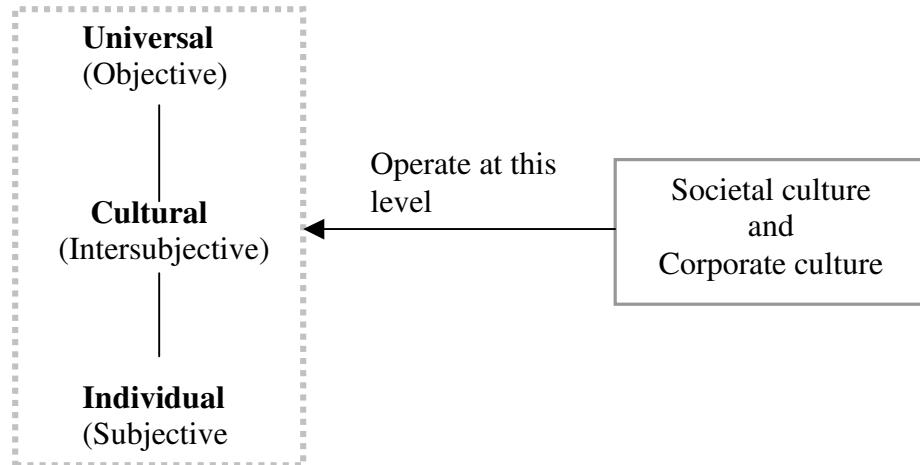
This section reviews the literature on societal culture, corporate culture, workplace design, and employee behavior to define and understand each of these concepts.

### Understanding the Concept of Culture

Many researchers have attempted to define the concept of culture (e.g., Pizam et al., 1997; Leavitt & Bahrami, 1988; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hofstede, 1984; Leach, 1976). Common to most of their constructs is the idea of a set of shared beliefs, values, and traditions, which help individuals form a collective identity as well as provide a framework with which to understand the world around them. For example, Hofstede (1980a) explains culture as “the software and collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another...the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group’s response to the environment” (p. 25). The notion that culture helps construct a social reality to help “keep chaos in control” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 103; Hofstede, 1984) and “produces orderliness and regularity from baffling, precarious, and disorderly circumstances” (Leach, 1976, cited in Trice and Beyer, 1993, p. 4) implies an interpretive function in the forming of cultural artifacts, that is, “the meaning of things is not given a priori in the things themselves. Instead, meaning results from interpretation” (Louis, 1983, p. 41). Shweder & LeVine (1984) also describe this shared meaning system, wherein members of the same culture are likely to interpret and evaluate situational events and practices in a similar way.

Hofstede (1984) further elaborated his model for culture, stating that every person carries with him or her “mental programs” developed through life that are partly unique and partly shared with others. He categorized these mental programs into three levels: universal (objective), cultural (intersubjective), and individual (subjective).

These are analogous to Louis's (1983) three levels of interpretation (universal, cultural and individual), by which individuals construe meaning.



**Figure 2.1.** Hostede's (1980) model of 'mental programming'

At the universal level all human beings share substantially the same programming. It incorporates the biological “operating system” of the human body, which includes various expressive behaviors like laughing and crying as well as associative and expressive behaviors that are found in higher animals.

It is at the cultural or intersubjective level that most of the mental programming is learned. Similar to what Louis (1983) calls the “cultural code,” this level is achieved as members of a specific social system refer to agreed-upon meanings that are assigned to specific things. This code is shared with people who go through the same learning process and with those who identify themselves as its members. Members do not have to share the same genes; these collective programs are transferred from one generation to another and across societies through familial and social groups. Both societal culture and corporate culture operate at this level.

The most unique part of human programming occurs at the *individual level*. No two people are programmed exactly alike, not even identical twins who are raised together. This is the level of individual personality and it provides for a wide range of alternative behaviors within the same cultural systems. Louis (1983) refers to the interpretation by which this programming is carried out as the individual's "personal code of relevance" (p. 42).

It is important to note that the cultural level—the focus of this discussion—is not to be understood as a singular monolithic entity. Within it, there may exist various kinds of cultures. Individuals exist simultaneously within numerous cultural, meaning-giving systems. Here, a distinction can be drawn between societal culture and corporate culture. *Societal culture* can be referred "to the core values and beliefs of individuals within a society that are formed in complex knowledge systems during childhood and reinforced throughout life" (Lachman, 1983, cited in Erez and Earley, 1993, p. 43). The term used for this study is *societal culture* rather than *national culture* because there can be more than one societal culture present in a nation. *Organizational culture* has been defined as "the process of beliefs and expectations shared by an organization's members, which powerfully shape the behavior of individuals and groups within the organization" (Byars, 1987, p. 48). Schein (1984) claimed "organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation in internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 3). In this study, the term *corporate culture* is used synonymously with *organizational culture*.

It is illustrative here to compare the concepts of societal culture and corporate culture. Trice and Beyer (1993) stated that the functions of societal culture are "to

create and manage collective uncertainties, social order, continuity, collective identity and commitment, ethnocentrism and as a mechanism generate dual consequences” (p. 8). And Louis (1983) described organizational culture as performing functions of control, continuity, identity of social group, and integration. The similarity of the listed functions of these two cultures is striking, the main difference being that societal culture operates at the larger societal level while organizational culture functions for an organization operating within it.

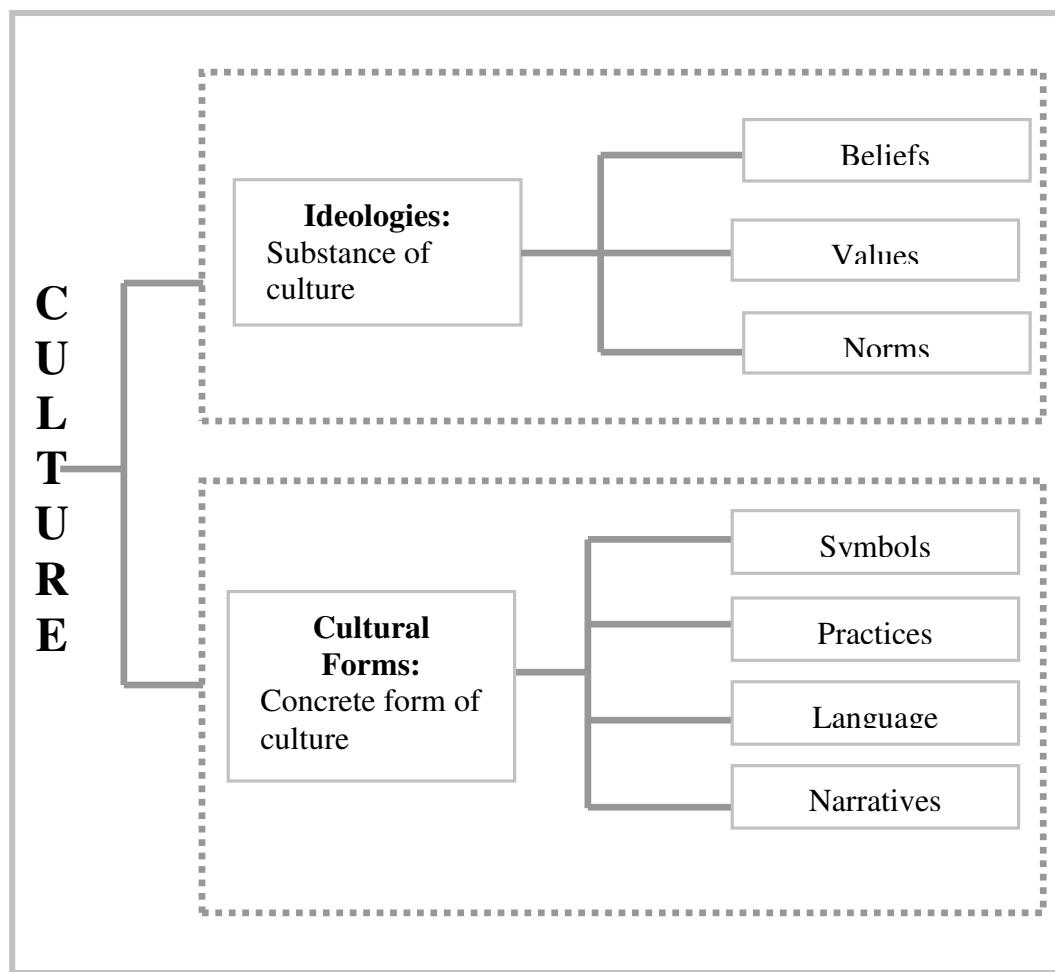
### What constitutes Culture?

In addition to Hofstede’s categorization scheme, another helpful analysis of the concept of culture is provided by Trice and Beyer (1993). From their model and the supporting literature, the link between culture and human behavior is established. The authors identify the constituents of culture as *ideologies*—the more important component, known also as the essential “substance of culture”—and *cultural forms*—the tangible manifestations of culture (see Figure 2).

Ideologies are “shared interrelated sets of beliefs about how things work; values that indicate what’s worth having or doing; and norms that tell people how they should behave” (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 33). According to Geertz (1973) people are “meaning-seeking animals” (p. 140). These meanings are embodied in peoples’ cultures as ideologies. Apter (1964) argued that ideologies serve two social functions: (a) promoting social solidarity by binding people together through shared beliefs, values, and norms and (b) providing a rationalized understanding that help individuals perform their social roles. The influence of ideologies on human behavior is implied by the latter function. Definitions of the ideological components from the literature clarify this relationship:

- *Beliefs* are “understandings that represents credible relationships between objects, properties, and ideas” (Sproull, 1981, p. 204).

- *Values* constitute the basis for making judgments about what is right and wrong and are social principles, goals, and standards having intrinsic worth (Hatch, 1997).
- *Norms* express which behaviors others accept and which behaviors are culturally acceptable ways to attain outcomes (Trice & Beyer, 1993).



**Figure 2.2.** Harrison M. Trice and Janice M. Beyer's model of culture (1993)

Trice and Beyer (1993) purport that the ideologies of a culture constitute a system of interpreting and that continued usage of ideologies makes them reliable means of understanding events as well as irrefutable guides to behavior. “Ideologies serve to

make social situations comprehensible and meaningful as people naturally tend to simplify what they perceive; ideologies act to structure that simplification” (p.45). This reinforces the definition of culture given by anthropologists Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945) as “all the historically created designed for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and nonrational, which exists at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men” (p. 97).

*Cultural forms*, Trice and Beyer’s (1993) second component of culture, are the tangible manifestations of culture; they comprise “observable entities, including actions, through which the members of a culture express, affirm, and communicate the substance [ideologies] of their culture” (p. 77). They divided cultural forms into the following four categories:

1. *Symbols*. “A symbol is a sign which denotes something much greater than itself, and which calls for the association of certain conscious or unconscious ideas, in order for it to be endowed with its full meaning and significance” (Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983, p.4). Here the term symbol is used synonymously for the term sign, that is made up of two constitutive components: signifier-the physical, material form of the sign and the signified-abstract concept to which the signifier points to in order to convey a meaning (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999). Examples of symbols are objects (natural and manufactured), settings, performers, and functionaries. Physical design of the workplace fits under this category.
2. *Language*. Language provides a means for the members of a culture to communicate meaning among one another. In addition to oral and written forms, gestures, signals, and so on are also classified as language.
3. *Narratives*. Narratives are stories that communicate people’s beliefs and emotions. They contribute directly to the interpretive sense-making of the

members of a culture. Examples of narratives are stories, legends, sagas, and myths.

4. *Practices*. These include, for example, rituals, taboos, rites, and ceremonies.

They are considered the most complex among the cultural forms and provide for a range of specific practices and behaviors that express cultural meaning.

Cultural forms give ideologies a tangible form, and both together serve as a sense-making mechanism, allowing members of a culture to think for themselves (Mukerji & Schudson, 1986). The interaction of ideologies and cultural forms thus empowers cultures to affect human behavior. As Kroeber and Parsons (1958) put it, culture is the “...transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior...” (p.583). Trice and Beyer (1993) in describing cultural forms cited (a) Gephart (1978), who termed cultural forms “sense-making practices”; (b) Kennedy and Deal (1982), who referred to them as “culture in action”; and (c) Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo (1982), who explained them as “sets of indicators and displayers of organizational sense making” (p.81). In this way societal culture acts as a major factor influencing individuals’ interpretation of workplace design—ultimately a cultural form or symbol—and thereby relates to employee behavior.

#### Describing Cultures through Dimensions

Many researchers have described societal culture and corporate culture on the basis of dimensions. Dimensions help us understand, differentiate, and describe various cultures, from societal cultures present in different parts of the world to the corporate cultures present in different organizations. Hofstede (1980a, 1984) categorized societal cultures (which he termed *national cultures*) along four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism and masculinity/femininity.

