

Culture systems, systems culture

 By [Elouise Kelly](#)

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It's one thing having the people and the resources to create culturally relevant work, but to be really effective, agencies must build the systems to support them.



Elouise Kelly, managing director at Ogilvy Johannesburg.

Looking back on South African advertising, one could argue that it's been fairly elusive. It is however, one of the magic ingredients of modern marketing. As marketers, we're almost unanimous about that. But at the same time, the real challenge is how to build this capacity into the systems of your organisation.

As brands strive to connect with the mainstream black market, there has to be a more thorough approach than only transforming our teams. By and large, teams are transformed right across the industry. The real work of unlocking the cultural understanding of those teams requires a systematic approach.



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Structures have to be built that on the one side, ensure that your team members are enabled and encouraged to contribute their unique personal abilities, and on the other side, that clients can access a full suite of capabilities and services and

select what they require efficiently.

At Ogilvy, we have applied this approach through what we call the Ogilvy OS, the Operating System, which simplifies our value proposition as a creative network, making our offerings easier to understand and access for our clients.

At the same time, it streamlines and lubricates the process of doing the work for our people. It gives great ideas an outlet. There are few things more unfortunate than a great idea unexpressed. Hence the need for effective frameworks to enable creativity. This is the perfect platform for culturally relevant ideas.



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In the South African context, the most popular demographics for many marketers are the youth market, and the black middle class. To resonate with these markets, one must engage people who understand those markets because they are part of them, but then also to have the set-up to authentically leverage that understanding.

“ This is how you align brand and agency, and build client collaborations, complete with internal and external research filters that ensure optimal quality and relevance, and keep the work honest. This honest, authentic element is a key component of cultural relevance. Without methods to research and confirm how ideas and approaches will resonate, cultural relevance can be relegated to a subjective opinion. ”

A fantastic example of how these elements combine to create relevant work, is the VW T-Cross “PlayByYourRules” campaign, featuring a TVC that captures the reality of family pressure in black extended families, but with just the right light-hearted tone:

The ad drips with accurate cultural insights into the life of the young black consumer, with the expectations from the family to conform to a certain way of living life. The young black couple try to escape in their T-Cross, to 'Play By Their Own Rules'.

The ad works, but without the right cultural insights, and the structures to ensure they are delivered with precision and authenticity, this would be a socio-political minefield.



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Another example of a fundamentally relevant piece of work is the Cannes Grand Prix-winning "[Immunity Charm](#)" campaign by McCann and the Afghanistan Health Ministry.

Instead of using easily lost paper hospital records to track a child's immunisation history, the campaign employed the existing tradition of talismanic bracelets meant to keep evil spirits away from children.

This is the very definition of cultural relevance, and 1,000 children were enrolled in the programme on the day of its launch.

These examples illustrate the effectiveness of embedding culture right at the centre of a piece of communication. But it can only work in the right space. It's about having the people at the agency. But then supporting them through your systems.

Culture thrives, and expresses itself authentically, in a supportive, enabling environment. It is this way in society, and so it is too, in marketing communications.

ABOUT ELOUISE KELLY

Prior to joining Ogilvy South Africa in April 2018, Eloise Kelly worked at some of the most prominent companies locally and abroad. As a Branding, Communication and Business Strategist, she revamped content for channels, launched brands, handled budgets of up R250 million, led various teams and successfully increased companies bottom-line in accordance with their objectives, including TopTV, MTV Networks Africa (Viacom), MTN Irancell, M-Net and brands within the SABC stable.

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