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In books, articles, journals and news stories, audiences hear about a “flat world”. In some instances, I can agree and attest that this is true. Across the globe, information has become easier to grab a hold of and spread. Jobs are being outsourced and insourced like never before. Businesses are expanding internationally and quickly. There is a definite boom happening around the world. That those paying attention to can recognize and foster.

We talked, on many occasions, in class about the differences in how businesses operate between countries and continents. We discussed cultural faux pas and awareness of situations and circumstances. All of which play crucial roles in globalization, which I will touch on in a minute. One topic we did not discuss was the actual look of businesses. I’m not talking about their hierarchies or products. I am literally going to discuss the look of the interiors within these businesses.

From the outside, walking up to any store or company, my opinion holds that they look similar to that of American companies. The architecture reflects the time period and place it was built in, but little else differs. Bright lights signify the business name with a recognizable logo and sliding doors. Yet the second you step foot into a European company, a world of differences jumps out at you.

If you’re reading this, I would assume that you’ve probably set foot in P&G or another US Fortune 500. Imagine what you see when you first step in. Marble, elaborate fountains, conference rooms of grey and blue are what welcome you. Now bring yourself back to our study abroad. Tell me, what do you see?

Colors. Everywhere you turn, in every room you enter. Unilever, Rosyblue and UCL. What a complete contrast compared to the offices of the states. Bold. Definition. Style. That’s the look of European businesses. The moment I walked into these places, it was apparent that business took on a whole new meaning.

While suits and slacks are fine for our conservative powers, the brand manager of Lipton Iced Tea was rocking jeans to work. While cubicles and computer screens line U.S. offices, glass walls and paintings cover European interiors. Even the stores we ventured in during our shopping adventures. The walls were bright, the workers were welcoming, and the products were inspiring.

Now, I am in no way bashing the companies of the US. I hope to, one day, own many myself. But this contrast was so defined in my mind. It made me stop to think about our lifestyles as a whole. Bringing the topic back to globalization, we must take a look at the rate of globalization and some of the changes we are going to experience.

There is no way, no matter how advanced technology gets, that European employees and business owners will adapt to the American way of life. We settle for offices of bland colors and tight sharp suits. We settle for long workdays with little breaks. But Europeans, they want to go home to their families, to make the separation between business and home, to bring color to their offices, and to enjoy their time no matter if they’re busy or bored.

We sit in cubicles and stare at screens. Their desks float in the middle of rooms lit by the sun. What I am trying to get at here is that the interior designs and plans of businesses tell a much deeper story about business culture than what we have been told. The reflection and correlation between the two is so apparent, that I’m surprised no one has ever mentioned it.

In movies and books, authors laugh about the difference between lifestyles of Americans and Europeans. They go home for lunch in the middle of the day; they don’t work overtime, on holidays, or during the weekends. These are all benefits that many American businessmen and women do not get to see. Cooped up in offices behind stacks of papers, overtime is something that is rarely paid for anymore. But these books, these movies, they never touch on the fact that this has filtered in to almost every facet of the businesses.

There is so much more that I would like to study now that I’ve made this connection. The interiors are completely different, but what else? The break rooms (we were offered free coffee at Unilever), the pay rates, the hierarchies, the benefits: where else do we see these lifestyle and cultural contrasts influence our so-called “flat world”?