Time & Money

A Guide to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country and recognise their continuing connections to land, waters and community.

We recognise that their wisdom, culture, and stewardship have sustained the wellbeing of this place for millennia. We pay deep respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to the Indigenous people who are part of the architectural community.

Time & Money: A Guide to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

The Wellbeing of Architects: Culture, Identity + Practice

Support

If this guide raises issues for you, we encourage you to seek support:

Your GP, who may be able to refer you to other services

Lifeline: 13 14 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Mental Health Australia

Research findings

This guide is an outcome of *The Wellbeing of Architects* research project (2020–2024), a groundbreaking study into the wellbeing of Australian architectural practitioners and students.

A key finding is that the overall personal wellbeing of practitioners was notably lower than the general Australian population (and decreasing). This low level of wellbeing was linked with conditions, practices and norms in the architectural workplace.

The research also showed that better personal wellbeing was most strongly associated with higher levels of career satisfaction, career support, relatedness to others, career optimism, and career balance.

Key publications

Tracey Shea, Brian Cooper, Maryam Gusheh, Byron Kinnaird, Naomi Stead, Kirsten Orr, Liz Battiston, Julie Wolfram Cox, *The Wellbeing of Architects: 2021 Practitioner Survey, Primary Report*, (Australia: Monash University, 2022).

Byron Kinnaird, Liz Battiston, Naomi Stead, Maryam Gusheh, Jonathan Robberts, Tracey Shea, Brian Cooper, Kirsten Orr, Julie Wolfram Cox, *The Wellbeing of Architects: Report on Focus Groups with Practitioners*, (Australia: Monash University, 2023).

Tracey Shea, Brian Cooper, Byron Kinnaird, Naomi Stead, Julie Wolfram Cox, Maryam Gusheh, Kirsten Orr, *The Wellbeing of Architects: 2023 Practitioner Survey* (Australia: Monash University, 2024).

Factors affecting wellbeing:

Industry pressures Costs of construction, availability of resources, negotiation and levels of fees, pressured timelines and unrealistic expectations of clients and contractors are all identified as having negative impacts on wellbeing.

Remuneration Many practitioners consider remuneration to be out of step with the nature of their work and responsibilities. In 2021, 43% of practitioners surveyed were dissatisfied with remuneration. Satisfaction increased with age and seniority.

Procurement A range of procurement practices are strongly associated with negative impacts on wellbeing. These include problematic tendering processes, a lack of longevity or security in projects, and the effects of value management.

Overtime Many architectural practitioners regularly work more hours than they are contracted to perform. In our 2021 survey, 37% of practitioners reported that their actual working hours exceeded 45 hours per week, including 8% who said they worked more than 55 hours on a weekly basis.

Resources Inadequate resourcing of projects is a significant contributing factor to poor wellbeing. Where fees are insufficient, practitioners have identified the flow-on effect of long-hours, unpaid labour, financial losses, exploitation of younger workers, and stress and anxiety.

Role overload This is a measure of survey respondents' perceptions of the amount of work they do and the pace at which they do it. It was recorded at statistically high levels in both our 2021 and 2023 surveys.

Burnout Respondents reported statistically high levels of work-related burnout.

Exhaustion Respondents who reported exhaustion also had perceptions of poor career balance, lower satisfaction of basic psychological needs (relatedness, competence, autonomy) and a perceived lack of organisational support.

Time & Money

1. What is the issue?
2. Why does it matter?
3. What can we do?

Overview

Skilful business management – with appropriate fee setting, sufficient resourcing and reasonable timeline expectations – help create workplace cultures in which people thrive. The knock-on effects of poor business practice and low fees include long hours, unrealistic deadlines and (often unpaid) overtime. It also translates to low pay, which impacts employees' motivation and wellbeing; and unprofitable businesses, with enormous financial risk and pressure on principals and managers.

This guide recognises the interconnection between good business practice, profitability and staff wellbeing. It outlines ways to improve general wellbeing in practice, with suggestions for employers on resource allocation, fee setting, time management, upskilling and support. It offers individuals ideas on how to improve their wellbeing in the workplace, with useful advice on communication, training and prioritising life balance. It also recommends how professional organisations can assist in addressing these issues.

It's important to note that this guide is an overview only, with prompts for thought and ideas for consideration.

It is not a substitute for professional or legal advice. Individuals and practices should seek advice regarding particular situations from their legal, insurance, HR or other business adviser. Like the other guides in this series, this does not offer medical opinion, diagnosis or advice. Individuals should consult their health professional as appropriate.

