

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATIONS

A transparent approach to pathways and promotion

Champions of Change Architecture Group

2023

The Champions of Change Architecture Group acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the many Countries on which we live and work and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We recognise that these lands were never ceded. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and to Elders past and present.

We gladly accept the invitation extended in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk together in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

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We recognise women in all their diversity

We recognise that efforts to advance gender equality have not lifted all women equally. By highlighting the specific demographics of people who experience exclusion, we increase the issue's visibility and boost understanding of how exclusion is experienced within organisations and in society more generally.

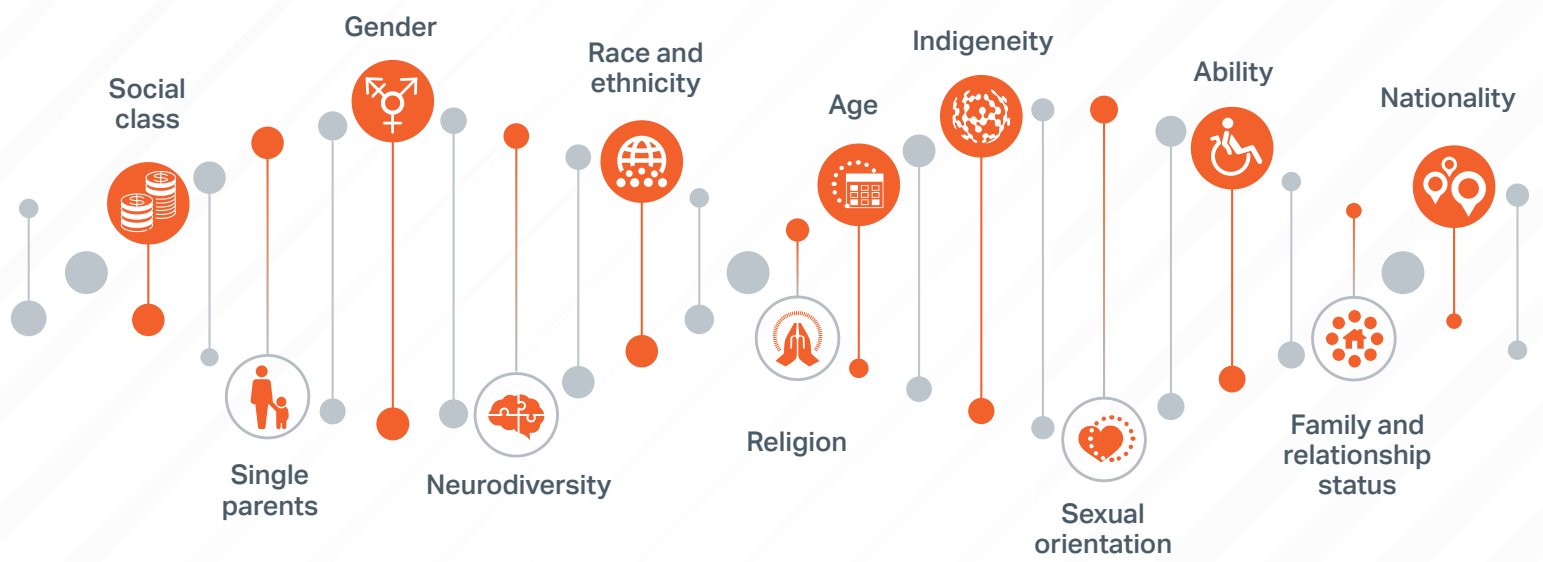
Throughout this document, the terms **women, women in all their diversity, women experiencing intersecting inequalities and diverse people** are used to improve readability. Women includes both cis and trans women.

When referring to **women experiencing intersecting inequalities**, means the structural inequalities and multiple, intersecting and compounding barriers to inclusion and progression faced by:

- **women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds**
- **First Nations women**
- **ethnically and/or racially marginalised women**
- **single parents**
- **women with disability**
- **neurodivergent women**
- **LGBTIQ+ women.**

When referring to **diverse people**, this means the wealth and variety of people who broadly reflect the diversity of our population.

Inclusive gender equality recognises that diversity, equity and inclusion strategies must consider and engage all genders in global efforts to achieve gender equality, with a particular focus on elevating and advancing currently under-represented and marginalised groups. At its core, the intent is to create respectful, safe and inclusive cultures of belonging for all.



The Champions of Change Coalition is committed to tackling barriers for underrepresented groups and taking action that leads to a more equitable and diverse workplace.

This toolkit provides a framework to assist architectural practices that would like to adopt a career development strategy for their staff, beyond the annual review process.

Foreword

We have heard from individuals and management that the typical catch up or annual performance review serves neither party well – it's not fit for purpose, with the purpose being feedback for growth and development opportunities.

