THE WELLBEING of ARCHITECTS culture, identity + practice.

in collaboration with Parlour

Trust & Transparency

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.

Trust & Transparency: A Guide to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

The Wellbeing of Architects: Culture, Identity + Practice

thewellbeingofarchitects.org.au

Research findings

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

The research demonstrated that a culture of trust in the workplace plays an important role in wellbeing, particularly in the ways that people feel connected to others, have a sense of autonomy and agency, and feel heard and understood. Actively building transparency within the architectural workplace can help in facilitating career development, healthy and respectful communication, and equity for all.

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:

Autonomy, competency and relatedness Workplace wellbeing is associated with feelings of autonomy (agency, choice and control), competency and relatedness (connection to others, engagement with a common cause, belonging to a group).

People working in architecture who have high levels of these three qualities report improved optimism, as well as higher levels of wellbeing and career satisfaction.

Connection Feelings of relatedness can include being connected to workmates, leaders and the wider architectural community through various forms of visibility, acknowledgment and belonging.

Size of practice In the 2023 survey of practitioners, sole traders appear to be more able to achieve a sense of autonomy, competency and relatedness than those working in larger practices. This suggests that as organisations get larger, strategies for facilitating trust and transparency are more complex to implement.

Transparency There is a strong case for an open flow of information, allowing early-career staff to grow and learn rapidly, and to feel trusted with information relevant to their work and employment.

Management support Employees look to supervisors and leaders for support. Supervisors can support staff in numerous ways, including explicitly valuing their contributions and opinions, and informing them of relevant information. Employees may not feel valued in offices where supervisor support is lacking, or psychological and psychosocial safety is not prioritised. These staff are more likely to leave the architectural profession.

Impacts on quality of life Positive experiences of workplace relatedness, morale and organisational support are associated with better quality of life and lower levels of anxiety, depression and burnout for people working in architectural workplaces.

Trust & Transparency

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

Overview

Trust and transparency are vital to a healthy and productive workplace. Trust is established when people have confidence in their colleagues and leaders, while transparency relates to the openness and accuracy of information shared within practice.

Creating a work environment where everyone feels valued and engaged is crucial for the success of the practice and the wellbeing of all. Where there is a free flow of information, including about tensions and challenges within a practice or a job, staff have a greater insight into why leadership decisions have been made, and hence a greater understanding and often acceptance of those decisions. People feel empowered when they are trusted with information and, in turn, feel respected, supported and valued.

This guide investigates the benefits of workplaces that value trust and transparency and shows how this can support work-related wellbeing in practice. It provides guidance for practices, individuals and professional bodies to help support trust and transparency in the profession and explores the challenges involved in implementing workplace change.

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?

Trust and transparency at work have a fundamental impact on wellbeing. Understanding definitions and impact helps to build healthy workplace cultures.

What is trust at work?

Trust is a firm belief in the reliability, truth or ability of someone or something. In the context of practice, it is the foundation of all interactions and is what relationships are built upon. This includes the ability of an individual to collaborate and communicate honestly with their colleagues in an inclusive environment. Of course, integral to that openness is for people to feel safe to be themselves at work, free of judgement or consequences. Trust can develop when people take the time to build supportive relationships with peers and know that they can depend on each other to complete tasks on time to a good standard.

See *Psychosocial and Psychological Safety: A Guide to Wellbeing.*

What is transparency at work?

Transparency relies upon activities being undertaken in an open way without secrets, so that people can trust that these activities are fair and honest. In the workplace, this involves open and honest relationships and the regular exchange of information between the business and its people. This can be demonstrated in various ways and involves everyone in the practice – owners sharing business development and financial information, senior managers sharing project budgets, briefs and objectives, task autonomy, truth-in-timesheeting, and peer-to-peer constructive feedback.

Transparency involves everyone in the practice. It can help build trust among colleagues and positively influence workplace culture.

How do trust and transparency impact wellbeing at work?