1. What is the issue?

The construction industry has a boom or bust cycle, with a constantly changing work pipeline that requires agility, experience and excellent time and resource allocation and management. Managing projects, staffing and resources well is a constant challenge that requires skill and vigilance. Rounds of redundancies are not uncommon, which can be distressing and impact culture and wellbeing across the practice. Fierce competition for projects and a lack of understanding of architecture's real value mean that fees are often extremely low. At the same time, liabilities and compliance costs are increasing and contracts frequently shift risk onto practices.

The connection is clear between fees and a practice's capacity to pay its workforce appropriately. Attempting to win projects by keeping fees low inevitably leads to a culture of excessive working hours to meet unrealistic deadlines, of unpaid overtime, financial losses, and exploitation of younger workers. Long hours cultures can increase stress levels and contribute to mental health problems, such as burnout, anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Just as these workplace issues can impact the overall wellbeing of staff, so too can poor wellbeing impact individual performance, resilience, creativity, motivation and productivity. It's a cycle that is both damaging and unsustainable for individuals, practices and the wider profession.

"The workloads are extreme. There is an expectation of unpaid overtime. There is a lack of valuing the contributions of graduate and junior architects, or non-architectural staff."

— Business development manager, 6–10 yrs experience, SA, 2021

Time management and sustainable hours

Time management is a challenge for many practices. While this can be a competence issue, it should be acknowledged that the business of architecture can be particularly challenging due to the complexity of services and procurement models, variability of clients and project types and the differing values between staff about when design iteration should stop (when is good enough?).

The concepts of critique, iteration, incremental improvement and refinement are highly valued in the professional culture of practice. The old idea that a design is never finished and that workers must continue striving for a better outcome sits at the base of many time management problems. While some practices value financial and practice management skills and prioritise business training through third-party courses and further tertiary education, poor business practice is still common in some parts of the industry.

Long hours

Architecture's long hours culture can be extremely demanding and stressful and, at times, counterproductive. In the short term, working long hours might seem to benefit an employee's career progress and job satisfaction, but this is not sustainable in the long term. When life balance issues become a permanent fixture in a person's life, they can significantly impact overall physical and/or mental wellbeing.

See also *Parlour Guide: Long Hours*.

Fees

Significant negative impacts on wellbeing can arise from external sources, and to an extent are tied to the complex structural conditions in a highly competitive industry. Client expectations for low fees are a constant challenge that requires meticulous assessment of contracts, briefing, scope and negotiation. In small practice, self-doubt and lack of confidence can also have detrimental impacts on fee proposals. Charging unreasonably low fees in an attempt to win projects can imply to clients, contractors and employers that challenging and time-consuming tasks are quickly completed, undermining the perceived value of architectural work and further entrenching expectations of low fees.

Under-quoting and fee-cutting are an ever-present problem, often leading to low salaries and excessive workload. The underfunding of staff can lower morale, increase staff turnover, and significantly impact the quality of work produced. Underpayment of workers and habitual unpaid overtime can result in burnout, serious mental wellbeing issues and reduced productivity and engagement. It can also exacerbate personal financial struggles. The appropriate balance between fee setting and the capacity to pay staff appropriately is essential to the long-term health of any practice and its employees.

"We as an entire profession need to stop the 'race to the bottom' with fee cutting and instead as an entire profession, charge appropriate fees for the work that we do, so that we can properly pay staff to do good work, in reasonable time frames, without undue stress, pressure and cutting of corners."

— Director/principal, NSW, 2021

Allocation of resources

Allocating and managing resources effectively are key to the health of a practice and the wellbeing of staff. But this relies on adequate fees, skilled management and effective systems. A lack of resource management systems can be a slippery slope for practice, contributing to out-of-control projects and all the attendant negative impacts on wellbeing.

Allocating resources inappropriately can lead to increased workloads, longer working hours and potential burnout and fatigue for employees. Allocating resources inefficiently can result in missed opportunities, project delays and financial losses for a practice, creating a sense of uncertainty and instability for employees. Allocating resources unfairly can result in resentment and disengagement among employees, negatively impacting morale and motivation. All have serious knock-on effects.

Procurement practices

There are tensions between traditional architectural processes of documentation and project delivery and some current and evolving procurement practices. Many practices find it difficult to navigate this shifting landscape, which can lead to repeated and additional work, additional stress, and decreased wellbeing.

Unreasonable procurement practices by governments and private clients have direct negative impacts on the wellbeing of principals, managers and project teams. These procurement practices can include problematic tendering processes; aggressive negotiation and project management strategies; a lack of longevity, security and control in novated projects; and the flow-on effects of cost-cutting measures. These factors can cause delays and disruption, creating increased stress, frustration and disillusionment for all in the workplace.