1. *Power distance* is the degree to which members of a group expect power to be distributed equally. Latin American cultures, for example, on average have a high power distance, indicating that hierarchy is readily accepted, while North Americans are less likely to accept a hierarchical system easily and therefore rate lower on power distance.
2. *Uncertainty avoidance* “is the extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events” (GLOBE, 1999, p.193). A group’s need for structure is measured with this dimension (Bjerke, 1999). In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures people feel uncomfortable in the absence of a regulated structure. Examples of high uncertainty avoidance cultures include most Latin American societies. On the other hand, individuals from countries like the United States, Britain, and Sweden feel less comfortable with rigid rules and thus these are considered weak uncertainty avoidance countries.
3. *Individualism vs. collectivism* is the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action (GLOBE, 1999). A majority of the Latin American societies tend to be more collective, while North American culture is known for its principle of individualism.
4. *Masculinity/femininity* is the degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality. The United States features greater gender egalitarianism than most of the Latin American.

While Hofstede’s dimensions distinguish different societal cultures, Trompenaars (1995) classified corporate culture on the basis of cultural values, identifying two dimensions on which corporate culture of different organizations can be assessed: *equality vs. hierarchy* and *orientation to the person vs. orientation to the task*.

Equality vs. hierarchy indicates the extent to which egalitarian situations are accepted by authoritarians, subordinates, and other members of an organization. Orientation to the person vs. orientation to the task, as the name suggests, distinguishes organizational cultures that are person oriented—more social, collegial, and positively disposed to team efforts—from task-oriented organizational cultures, which emphasize the work being accomplished, support individual achievements, and also generally encourage competitive environments.

**Table 2.1.** Hofstede's (1984) research data on four cultural dimensions shows the ratings for seven Latin American countries versus the United States

Country	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Gender Egalitarianism	Collectivism vs. Individualism
Argentina	Medium-49	86	56	46
Brazil	High-69	76	49	38
Chile	High-63	84	28	23
Colombia	High-67	80	64	13
Peru	High-64	87	42	16
Uruguay	High	100	38	36
Venezuela	High-81	76	73	12
United States	Low-40	46	62	91

### Workplace Design and Employee Behavior

Adler defines behavior as “any form of human action” (p.18). For this study, behavior comprises actions and processes that take place at individual, group, and organizational levels that can be measured by either objective or subjective criteria.

Objective criteria include performance quality and quantity, withdrawal behavior such as absenteeism and turnover, communication, socialization, team participation, negotiation, as well as extra-role behavior, that is, behavior over and above expectations. Subjective criteria involve perception and attribution, attitude formation, motivation, and commitment. Design of workplace environment is receiving growing attention as a factor influencing organizational effectiveness due to its ability to impact employee behavior. Research has long shown that ambient environment, including such factors as furnishings and their arrangement, can influence worker behavior, comfort, morale, and satisfaction, and hence either directly or indirectly improve performance. As early as 1957, Osmond provided evidence that it can contribute to facilitating or impeding individual and organizational objectives. Carnevale (1992) and Carnevale and Rios (1995) showed that spatial layout influences employee interaction and task performance. Further support comes from Ilozor and Oluwoye's (1999) study showing that spatial arrangements within organizations, by encouraging certain behaviors while restricting others, affect social interaction required for both effective performance and satisfaction with social needs.

Many authors (e.g., Uzee, 1999; Leaman & Bordass, 1993; Williams et al., 1985; Llozor, Love, & Treloar, 2002) have concluded that the physical environment of the work setting along with management procedure can augment productivity and improve management effectiveness. This is based partly on the premise that satisfied workers are often more productive and quality conscious (Brand & Syfert, 1998). Vischer (1995), for example, reaffirmed that a work setting that accommodates and supports employees' work tasks and processes not only leverages work performance, but also augments productivity. Also, it has been shown that poorly planned offices have an inverse relationship to productivity because of resulting negative behaviors

that lead to absenteeism, hindrance of work flow, and facilities over expenditure (Fredrickson, 1989; Ilozor & Oluwoye, 1999).

The idea that a physical workplace design that specifically supports an organizational culture facilitates business objectives has been demonstrated by many researchers. Moleski & Lang (1986) argued that an organization communicates messages about its character and values both to its staff and the public through its physical design. They further stated that the choice of office layout, planning concepts, spatial organization, and environmental design all contribute to the organization's identity and an individual's perception of his or her place within the organization. Duffy (2000) recognized that the design of an office work setting is an important tool that can effectively improve business results by accomplishing organizational objectives. Corporations have been increasingly using workplace design to attract and retain new talent, modify cultures, and promote new work practices through its influence on the strategic style, organizational culture, and employee performance (Linda & Lawrence, 2000). Duffy (2000) contended "The challenge is to unlock the enormously persuasive and eloquent capacity of design to reinforce business performance by expressing business ideas for business purposes" (p. 373).

### Importance of Societal Culture in Organizations

Although the studies cited show that supporting the corporate culture through workplace design can be beneficial to achieving organizational goals, other research emphasize that an awareness of *societal culture* is important for effective corporate management and design. England (1983) argued that societal culture must be considered along with organizational culture in order to fully comprehend the relationship of an organization's culture to organizational functioning. Also, Lincoln, Hanada, and Olson (1981) showed that matching organizational culture with societal culture results in high job satisfaction. Along these lines, Ferris and Wagner (1985)

found that a congruence of Japanese organization structure with Japanese values was positively related to the effectiveness of “quality circles.” Erez and Earley (1993) warn: Managerial practices and motivational techniques that are considered to be valid and acceptable in one culture may not be acceptable in another. Adler (2002) contends that organizational norms, rules, and functioning should match an employee’s societal culture to help avoid the employee be subjected to ‘role ambiguity and alienation’. Van Maanen and Barley (1984) make similar conclusions in their work on organizational communities.

Workplaces are being designed to support organizational culture in order to help organizations achieve their business objectives; however, it is clearly important that the employees’ societal culture is not overlooked in the design of workplaces. Societal culture’s relevance to the decision-making process involved in designing workplace environments is due to two factors:

1. Corporations exist within a larger environmental context where:
  - Various cultures interact within this environment.
  - Societal culture along with corporate culture and other factors simultaneously influence behavior in organizations.
2. Societal culture mediates individuals’ behavior.

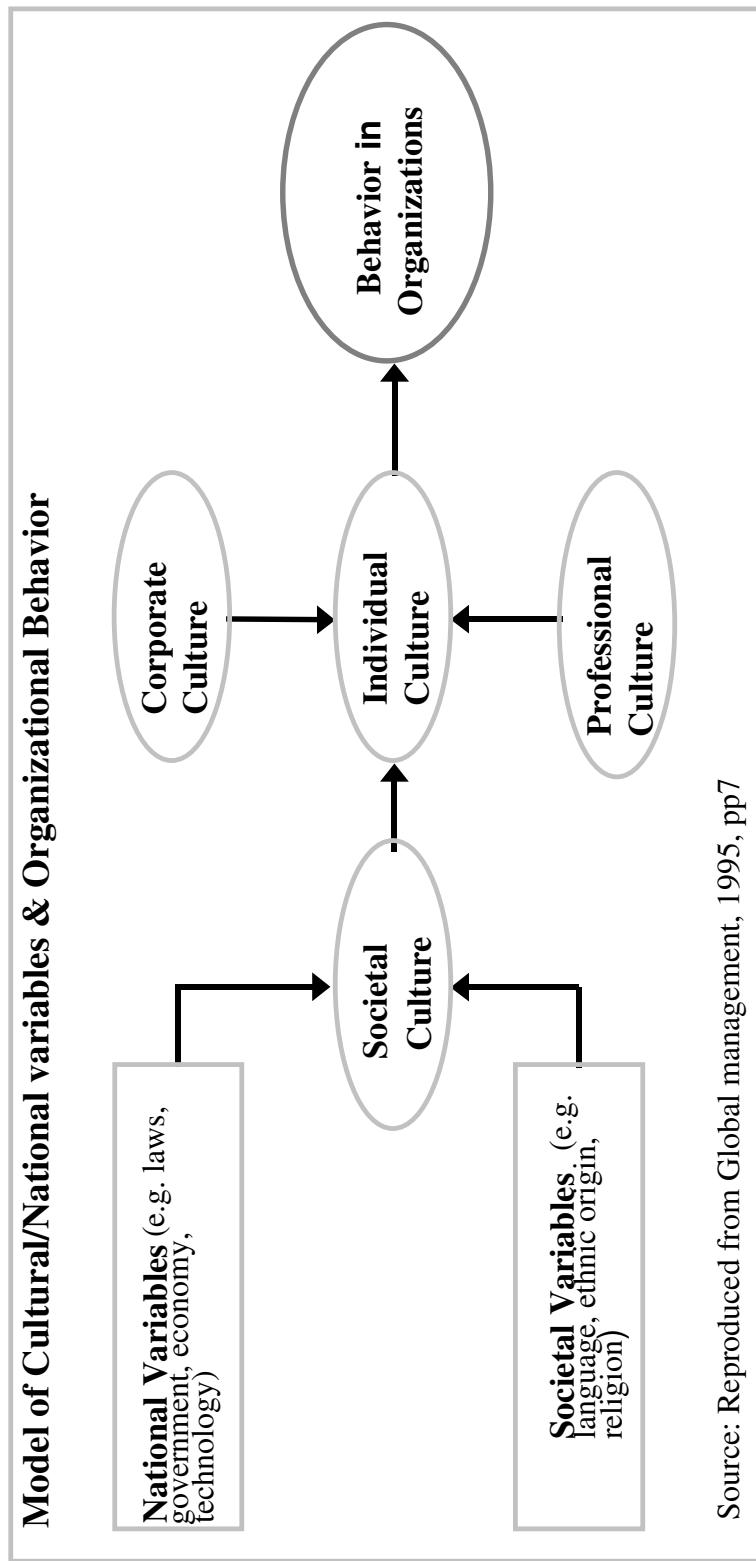
Corporations exist in a ‘bubble’ comprising multitudinous cultures.

Trice and Beyer (1993) point out that corporations exist in an “organizational environment,” which they describe as a big bubble containing many different entities, including nations, regions, industries, competitors, religions, political parties, and other societal institutions, each having their own cultures that are not part of the organization itself. Though all the entities with their individual cultures seem to stand independently, they actually are interlinked and exert forces that influence other entities within the environmental bubble. But as Metcalfe (1981) observes, “There is

no enveloping membrane to separate them from their environments” (p.505). While boundaries between organizations and the environment are often indistinct and adaptable, they are also permeable. Trice and Beyer (1993) continue on this theme: “The straightforward way of drawing organizational boundaries is to determine who is and who is not a member” (p.299). They state, the dilemma is that members of the organizations exist in parallel environments in the same temporal period. Therefore during the time an individual is a member of the organization he or she simultaneously pursues activities outside the organization.

Thus organizations are embedded with other social and cultural systems, and all are contingent on one another within the larger environment. This interdependence causes reciprocal binds between these entities. Therefore organizations are not only inert receivers of the external cultural influences but at the same time affect the cultures of entities in their environment by exporting elements of their own culture. (Trice & Beyer, 1993). The authors continue, “it has been shown that corporate culture is supported by cultures of other entities, especially if the corporate member has been a part of a primary societal organization for many years” (Trice & Beyer, 1993). “The creation of modern societies can be attributed to organizations, but organizations could not have emerged and survived without the resources and cultural elements in the wider society” (Scott, 1981, cited in Trice & Beyer, 1993, p.302).

Another research study conducted by Mendenhall et al. (1995) pointed to both corporate culture and societal culture as among the six parameters that simultaneously influence behavior in organizations (see figure 2.3). Their model shows the relationship between national variables, societal variables, societal culture, corporate culture, professional culture and individual values (for definitions refer to Mendenhall et al., 1995).



Source: Reproduced from Global management, 1995, pp7

**Figure 2.3.** Model of Cultural /National variables and Organizational Behavior

Societal culture mediates individual behavior.

In order to better understand organizational behavior across cultures, Erez and Earley (1993) developed a model called *cultural self-representation*. This model consists of four factors:

1. Culture—a shared set of meaning, transmitted by mental programs that control individual responses in a given situation.
2. Managerial practices and motivational techniques operating within a work environment.
3. The self, a product of the social system shaped by a shared understanding of members of a societal culture of what it is to be human (Cahoone, 1988; Cushman, 1990) as well as individual experiences. The self interprets managerial practices and motivational techniques in light of cultural values and norms and in relation to self-generated needs.
4. Work behavior as an outcome of self-regulatory processes.