An absence of trust and transparency can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of all. This can manifest in feelings of stress, distrust, lack of motivation, absenteeism and poor mental health outcomes.

When individuals don't trust their colleagues or leaders, they can feel anxious or stressed about their work environment – this worry can lead to concerns about being left out of important decisions or not being recognised for their contributions. When leaders or managers don't trust employees, they can feel anxious about deadlines, work quality and client satisfaction – this worry can lead to tense or combative work environments and a tendency to micro-manage and remove worker autonomy.

If individuals are given clear and accurate information, they are more likely to be engaged, communicate openly and collaborate effectively, leading to improved business outcomes and wellbeing. Sharing practice goals, strategies and decision making also builds knowledge, confidence and feelings of security. A lack of transparency around decisions, resourcing and project management does the opposite. This is commonly a source of anxiety and stress as a result of uncertainty and lack of agency.

"Good relationships are based on trust. There needs to be more open communication within architecture workplaces and genuine interactions to ensure trust is developed between employers and employees."

— Graduate in private practice, 6–10 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

2. Why does it matter?

Trust and transparency play a vital role in retaining productive, talented, healthy and engaged people within practice and the wider profession. There is still much work to be done to ensure that working in architecture is seen as a viable, safe and enriching career for all – one that reflects the diversity of Australian society.

"Having enough knowledge about how the business/company functions can help team members do their jobs better and feel less stressed – so transparency and governance [can improve workplace wellbeing]."

— Practice manager, 6–10 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Benefits

Building trust and transparency within practice is beneficial to all, leading to increased communication, more effective collaboration, better teamwork, higher levels of productivity and commitment, and better decision making and problem solving at all levels of the practice. Significantly, it reduces stress and anxiety, and helps create a happier, healthier workplace.

People feel valued

By prioritising trust and transparency, practices create an environment where individuals feel valued and motivated to do their best work. A trusting environment helps build individual confidence, creativity and innovation.

Stronger collaboration

Teamwork and collaboration are key in architectural practice. Successful teams depend on their ability to collaborate efficiently and effectively, and rely heavily on the belief that each individual supports and trusts each other. Strong professional working relationships are positive and fulfilling, with architects finding great satisfaction in their capacity to collaboratively solve problems, particularly in association with the unique or complex needs of a project or client.

Better communication

Effective and clear communication is essential for a team to function efficiently, and a lack of trust can hinder communication efforts. If team members do not trust each other, they may be hesitant to speak up or share their ideas, fearing criticism or rejection, or that credit will be taken for their work. This can result in missed opportunities, information-hoarding and reduced innovation in the workplace.

Communicating clearly about project progress or priorities and decision-making can reduce uncertainty and ambiguity.

This helps employees manage their time and meet the expectations and goals of supervisors, which can positively contribute to their sense of purpose, value and effectiveness.

Psychologically safe workplaces

A psychologically safe workplace is one in which individuals trust their colleagues and leaders, feel comfortable taking risks, expressing their opinions, challenging the status quo, and making mistakes without fear of negative consequences. It is common for early-career staff to lack confidence and knowledge in the complex architecture environment, so creating psychologically safe workplaces is particularly important for their professional development.

See also *Psychosocial and Psychological Safety: A Guide to Wellbeing.*

Stronger sense of ownership and responsibility

Workplace autonomy can have a significant positive impact on employee job satisfaction, motivation, creativity and overall wellbeing. When employees are given more autonomy and control over their work, they feel a greater sense of ownership and responsibility, which can lead to increased engagement and productivity.

Enhanced reputation

A trustworthy and transparent workplace can enhance a practice's reputation with clients, stakeholders and prospective employees. This can lead to increased loyalty and a better bottom line.

Staff retention

Maintaining open, trusting relationships in practice makes good financial sense. When staff understand the financial intricacies of a project and an office, they are better able to prioritise tasks and manage their time. This means that when employees step up into leadership roles, they are already equipped with an understanding of how things work in the practice.