See also *Risk & Responsibility: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

2. Why does it matter?

Low fees and poor business practices by some reflect badly on the profession as a whole, reducing regard and reputation, thereby constraining opportunity for all. Short-term survival strategies by individual practices can accumulate to create long-term problems for the wider profession.

Inadequate time and money can jeopardise financial security for individuals and businesses, creating stress, anxiety and burnout. Practices struggle to survive, and good, talented people leave the profession for careers in other sectors. Better economic security is one of the key reasons architects leave the profession, while life balance is another. Attrition is a major challenge for the profession that needs to be addressed.

Impact on projects and practice

Time and financial management can significantly impact the wellbeing of architectural practitioners – for better or worse. The negative impact of poor mental health and wellbeing on a practice can be significant, often leading to a loss of energy, creativity and productivity. Significant project delays, budget overruns and resource management pressure are the potential outcomes. Health and wellbeing concerns can lead to increased staff absences, which inevitably have impacts on project teams, with damaging flow-on effects of stress and additional pressure on managers and other team members.

According to Safework Australia, in 2020–21 the most common type of mental health claim was related to anxiety and stress, accounting for 36% of claims. These claims are becoming increasingly prevalent and are one of the most expensive types of workplace injury, often resulting in longer periods of absence from work, averaging 30.7 weeks per claim.

Quality of work

An environment of overwork, exhaustion, burnout and stress isn't conducive to creativity, innovation and quality. Design can be compromised when projects are under-resourced, and employees are exhausted and anxious. Stress can negatively impact people's ability to think clearly, make sound judgments and problem-solve. It's also difficult to find ideas and inspiration for projects when locked in an office 12 hours a day.

Life balance

A long-hours culture can significantly impact an individual's private life and health, with relationships, friendships, external pursuits, hobbies and exercise compromised. When architecture practice does not allow adequate time or flexibility for family or children, women are disproportionately affected. Increasingly, this affects all parents and others with caring responsibilities. Having time to engage fully with the world outside architecture is valuable for individuals, but is also extremely beneficial for the work they do in practice.

Burnout

Burnout is not simply struggling to cope during stressful periods that require long hours. Burnout is different from stress in that it manifests as emotional exhaustion, loss of energy, disinterest in work, and reduced job satisfaction. Unfortunately, people may not realise they are experiencing burnout, so they don't take the necessary steps to rest, recover and look after themselves. Burnout can result in an extended leave of absence, impacting on projects, clients and everyone in practice.

Financial security

Wellbeing issues can impact an individual's ability to work and remain employed, progress in their career, and take full advantage of their education and training. In the worst cases, it can financially limit their ability to support themselves and others in the short and long term.

"I feel like I'm post-passion. Passion doesn't do it any more for me. It's not enough. You have to get paid."

— Senior team member in government, 11–20 yrs experience, 2022

3. What can we do?

Sound business acumen and financial management skills play a pivotal role in building a successful sustainable, thriving architecture practice. Skilful, strategic business management reduces the stresses of financial precarity and helps to create a more positive workplace culture, with increased energy, enthusiasm and creativity in the practice. Reducing time and money pressures means that practices are in a better position to avoid disruptive redundancies, improve job security and satisfaction, and pay their people well. Reducing stress across the practice can lead to happier, more focused and motivated staff, more positive creative energy, increased innovation and productivity, and a great practice culture.

Everyone has a part to play in making positive change, whether it be directors and managers, employees and sole practitioners or professional organisations. Working together to improve business systems and practices, building transparency and awareness around fees, hours and time management, and prioritising the wellbeing of all in practice are key first steps.

— Practices
— Individuals
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Practices

Many practices are profitable businesses, doing good work while prioritising efficient business processes, realistic fees and reasonable working hours.

So, what can others learn from these exemplars? What improvements can be made within businesses to prioritise the wellbeing of all?

Set realistic fees

Securing realistic fees can reduce time and financial pressures, enable better staff remuneration and improve life balance for everyone in practice. There is a clear connection between negotiating adequate fees and successfully communicating the value of architectural services.

✳ Ensure you understand the full cost of providing appropriate levels of service. Develop fee proposals accordingly to ensure employees have adequate hours to complete tasks to a high standard.

✳ Use resource management or planning software to benchmark and pre-plan projects. This allows the business to track fees, time and the allocation of resources required over time.

✳ Make sure that you are paid for the work you do – all of it. **Do not work for free!** It undermines your practice, and everyone else's as well.

✳ Notify clients when you are working out of scope. Get employees to record hours separately so that if this becomes a regular issue, a variation in fees can be discussed and substantiated.

"With decent fees, people could be more fairly remunerated and this would also allow for more staff, reducing pressure on individuals, and even more so, allow money for training, better tech, better facilities. We all want better for our staff and ourselves."