Culture shapes a society's core values and norms, which are shared and transmitted from one generation to another through social learning processes of modeling and observation as well as through the effects of one's own actions (Bandura, 1986). Cultural values, as they are represented in the self, serve as criteria for evaluating managerial practices. Positive evolutions of managerial practices result in the desired behavior, whereas negative evaluations hinder the desired behavior. Thus the self—a composite of individual experiences and societal culture—mediates the relationship between managerial practices and worker behavior. This model purports the idea that effective managerial practices should adhere to societal cultural values, which have an influence on worker behavior.

Louis (1983) described societal culture as the “psychological context of organizations” because much of the relevant processes and events that take place in

organizations occur at the intersubjective level. Schutz (1970) showed how an individual's "interpretive scheme or meaning system" (p.46) is rooted in his or her societal culture. This is important because at the individual level "...human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them..." (Blumer, 1969, p.2). Thus it can be inferred that societal culture, with its inherent formative relationship to individuals' behavior, influences employees' responses not only to managerial practices but its influence can also be attributed to workplace design.

### Integrating Societal Culture and Corporate Culture in Workplace Design

The discussion so far elucidates the connections between workplace design and corporate culture with respect to influencing employee behavior, and also between societal culture and behavior. Clearly an integrated approach that takes into consideration both societal and corporate culture is indicated for designers when designing effective workplaces, particularly in a global economy where MNC operate in a variety of distinct societal cultures. The narrative construed on the design process of Discovery Networks International – Latin America provides additional evidence to support this paradigm.

## Methodology

### Research Design: Case Study through Narrative Inquiry

This exploratory case study uses the narrative inquiry method to reveal the influence of societal culture and corporate culture on the process of workplace design. Yin (1998) defines a case study as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidences are used.” But while the case study lays out the framework for the study (Portillo & Dohr, 2000), in which the cause is in question and the circumstances reveal something under consideration, the narrative through its chronological structure, provides events from the start, the development phase and in conclusion describing the subjective experience in the organization (Hannabuss, 2000). Therefore, since narrative inquiry complements the case study by bringing forth the emotional along with the cognitive aspect of the process, it is used here alongside case study as the research method.

Additionally, the narrative method was chosen because of its unique ability to obtain culture-sensitive data and reveal the impact of non-material forces that are at work in organizations. By unearthing social phenomena, social drivers and collective beliefs both within and between populations (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Budd, 2000) narratives can bring to surface, the tensions within the workplaces of multinational corporations that are related to culture, and simultaneously tap into the decisions that were made as an influence of culture. Wheatley (1999) raises the issue of cultures, values and perspectives as intangible forces that exert an effect on the quality of human and organizational life. He commented “Each of these concepts describes a quality of organizational life that can be observed in behavior, yet does not exist anywhere independent of those behaviors” (Wheatley, 1999, p.54). Narrative

inquiry can reveal the impact of those forces via the testimony of the people working in corporations who experience them.

An analysis that lends itself sensitively to research carried out within organizations is required. What often can remain elusive are the thought processes and experience of the people who are involved in the management and organization of events. Investigating this knowledge, called “corporate memory,” along with the processes that lead to it can provide valuable information (Hannabuss, 2000) for designers who are designing workplaces for corporations. Narrative inquiry offers one way to access this information. The narrative provides a window to the rich interpersonal interactions, anxieties, and significant information (Shaw, Brown, & Bromiley, 1998) that are difficult to elucidate by traditional means of data collection such as experiments, questionnaires, and observations (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

A narrative inquiry also addresses the problems raised by the complexity of some of the issues being studied, including the interaction of ideologies and the cultural forms that constitute a design and how these ultimately can influence human behavior. Narratives include a more thorough and meaning-laden account of human experience and behavior (Bruner, 1990). They identify decision points within organizational life and draw attention to changes where different actions could have resulted in different outcomes. (Llewellyn, 1999). Thus “narratives identify when certain objectives become potentially realizable” (Llewellyn, 1999, p.229). Emotions revealed and expressed by an individual increase the repositories of knowledge and experiential learning of the organization (Stewart, 2001) and can be extrapolated from individual memory through narrative inquiry. Connecting actions and events and turning them into a meaningful whole (Czarniawska, 1998), narratives also illuminate the speaker’s values toward these events (Linde, 2001). Ganoe (1999) contends that the

characteristics of the narrative help to organize the complex world of people, entities, and events through the language of stories provide a flexible framework for understanding and expanding the meaning of design (Portillo & Dohr, 2000). The utilization of a narrative as a mode of storytelling provides the most suitable way to reveal the relevance of societal culture with regard to organizational processes and workplace design, and makes the valuable insights acquired applicable to practice by design professionals, design educators and multinationals corporations themselves (Cole, 1994, 1997; McLain-Kark, 2000).

#### Case Selection: Discovery Networks International–Latin America

Sponsored in part by the Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research (FIDER), this study is an outgrowth of a larger research project titled “Strategic Stories: Shaping Interior Design for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. The original research project established four criteria for case study selection. For the case to be eligible, it had to be (Danko, 2000):

1. *Strategic*. For a design to be strategic it has to fulfill a proactive and future-oriented change aimed at enhancing corporate competitiveness (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).
2. *Aspiring*. The selected case should inspire new approaches and alternative ways of examining a problem versus relying on prescriptive or best practice solutions.
3. *Authentic*. The selected case should describe real people in real situations.

Although narratives are sometimes fictitious stories integrating events from different stories and/or based on fabricated events and characters, the narrative derived for this study reflects actual events.

4. *Multivocal.* The case should have multiple voices. Danko (2000) supports that multiple voices add validity and provide different viewpoints in the perception of a similar event.

The design process for Discovery Networks International–Latin America (DNI-LA) met the above criteria for case selection in the ways listed below.

Discovery Networks International (DNI) developed a new broadcasting office facility to accommodate Latin American programming development, production, and distribution needs. This scenario provided an opportunity to study a successful effort in office design that was heavily influenced by an approach that integrated the parent company's corporate culture and the societal culture of the employees. By adopting this novel solution that was achieved by looking at the problem in a different way the case study here demonstrates the desire of the people involved to perform better and hence fulfills the criteria of being 'aspiring'. One of the greatest challenges of the business plan at the inception of the project was how to make the new office facility more employee oriented so as to attract and retain a workforce that was the best in the region. This case study with its message of motivating employees by respecting their societal culture strategically links to this business plan of DNI-LA. Also, the multivocal quality in the case study is reflected by the different voices of the various interviewees. Finally, this case study was chosen because it represents real people and real events.

Discovery Networks International is a separate division of Discover Communications, Inc. (DCI), the world's leading real-world media and entertainment company, reaching more than 330 million households across the globe in over 150 countries. DNI is known as a top resource for providing constructive, value-based information and knowledge, featuring numerous cable television channels such as Discovery Channel, Discovery Kids, Discovery Health, Discovery Home & Leisure,

Animal Planet, People + Arts, Discovery Sci-Trek, Discovery Travel and Adventure, Discovery Civilization, and Discovery Wings. These are supplied to various countries via 62 separate feeds by 11 satellites and feature 33 languages as they cater to each region's viewership and schedule.

Discovery Networks International (DNI) has its regional offices located in many countries around the globe. The facility Discovery Networks International – Latin America (DNI-LA), studied here, is Discovery Networks International's regional office for Latin America located in Miami, North America. When the new office facility project for DNI-LA was being pursued, Discovery Networks International's headquarter was situated in Bethesda, Maryland. It has since moved to Silver Springs, Maryland.

The new DNI-LA offices integrated three different departments—the business group (administration, programming, and marketing sales); the network operations group; and the production group—into one physically cohesive facility. Previously, they had been located in three separate offices that were approximately at a distance of 35 miles from each other. Collocating these three distinct operations was a new conceptual approach for DNI and as a result, this regional office of DNI, located in Miami, Florida, is the only office in the company that had a broadcast facility designed and built for its own needs. It is also the only group in the company that executed the launch of a new channel entirely in-house, from inception and concept development to marketing, launching, and finally maintaining the channel. Started with a staff of less than 12 people in 1994, DNI-LA had 270 employees by 2003 and is still undergoing rapid growth in this Miami office. (Table 3.1 gives the demographics of the employees in May 2003.)

**Table 3.1.** Demographics data of the employees at Discovery Networks International - Latin America, located in Miami, U.S.A in the year 2003.

Country	No. of People	Country	No. of People
Argentina	7	Bolivia	2
Brasil	25	Canada	1
Chile	1	Colombia	30
Cuba	63	Dominican Republic	17
Ecuador	3	European	11
Mexico	9	Paraguay	1
Peru	1	Puerto Rico	28
South Africa	1	Spanish	10
Venezuela	17	West Indies	3
Central America	11	America	29

TOTAL = 270 employees

#### Data collection and analysis

The subjective points of view experienced by the designers of the Discovery Networks International - Latin America's facility, as well as the occupants of the workspace were captured through a series of interviews and an on-site visit. All interviewees sanctioned the recording of the interviews and the use of names via written consent forms prior to the interviews. The designer and senior executive leaders were asked to construct detailed accounts of the design process, the rationale behind the decisions that were made, and any events that affected or changed the process of the design of the physical space. Key informants are listed in Table 3.2. The participants not directly involved in the design process were questioned as to their responses toward the physical design.

Two telephone interviews were first conducted using a semi-structured open-ended set of questions: One with Dawn McCall, then senior vice president and general

manager of DNI-LA who is now the current president of DNI at Silver Springs; and the second telephone interview with Christopher Budd of STUDIOS Architecture, who was the lead interior designer and project coordinator (see Appendix 1). The face-to-face interview with Christopher that followed addressed many areas related to the design issues that arose during the process and formed the basis for detailed follow-up questions on the relationship between design and culture with respect to employee and organizational dynamics. The final interviews were conducted on-site at DNI-LA's office on May 6, 2003. Myrna Renaud, Senior Vice-President – Operations; Henry Martinez, Chief Operating Officer; and Susanna Prego, Director of Administration, were queried to gather details that were important for developing the narrative and forming the case. Additionally, their perspectives on the events and results helped corroborate what earlier interviewees had mentioned. Collecting interviews on-site also supported the validity of the data by providing an opportunity to observe the actual end results and obtain a better understanding of the references made in the interviews. Documentation of the site through photographs and field notes was supplemented by the collection of archival material in the form of construction documents and reports. Prior permission for gathering these was received. They helped confirm various points covered in the interview and provided background information.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Lines were numbered to allow verification and cross-referencing of themes as they emerged during the analysis phase. The transcriptions of the existing data set and of the initial two interviews were coded for themes and categories in accordance with the inductive process of qualitative research. The author determined final categories that emerged during the coding of each interview. The coding of the initial interviews gave rise to three domains: Conflict between societal culture and corporate culture in design; a leader's

role in the design process; and trust between client and designers. This paper focuses on the conflict between societal culture and corporate culture. To further unearth and capture the rich data related to the issue of culture, a more detailed set of interview questions were then generated for the four interviews conducted subsequently.

(Appendix 2 provides the interview questions used for the last four interviews.)

**Table 3.2** Key informants for the narrative inquiry.

Key Informants	Job Title (during the project, current)	Data Collection
Dawn McCall	<u>Title during project:</u> Senior Vice President & General Manager of DNI-LA (1999) <u>Present Title:</u> President, DNI (2003)	• Existing data • Phone interview
Christopher Budd	Project Coordinator, STUDIOS Architecture	• Phone interview • Face-to-face offsite interview
Myrna Renaud	Senior Vice President-Operations DNI-LA	• On-site interview
Henry Martinez	Chief Operating Officer, DNI-LA	• On-site interview
Susana Prego	Office Manager, Facilities, DNI-LA (1999) Director of Administration, DNI-LA (2003)	• Existing Data • On-site interview
Pandit Wright	Executive Vice President-Human Resources & Administration, DNI	• Existing data
Charlie Humbolt	Project Manager, DNI-LA	• Existing data
Rick Rodriguez	Head of Production, DNI-LA	• Existing data
Sally Zamudio	Marketing Professional, DNI-LA	• Existing data

### Creating the Narrative

From the selected case study, which provided multiple issues and viewpoints, a narrative entitled, “The Clash of Cultures – Corporate vs. Societal and their Resolution” was developed to communicate the specific issue of societal culture and corporate culture, mainly through the voice of one of the key informants, Christopher Budd. There were two main project leaders involved: Phil Olson and Christopher Budd. While Phil oversaw the client relationship and overall design, Christopher played the role of a strategic planner and lead designer. Budd was chosen as the protagonist not only for his central role in the design process, but because the data analysis revealed that his design experience with Discovery Networks International – Latin America set forth a compelling design issue for designers to consider in the present global economy while it simultaneously affected his personal philosophy of work. While the narrative generated is based on the perspective of Christopher Budd addressing the issue under scrutiny, multiple voices are used to support the strategic story (Danko, 2000).