We understand development focused conversations play a crucial role in fostering gender equality within the workplace. These discussions are not only instrumental in professional development but also in promoting accountability, a crucial aspect in achieving gender equality.

This toolkit examines how regular development-focused conversations between management and individuals can enrich a team member's purpose, ownership, connection and career pathway in a practice, more so than annual reviews.

The process presented in this document emphasises forward-looking, positive collaboration – bringing together practice leaders and team members for regular check-ins throughout the year. These discussions aim to foster professional development and accountability through a set of meaningful, constructive conversations and tangible actions.

This document provides practices with a framework including implementation guidance and case studies. This work complements earlier toolkits produced by the Champions of Change Architects Group - Role Descriptions & Career Planning and Progression.

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"We need greater transparency surrounding career progression."

"Twelve months between reviews is too long, things are often lost or forgotten."

"Career planning is important."

"We need to have honest, constructive conversations about strengths and attributes to develop."

Champions of Change Architecture, Listening and Learning Sessions (2021)

What have we heard?

Individuals want:

1. Real-time feedback to allow them to 'auto-correct' and learn continuously.
2. To understand how to develop and progress, what skills and experience they need.
3. Clarity on their career prospects and what development opportunities are available in the practice today and in the future.
4. Equitable and transparent learning and development opportunities.
5. Opportunities to align individual skills and aspirations with the vision and strategy of the practice.

What have we learnt?

Regular development check-ins can:

1. Create a fair and inclusive structure for career development conversations, reducing risk of favoritism and bias.
2. Establish connection and trust, and enable meaningful, authentic development conversations.
3. Facilitate real-time growth, learning, and mentoring opportunities, supporting a culture of continuous performance feedback.
4. Increase retention by reinforcing the value team members bring and understanding their career goals.
5. Create alignment between individual development and the practice's strategic vision.
6. Enable valuable 'upward' feedback opportunities to practice leaders.

We have suggested a step by step process to successfully introduce development conversations to your practice. The actual discussions could be as simple as a walk around the block or a more formal discussion - the idea is that they are regular.

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"Frequent strengths-based conversations are the most effective and efficient way to accelerate performance. Yearly conversations are too infrequent to drive change."

MIT Westerman, G. and Lundberg, A. (2023)

STEP 01

Set up a program of regular check-ins between leadership and team members

- All parties to commit to quality and dedicated time.
- Find a place conducive to a relaxed and open conversation.

STEP 02

Educate management and leadership to

- Listen actively to team members' goals and aspirations.
- Invest time in the individual, and the career development process.
- Be able to communicate openly and honestly with team members on specific strengths, weaknesses and associated actions for greater clarity around individual growth and career progression.

STEP 03

Create a template to guide discussion

- Depending on the size of the practice, existing processes and management capability, the template may be simple. Refer to Section 4.0 for PDP template examples.
- It may include some basic questions ("where am I?", "where do I want to be?", "how do I get there?") that can be recorded and tracked.

STEP 04

Leaders work with team members to

- Identify their goals, strengths, skills gaps.
- Have clarity on where they want to progress.
- Identify any barriers to achieving their development goals.
- Be accountable to goals that are set.
- Understand expectations and seek alignment with the practice's values and strategic goals.

STEP 05**Make opportunities and career pathways visible**

- Leadership needs to be transparent with opportunities for growth and ensure gender balance in those opportunities.
- Team members can't explore growth opportunities that they can't see.

STEP 06**Provide opportunities to learn and practice**

- While team members may have visibility into career growth, they need to be given the opportunities to learn the skills and competencies required in a progressed role. This means training, coaching, mentoring. A practice must foster psychological safety and trust and allow the team member to be curious, to question, to fail and learn from mistakes and gain expertise in doing so.

STEP 07**Deliver rich feedback and coaching**

- Providing honest, constructive feedback, in real-time, is essential if learning is to occur as part of career development.

STEP 08**Counter bias**

- Training for management in areas of self-awareness and unconscious bias.
- Offer continual feedback and opportunities for one-on-one discussion to counter recency bias.
- Seek depth and breadth of feedback.
- Invest in preparation so the process is valuable to all parties.
- Ensure conversations between management and individuals are enhanced with diversity of thought, feedback and experience.
- Support communication training for individuals and management to have the confidence to communicate with authenticity and clarity.
- Provide review templates to ensure consistency and fairness of the process.
- Ensure psychological safety in the workplace for open, honest communication.

A Personal Development Plan (PDP) is an actionable document that is collaboratively developed between management and a team member. It serves as a guide for the team member's personal development. No two reviews or conversations will be the same and individual goals will need to be aligned with practice goals and needs.

The PDP is created through ongoing and collaborative discussions. It is a personalised and people-centred approach that is increasingly essential for staff retention and recruitment, making it an integral part of an organisation's employee value proposition.