— Director in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

✳ Discuss fees and fee-setting processes with everyone in the practice. This helps create understanding around priorities, resourcing and self-management. Ensure that the team has access to the fee agreement, so they are clear on the scope and what services you have been engaged to provide.

✳ Be selective about clients and don't be afraid to say no. It's often preferable to walk away from a low-fee proposition than allow an under-resourced project to damage the financial security of a practice and the enthusiasm and morale of its employees.

Monitor fee performance

Prioritise open communication between team members, managers and clients about fees and fee performance, helping to build trust and transparency between everyone.

✳ Track, critically analyse and review fee performance on a project-by-project basis.

✳ Create trust, rigour and confidence for all by being open about fees, expenses and profitability. Remove the stress and distrust of having some who "know the numbers" and some who don't.

See also *Trust & Transparency: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

"Architecture is a business, it needs fees and cash flow to survive. The health of the people is strongly influenced by the financial health of the business."

— Director in government, over 30 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Provide exemplars of previous work

Exemplars are useful to help teams understand, plan for and visualise the work standard and effort required. This is particularly important for projects with many stages and deliverables, and helps employees to manage their time well and not 'over-deliver' on the required work.

✳ Provide a variety of exemplars of completed projects that show a package of deliverables and the level of detail required for that particular stage or type of project (from your practice or others).

✳ Encourage regular open communication about expectations, so everyone knows what level of detail is required and can check in as needed during the process.

Be vigilant about scope creep

Scope creep is a common challenge for architects at every scale, from sole practitioners to large practice. It can have serious repercussions for the profitability of projects, the impact on workload and the wellbeing of all in practice. Don't let ambiguity, awkwardness, or poorly managed expectations derail the financial viability of your practice.

✳ Work closely with the client to define project goals, objectives and deliverables. A well-defined project scope minimises the likelihood of ambiguity and misunderstandings down the line.

✳ Develop a comprehensive project brief that outlines the specific requirements and expectations of the client. Ensure that everyone involved in the project understands the project scope, design intent and desired outcomes.

✳ Draft detailed contracts that clearly define the scope of work, responsibilities and deliverables. Explicitly outline what is included in the contracted architectural services and what falls outside the scope, along with processes for managing and costing additional scope.

✳ Clearly define the process for handling changes to the scope, including how changes will be documented, evaluated, approved and communicated to everyone involved in the project.

✳ Pair increased scope with increased fees. Ensure all scope creep is paid for.

✳ Document all changes to the scope. Clearly record the reasons for changes, the impact on the project timeline and budget, and any adjustments to the contractual agreement. This documentation may help if dispute resolution if needed.

✳ Make sure you maintain open and regular communication with the client. Keep them informed about progress, potential challenges, and any proposed changes.

✳ Integrate risk management into your project management approach.

See also *Risk & Responsibility: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

Prioritise resourcing tools and training

Effective management of resources and time at every level of the practice is critical. Implement management training and tools across the practice. Start with all managers and then extend to the workforce generally. Remember, a 'good architect' doesn't automatically make a good manager – of people, time or money. Training can help make the step from architect to manager a successful one, which is less stressful for all.

✳ Ensure that you have staff specifically responsible for managing and monitoring fair and equitable resourcing across the practice. This helps ensure an appropriate standard of work can be achieved within reasonable hours.

✳ Monitor employee workloads. Regularly track employee tasks and understand the hours required to complete them realistically.

✳ Allocate adequate time and funding for training and development. Demonstrate that you value skilled project and time management by offering training on these skills, either practice-specific or by external providers – or both.

✳ Manage resources and time at every level of the practice. Industry surveys reveal that senior management and employees juggling multiple commitments remain the cohorts of most concern when it comes to mental wellbeing.

✳ Provide employees with advance notice on upcoming tasks and how many hours they should take to complete. Good communication is critical.

✳ Involve team members when making decisions about how tasks are to be delivered and actively listen to their ideas about how to manage the work and the likely timeframes required.

✳ Maintain regular resourcing meetings to specifically discuss staff resourcing, project deadlines and competing project pressures. Discuss what time was or wasn't used the previous week, so planning and potential time overruns can be identified sooner rather than later. Actively engage all staff in this process.

✳ Ensure that any overtime required is paid or compensated with time-off-in-lieu (by mutual agreement), as per the Overtime clause of the Architects Award.

✳ Regularly catch up with your team to discuss the minimum and maximum documents required for deadlines, and what is and isn't required. Be task oriented and remember that perfectionism isn't always desirable (sometimes 80% is good enough!)