The narrative was constructed using the key parts of the transcripts that were directly related to the tension between societal culture and corporate culture. Labov’s narrative structure was used to identify and organize major themes related to these two cultures and create a logical story line that was developed using only first-hand accounts from informants. The narrative maintains the chronology while simultaneously capturing the holistic essence of the events, process, solution and insights as mentioned by the informants in detail; the observations of the Discovery Networks International –Latin America’s office workers; and the reports of the design process as acquired from STUDIOS Architecture - the architecture and interior design firm involved.

Labov's 6-point narrative framework was chosen because it provides a structure for forming the narrative as well as for its analysis. This framework allows exploring descriptions of past events in a structured way (Labov & Waletsky, 1967). In the words of Reissman (1993), "Like weight bearing walls, personal narratives depend on certain structures to hold them together" (p. 18). Labov's six-point framework consists of the following:

1. *Abstract*—summarizes the plot and presents the purpose of the story
2. *Orientation*—introduces the characters, place, time, and context of the narrative
3. *Complicating order*—shows the sequence of events within the narrative and defines important events that do not surface in single explanations
4. *Evaluation*—this is the analysis of what occurred: communicates the significance and implication of the events and actions, and reveals the viewpoint of the narrator
5. *Resolution*—presents the outcome of the story
6. *Coda*—brings the narrative back to the present by conveying the moral of the story

### Validity

Validity in qualitative research can be problematic, especially when interviews are conducted. It is easy for interviewees to be flattered by the special attention paid to them by recording what they say, which may lead to exaggeration. Hannabuss (2002) contends "subject areas like personal performance, leadership, job satisfaction, team-building, achievements of a section, prospects for a project team, and thoughts of promotion are all susceptible to distortion, ironic projection, self-disparagement and reticence, at the best of times between friends, let alone when invited to disclose thoughts to relative strangers."

Four characteristics—reliability, dependability, conformability, and transferability—help establish the validity of a narrative inquiry’s results (Greene, 1994). Greene argues that *credibility* is derived only after the key informant has read the paper and verified that the analysis is a representation of his or her own perspective, which Greene calls “emic” meaning. A narrative attains *dependability* by being based on true-life experiences, where none of the events or encounters described is contrived. *Conformability* is established by tracing the conversation back to the original transcripts. Finally, *transferability* is achieved when the descriptive data embedded in the detailed thought process described enables readers to associate themselves with the narrative content. The final draft of the narrative “name of the narrative” was given to Christopher Budd, the protagonist of the narrative, to review and validate the sequence and accuracy of the material. Corrections were made per his recommendations.

### Narrative: The Clash of Cultures – Corporate vs. Societal and their Resolution

Conglomerates, corporations and varied business interests have seen the world shrinking into a Global Village. Across the world, borders of nations have become permeable in order to facilitate trade while multinational corporations have extended their business empires in various countries. This exposes the countries to new corporate cultures while at the same time exposing the corporations to new and varied societal cultures. The fabric and composition of the workplace is a reflection of the employees societal culture, as each group of employees brings to the workplace their personalities and collective behavioral approaches. Corporate culture has many a time clashed with the societal culture of a place, undermining business, the very reason for its being. This could lead to various problems or disputes, which if not realized and rectified in time, could lead to negative impacts and losses. Quite often this is unintentional and when handled with care and sensitivity the problem can be resolved with satisfaction. Take the case of STUDIOS Architecture (S.A.) of Washington D.C., an architectural and design firm that was hired to design Discovery Network International's new Latin American division office in Miami, Florida. Christopher Budd led the strategic planning process and translated the strategy into the design. As a strategic planner and lead designer of this project he faced many problems and conflicts when designing for them. But, he and his design team were able to successfully resolve the conflicts when they were able to grasp the idea that it was the cultural disparity between the various groups that led to different tensions, and that these could be successfully resolved by understanding the causes and tackling them in a positive way.

DNI is a company of worldwide repute, which spreads knowledge of each and every facet of life, through its many TV programs and documentaries. Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, they decided to start a new division for Latin American

programming in Miami, Florida in the year 1994. This division of DNI, called Discovery Networks International- Latin America (DNI-LA), was only a year old with a single channel and less than 12 employees when the new office facility was proposed. Initially, this regional office had its departments scattered in three different offices in Miami. While one office dealt with network operations, the second dealt with production, and the third dealt with administration, programming and marketing sales. This disparate geographical location of departments made it difficult to coordinate the various projects and processes, while aggravating the problem of uncertainties in service delivery. These factors along with a forecasted expeditious growth of the subdivision over the next several years, led to the planning and design of the new hybrid facility where the three departments would all come under one roof. Never tried before in the history of the organization this project was an experiment.

The project began in 1996 as a high-risk proposition carrying with it many apprehensions and uncertainties. Christopher recalled, “A big concern of DNI-LA was attracting and retaining the country’s most sought after Latin American talent, as, quality of service and profitability was dependent on the employees. Discovery was very nervous about the move because they were sensing that people would be reluctant to move from the old location very close to Miami Beach - a hub of city life to the new site that was located 35 miles away near the Miami International Airport, an area devoid of any restaurants or city life, a crucial factor in attracting and retaining personnel. Charlie Humbolt (Project Manager) stated another project objective, “There was a delineation between the 15 Discovery employees and the 50 outsourced, contracted employees at the other offices. Therefore in creating the new integrated broadcast facility to take care of our Latin American development and distribution needs we wanted the space to help the contracted employees feel as though they were part of the organization and not an external component. The design objective being not

to design just another technical facility but to promote flow of information and connectivity between departments and individuals that would help all the employees understand the business and feel as part of one corporation.” This made the project all the more challenging, as the office design had to negate the not-so-perfect location and create a space that integrated different employees by making it employee-centric or employee-oriented.

There were 3 distinct groups that came together to make this new corporate experiment a reality. Working together, their aim was to provide a workplace strategy in the form of office design that would aid the corporation to function at its best by supporting the work processes. The first group was the people from Bethesda, mostly North Americans, the second group was the people from Miami, many of Latin American origin, and the third group was the designers from Washington, mostly North Americans. The people at Bethesda represented the corporate headquarters and the existing model of corporate culture while the office at Miami consisted of and proposed a talent pool and workforce that was primarily Latin American. Each group had their ideas and aspirations regarding this project. The leaders from the Bethesda group knew that different countries had different ways of doing business. Thus, Latin American countries did business differently from the United States of America. In the words of Christopher Budd, “Bethesda knew that they were walking a fine line because if they transposed North American business practices in an unsubtle way when dealing with Latin American countries, their business could fail.” Thus, Bethesda wanted the DNI-LA office to function on the lines of the Latin American way of doing business, hence a completely separate entity, situated in a city in the United States whose ethos was more Latin American than North American. The leaders at Bethesda knew this, but did not voice it. On their side the Miami workforce was apprehensive and worried that headquarters would interfere and try to control the

working of the Miami office. The third group, comprising of the designers were working to design an efficient office facility that would take care of all the business needs of the people working there, to improve the quality of service and their profitability - in short they were striving to align the office design to the corporate culture of Discovery Networks International.

Christopher Budd reflecting on his evolving thought process explained the fundamental issues regarding DNI-LA. “My design team held a daylong session of programming with the group at Miami, at which some executives from Bethesda were also present. We conducted many different exercises to help the employees talk about core issues - what type of company were they, what type of people they wanted to hire, the possibilities of improving technology, space utilization, and work processes. The objective of this programming session was to understand the employees’ notions for an optimal workplace.” Elaborating on the process, he spelled out the persona of the Miami employees. “We had the employees do an exercise where they had to prioritize and rank three qualitative words that they wanted in their work setting. At first they used indeterminate words like ‘creative’, but then became very precise and mentioned qualities like ‘intimately social’, a very unique characteristic that had started to become evident in the Miami office. The Miami people had different ideas from those at Bethesda, especially on features for entertaining clients and allowing visitors to see their work-processes.”

In response to the information collected with the DNI-LA employees and Bethesda executives, the design team proposed using furniture that would convey creativity, a prime component of the corporate culture. They also wanted everyone, whether employees or executives, to be assigned the same furniture. But the senior executives at Miami, including the leaders from Bethesda vetoed this. They wanted traditional furniture to designate the six key leaders in the Miami office.

Here was the paradox. Although creativity was to be integrated in the design of the space reflecting the corporate culture, the design team felt the message of corporate culture stopped outside the leaders' doors, giving the impression that senior leaders were not required to be creative. Christopher voiced his concern, "I felt it was detrimental to the space because they were encouraging creativity on one hand and adhering to an authoritarian idea on the other. We thought that the breaking down of strict hierarchical notions would have been enthusiastically accepted by all at DNI-LA, but we lost the argument against the client."

This episode illustrated that in supporting status the client was advocating for an underlying cause - a cause that the designers at this point were unable to decipher. There was a conflict here. But, what was the reason for this conflict? Was the group in the Miami office different from what the design team had assumed them to be? Did the communication of ideas by Discovery pose as the problem or was there a discrepancy in understanding and decoding the needs of the employees by the design team?

Christopher presented another example of emerging discord. "My design team was ready to present the first schematic design to the people of DNI-LA. Confident about our design, my team and I flew down to Miami, with the materials and color boards. We thought we had the hippest cutting edge design." Recalling that particular day brought a look of distress to Christopher's face; he continued: "After landing in Miami, 20 minutes before presentation, the materials and color palette, which we thought was really sophisticated and unique, seemed to change to a muddy palette of odd greens and oranges. Aware that nothing could be done at that point of time, we showed it to the employees, to hear their comments and get some feedback from them. Never shy about discussing their likes and dislikes, the employees expressed a universal hatred for the proposed scheme. I remember someone saying that it is so

70's looking - "This is so retro looking." Another employee mentioned that the proposed look belonged to the 'avocado refrigerator trend.' My team and I were annihilated."

This was a designer's worst nightmare, to have a design proposal totally rejected by the client. From the inception of the project the designers were trying to align the workplace design with the corporate culture of DNI by providing a non-hierarchical design and choosing colors that reflected DNI-Bethesda's organizational culture. Then why did the color palette fail in Miami? Christopher described what they had overlooked. Since the light quality in Miami was so different from the light quality in Washington, D.C, things had to be more high contrast in Miami and chroma had to be intensified. But more important than this, the design failed because the design team had overlooked the cues. They had completely overlooked the cultural and social context. Recalling his journey through the design process Christopher said, "We should have asked ourselves this question, that how do our Miami clients view color? If we had taken clues from the way people dressed, from the type of employees they hired, from the type of space they had, to the type of products they were producing, we would have known right away that it was a loser. But we did not look enough at the context and what the colors meant to the group at the Miami office." Christopher confessed, "I began putting it together. I realized the design came from us. We were imposing our cultural preferences on the Miami people with the color scheme. What we took down there had no business being in Miami. The response of hatred we were getting towards the scheme was because it had a bizarre meaning for the people working there. Things which are "hip" in Washington, D.C. are "pretty tame" in the Miami context, as they have to be of high contrast in Miami. I can't imagine that the color scheme would have died in New York and with some of our other clients. But in Miami it died instantly."

This awareness led Christopher to think more deeply about cultural context and made him share an anecdote related to another client's business experience in Japan.

"One of the things that bothered my client was that everybody in Tokyo was so formal. Even in summer, despite the heat, everyday, everyone came to work dressed in a dark tie and dark suit. If they had glasses, they were black plastic. So, he established 'Casual Friday'. After he instituted it, to his dismay, he found that nobody followed it. He got irritated and made everybody either give him their tie or he would cut off their ties. The third time he did this he realized that he was humiliating these people. When you think about it, 'Casual Friday' only helps when you see it as a positive. If you are diminished by appearing in a business environment without a tie and it makes you different in a culture that values never 'drawing attention to yourself,' how awful is that? The employees felt terrible without their work attire because their professionalism was tied up with their dress code. 'Casual Friday' does not have the same relevance to the Japanese as it has to the North Americans because the home life and the work life in the culture of Japan are so separate. So, realizing the error of his ways, my client discontinued 'Casual Friday'. He learned the dangers of taking things from one culture and transplanting them into other culture."

Using the above story as an example Christopher was alluding to the following message. When working with people from a different socio-cultural milieu, a designer should keep in mind that though every object has a cultural underpinning that carries a meaning with it, this same object might have a different meaning in different cultures. Dissimilar ideologies, dissimilar ways of life, and dissimilar work-styles can all be summed up to dissimilar cultures.