Staff retention is also important. The cost of replacing staff is estimated at around one-and-a-half times the annual salary of the position (considering recruitment and training costs, the opportunity costs of being understaffed, and the time-lag on projects). Losing key staff can also come with a devastating loss of skills, experience and corporate memory, and the loss of a potential leader of the practice. Staff who feel trusted and valued are more likely to stick around.

Mitigation of risk

By promoting transparency and trust, practices can mitigate risks that can have costly legal and financial consequences. Without effective teamwork and collaboration, communication breakdowns can occur, leading to errors, omissions or negligent contract execution. This can result in claims against a practice for poor performance or failure to meet contractual obligations. A lack of transparency and trust can foster an environment where discrimination and harassment thrive, potentially resulting in costly legal actions.

Embracing failure fosters rapid learning. Trust enables blameless recording, where everyone feels safe to raise concerns or report issues. Once aware of 'what happened' rather than 'who did it', practices can resolve issues quickly and mitigate further risk.

Challenges

Building a workplace culture of trust, transparency and clear communication takes time. It requires planning, strategy and policies, and the energy and motivation to follow through. It can be difficult to calibrate the right degree of transparency. Giving people too much information, especially in harder times, can be paralysing if they have no ability to engage with or influence it. Dealing with a wide variety of personality types and generational differences in the office can also be a challenge. It's important to acknowledge the challenges in order to navigate them successfully.

Finding the time

When a practice is busy, it's all-hands on deck, and it's often difficult to find time for anything outside the looming deadline. Nevertheless, it's important to carve out some time – no matter how small – for regular check-ins and the sharing of project and practice information.

Everyone is different

The workplace is often a melting pot of personality types, each with their own needs and preferences. Some will be thirsty for knowledge about practice values, financial management and project resourcing and goals. Others may be happier knowing very little about the financial side of the business, so they can focus on the immediate task at hand. Creating an environment of openness and trust is important, but it's equally important to ensure that individuals are not experiencing stress from the information shared. It's a balancing act that needs to be carefully monitored and reviewed.

Leadership styles

The very nature of architecture and the need to be across countless details on multiple fronts can lead to controlling behaviour among leaders and managers, which can limit employees' autonomy. Strict workplace hierarchies have been in place in some Australian architecture practices for a long time. Many managers and leaders have learnt to manage and lead within this cultural environment and bad habits are hard to break.

Micromanagement and a command-and-control style of leadership can trigger employee turnover, distrust, disengagement and burnout. This overcontrol can mean that employees have limited exposure to management skills and practices, impeding opportunities for promotion or career support towards leadership roles. The uptake of hybrid working arrangements has highlighted the tension between command-and-control versus a 'we trust you' attitude. Where staff feel they have insufficient autonomy and agency, this can create frustration, impact on wellbeing and lead to people leaving the practice. Education and awareness are key to changing long-held but unhealthy norms within practice.

"There is such a demand right from the beginning of projects in regards to time pressures – all of a sudden that project takes precedence and there is no respite - its just 'go, go, go' and so much expectation of our practice and from the client. And when we finish a project, its straight onto the next because ongoing work is never a given. Its a highly stressful hamster wheel to be on!"

— Team member in private practice, 1–5 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

3. What can we do?

Everyone can play an important role in advocating for trust and transparency in the architectural workplace – practices, individuals and the profession as a whole. The following section offers ideas and suggestions on how to identify and address cultures of mistrust, improve clear communication and transparency, and identify areas where wellbeing may be improved.

— Practices
— Individuals
— The Profession

"If there are tasks I need help with, we work through this in our office and delegate tasks as required. I think the biggest thing is open communication and working in a supportive office where all staff are shooting for common goals."

— Senior associate in private practice, 6–10 yrs experience, QLD, 2021

Practices

There are many strategies practices can put in place to establish and maintain a culture of trust and transparency, thus creating a more supportive, inclusive and collaborative workplace.

Prioritise office-wide communication

Maximising clear communication across all levels of the business helps to minimise fear and uncertainty, resulting in a healthier workplace. Increasing office-wide communication gives individuals a greater sense of sharing knowledge and purpose with their colleagues, significantly improving productivity, morale and wellbeing.