✳ Practices commonly face fluctuations in cost and time pressures, which can intensify at the end of a project or specific deadlines. Prepare for shifting work demands – manage and resource them to maintain productivity and alleviate excessive demands on staff.

✳ Prioritise document reviews and sign-offs in a timely fashion, so people are not working late unnecessarily.

Use standardised, regular reporting

Undertake standardised reporting on time/resourcing allocations. This helps improve understanding of what is achievable for various tasks. Be vigilant about data collection and analysis in order to better manage future projects.

✳ Use resource allocation software to regularly audit the practice's performance in relation to time and budgets. Track projects and collect data to build knowledge about time taken, number of drawings required, costs and budgets and so on. Use this to continually improve and update projections about staff resources required for different types of projects.

✳ Advocate for truth in timesheeting. Senior managers need to encourage employees to record the actual hours worked to ensure future benchmarking and monitoring of hours is successful.

✳ Acknowledge and discuss why employees might be under-counting and recording their hours inaccurately – be open to understanding and addressing the varying reasons why staff might do this.

✳ At the completion of a project, critically review and assess whether that project work and/or client is one the practice wants to pursue in the future.

Model good behaviour

Encourage and support modelled behaviour from leadership/practice managers on appropriate hours and quality of life outside work, such as a 'sustainable hours policy'. Provide a platform to share it widely and regularly. Communicate frequently.

✱ Model good behaviour around hours, so early-career staff feel comfortable working sustainable hours and avoiding burnout.

✱ Provide leadership/practice management training to support specialisation and individual career paths (such as business management). This will help practitioners be more intentional and focused – and follow their particular strengths.

✱ Lead from the front – encourage and train senior staff to 'leave loudly', leaving work at a reasonable hour. This helps establish norms around acceptable behaviour, and uncouples successful leadership and long working hours.

✱ Ensure training and networking opportunities occur within the allocated working hours wherever possible.

✱ Review 'support' systems that may inadvertently encourage poor work and time management habits – for example, providing out-of-hours Friday drinks, meals when working late, or staff events, all of which tacitly encourage staying late at work. There is no one-size-fits-all approach around out-of-hours events, however. Some cohorts value the camaraderie of Friday night drinks. Others are unable to participate due to competing commitments. It's important to ensure that people who can't partake don't face career penalties as a result.

✱ Ensure that performance and promotion systems (both formal and informal) do not reward bad practice and are not dependent on long hours in the office. Regularly and deliberately review who has been promoted and why.

Assess and manage client expectations

When excessive time pressures occur frequently, a sense of perspective is important. Check and assess the reasons for the stress. Has the practice set up unhealthy expectations for the client? Is there chronic un-managed scope creep? Do firmer (and more realistic) boundaries need to be set by senior managers?

✱ Make sure there is clarity about what is expected from each stakeholder at the commencement of the project to prevent time-consuming and stressful conflicts later.

✱ Set boundaries for clients early on, so unhealthy last-minute requests do not become a habit. Communicate clearly about reasonable timeframes for task completion to ensure employees are not put under stress unnecessarily.

✱ Communicate and decide on a threshold time when clients cannot make any further changes. This will help your team stay on track and complete the tasks within the allocated timeframe. If changes need to be made beyond this, negotiate additional fees and time to complete the additional work.

"Balance deadlines and expectations. We need to be reasonable in what we can achieve and hire more people to assist with a better outcome. This will reduce the hours of being over-worked and under-paid."

— Graduate in private practice, 1–6 yrs experience, QLD, 2021

Individuals

Changing entrenched long hours cultures within practice may seem insurmountable. However, everyone can make changes in habits and behaviour, and build awareness of healthy, sustainable behaviours in practice.

Recognising the potential negative impacts on mental wellbeing is important, as is good communication, education and training, a focus on time management, and the personal prioritisation of life balance.

Understand the rules

The Australian National Employment Standards and the Architects Award offer clear guidance on what constitutes ordinary hours of work and rules related to overtime requests and compensation.

✳ Remember that any overtime required must be compensated at 150% the minimum hourly rate or with time-off-in-lieu (by mutual agreement), as per the Overtime clause of the Architects Award.

✳ Remember that under the National Employment Standards all employees have the right to refuse unreasonable additional hours.

✳ Remember that intentional wage theft has been criminalised at a national level in Australia, with new penalties applicable from 1 January 2025.

See *Rights and responsibilities* at the end of this guide for more information.

"As I have become older, I avoid late night working (where possible) and I don't work weekends. I also do not accept any work from project managers unless I have a direct contractual relationship with the client. I also do not discount fees and have ceased accepting deleterious contractual obligations."