This was the turning point in the design process. Finally, Christopher and his team identified and understood the different nuances of the Miami personnel from those of the Bethesda personnel and also from themselves. He and his team now knew

for certain that DNI-LA, even though a part of DNI-Bethesda was a completely different entity, in the way people viewed themselves and their behaviors. “The Miami and Bethesda offices of DNI were really two different cultures even though they both shared a corporate culture.” The questions he had been asking himself all along - Why did our initial proposed design fail to be accepted in the Miami office? Why has our hip colors failed in Miami? Why do our ideas of space fail over here? – finally started to be answered now. Christopher, by starting to change his perspective about design vis-à-vis the Miami personnel, by adopting a different meaning regarding space, color, furniture and other aspects of design, started to arrive at a probable answer. He realized that although both the Miami office and Bethesda office resided on the same continent, the same country, they were actually two different cultural entities. Their societal cultural backgrounds made them think, feel, visualize and behave differently from each other.

Referring back to the rejected color scheme he mentioned in the beginning of his story, he concluded, “They shot down the drab palette of greens and browns, not because it was North American but because it was not Latin American. What did come out of it was a very different design that I would never have come to. It really was about high contrast, bright colors, and things. I would never have used it as it was against my own tendency, but I did use it because it was just right for the group I was designing for.”

Identifying the existence of two separate cultures was only half the battle won. The greater challenge was acquiring a deeper insight into the group at Miami - what their way of life and work processes actually were. Also, even though Bethesda was aware of the differences between itself and the Miami office, tension lurked between these two offices, due to their different ideologies and cultures. The employees in the Bethesda office had a way of life that followed their corporate culture, whereas the

way of life in the Miami office was primarily influenced by the employees' societal culture. These ideologies and cultures represented the conflict between 'Corporate Culture and Societal Culture'. The designers had been attempting to arrive at a solution by focusing on the all-important corporate culture, but in their quest for the right design solution they found that the societal culture of the Miami employees was also a key factor that influenced their behavior and way of life. Tensions are key in highlighting underlying problems, as they compel us to provide a fundamental framework for discovering new solutions to old problems. Christopher's design team encountered cues in the tension between Societal Culture and Corporate culture. These cues manifested themselves in areas, such as, private space, worker autonomy, personal expression and hierarchical reinforcement.

Based on site visits and interviews with the employees and management executives, the design team started to understand the subtleties of the two offices of DNI. DNI-Bethesda was known territory to them, as it was based on a familiar culture (North American). Christopher realized that the Bethesda office had none of the "social kind of free flowing qualities that existed among the people" he met in Miami. "The group in Miami was a very social group; it was a very creative group; it was a very much finishing-each-others-sentences type of a group, whereas, everyone in Bethesda kept his or her voice at half tone. Their (Bethesda's) corporate culture was more uptight. But in the Miami office they were screaming out the door; they were walking up and down and into each other's spaces. It was the most social, mobile group I have ever seen. It was as unlike a Mid-Atlantic office as it could possibly be." Susanna Prego, Director of Administration further emphasized this point in her interview and mentioned the loud and boisterous talking quality of the people in the Miami office. Reinforcing that the employees at the Miami office indeed followed a societal culture that was different to the Corporate Culture existing at their other

offices, Myrna Renaud, Senior Vice-President of Operations compared how quiet their other offices were in comparison to their Miami office.

Christopher explained in detail the issues of cultural conflict he was referring to. He confessed to having used the North American model in the initial design phase, which was a consequence of his own cultural predispositions. “People in North America are generally not as social in the work place and will hole up in their offices. I guess the reason why there are so many theories and so much effort in the design community to bring employees out of their individual office spaces and promote their interaction in open spaces is because they don’t naturally do that. But the collection of people in Miami was the complete antithesis of this. Nothing could keep them from communicating. Their business is social; their relationships are social. In North Americans offices, employees are encouraged to be more social and interactive, but then there is a fear of wasting time and productivity being lost. But at DNI-LA it was a natural part of the employees’ behavior. These people worked under tremendous pressure and worked day and night to achieve results in a facility open twenty four-seven. Being social was their natural way of dealing with their work tensions.”

Understanding this aspect of their societal culture helped Christopher arrive at the right design strategy. He realized that along with the open communal spaces, which he had to give them for their normal, socializing behavior, he had to also design offices and workstations with more privacy for them. This was necessary so that they could have a space to themselves and be alone.

Designers are often blinded by their cultural biases and need to be cautious, as these may influence their design decisions. But the greater lesson the design team learned is that design of workplaces should support the natural or default behavior of the people who work there. In this case Christopher and his team designed a space that could help improve business practices by being perceptive of the inherent societal

culture. Christopher pointed out that the employees needed a space that would balance their sociable behavior by providing a private space to concentrate. Hence design here supports the functions of corporate culture that are established to meet business requirements while at the same time bearing in mind their societal culture – an integration of both the cultures.



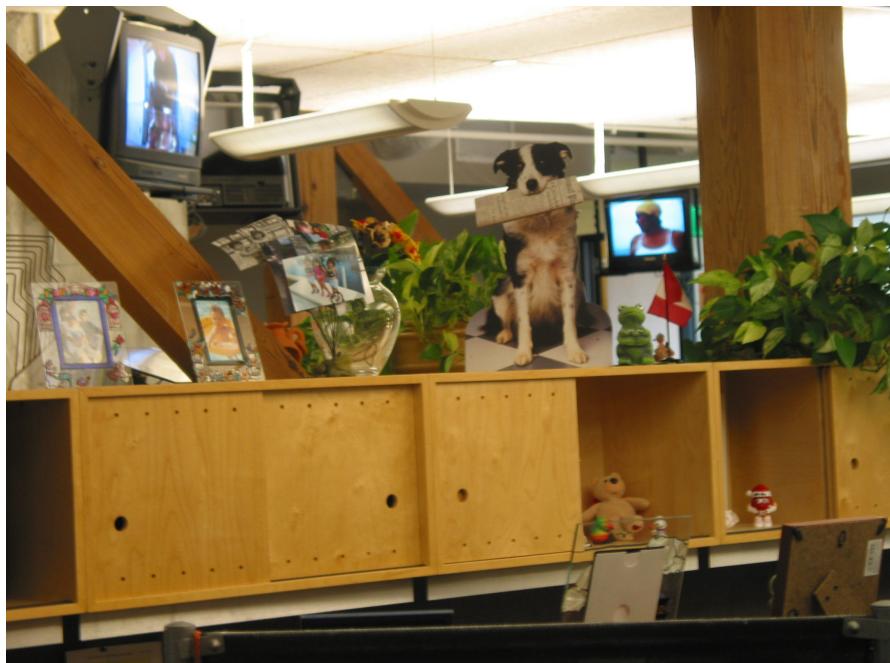
**Figure 4.1.** Private Space - Movable screens provide privacy in open landscape area

Christopher pointed to another area where cultural differences became apparent: “What we noticed about the DNI-LA personnel was their need for self expression. In addition we became aware that this group was not only highly sociable in their approach to work, but was also responsible and professional in their attitude. As a result we wanted the new space to be expressive and have some emotion to it.” As part of their design approach and drawing from the self-expressive nature of the employees, the design team encouraged the display of personal memorabilia. Hence

by tapping into the employees' potential of personal expression the design solution also respected the employees as 'individuals'.



**Figure 4.2.** Personalization of an employee's workstation



**Figure 4.3.** Personalization of an employee's workstation



**Figure 4.4.** Personalization of private office with travel memorabilia and cultural artifacts



**Figure 4.5.** Personalization – Soft toys displayed over workstation

Referring to their design approach Christopher informed that they decided not to impose a preconceived notion of how furniture and space should be integrated. “In DNI-LA along with huge amounts of individual expression there was also this huge amount of individual responsibility. Instead of giving them a prescriptive space in the form of an open plan office, we gave each employee five basic components comprising of a big peanut shaped table, a little side table, a mobile “ped”, a lamp and a hexagonal privacy screen. We gave them the freedom to configure their individual components to create a layout for themselves and their team, depending on their needs and how they liked to work.”

Christopher mentioned the obstacles in offices - “...the reason why people can’t move their stuff in most companies is because power, data and privacy are all interconnected. We came up with a solution to this and called it ‘an intelligent bay’, with utilities running on either side. All the power and data were connected to this structure.” Thus, people could dock to the station in order to get their equipment to work and configure their furniture components depending on how they liked to work in a team. But, two rules had to be followed. One, each employee could only use the pre-designated overhead bin directly above them to store their things, called ‘air rights’. Two, they could not go outside the boundaries specified to maintain the fire aisle.

Realizing that the Miami workforce’s behavior was because of their Latin American culture, Christopher and his team designed the workplace to suit the philosophy and ideas of the workforce. Explaining their approach to the problem, Christopher offered the following interpretation. “We wanted the design to be behaviorally driven. So we said, behaviorally let’s break it down and let’s look at the structure of your business and the structure of your culture. How do they work with space? We wanted to create an environment for adults who can make their own

decisions and negotiate when their decision impinged on someone else's. We did not create something that is prescriptive, that said, 'We don't trust you to make your own decisions, so this is what you get, and everyone gets the same thing.' I can't imagine that a group in marketing and a group in production would work in the same way, or need to talk to the same people or cluster in the same way. There are huge structural differences in how we organized the space, because there are big differences in how the different people operate and work together. We were saying, 'As an individual or as a group, you know best how to work.'"

This design solution of worker autonomy was the answer to the societal cultural concerns of the DNI-LA employees. Christopher said, "The resulting design was based not around an individual but around groups. We noticed there was an undercurrent of not wanting to be dictated to." It also reinforced the CEO, Dawn McCall's philosophy that if people are offered choices because you respect them for the decisions they make and what they do, they will be responsible. Susanna Prego had also talked about this aspect, in her interview, "One thing about Latin Americans is that they are not timid people, so right off, people are moving their things around. Latinos don't ask (for) very much. They are very comfortable just taking things and reconfiguring them. It helps people feel right at home as soon as they start here (at DNI-LA)."

Of course these ideas could be effectively utilized irrespective of cultural context, but here the specific intention of acknowledging the underlying societal culture of the employees while also considering the goals of supporting the corporate culture provided a unique solution for this office design.



**Figure 4.6.** Worker Autonomy – Flexible workstation components



**Figure 4.7.** Worker Autonomy – Docking bays that act as spines for data and power ports and overhead bins that are called ‘air rights’

As said earlier, the pieces had started to fall into place. Christopher now understood the hierarchical aspect inherent in Latin American culture. He could now comprehend the reason why the top executives of DNI wanted the directors' furniture to be different from those of the other employees during the furniture episode described earlier. When Christopher and his team had proposed the same type of furniture for all of them, irrespective of their designation, this idea was shot down by them and they had opted for traditional corporate type of furniture. This decision of the senior leaders to let the furniture voice a hierarchy was not an attempt to impose the Corporate Culture of Bethesda but a mechanism to reinforce the power distance so inherent in Latin American culture. Christopher reaffirmed, "Our initial response was [to do] what we do in North America, (i.e.) break down the walls, equalize positions and so forth. What we identified later was that there is a huge sense of hierarchy in Latin American culture, which the leaders were trying to bolster."



**Figure 4.8.** Hierarchical Reinforcement - The furniture in private offices voices status as compared to employee workstation furniture

Christopher discussed his key takeaways from this experience. “We had to keep ourselves from trying to assimilate or push North American culture on them. If you’ll notice in their interviews, they never see that as a goal because that’s not what they’re thinking. They’re thinking of themselves as themselves. When things were shot down, they were our ideas. We tried to find the root of that and what it was that we were assuming that we shouldn’t have been assuming.”

Awareness of how culture evokes and drives the meaning of design and behavior clarified for Christopher the need to be cautious of cultural biases. In addition he also learned avoiding the temptation to fall back on previous experiences by solving new problems in new, more situation-appropriate ways. Christopher reiterated, “This project taught me how to listen, which means not just listening and writing down your assumptions, but actively capturing the data, like the ones in this project and looking for patterns in what people are trying to tell you. I think we like to jump to conclusions because it is easy for us. As designers we often say ‘Oh! I have done this kind of project before’ and think experience-wise we can apply the same kind of solution over and over. If one is a competent designer one should look for where it is not like your experience. Knowing this has changed the complete perspective of how I now approach design. This project with DNI-LA was a real eye opener for me.”

