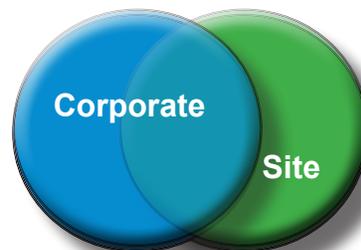


# Workplace Insights

## The Art of What's Possible: Implementing Consistent Design Across a Large Real Estate Portfolio

Corporations with large and diverse real estate portfolios often develop, maintain, and enforce design standards so that all locations are aesthetically and functionally consistent, and are a reflection of the corporate brand and culture. At the same time, design professionals and corporate property administrators are challenged to satisfy unique and important local site needs and preferences. Based on a wealth of experience, Hixson recommends these three critical steps to strike an appropriate balance between corporate standards and local desires:

- 1. Establish the “corporate ideal” and create a standards template.** Strong and clearly defined corporate standards should be established early, with sufficient buy-in, to serve as the framework around which everything will be done from a design perspective. These standards represent not just spatial needs, such as square footage per person, number of training seats needed, wellness room requirements, etc., but fit and finish requirements as well. The standards should be broken down by space type and detailed with sufficient layouts and pictures/ images to accurately represent the layout and appearance of the space. Standards development must take a long-term view, so that the spaces will function well. Additionally, selecting attractive and available materials that will “hold up” over an extended period is essential.
- 2. Understand the local site’s needs and spatial issues.** Each location may have unique physical restraints and local tastes which may not conform to the “corporate ideal.” A full visual and drawing survey of the physical space and a thorough understanding of the end users’ needs is critically important prior to any discussion of standards application into the space.
- 3. Meet in the middle with change management.** Ideally, standards lay the ground work for aligning a location’s layout and finish to fall within the corporate standard and provide opportunities for local variation. Good design is the magic that enables every location to look and feel like part of the brand, while change management is the glue that holds the process together. In a change management session, goals and needs are stated and recorded. The project team works together to achieve as much overlap as possible. Having a common understanding of the overriding corporate goals and objectives between all parties is a critical feature of successful change management.



Success in this sphere is defined as “the art of what’s possible.” A successful project is possible when backed by agreed-upon standards and principles, and embraced by the local structure, needs, and politics. The standards become, therefore, an essential starting point that must then be balanced with the local needs through change management, a thoughtful and comprehensive design strategy, budget, time, etc. Knowing the rationale behind design

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decisions, and the relationships between the project goals and corporate standards, helps those tasked with working in the space with understanding the need to conform. As a result, the local organization and occupants are much more likely to be fully satisfied with their space.

This balancing act was demonstrated when, on a recent Hixson project, a corporate standard of smaller private offices located in the building interior was met with local resistance accustomed to spacious offices with the best views. Several iterations of the test fit were required to reset the private office sizes to current standards. The preferred window views were reallocated to the open office area while management group were repositioned to a new window view facing the less desirable parking lot.

In the end, it is important to remember that both corporate and local team members must understand that perfect cannot be the enemy of good, and that modifications of the standards can improve the space. When corporate and local stakeholders find the commonality between their goals, all can achieve success.

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