—Director in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Undertake due diligence

A lot of attention has been directed to improving workplace conditions in architecture in the last decade. Many practices are loud and proud about workplace cultures and policies for flexibility, parental leave, part-time work and mental wellbeing. When seeking work consider the kind of people you want to work with, and identify fair employers.

✳ Research a practice through its website and social media. Read its mission statements, press releases and public statements. See what it values. Pay attention to how it communicates employee benefits and any initiatives related to employee wellbeing.

✳ Reach out to your networks. Ask friends and acquaintances about practice cultures and/or the work reputations of contractors and other consultants.

✳ Avoid practices who have a reputation for poor management and long hours.

✳ Don't be afraid to ask questions in interviews about practice culture, hours and any wellbeing initiatives.

✳ Trust your gut. Instinct can provide valuable insight. If something doesn't feel right or align with your values during an interview, consider if the practice is the right fit. Pay attention to warning signs or inconsistencies that may indicate potential issues with workplace culture.

"I genuinely believe the more that people understand about business, the better work they do, and they can speak back to the issues. I think it's healthy for people to understand what they're getting themselves into in terms of these business structures."

— Director in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, 2022

Manage your time and communicate!

Know yourself and how you work best. Individuals can develop routines and schedules to ensure they're getting the best out of themselves.

✳ Participate in the positive communication loop of reporting and managing time and resources.

✳ Work on your own personal development and track your productivity to better understand how long it takes you to perform a task.

✳ Set times to do focused work and avoid distractions and interruptions, including emails and social media. Make sure you regularly disconnect from technology.

✳ Create weekly plans to help prioritise and deliver required tasks, ensuring you embed time for regular breaks and lunch.

✳ Find ways to switch off from work when leaving the office. For example, at the end of each working day, write a list of where you got to and the required tasks for the next day.

✳ Recognise the benefits of work breaks, exercise, time in nature and social engagement for the quality of your work.

Speak up

Communicate regularly with managers, colleagues, consultants and team members about how work is progressing. Try to tackle issues as they arise. If you have concerns about unreasonable workloads and expected excessive hours, speak up early.

✳ Contribute to a collaborative and communicative culture within the project team. Communicate openly and encourage others to do so.

✳ If the allocated workload is unreasonable or you are having trouble managing an aspect of your work, speak up early to a trusted team leader or manager to sort things out.

✳ Remember that there is strength in numbers. Others in the practice may have similar workload issues. Speak to a trusted colleague or manager.

✳ Be respectful and understanding of the perspective of others – give them time to consider what has been raised and schedule in a follow-up meeting for further discussion.

✳ If your practice lacks mental health support, start a conversation about the benefits of third-party support.

"Many young people ... get into the habit of working overtime to compensate for taking a long time to do stuff. Often the overtime habit sets in, and once practitioners have gained more skills and experience, they still feel inclined to habitually overwork. You've really got to check yourself and your habits."

— Director in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, 2022

"I went back and started my MBA, and it was just incredible in terms of the level of self-reflection you're able to do over your own experience."

— Project leader in private practice, 6–10 yrs experience, 2022

Seek out education and training

Gaining experience and training about practice or business management can be beneficial for both productivity and wellbeing in the workplace – at any stage of your career. Start by identifying skills needed to improve time and resource management, and opportunities to enhance these. Remember, education and learning new skills is a continuous process.

✳ Participate in CPD courses on identified areas of concern: workplace wellbeing practices, practice management, business management, leadership.

✳ Attend workshops, seminars or webinars that focus on time and fee management. Explore resources outside the profession.

✳ Seek guidance from mentors, colleagues or other professionals who excel in time and money management.

✳ Regularly reflect on your skill sets and what could be improved, adjusting education and training based on these observations and experiences.

Manage expectations

Setting personal boundaries around work availability and sticking to them can be challenging, but it's vital for life balance and personal wellbeing.

✳ Prioritise dedicated time for focused work. Be clear about time periods when you are not to be disturbed, but also provide a window when colleagues and staff can contact you.

✳ Communicate clearly to clients and contractors about your availability, and when you can and cannot be contacted.

✳ When asked to work late, attend meetings or take on extra tasks outside work hours, consider their importance and if they can wait until the morning.

✳ If you work flexibly and outside standard working hours, ensure that your colleagues are aware of this. Be clear that they are not expected to respond after hours. Consider using scheduled emails and correspondence if working late.

✳ Focus on switching off after hours. Turn off notifications and enable 'do not disturb' on work devices.

✳ Not being available all the time can be beneficial to your team members – it allows early-career staff the opportunity to step up. It is important, however, that other staff are available to support them if a critical matter arises.

Prioritise life balance

Prioritising life balance is fundamental to maintaining your mental wellbeing in the long term.