Reflecting on the role that corporate culture and societal culture play when designing workplaces for multinational corporations, Christopher stated, “The worst mistakes companies make, is imposing standards on their regional offices, when they should be actually implementing guidelines. So, it becomes a case between rigid standards and flexible guidelines. Multinational Corporations should realize that the culture surrounding the corporate environment in one country is very different from the culture surrounding the corporation in another country. Corporations need to ask “how different is New Delhi culturally from San Francisco and how does this effect

business? Just because you say that you want your company to be this way doesn't mean that the environment you're working in is this way. Therefore, rarely will a prescriptive space standard work. It may only work where all employees belong to the same culture, but not otherwise."

Christopher emphasized the necessity to include societal culture in the equation of designing workplaces. "Space is a language and you have to speak this language where ever you go. Also, cultural literacy is a necessity. Are you going to a country like France and not practice saying 'Bon Jour'? It is very dangerous when both Multi National Corporations and designers don't respect the cultural differences found in different countries. By creating the same standard worldwide, all designers and corporations are saying, 'We don't respect your culture', and then the people of one culture working in a different environment will cause endless complications. Culture is one part of the environment and it will benefit corporations and designers to think of it as an environmental guideline more than being just a space guideline. Designers can give corporations a powerful tool for the growth of their business if they take into account how cultural differences affect rules of business, people's behavior and reactions, while designing for them.

Christopher's narrative shows us that the designer has an important role to play because by designing in such a way that the cultural aspirations of the workforce is met, the workplace design can be used as a tool to motivate employees into giving of their best to the organizations they represent. Motivational responses and behavior vary among societal cultures, and hence it is important that cultural context is fully considered.

Christopher has a favorite anecdote to relate. "My story involves a client who is on the point of retiring. Years back, as part of his graduation research, he had conducted a study of a company, in the United Kingdom, that made pork patties. The

owner hired women who came in from 2p.m.- 5p.m. every day. It was their job to stuff the patties. My client carried out an evaluation that showed that the productivity was terrible. He reported that they talked more than they stuffed pies and made recommendations of imposing rules on how many pies had to be filled and also for hiring them for 8 hours a day. The owner studied the report and then replied. "It is important to understand that these women whom we get are the only available talent and this particular time slot is chosen because this is the time their husbands are at work also. Working over here enables them to make some extra money. But more important than this is, if they didn't talk to each other and if it wasn't such a big gabfest, the money would not have mattered and I could not have got their help." After a pause he continued, "So, you have to really look at motivation before you can look at the standards that are based on control and efficiency. You need to look at what's going to motivate people. If you eliminate the very motivation to get that pork-pie stuffed, you will be left with nothing."

Thus, Christopher Budd and his design team of STUDIOS Architecture were able to bring to fruition a successful design for DNI-LA, Miami, Florida. By taking the trouble to understand the nuances of the behavioral pattern of the employees with the help of the parent company, they arrived at a design, which catered to the aspirations of both the corporate as well as the societal culture of the people involved. They identified these behavioral patterns of the workforce as being grounded in their societal culture and hence the design team strived to effectively meld the corporate culture of DNI-LA, as well as the societal culture of its employees. The message imparted is that though design is an aesthetic as well as a functional system, it is more than this. It also plays a role as a behavioral system, where by incorporating aspects of culture of the personnel, the components of design can be coordinated to achieve improved business performance. Hence workplace design can help corporations cater

to the societal needs of their employees and send a positive message of caring, nurturing and enhancing. It shows that corporations by respecting the cultural differences of the employees as real human needs recognize them as a valuable resource of their business.

(For additional photographs for DNI-LA's new office space see Appendix 1 and 2.)

## Discussion

The narrative revealed the cultural tensions that may arise while designing workplaces for multinational corporations. Conflicts between the existing societal culture and inherent attitudes toward designing for a de facto corporate culture were revealed at DNI-LA.

The narrative brought to surface how employee behavior in organizations can be influenced by the interpretation of the meaning of the physical design of the workplace. This interpretation of the office space is driven by the societal culture of the employees and varies between different cultures. Simultaneously Christopher's own cultural colorings, a result of his societal culture, were illuminated.

A message received or an interpretation made of an object can vary from one culture to another. The literature in cultural theory suggests that the symbol, the smallest unit of cultural expression, is made up of two elements: the physical object and the message (Turner, 1967), analogous to the concepts of ideologies and cultural forms discussed earlier. Objects have a different relevance in different cultures because the interpretations assigned to an object's meaning are embedded in the context of a societal culture. According to Trice and Beyer (1993), the object's tangible form along with the culturally influenced interpretation act as a sense-making device that conveys the message for an individual. For example the interpreting act by the Miami employees of the originally proposed color scheme differed completely from that of the designers. The majority of employees in the Miami office at that time were Latin Americans. They expressed a dislike towards the design proposed initially because the design arose from a differently tuned culture that was very unlike their societal culture and hence the color scheme had a very different and unexpected meaning for them.

That such differing interpretations can lead to behavioral differences is evident from then-Vice President Dawn McCall's comparison of DNI offices located in two different countries: "If you take the space of the Miami office and put it in our office in London, it would be used differently. For example, in our Latin American office there is much more willingness to use the open space as a communal space. We have often held meetings in the open spaces and even in the passageways. But the open spaces in the London office are used very differently because it does not enter their mind to use it in that communal way."

Contemplating space and design of a physical environment as a symbol, Christopher explained his notions of how design functions: "Your space [design] is a language and it communicates with you. By telling you that 'I'm different, and you need to work differently around me,' it is sending you very different cues. But if it does not say this then people may not work differently around it." The significance here is that designing to convey a message not only creates a symbol - an artifact of culture, but by providing clues is also a communicator of behavior—the signified of the symbol.

However, a message implied might not be same as the message received. It is important to note that the inherent ideologies of one's societal culture operate on all sense-making activity. Not only do we construe meaning from objects (forms), but also from the other cultural constructs within Trice and Beyer's "bubble" of entities that exist in our day-to-day lives. All of these participate in forming our responses to the environment via our individual cultural lens. Therefore, societal culture influences employee behavior by mediating the roles played by physical design of the workspace as well as the corporate culture of the organization.

Dawn (Vice President) demonstrated considerable insight into the connection between societal culture, behavior, and workplace design, recognizing that people in

different countries use and behave in spaces differently because of their societal culture. She understood instinctively that the cause of the tension was due to the existence of two different cultures being at play: “Miami is a different world...you think you are in an international city and that you’re not in the United States. Hence the issue was that of an international entity versus a U.S. domestic entity.” In some respect, then, the issue of the domestic North American culture being different from that of the Miami office was evident from the beginning, but the design process brought the design implications to light in specific areas.

The final design for DNI-LA responded to both the needs of societal culture and the goals of the corporate culture. This was achievable only because the design team and the leaders at DNI-LA ultimately understood and considered the role that culture plays on employee behavior. These opportunities surfaced in the narrative in four areas: (a) private space, (b) worker autonomy, (c) personal expression, and (d) hierarchical reinforcement.

#### Private Space

Privacy was one of the issues the design team identified as important to be addressed in the design of the new facility. Information provided by the key informants illustrated that the leaders at DNI were also cognizant of the very social, interactive, and collective nature of their Latin American employees. Myrna Renaud, Senior Vice-President of Operations reports, “It is not until we go to our offices in Silver Springs or in London that we realize how loud (noisy) we are because my whisper is louder than their scream. When we first started to think about the space here, we realized we are the folks that get passionate and loud and we took that into consideration while putting the space together.”

The employees themselves were also aware of the difference; as Susanna Prego, Director of Administration, elaborated on the social quality of the employees: “We are

very loud. When you walk down the halls and between cubicles in Bethesda you will notice it is much quieter there than here in Miami. Occasionally, in some of the areas in the Bethesda office, you will hear a pin drop. But here in this office, because we as Latinos are more boisterous and speak much louder you will never hear a pin drop. In fact you will not hear anything drop.”

Privacy is generally “referred to as a psychological state that accompanies a satisfactory retreat from, or regulation of, social interaction” (Sundstrom, 1982; 1986). Over the years researchers have paid attention to privacy as either control over social interaction or autonomy of action. The data in this study focuses on privacy as privacy-regulation, a theory proposed by Altman (1975) where privacy is “selective control of access to the self or one’s group.” Similarly Marshall (1970) also focused on privacy as control over access to the self and over one’s social interaction (Sundstrom, 1982; 1986). Therefore for the purpose of this study privacy is defined “as the ability of individuals or groups to satisfactorily regulate their accessibility to other” (Sundstrom, 1986).

Much of the literature on workplace privacy has shown that designs that support increased privacy can also be a hindrance to effective communication. Research conducted by Sundstrom, Burt, and Kamp (1980), for example, provides evidence that the physical enclosures of workspaces, specifically in the form of walls or high partitions, act as an aid for privacy. Pile (1978) suggests that open offices, where employees are placed close to one another without barriers as obstacles, encourage communication. What should be noted here are that these studies were conducted in North America and Europe and hence are implicitly related to the specific societal cultures in which they were conducted. Physical enclosures may have often been seen as a hindrance because in the societal cultures of the groups studied, the behavior of employees was less socially interactive.

While the norm for North American offices is to provide a minimal amount of private space, just enough adequate for employees to concentrate and complete individual tasks, the design solution for the Latin American employees was just the reverse. Christopher recalled, “Their [Latin American employees’] business is social. Their relationships are social. The office meant a very different thing to them. You almost did want to give people offices, because where else would they ever be able to be by themselves and be alone. Their interactive behavior needed a space that would balance their social behavior by providing a private space to concentrate.

Christopher observed that in an office such as DNI-LA’s, where social interaction and frequent communication was a natural way of conducting business, emphasis need not be given to encourage interaction within the group as a means for passing information in organizations, as it often is in other situations. He saw that their default social and interactive behavior already assists in accomplishing this. Instead he identified the primary criterion as how the employees would accomplish their individual work tasks and concentrate amidst all the social behavior.

The interviews conducted for this study confirmed that the new office design provided more spaces to facilitate concentration and provide for time away from social interactivity. Supporting employee functions helps to meet the business bottom line and accomplish business objectives. And, societal culture of the employees is considered while designing workplaces to support corporate culture. Thus, by shifting the perspective and looking at the dilemma of privacy through the cultural lens of the employees, the designers were able to find and provide solutions that support more effective employee functioning.

### Worker Autonomy

Attitudes toward worker autonomy were also identified as playing a significant role in the design for this space. Christopher stated in his interview, “We noticed there

was this undercurrent of not wanting to be dictated to.” Voicing Dawn’s (Vice President) perspective, he elaborated, “People rise to the occasion if you respect them for what they do and give them choices.”

This ideology of worker autonomy was addressed by providing a set of flexible, movable furniture for various employee groups. Each group space was designed to accommodate three to eight people. The users decide how they want to work. Christopher recalled: “We did not give them a prescriptive space in the form of an open plan office.” The idea here was not only to free them from the obligation of setting up their work environment in a particular fashion, but also to give them a system that they could adapt according to their work style and behavioral patterns.

The important thing to bear in mind is that even though establishing one’s territory and expressing one’s identity is natural human behavior, the approach of its execution may vary depending on one’s cultural background (Suzuki, 1992). The designers during their interaction with the Latin American user group discovered an affinity to adjust their immediate physical work environment and make it more suitable for themselves. They were very comfortable moving their things around and reconfiguring them. Susanna Prego (Director of Administration) commented that they did this to help them feel at home. The designers were sensitive to the employees’ need of variation in creating their workspace and also the autonomy that it carried.

Christopher described the resulting solution for Discovery Channel Latin America as a design based around groups over an individual. In Latin American cultures people’s collective nature enables them to function comfortably as part of a group (GLOBE, 1999; Hofstede, 1980; 1984). The designer’s insight allowed for an approach in which the employees’ collective nature could be accommodated through a flexible, empowering design solution.

## Personal Expression

Discovery Networks International–Latin America is a good example of a corporation that provides its employees with the freedom of personalizing their work environment. Interviews revealed that personal expression was considered an essential element of the Latin American societal culture exemplified by the DNI-LA staff. Christopher described self-expression as being second nature to the employees so the design team provided a space where the employees could be expressive and add emotions to it. In conjuring such a space, they designed the space to accommodate a lot of personalization of the people working there. The author's site visit confirmed this attribute of the employees. The following paragraph is an excerpt from her field notes.

