

How workspace design can affect the bottomline

According to Hassan Shaikh, founder of Revolve, a specialist corporate and retail interior design strategy agency, SA companies are getting workspace design wrong.



Hassan Shaikh, founder of Revolve

“Office space is a tool to support business. It needs to be functional, flexible and inspiring. It is also critical that the significant investment made in workspace design produces a return on investment to the business,” he says.

While this seems logical, many South African companies are getting it wrong. “Companies do a lot of strategic thinking around business but often when it comes to utilising their space, little thought is given to how the space needs to drive profitability. There is a direct correlation between effective workspace usage, increased productivity and profit,” he says.

Multifunctional, multidimensional, organic workspaces

Shaikh believes South African companies have a way to go yet when it comes to understanding how workspace design can affect the bottomline. “While we always need to bear in mind our unique South African complexities, global workspace trends are showing companies benefiting immensely from multifunctional, multidimensional, organic workspaces.” He adds that sadly many SA companies have spent millions on workspace designs that simply aren’t working. “We often get called in to assist companies that can’t work out why their design investment is not paying off.”

In essence, the issue, he says, is applying a cookie-cutter design approach to workplace design and design thinking distorts the well-researched design principles that should be applied. “This is normally done to either create more aesthetics or to try accommodate only basic business requirements. This is the stumbling block in many workspaces and leaves companies with beautiful spaces that are under-utilised and offer little or no value to the business.” Space ideally needs to be designed in such a way that it allows employees to focus, collaborate, learn and socialise. “This requires a shift away from a traditional, one-dimensional floor plans to multifunctional, multidimensional workspaces,” says Shaikh.

Flexible and tailor-made

“Creating spaces that are flexible and tailor-made to specific business needs is just as important as making the space reflect the corporate or brand culture. Each business is different and the layout, design and aesthetics need to reflect this. Having work environments that are static and unreactive in the fast-changing, economic environment that organisations operate in, does not allow businesses to be reactive enough. Interior design must be used as a tool to provide agility and create spaces that promote co-working and collaboration to enhance productivity which ultimately results in higher profitability.”

Critical, strategic thinking is therefore the starting point for workplace interior design. “To achieve the necessary alignment and value, an audit of where the business is and where it’s heading as well as insights from employees are essentials to create spaces that are people-centric and give businesses the environments to lead transformation and growth internally.

“Using solid researched design principles like ergonomics, proxemics, spatial layout strategies and also incorporating essential elements of design science, workplace design can be positioned as a holistic resource that benefits both employees and the business,” explains Shaikh.

Get a designer involved early

For maximum benefit the best scenario is to get a designer involved early at the building or office space selection part of the process to maximise the value the design strategy offers. “This gives the designer insights into the business strategy which feeds into the spatial accommodation strategies and also the design strategy. It also eliminates the sacrificing of both aesthetics and practicality to create designs that are within budget, on time, to specification and still meet the client’s immediate needs as well as being flexible enough to accommodate business growth.”

Office design is changing and so is the way business functions and how people work. “SA businesses that are progressive enough to start testing and experimenting with workplace environments that suit their businesses and are specially designed to accommodate a changing workforce will reap the rewards,” he concludes.

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