✳ Prioritise time for friends, family, seeing or making art or music, playing sport, building something in your backyard, travel, community work or simply rest and quiet contemplation. All these things will replenish your reserves and make you more satisfied, productive and creative at work.

✳ Take the time to define what you want and expect from your work life. If your expectations cannot be met in your current workplace, consider changing your employment situation to one that better suits your needs.

The profession

Professional bodies and institutions can play a significant role in advocating for better fees and time management strategies within architecture and the broader construction industry, to better support the wellbeing of the profession.

Advocate for appropriate fees and fair procurement processes

Professional bodies must continue supporting and advocating for the industrial protections of architects and architectural labour. This includes publicly advocating against low fees and unreasonable time management pressures, which impact the wellbeing of the profession. There is also a clear need to strengthen the profession's voice in relation to fair procurement processes, tenders and contracts.

✳ Advocate for the need to price architectural services appropriately so the interests of both the client and their architect are served.

✳ Encourage or lobby the public sector to lead by example when it comes to architectural procurement, particularly regarding fees and tendering.

✳ Use the body of research demonstrating the negative impacts of poor procurement processes on worker wellbeing as part of sustained and coordinated advocacy programs.

✳ Participate in construction industry–wide groups, research, campaigns and advocacy programs. Make sure the voices of articulate and informed architects are present and heard.

✳ Advocate for fair design competition conditions and remuneration that does not lead to worker exploitation. Do not endorse, support or participate in competitions that do not meet these criteria.

✳ Advocate for fair tendering conditions. Support industry-wide initiatives, such as campaigns to limit tenders through public holiday periods.

✳ Advocate for efficient, intelligible tender documents with submission criteria and deliverables that are appropriate to the scale and complexity of the project.

See also *Risk & Responsibility: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

Support research examining efficient documentation and delivery processes

There is a clear need for rigorous research that provides knowledge about working efficiently in new procurement contexts.

✳ Conduct or support research that generates data and knowledge that provides content and context for analytic reflection and improvement within practices and the profession as a whole.

✳ Ensure continued benchmarking against other professions on the management of time and money.

Share knowledge across the profession

Professional bodies have important roles to play in developing and sharing knowledge.

✳ Develop and promote case studies of businesses exploring solutions to these issues, such as fee-setting processes or sustainable hours policies.

✳ Help practices understand how to navigate complex and/or new procurement environments.

✳ Support individuals and practices to improve negotiation skills and understand the opportunities and pitfalls in different environments.

Educate about legal obligations and promote ethical practices

There is great opportunity for professional bodies to extend and strengthen programs and resources that educate about legal obligations and ethical workplace practices. This includes appropriate fee setting, good time and resource management, and best practice HR policies and procedures.

✳ Educate about the Architects Award and legal obligations related to overtime.

✳ Condemn unlawful employment practices – for example, unpaid internships outside established education programs, remuneration that does not meet award minimums, and long hours cultures within practice.

✳ Keep member practices informed about obligations as employers and updates / changes to relevant legislation. Support them to understand how these can be used to create positive change within their workplace.

✳ Support practices and individuals to ensure they understand their workplace rights and responsibilities, as employees and employers.

✳ Explore and develop opportunities to recognise and reward exemplar firms with good ethical business practices. This could include awards, case studies, discussion forums etc.

✳ Examine the criteria for project and design awards. For example, consider making it an entry requirement that no unpaid overtime has gone into the project (with a statutory declaration).

✳ Continue to build awareness through articles, CPD webinars and other training around employer obligations, ethical practice management and mental wellbeing initiatives.

"I was blessed to have been brought up within a large practice that valued its people. While I did some long hours at times, this was always balanced with time off and they encouraged an active healthy life outside work.

I have used a 40hr/week limit to work hours as a sole practitioner, forced also by family commitments. It can work, but it does require fees to be adequate to support this, and allowing projects or clients that don't feel that this is reasonable to fall by the wayside. I make no apologies for this and encourage all in the profession to do so."

— Director in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Rights & responsibilities

It's important for individuals, practices and institutions to understand the legal context within which they work, and their associated rights and responsibilities. We encourage readers to investigate and understand relevant workplace legislation in their context.

This section outlines key rights and responsibilities enshrined in Australian law at the time of writing. This is offered as an overview only. Readers are reminded that legislation and Awards may change, and are advised to check current legislation at the time of reading.

In Australia, the *Fair Work Act 2009* is the primary legislation governing employment relationships. It outlines the rights and responsibilities of both employers and employees, including unfair dismissal laws and the National Employment Standards.

The Fair Work Commission sets the national minimum wage, which is the lowest amount that an employee can be paid. The Architects Award has minimum rates for students, graduates and architects that are updated annually.