*Every individual employee's workspace had objects that spoke of him or her as an individual. Not only objects related to work (e.g., fancy stationary or creativity simulation toys) were displayed, but all the employees, including the leaders' spaces, had personal objects like soft toys, family photographs, travel memorabilia, and fun items that they not only treasured but which also spoke of their own personality. It seemed like these objects were reminders to them of their life outside work, their backgrounds, and their holistic life. It was a very humane environment.*

Becker (1977) defined the term personalization as a self-initiated change in the workplace carried out by adjusting the environment to suit the users preference and values, and Suzuki (1992) emphasized the concept's function of expressing one's own personal and professional identity. A study conducted by Steelcase Inc. (1982) entitled "National Study of Office Environment" found that autonomy given to employees to express one's own identity in the work environment ranked as the fourth most important quality in evaluating a desirable office (Suzuki, 1992). Even though the study did not directly use the term personalization, it supported the significance of

encouraging employee self-expression in the workplace. Danko (2000) argued that personalizing helps in humanizing office environments and simultaneously can be used as a “corporation’s competitive edge.” She states that the “human touch clearly transforms ‘designed’ space into ‘lived’ space and signals a different quality of work life than a space void of humanity” (p. 16). However, the way personalization is executed varies depending on ones cultural background. For example, in Japanese culture, office personalization is primarily restricted to work items and excessive decoration is considered to be a sign of an outsider (Suzuki, 1992). Obviously, it is therefore important to apply policies of personalization in culturally contextual ways.

One of the leaders of the Miami group, Rick Rodriguez, then Head of Production, expressed their own reasons for creating a personalized facility: “We wanted to reflect the values and attitudes of Latin America. With a lot of our staff being from Latin America we wanted them to feel at home and therefore wanted our space to feel like it could be at home there.” Respecting and valuing their employees as individuals was a prime concern of the leadership group of DCI–LA during the design process. The point to emphasize here is that not only did the leaders promote personalization as a means for self-expression and identity or as a mechanism for adjusting individuals to their surroundings, but also as way to acknowledge and respect a majority of their employees’ Latin American culture and background. Susanna relates, “Not stopping at displaying personal memorabilia, we went on to encourage them to display objects that spoke of their culture.” She expressed DNI-LA’s further intent of using the personalization of workspaces as a method for employees to learn about one another’s individual backgrounds and societal cultures. DNI-LA is also currently working on a project to display information and materials from various local cultures, including the Latin American culture, to educate their employees and continue to make them feel at home. Susanna elaborated, ”We also work with people who are displaying art objects,

photographs, and other things that speak of cultures of Latin America, to help bring more and more of the culture into our staff so they don't lose touch with their own culture."

It is apparent that while the space supports the societal culture it also voices the company's motto in valuing its employees. Susanna concludes, "Our employees are the most important assets for us because as a company we cannot succeed without their knowledge, their input and how they exchange their ideas within the facility. So personalizing their work environment makes them feel comfortable about where they work."

### Hierarchical Reinforcement

The need for reinforcing hierarchy is another pertinent issue in the narrative. One of Hofstede's (1980) dimensions to describe cultural differences, power distance characterizes the degree to which members of a group expect power to be distributed equitably (Hostede, 1980; 1984; GLOBE, 1999; Tan, 2002). Societies that expect more unequal distribution of power are "high power distance societies." Research conducted by Hofstede (1980) and GLOBE (1999) has shown that many Latin American cultures rate relatively high in the power distance dimension (see Table 1).

Recognizing the applicability of hierarchical reinforcement at DNI-LA, decision-makers from Bethesda and Miami insisted on office furniture that echoed the office's power dynamics. At first the designers tried to equalize everyone's furniture in order to foster creativity by de-emphasizing the office's beauracratic nature and authoritarian status. The design team was applying their own North American bias toward a low power distance office space, which had been a successful approach in the past towards innovative corporations. Christopher recollected, "What we identified later was that there is a huge sense of hierarchy in Latin American culture." In the end, everyone agreed that accentuating the hierarchy in the office was in line with the

societal culture of the employees and should be reflected in the workspace standards of the personnel.

### An Evolving Paradigm: Integrating Societal Culture and Corporate Culture in Workplace Design

*The major thrust in corporate office planning must be the integration of organizational objectives and the individual need of the worker.*

- Moleski and Lang (1986)

Enduring implications for designing workspaces are echoed in the narrative - “The Clash of Cultures – Corporate vs. Societal and their Resolution”. The design process for the DNI-LA facility addressed various issues illustrating the effectiveness of designing with an integrated approach toward supporting aspects of both the prevalent corporate culture and the societal culture of the employees. In addition to easing the tensions caused by conflicts between these two sometimes-distinct cultures, as has been shown, this approach has further tangential benefits.

The integrated approach aids the corporate culture of multinational corporations: it helps achieve business objectives by facilitating worker efficiency and also fostering employee motivation. The designer’s role in assuring that workplace design also addresses the employees’ motivational needs emerged in Christopher’s narrative.

Motivation is the key word in any successful enterprise. It takes different forms in different industries and different countries. An all-important impetus in any workplace, does ‘motivation’ mean the same thing to diverse people in diverse settings and in diverse places? Are the factors, which motivate one set of people, the same for the others? Does the meaning of an action, event or thing hold true for all or does it have different connotations in different set-ups? Time and again Christopher Budd and his design team were plagued by these self-same questions when they were designing the

broadcasting facility for Discovery Networks International-Latin America to make it more employee oriented.

Motivation has been described as the force that energizes human behavior and directs and channels that behavior to accomplish goals. (Steers & Carlos, 2001; Adler, 2002). According to Milton Rokeach (1973; 1979), values are motivation. Rokeach's value model claims that values serve as a powerful motivational influence in three ways (a) they are instrumental in attaining desired end-states, (b) they are desired end-states themselves, and (c) they help us define and reinforce our sense of self.

*Rokeach (1973, p.14) elaborates:*

- a) *Instrumental values are motivating because the idealized modes of behavior they are concerned with are perceived to be instrumental to the attainment of desired end-goals. If we behave in all the ways prescribed by our instrumental values, we will be rewarded with all the end-states specified by our terminal values.*
- b) *Terminal values are motivating because they represent the super goals beyond immediate, biologically urgent goals. Unlike the more immediate goals, these super goals do not seem to be periodic in nature; neither do they seem to satiate—we seem to be forever doomed to strive for these ultimate goals without quite ever reaching them.*
- c) *But there is another reason why values can be said to be motivating. They are in the final analysis the conceptual tools and weapons that we all employ in order to maintain and enhance self-esteem. They are in the service of what McDougall (1926) has called the master sentiment—the sentiment of self-regard.*

**Figure 5.1.** Rokeach (1973) value model explain how values are motivation

Rokeach's value model explains how values are the quintessence of individuals. This implies that the values of individuals, which are based largely on ideologies

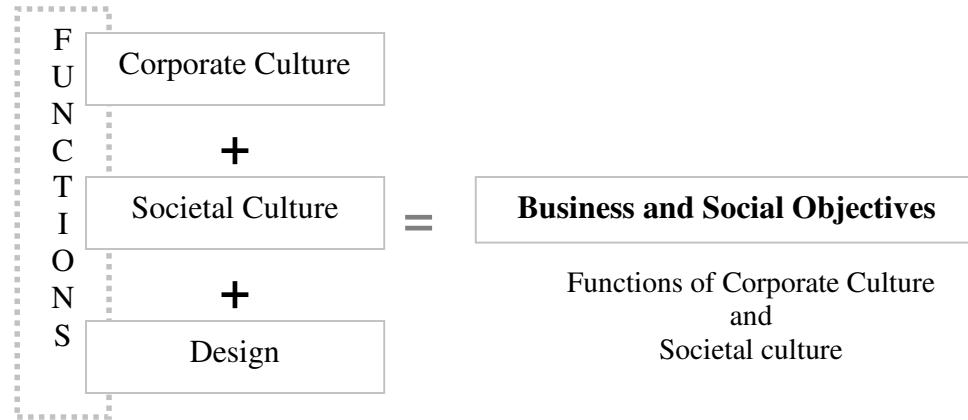
rooted in their societal culture, motivate them and hence need to be accounted for and understood when managing human resources. The integrated approach by supporting the societal culture of the employees and understanding their values that represent their identity accrues a two-fold benefit – Values through motivation can help create a positive effect on bottom line results, but more importantly also achieve the social objectives of caring for and respecting its employees. Thus this is an important consideration for designing spaces that harmonize with culturally influenced behaviors.

When asked what standards he thought multinational corporations should follow when designing workplaces for offices operating in different countries and cultures, Christopher shared his view, “Culture is one part of the environment, and we need to think of it as an environmental guideline. Also, you have to really look at what’s going to motivate people before you can look at the standards that are based on control and efficiency. You can be eliminating the very motivation [you hope to achieve] … and then you have nothing.”

Companies that demonstrate respect for the values and backgrounds of their employees provide an opportunity for another route to a positive effect on bottom line results: by eliciting improved employee satisfaction. In doing so it can, for example, assist with recruitment and retention of desirable employees and also help improve the quality of work-life of their employees. This is a pertinent issue because the increasing interwoven nature of work and quality of life cannot be escaped as more and more employees are looking out for an improved quality of work life (Danko, 1997; 2000).

Duffy (2000) asserts, “Business in a time of changing values and developing technologies now depends upon the systematic use of design to achieve business and societal goals” (p. 374). Achieving business and societal objectives where design serves to achieve the functions of societal culture and corporate culture, this study

supports the framing of an evolving paradigm: Integrating societal culture and corporate culture through workplace design.



**Figure 5.2.** Evolving Paradigm: Integrating societal culture and corporate culture through workplace design

While this study emphasizes integrating both societal culture and corporate culture it is necessary to mention that the message does not imply the precedence of societal culture over corporate culture. In North America even though employees prefer more privacy, corporations provide their employees with an open landscaped workspace with minimal privacy and shared utilities to promote interaction. Interaction helps in transmitting information and knowledge among employees ultimately a benefit in achieving business goals. Hence, accomplishing the project objective should be the main focus. In the case of DNI-LA the designers were conscientious about identifying conflicts, understanding the nature and comparing both societal and corporate culture. In doing so they addressed the elements of both these cultures and helped achieve the project objective - to make the new facility employee centric and boost productivity and services that are both dependant on the employees.

## Implications for Further Research

Christopher's narrative and the data retrieved from the key informants in this study present the design community with questions for further research.

Multinational corporations often carry with them the cultural stowage of their home country; they can bring the assumptions, beliefs, values and lifestyles of their home countries as part of their organizational culture. To what extent do the corporate cultures of MNCs, as practiced in their regional offices, transplant the values of their home's societal culture to the workplaces of their regional offices? Do their practices result in significant changes in employee behavior? As mentioned in the discussion section, organizations exist in a context of multitudinous environmental subcultures, which are interlinked and exert forces upon one another. Whilst this study concentrated on how employees' societal culture helps influence the inner workings of the company, one also must ask whether any behavioral changes in employees that are instigated by imposed corporate or other outside cultures can affect the societal culture of the region.

Another area for future study elucidated by this narrative is the danger of cultural bias on the part of design professionals. There seems to be a need for increased awareness of the values inadvertently transmitted by design professionals and design educators based on their own societal culture. An unfamiliarity with the values and behaviors of the societal culture of the people they design for may prevent potential problems from being seen and certain solutions from being offered. Research that addresses the issue of designers' cultural colorings would be beneficial. Does the impact of workplace design strategy differ when designers come from the same versus a different societal culture as the user group? Is it possible to chalk out frameworks for designers to caution themselves on the cultural biases they may be incorporating via workplace strategies they promote through the physical design of the space?

Cultural biases are very difficult to acknowledge leave alone identify them. The following are suggested strategies designers can utilize during the design process to help them recognize their own cultural biases:

- A diverse team - A team constituting members from diverse cultures will help in recognizing and pin pointing any cultural biases that may exist among the team
- Cultural member - If designing for a particular culture, include designers from that particular culture on the team to increase the understanding of cultural nuances that may go unnoticed to members not familiar with the societal culture.
- Understand the ‘why’ - During client meetings if any misunderstandings surface the designers should not stop at ‘what’ the correct answer is but ‘why’ there was a difference of opinion and the underlying values and rationale that support it.
- Analyze the interpretations - After collecting data; an internal analysis session among the designers will help bring to surface any discrepancies in the interpretation or understanding of the data collected.
- External Consultant - It is helpful to hire an external consultant on a big project to help awareness and sensitivity to cultural issues. An external consultant with an outsider’s viewpoint can assist in identifying distinguishing cultural backgrounds and values.
- Games as tools - Games that help recognize cultural biases can be developed and used as a tool for designers. E.g. Showing designers’ photographs of unknown objects and events and asking them to describe what they see.