A PDP is:

- Personalised to the individual – career stage, goal specific.
- Regularly updated via regular conversations/feedback.
- Collaborative document between management + individuals.
- Aligned to practice values and strategic objectives.
- Contains achievable goals.

A PDP is NOT:

- An annual performance review.
- A set & forget document.
- Imposed by top down directives.
- The sole responsibility of the team member.
- A one-size fits all.

Practices are at different stages of a pilot phase to test the effectiveness of Personal Development Plans (PDP).

These case studies introducing a PDP to their practice provide a status update on the pilot phase, participant feedback, insights, and challenges, which are particular to the practice's culture, size and personnel.

Overview

The introduction of the PDP increased engagement and involvement in the studio culture, fostering continuous learning and growth and raising awareness of individuals' roles within the team. Participants willingly took on extra tasks, showcasing their commitment to growth.

Participant Feedback

Participants found the questions in the PDP valuable, prompting thoughtful answers with concrete examples. Incorporating measurable objectives and milestones encouraged individuals to set clear development targets, instilling accountability and purpose.

Reviewers faced challenges in ensuring commitment and engagement, requiring significant effort to motivate them. Maintaining their commitment throughout was challenging, partly due to time constraints from other responsibilities and operational deadlines.

Reviewers desired a simpler PDP, finding the process repetitive when discussing priorities and focus areas. They believed a streamlined approach would better capture their interests and goals.

Insights and Challenges

Talent Retention

With clear development plans and growth pathways, retaining talent becomes more manageable.

Clearly Communicated Performance Expectations

Senior leaders must work on guiding their teams towards optimal outcomes when performance expectations are communicated more frequently. Unclear performance expectations and infrequent feedback increase the likelihood of under-performance and stagnation.

Manual Inputs and Administration

With multiple, one on one discussions being held administration and monitoring of progress was challenging for Practice Management.

Key Takeaways

The PDP improved team communication by facilitating interaction, collaboration, and a stronger sense of belonging. It provided a platform for open and transparent communication, enabling effective sharing of thoughts, ideas, and concerns.

We believe it has encouraged reflection, identification of improvement areas, and nurturing of professional progress.

Participant Feedback

Career and Personal Responsibilities

Some individuals admitted they had not actively considered their career and professional development in recent years, relying on guidance from managers to inform what they should focus on.

Timeliness of Feedback

Reviewers acknowledged the new model would encourage more timely feedback, ensuring that individuals are aware of their performance and progress throughout the year. The yearly review process was deemed stressful and time-consuming. It often failed to address feedback and development in a timely and meaningful manner. The reviewers anticipated that the continuous feedback model would foster mutual accountability between reviewees and reviewers.

Insights and Challenges

Accessibility and Timing

Participants mentioned that although they can easily access studio management to discuss professional development, it is often hard to find the time, due to project-related tasks. They expressed the need for more regular touch points instead of an annual discussion. Having a scheduled time is good.

Key Takeaways

Participants were enthusiastic about greater continuous learning and development. They welcomed more regular catchups and feedback to track their progress effectively. They don't like waiting a year to receive feedback.

Overview

Bates Smart implemented the Role Descriptions Toolkit, which removes annual progress reviews and emphasises mentoring, peer feedback, and informal iterative sessions. As an extension of this framework, Bates Smart initiated a small pilot project in their Sydney Studio, involving several junior participants.

Participant Feedback

Feedback was positive from people using the PDPs. They appreciated tangible actions outlined in their plans, which provide clear steps for their career progression. The PDP has facilitated discussions with mentors and practice managers, enabling better alignment with their roles and tracking targets and goals.

Mentors and Practice Managers have also provided positive feedback. They acknowledge that the PDP harnesses the motivation and energy of junior team members, aligning their growth with business directives and creating a clear development path.

Insights and Challenges

Structuring Informal Reviews

Ensuring actioned and structured sessions for each team member proved challenging across the transition from formal to more iterative and informal reviews. This process required additional, or an adjustment in, Practice Management administration.

Integration into Career Planning Framework

The implementation of the Role Descriptions Toolkit is still in progress, and introducing PDPs at this stage would require additional layers to the process. There is potential for PDPs to become part of the mentoring program to facilitate more focused actionable discussions where required.

Reviewer Capacity

With a considerable workforce of over 300 individuals it would be challenging for each senior leader to conduct monthly or quarterly check-ins with all in addition to our current career planning framework. Expanding the pool of reviewers to include other individuals would be necessary to achieve this.

Participant Feedback

The Repetitive Process

Reviewers found the PDP repetitive, as they had to repeatedly emphasise their priorities and areas of focus. They felt that this redundancy took away from the effectiveness of the process and made it less engaging.