The National Employment Standards set a standard maximum of 38 hours per week for full-time employees. However, an employee can agree to work additional hours, provided that these hours are reasonable.

Part 5 of the Architects Award sets out employer obligations related to overtime. It specifies:

"An employer must compensate an employee for all time worked in excess of or outside the spread of ordinary hours by: payment for such excess hours at the rate of 150% of the minimum hourly rate; or by such other arrangements as may be agreed so long as the arrangement is not entered into for the purpose of avoiding award obligations, does not result in unfairness to the employee and is recorded in accordance with clause 17.3 [which relates to time-off-in-lieu (TOIL)]… An employee and employer may agree in writing to the employee taking time off instead of being paid for a particular amount of overtime that has been worked by the employee. The period of time off that an employee is entitled to take is equivalent to the overtime payment that would have been made [TOIL at 150% additional hours worked]."

Employers are required to maintain accurate records of employee wages, hours worked, and other entitlements, and retain these for seven years. Employees have the right to access their employment records upon request.

The Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes) Act (Part 1, December 2023) criminalised the intentional underpayment of wages, with severe penalties applicable (including jail sentences up to 10 years for individuals and penalties three times the underpayment for businesses and individuals). These wage theft laws come into effect on 1 January 2025.

Several countries and regions worldwide are introducing "Right to Disconnect" laws to address the issues of overwork, burnout, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life in the digital age. In February 2024, the Australian government legislated "Right to Disconnect" laws in part 2 of its Closing Loopholes legislation, which aim to establish boundaries around employees' working hours and their accessibility outside of those hours, particularly regarding emails, calls or texts related to work.

Note: The above section is necessarily general in nature and specific legal, HR and business advice must be sought for your own specific circumstances and business.

Further resources

There are many resources available to support improved business practices and thereby improved wellbeing.

Parlour Guide to Equitable Practice: Long hours
Parlour

Parlour's second guide in the set addresses and questions the prevalence of long-hours culture in architecture. It explores the many factors contributing to this culture and provides actionable suggestions on effectively managing workloads and fostering a healthier workplace.

Parlour Guide to Equitable Practice: Negotiation
Parlour

Parlour guide seven provides valuable suggestions to both employers and individuals on how to negotiate in a range of scenarios and create fair, safe and equitable playing fields for this to occur.

Architects' Time/Cost Calculator
Association of Consulting Architects

The Architects' Time/Cost Calculator (paywall) is a tool that helps professionals in the architecture industry estimate and determine appropriate fees for their services based on the time required for a project. It takes into account factors such as project complexity, team size and overheads to provide a comprehensive calculation that reflects the true cost of delivering services.

Code of Novation
Australian Institute of Architects

The Code of Novation establishes sector-wide principles for the procurement of projects involving novation. This code aims to enhance industry practices by promoting a 'best value' approach and delivering quality built outcomes.

ACA Salary Calculator
Association of Consulting Architects

The Salary Calculator (paywall) is a tool to help the architectural industry estimate appropriate salary levels. It takes into account various factors such as years of experience, location and job position to provide a salary range that aligns with industry standards.

ACA Pay Rates information
Association of Consulting Architects

The ACA provides annual updates to the architectural profession on award and pay rates for staff wages, helping practices to stay up to date and fulfil their obligations regarding employee wages.

Further reading

Long hours, fatigue and mental health
Ceilidh Higgins
Parlour, March 2019

This article discusses the negative impacts of long working hours on the mental health and wellbeing of architectural professionals. The article highlights how the prevailing long hours culture can contribute to fatigue, burnout and increased risk of serious mental health issues.

Avoiding Burnout
Peter Raisbeck
ACA, May 2019

Peter Raisbeck acknowledges the demanding nature of running and directing an architecture practice, emphasising its potential impact on mental health. He identifies various stress factors associated with these roles and provides a number of self-care tips to mitigate their effects.

The Wages of Overwork
Anne Helen Petersen
2024

This article delves into the consequences of overwork in contemporary society. The author highlights the pressure and expectations that drive people to work excessively long hours, sacrificing their leisure time and mental health in the process. She explores the role of technology, the erosion of work–life balance boundaries, and the glorification of busyness in perpetuating this cycle.

Working more than 50 hours makes you less productive
Bob Sullivan
CNBC, 2015

This reading highlights the negative impact of prolonged working hours on productivity. It emphasises the need for individuals and organisations to recognise the value of maintaining a healthy life balance and optimising work practices to achieve strong productivity levels.

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Culture, Identity + Practice

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BVN

DesignInc

ELENBERG FRASER

THE FULCRUM AGENCY

Hassell

SJB