✱ Schedule regular office meetings to discuss projects so that employees have a clear understanding of practice priorities, the projects their colleagues are working on, and their own priorities for the week/month. Promote attendance and provide minutes for those unable to attend.

✱ Ensure that practice values and vision are clearly communicated to all staff, so they have a good understanding of practice ambitions and future direction – the 'why' of what they're working on.

✱ Provide safe spaces to have honest and transparent discussions about complex or 'taboo' topics in the workplace (mental health, remuneration, workload, hours, how practices are managed, bullying, unhealthy leadership styles, etc).

✱ Be clear in what you are communicating. Explain why you are asking an individual or a team to do something.

✱ Openly discuss fees (and how they are managed). This builds employee confidence and knowledge around priorities, resourcing and time management.

✱ Use post-project debriefs with your team to discuss how the project was designed and delivered – this allows open learning from problems and successes and the free flow of ideas for the future.

✱ Invite staff to offer feedback on processes in the workplace and suggestions for improvements.

✱ Be mindful that any rapidly made decisions relating to the practice can create perceptions of injustice – make sure decisions are consistent and communicated openly so everyone feels included.

Make time for regular informal check-ins

Informal and more personal check-ins are an easy and effective way to enhance communication and build trust across the practice. This interpersonal communication can provide employees with useful support and guidance, provide the practice with valuable insights into how their staff are going, and promote a culture of connectedness.

✱ Schedule one-to-one check-ins between leaders and their teams to assess work satisfaction, professional relationships, growth and productivity. Also use these informal catch-ups as a way of checking in with people's wellbeing and what's happening in their lives. Consider organising simple and regular coffee catch-ups or 'walk and talks' around the block. These are quick and easy ways to check in. Always ensure a follow-up check-in is scheduled.

"Cultivation of the human-side of practice [is important]. Staff should not be considered resources, but human beings and need to be listened to, and treated with respect, regardless of how busy or project/profit-focused practices and leadership are."

— Director in private practice, 11–20 yrs' experience, NSW, 2021

✳ Make sure you check in with senior staff as well. Remember that senior employees (including business owners) are often under enormous pressure and also require support.

✳ Consider workshopping topics of interest within a group setting. Set up an anonymous survey to ensure quieter people in the office can also have a voice, and that feedback can be offered without fear or favour.

✳ Be approachable by creating regular opportunities for open conversation to take place and provide encouraging and constructive feedback. Model a positive and productive response to feedback, including when it's critical. Be sure to address it openly, articulating what you have done in response and why.

✳ For larger practices, make time for regular leadership catch-ups every six months to promote an approachable culture, encouraging the sharing of insights, experiences, feelings and current challenges.

"To improve workplace wellbeing, check in with staff and make sure they are OK. Also keep timesheets and understand why aspects of jobs are taking so long. Is there a better way to do it?"

— Associate director in private practice, 11–20 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Build a culture of openness and curiosity

The architectural profession is complex. It is not possible for one person to know everything. It is important to build a workplace culture where everyone (including leaders) can be open, share experiences and knowledge, ask questions, admit mistakes, and actively listen to and learn from others. The most senior leader has a lot to learn from the most junior staff member, not just vice versa.

✳ Encourage everyone to ask for help when needed (even leaders). Asking questions and seeking help from others should not be seen as a weakness. Employees who bluff or exude over-confidence (rather than competence) can be dangerous, damaging office culture and leaving the company open to litigation.

✳ Encourage all to be open to learning something new and/or teaching something new. Learning and sharing new skills sparks curiosity, nurtures personal development and can enhance adaptability in challenging times.

✳ Consider implementing open, honest 'listening and learning' sessions to deepen understanding of the challenges, experiences and barriers faced in practice. (See Listening and Learning material and advice on the Parlour website.)