This section cannot be concluded without calling attention to the need to remain mindful of the questionable applicability of various workplace theories across the different societal cultures of the world. As stated by Staniszewski (2001), “All that we experience in the world is mediated by culture” (p. xxiii). To what extent are the workplace theories championed in the literature influenced by the societal cultures in

which they were conducted? What significance does a design theory, or even design products, borrowed from a different cultural context have? Hofstede (1980) warned: “The expectancy and equity theories of motivation emphasize a rational and individual thought as primary basis of human behavior. The theories therefore do not offer universal explanations of motivation but reflect the values of the Americans who framed the theory” (cited in Adler, 2000). It is imperative to guard against imposing cultural assumptions in the application of workplace or behavioral theories indiscriminately. Thus it would be beneficial to examine whether specific workplace strategies—such as adjacency in work processes; enhanced communication, creativity and organizational learning; and the concept of nonterritorial offices—work better in certain societal cultures compared to others? If yes, then further studies concentrating on the cause for the differences becomes exploratory.

## Conclusion

Edward T. Hall (1976) spoke of the significance of culture:

*Deep cultural undercurrents structure life in subtle but highly consistent ways that are not consciously formulated. Like the invisible jet streams in the skies that determine the course of a storm, these currents shape our lives; ....* (cited in Adler, 2000).

As one of the most pertinent topics of the 21st century, multinational corporations need to be sensitive to the varied societal cultures of their human resources that they encounter in different locations of the world. Mendenhall et al. (1995) support this as a responsive strategy for creating competitive advantage in global management.

Models of culture, including those of Hofstede, and Trice and Beyer, point to the ways in which culture's influence upon interpretive meaning lead to an individual's behaviors and responses. Ideologies, of which values are the most influential component, form an important basis for interpreting the physical design (forms) of the workplace.

This narrative draws the attention of the design community to the need for workplaces to be designed incorporating elements from both the corporate culture as well as the societal culture of the employees. "The Clash of Cultures – Corporate vs. Societal and their Resolution" reveals the tensions that emerged when two different ideologies were brought to light during the design process of the new office facility. These two ideologies alluded to two different cultures. Documenting the design team's struggle first to recognize the conflicts and then to balance these two cultures, the narrative offers an opportunity to develop a framework that encourages societal cultural sensitivity in the design process. In recognizing the role societal culture plays in workplace design and employee behavior, the design team partnered with DNI-LA to provide particular design solutions to address the tensions between the two cultures.

Describing the design team as “true partners” in this endeavor, Head of Production Rick Rodriguez attributed the business’s current success in part to the design of the office. Dawn McCall (Vice President) confirms: “The design of the space has affected every single thing that we’ve done in this company ever since.” Complimenting the design team for their insight of looking beyond the required needs of the workplace, Myrna Renaud used the phrases “complete beyond my expectation,” “sensitive to mine and my group's needs,” and “long-term successful” in describing the design and the role of the designers from STUDIOS Architecture. And Susanna Prego praised, “The designers did a very good job in looking at what we were about here in Miami and incorporating that into the design.”

Supporting elements of both the societal and corporate cultures for this situation, where both the cultures could contribute to attaining business objectives, provided an effective method in designing the office space for DNI-LA. The narrative suggests that multinational corporations can use this proactive approach as an important strategy in workplace design. Consideration of societal cultures with respect to issues such as private space, worker autonomy, personal expression, and hierarchy reinforcement can provide positive results on employee behavior and hence employee effectiveness. To maximize effectiveness, workspaces in different regions need to be designed with a consideration of the societal cultural context, even when the workspace is required to reflect the corporation’s organizational culture. At the end of the day a corporation’s most valuable assets are its employees. When the meaning and cues provided by societal culture are properly understood and applied both by designers as well as multinational corporations, can, the resulting workplace solution act as a motivating tool. Moleski and Lang (1982, 1986) agree that corporate environment must be supportive of organizational needs *within the context of human*

*values.* A cultural sensitive approach to workplace design of multinational corporations can be employed as a means toward this goal.

## Appendices

**Appendix 1.** Discovery Networks International – Latin America's office facility in Miami.



Atrium Stairs



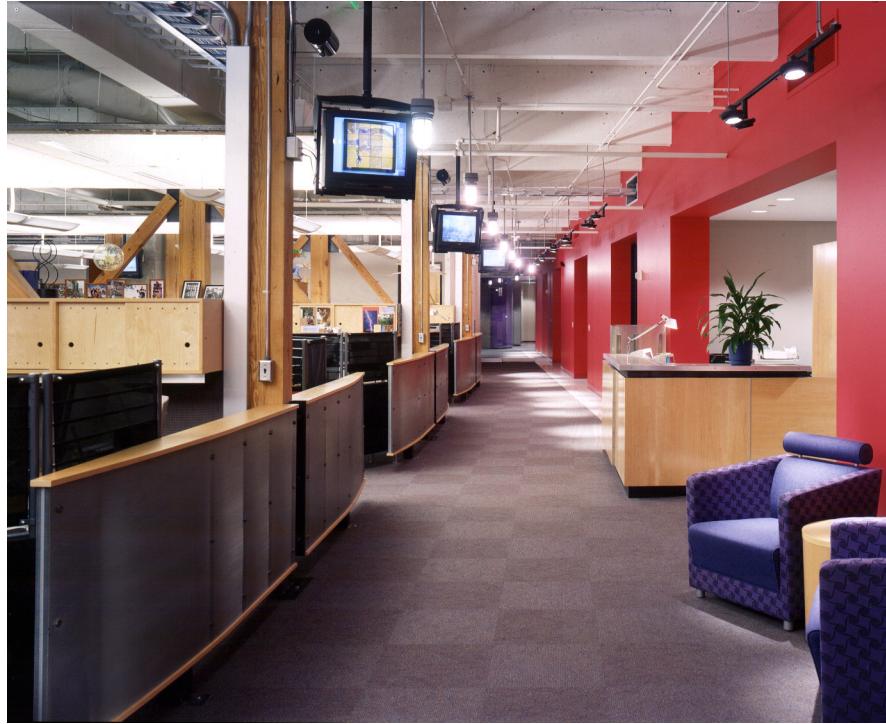
Elevator Lobby



Entrance



Entrance



View of employee workstations from the corridor



Conference room



Audio Station



Broadcasting station



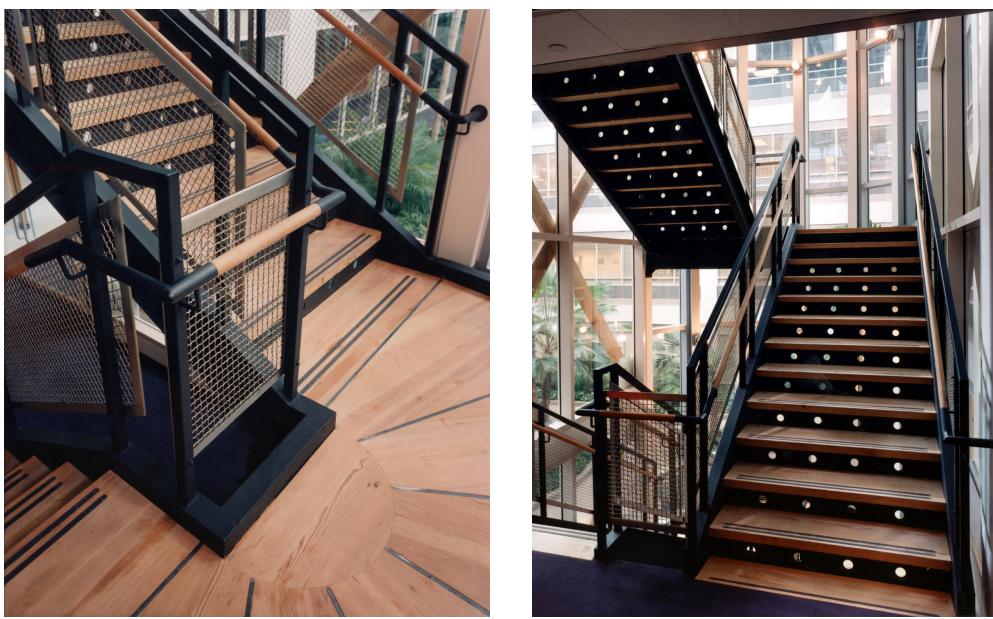
Broadcasting station



Display of trophies



Detail of rafters in corridors



Staircase details



Personalization of private office - remembering the places visited



Personalization with favorite things. The employee wears a Ms. Venezuela sash awarded to her for coordinating Discovery's newly launched Venezuela channel.



Calendar marks the countdown to the launch of new channels. Today is the day...THIS IS IT!

**Appendix 2.** Discovery Networks International-Latin America's office facility in Miami – Alternative Workspaces and Shared Support Spaces



Informal workspace / Meeting space



Informal workspace / Meeting space



Corridor leading to break area / coffee bar



Break area / coffee bar



Lunchroom / Break area / Informal meeting area



Lunchroom / Break area / Informal meeting area

**Appendix 3.** Open-ended questionnaire used for targeting certain issues during the interviews with Dawn McCall and Christopher Budd

- Understand the relationship between DNI headquarters and DNI-LA
- The objective of setting up the new DNI-LA office facility in Miami.
- Were there any risks involved in the project with DNI-LA, Miami?
- Present culture of Discovery Networks International headquarters office in Silver Springs, Maryland.
- Was the corporate culture of Discovery Networks International's headquarters' at Silver Spring the same as when it was in Bethesda and before the Miami office came into being?
- Culture at DNI – LA, Miami
- Difference between DNI-headquarters and DNI-LA, Miami office.
- Did the headquarters recognize the difference or need for a difference? How did they react? Was it a key issues? If yes, did they take any steps to acknowledge the differences?
- Design process of the new office facility in Miami.
- What were the main design issues that were addressed during the design of the office facility?
- Were there any crucial points in the design process? Were there times when things had to be rethought or restated?
- Describe the process the design team followed in arriving at the design solution.

- Dawn McCall's role in the entire process. What was her perception of her responsibility to the project, the headquarters, her employees, and how did she see it tie to the business objectives or other philosophies she followed.
- Dawn's leadership style? (Christopher's comments saying she was a filter) Did your transfer from Bethesda office to the Miami office present any particular leadership challenges or call for different leadership tactics?
  - What role did the design team see themselves playing?
  - Key takeaways for Dawn and Christopher

**Appendix 4.** Questions for on site interviews held at the Miami office facility of DNI-LA.

**Role of the informant**

Q. What is your current role in the organization?

Q. Were you involved in the design process of the new office facility in Miami? If yes, what role did you play?

Q. How would you describe your leadership style?

**Relationship between DNI and DNI-LA, Miami**

Q. Describe the relationship between DNI and DNI-LA

Q. How are they linked to each other as per the organizational structure of the corporation?

**Objective and vision for DNI-LA**

Q. What was Discovery's vision for DNI-LA?

Q. Was it clearly articulated?

Q. Did the vision change at any point?

Q. Did Discovery's initial vision differ from STUDIOS Architecture? If so how?

**The culture at both the offices and any difference between them**

Q. What is the corporate culture or philosophy that DNI promotes?

Q. That being said how do you'll promote and try to achieve the corporate culture...especially since you are a multinational company?

Q. Does DNI have one umbrella culture and corporate polices uniformly for the entire organization or does the DNI-LA operate as an autonomous unit but reporting to the DNI at large?

Q. How would you describe the corporate culture at DNI and DNI-LA?

Q. From the previous interviews conducted we are of the understanding that there was tension related to the cultural issues between the Miami and Bethesda (headquarters) office. How did these tensions reveal itself in the design process of the office facility?

Q. Did the difference in culture provide any challenges or differing leadership strategies?

### **Risks involved**

Q. What were the risks involved in setting up the new office facility in Miami?

Q. Did Discovery have a lot to loss associated to these risks?

Q. What were the big concerns for the project going into the first programming meeting where STUDIOS Architecture, leaders from DNI-Bethesda and DNI, Miami were all present?

Q. How would you describe the mood in the meeting?

### **Design process and workplace design**

Q. If you were involved in the design process of the new Miami office can you recall any important meetings or decisions taken during the design process. Please explain the reasons that acted as a driver for the decisions.

Q. Did DNI or DNI-LA's initial vision differ from STUDIOS Architecture? If so, how?

Q. At the beginning of the interview you talked about your leadership style. Does the new workplace design address or play a role in promoting your leadership style. If so, how?

Q. What are the impacts if any the workplace design has had on the business of DNI-LA?

Q. Has this affected DNI at large or DNI office headquarters' in any way?

**Lessons learned**

Q. How do you manage the challenges that come about in your corporations as a result of operating in countries following a different societal culture?

Q. As a leader what are your views on the corporate culture of multinational corporations vs. the societal culture the companies operate in? This is pertaining to the other MNC and global companies operating out there.

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