Desire for a Clear and Tailored Approach

Reviewers desired a simpler version of the PDP that could be tailored to their individual interests and needs. By having a more streamlined and customised approach, they believed it would be easier to maintain their commitment and engagement throughout the process.

Dedicated Time

In addition to simplification, the reviewers also expressed the need for more time outside of their day-to-day responsibilities to implement their PDP. They felt that dedicating time to their personal development would allow them to fully engage with the process and achieve meaningful outcomes. They desired a balance between their regular work responsibilities and the opportunity to focus on their growth and improvement.

Insights and Challenges

The reviewers faced several challenges regarding ensuring commitment and engagement in their work. Despite their roles as reviewers, they found it challenging to maintain high dedication and enthusiasm.

Time Constraints

One of the significant factors that contributed to this difficulty was the time constraints imposed by operational deadlines. These strict timelines made it hard for individuals to allocate sufficient time and effort to complete their Personal Development Plans (PDP). The reviewers felt pressured to meet their daily work requirements, leaving them with limited energy and motivation to focus on personal growth and development.

4.0

RESOURCES

Example PDP Simple

This is an example of a simple PDP, the below questions could be documented and recorded or just conversation starters for an informal catch up between leadership and team members.

Name:			
Creation Date: DD/MM/YY	Check-in 2: DD/MM/YY	Check-in 3: DD/MM/YY	Check-in 4: DD/MM/YY
Check-in 1: DD/MM/YY			
<p>What are your short term goals?</p> <p>Specific, well-defined, clear, attainable.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 			
<p>What are your long term goals?</p> <p>Meaningful, measurable, motivating.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 			
<p>How will you achieve these goals?</p> <p>Set out actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 			
<p>How can you track and measure these goals?</p> <p>Make actions measurable and time based. How will you decide when you have achieved this goal? When will you complete it by?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 			
<p>What can the Practice do to support you in achieving your goals?</p> <p>Outline with leadership the responsibilities of the Practice</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 			

Example PDP Competencies Based

This Personal Development Plan was developed based on an existing competencies matrix aligning with the Champion of Change Architecture Group Role Descriptions Tool Kit released in 2020.

Team Member *[Insert name]*
Goal Summary *[Insert goal summary]*
Example:
 Advance Technical Construction Standards
 Direct Exposure to clients/builders/council/consultants
 Attend Construction Sites

Competencies	Skills	Career development tasks	Quarterly actions filled out by individual									
			Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	
Contribution To Studio <i>Our collective contributions affect engagement, business performance and studio culture.</i>	Thought Leadership	1										
	Formal practice development and enhancement	2										
	Informal knowledge sharing	3										
	Contributes to a positive studio culture	4										
Leadership and Mentoring <i>The ability to lead yourself and others - role model, support and develop the careers of others.</i>	Positive Leadership	1										
	External Relationships	2										
	Resilience and Flexibility	3										
	Mentoring	4										
Design Thinking and Strategy <i>Design thinking is important in all phases of the project</i>	Design Strategy	1										
	Creativity and Innovation	2										
	Ability to develop and evolve design ideas	3										
	Solutions and quality focussed	4										
Professional skills <i>Acting in a professional and respectful manner, representing the culture and values of Bates Smart.</i>	Strong work ethic	1										
	Respect and inclusivity	2										
	Cross discipline collaboration	3										
	Ability to problem solve	4										
Knowledge and Technical Design <i>The development of knowledge and technical design skills is an evolution that happens throughout your career, not all staff will develop all of these skills</i>	Construction and material knowledge	1										
	Regulatory and statutory knowledge	2										
	Accurate and thorough documentation	3										
	Specialist in a particular field	4										
Communication <i>Effective communication is the ability to listen, understand, interpret and clearly convey a message</i>	Verbal communication	1										
	Written communication	2										
	Visual communication	3										
	Actively listens	4										
Project Management and Commercial Acumen <i>The ability to understand how the project is run are skills developed at every level</i>	Project brief scope and deliverables	1										
	Project finance	2										
	Time management	3										
	Team management	4										
Organisation Responsibilities	1. Support professional growth by review of PDP every 3 months											

Champions of Change - Role Descriptions Toolkit

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Design Inc

Richard Does
Tara Keast

The logo for DesignInc, featuring the word "DesignInc" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

COX

Margot McGinness

The logo for COX, featuring the letters "COX" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with a stylized 'X'.

DKO

David Randerson
Gemma MacDonald

The logo for DKO, featuring the letters "DKO" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

Grimshaw

Thihoa Gill

The logo for GRIMSHAW, featuring the word "GRIMSHAW" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Bates Smart

Linda Mason

The logo for BATESSMART, featuring the word "BATESSMART" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with a trademark symbol.