✳ Lead by example – build others' confidence and trust in you with your behaviour. This includes being a positive influence and demonstrating desired behaviours.

✳ Create an environment in which everyone has a chance to share their perspectives in meetings without being influenced by leaders' comments and opinions. Leaders should consider speaking last in meetings to create space for others. Before a meeting, ask team members how the leader might be able to make them feel more comfortable sharing their opinions. Actively seek ways for quieter people to contribute and engage.

Make the most of downtimes

Building trust and transparency in the workplace can be difficult at peak work times when it's 'nose-to-the-grindstone'. If it's difficult to carve out time for communication or team building, make the most of quiet times in the schedule.

✳ Organise team building days or weekends during work lulls.

✳ Invest in communication or negotiation workshops for everyone in practice. Recognise that communication is a skill. It can be learned. Some people will have more developed skills than others, but everyone can improve.

✳ Invest in professional development training and workshops to enhance employees' skills in areas identified for growth or improvement.

✳ Share success stories and lessons learnt from past projects or initiatives highlighting how transparent practices played a role in achieving the desired outcome.

Promote autonomy

Autonomy in the workplace is built upon respect, trust, transparency and a culture of accountability – not one of fear of repercussions or failure to deliver.

Promoting autonomy in the workplace empowers individuals to be proactive, giving them control and authority over their work schedules and environment. Autonomy can also create innovation and foster creativity, because different people try different approaches. Early-career staff can be valuable creators as they are less oriented to what 'usually works'.

Consider the following ideas to promote supportive workplaces:

✳ Consider giving individuals their tasks and a due date, and allowing autonomy to complete tasks in their own way within the given timeframe. Being trusted is a huge positive motivator.

✳ Allow people to set their own work goals and provide sufficient resources, time and support to achieve these. When people have clear and meaningful goals and feel capable of achieving them, positivity tends to be high.

"I think it is important that everyone is involved in or at least gets the opportunity to witness the decision making, especially regarding design decisions. I find much more satisfaction in my job when I feel a personal connection to the project."

— Associate in private practice, 6–10 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Manage project teams thoughtfully

From the early stages of a project, prioritise good communication and cooperation with the team. Plan well, taking into consideration skills, ability, interest, motivation, roles and group dynamic. Remember the value of diversity.

✳ Assign achievable tasks. Check in regularly with the team to assess progress and adjust tasks or goals as necessary.

✳ Establish clear roles and responsibilities, articulate the project's vision of success and seek input from the team on their perceptions of project success.

✳ Focus on developing supportive relationships with the project team. Participate in resolving issues or sharing responsibilities to counter feelings of loss of control or perfectionist tendencies.

✳ Be very clear about preferred involvement in projects if you're a team leader, including lines of communication and required sign offs. This will ensure the team is able to plan their schedule and goals appropriately and ensure the team leader is across required content.

✳ Delegate assignments fairly and give others space to grow by encouraging ownership of work.

✳ Establish team days spent in the office and communicate protocols for hybrid work – be mindful of an individual's preferred working hours and patterns.

✳ Avoid practising micro-management.

✳ Set growth goals for each team member once the competencies of each individual are understood.

See *Time and Money: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

Employ good managers

When filling practice management positions or other management roles, consider seeking candidates with strong people management skills. 'Good architects' don't always possess good management skills.

✳ Clearly define the specific management skills and qualities required for the role, identifying key competencies such as business management, communication, leadership, and strategic thinking.

✳ Separate design competencies from management abilities when evaluating candidates.

✳ Consider the candidates' interpersonal skills during the selection process including a face-to-face interview.

✳ Look within the practice for good managers. Identifying and nurturing talent within a practice can be beneficial as they are familiar with the workplace culture, its people and the everyday business functions.

See *Parlour Guide: Recruitment*.

Implement management and leadership tools, training, processes and policies

Implement management and leadership tools and training in the business for practice managers and architects in general. Build processes and policies for trust and transparency in the office.

✳ Develop models for inclusion of early-career staff in processes/challenges/decision-making in the practice.

✳ Develop programs to support early-career staff to understand their work rights, develop time management and negotiation skills, and set professional boundaries.

✳ Encourage team building activities to develop trust within the practice.

Make career progression visible

Pathways for career progression and specialisation should be clear, so that people can be more intentional and focused. Being cognisant of personal career goals and possibilities for skills acquisition and progression within the practice can have a powerful impact on employee engagement, retention and overall wellbeing. It can also help create a culture of trust and transparency.

✳ Consider developing a Role Descriptions and Competency Map, which provides a transparent system of career development within practice. This creates a clear visual guide of many skills required in the industry and the expected competencies for various career stages. (Download the Champions of Change Role Descriptions Tool and Competency Map from the Parlour website and adapt for your own practice.)

"Improve transparency between management and employees of a company to be able to understand and appreciate each other. Genuine evaluation of skills and pathways to role progression [contribute to workplace wellbeing]."

— Project leader in private practice, 6–10 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Provide access to leadership opportunities and training

Is access to workshops and training equitable in your practice? Are the same people always nominated for committees? Consider how these opportunities are communicated and allocated in your practice. Actively look for who is being overlooked, and consider why this is.

✳ Open up leadership opportunities and training to as many people as possible.

✳ Ensure that all employees understand what opportunities and leadership roles are available to them.

✳ Ensure selection processes are open and there is transparency around how these decisions are made.

✳ Remember that leadership can be demonstrated at all career levels – early-career staff can provide valuable and fresh insights, giving them motivation to step up.

Celebrate diverse leadership

Research tells us that diverse management and leadership teams encourage innovative thinking, help to avoid group-think, and lead to better business outcomes.

✳ Support and communicate what different people can offer.

✳ Role-model diverse and respectful leadership. Do not allow loud 'blokey' banter to dominate in the workplace.

✳ Promote and make visible the diversity of roles available. Be aware of implicit or explicit value judgements about some roles being more important than others. Understand that all roles in practice have their part to play.

✳ Promote and celebrate difference in backgrounds, leadership styles, views and perspectives, and other differences (for example, neurodivergent, introverted, extroverted).

Individuals

Trust and transparency in practice is a two-way street. Employees benefit from actively engaging in the workplace culture of the studio, being open to new professional opportunities and relationships, taking responsibility for their ambitions and strategising to make them happen. There are many steps that individuals can take to maximise their career potential and wellbeing, and to be prepared to embrace opportunities when they arise.

Be proactive

Speak to your employer or team leader about your goals and ambitions and put yourself forward when there is an opportunity for new challenges and personal growth.

✳ Be proactive in establishing your weekly and monthly schedules, asking about deadlines, required signoffs and responsibilities. If any of this is unclear, seek out your team leader or a trusted colleague for guidance. Setting a time at the start of the week to plan this can be a good strategy.

✳ Set goals. Have a clear idea of what you want to achieve in the short and long term. Plan how you will achieve your goals and seek out an employer or team leader who will support you in these endeavours.

✳ Make an effort to get to know colleagues and managers. Stay in touch if they move to another practice. This can help build a strong network for the future.

✳ Show up (face to face or virtually) consistently for your team and the wider project. Hold up your side of the bargain and support your colleagues as you would like them to support you.

Prioritise good communication

In practice it is important to be able to communicate effectively – with managers, colleagues, potential clients and consultants. Focus on your communication skills, both verbal and written, as this will allow you to express your ideas clearly and concisely.

✳ Be prepared for catch-ups and or reviews with your leaders/managers. If these meetings have fallen by the wayside, be proactive and follow up.

✳ Be open to constructive feedback and ask questions if you are unsure.

✳ Remember that there is strength in numbers. Other colleagues are likely to have similar topics they would like to discuss. Speak to a trusted colleague or manager as a group.

"Improved communication and leadership skills enable team members and leaders to become better at having difficult or vulnerable conversations with one another."

— Senior associate in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Speak up

Speaking up in the workplace helps to foster a culture of openness. It also holds leaders accountable, builds trust, reduces the risk of unethical behaviours and can contribute to the overall wellbeing of the practice.

✶ Say what you think. Be visible. Take risks. We are all learning!

✶ Remember that there is nothing wrong with asking questions or seeking help.

✶ For early-career staff, your insights and ideas can provide valuable innovative and creative solutions to problem solving – be comfortable with putting your ideas on the table and be open to feedback. Something that seems blindingly obvious to you, may not be to others.

✶ Be transparent about your concerns and ambitions. It sends a clear message that you are paying close attention and expect leaders to act with integrity and transparency.

✶ Managing a practice (of any size) can be incredibly complex and challenging. Try to communicate with leaders and managers with empathy, recognising their daily challenges and stresses.

Seek out opportunities

Seek opportunities to build trust and transparency at work. This not only helps promote a positive working environment, but assists you in developing collaborative skills, enhancing communication skills, and improving engagement and reputation. Sole practitioners and people from small practice will find value in building trust and transparency with clients, consultants and other stakeholders.

✶ Be open to learning new skills and seek these out. Continuous learning is essential for career development and satisfaction.

✶ Volunteer for inhouse tasks that will test your leadership abilities and show your employer that you're capable of more.

✶ Be active in volunteering for professional bodies and industry organisations.

✶ Seek out mentoring and networking opportunities. Learning from the experiences of others can assist you in developing your own career goals and plans. Identify mentors who can guide you, help you navigate challenging situations, and provide support and valuable insights when needed.

✶ Have open, honest conversations about challenges in practice and don't be afraid to make suggestions for improvement.

✶ Contribute to a culture of trust and transparency in the practice – ensure leaders have confidence and trust in you.

See *Parlour Guide: Mentoring*.

'Better communication between clients and those performing the tasks on particular projects (rather than through a principal or other) would improve a lot of people's wellbeing in terms of thinking that they are appreciated and trusted."

— Associate in private practice, 1–5 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

The Profession

Professional bodies and industry organisations play a significant role in shaping industry standards and practices. By promoting trust and transparency, these bodies can establish ethical and moral standards for the profession, foster a culture of honesty and openness, facilitate change within practice, and promote a stronger reputation for the profession as a whole.

Recognise and promote best practice management

Professional bodies can lead cultural change by celebrating practices that prioritise trust and transparency through awards programs and published case studies.

✳ Provide incentives and recognition for good practice leadership and management through industry or external professional awards.

✳ Promote case studies of practices who have established and maintained workplace cultures where trust and transparency are valued, and mental wellbeing is prioritised.

✳ Help promote healthy, transparent work cultures through articles, guidelines and events.

Educate through practical resources

Professional bodies can use their platforms to provide resources to demonstrate the opportunities and possibilities within practice.

✳ Educate and support modelled behaviour from leadership/practice managers on appropriate hours and quality of life outside work. Promote resources such as a 'sustainable hours policy' and provide a platform to share it widely.

✳ Provide opportunities for social cohesion in the profession. Resource small practice groups and maintain forums for people to talk openly, to mitigate the challenges of isolation.

✳ Support and share different models of leadership within practice (for example, 'lead from behind', 'managing up', 'affiliative leader, lateral, etc.), and models of co-ownership.

Develop reporting and guidelines

Data is powerful. It is important that wellbeing research work continues in some capacity and is supported by as many organisations, practices and individuals as possible.

✴ Develop mechanisms for reporting on wellbeing and happiness within the profession.

✴ Encourage organisations to support research work through participation and encouragement of members, partners and networks.

✴ Report on positive initiatives that are promoting trust and transparency in practice.

Advocate for open, honest discussion

Professional bodies can advocate for trust and transparency through their collaboration and communications to members, partners and networks. They can model good behaviour by welcoming discussion and collaboration between professionals from allied groups.

✴ Support and advocate for industrial protections of architects and architectural labour (regulation).

✴ Advocate for and provide safer and empowered spaces to have honest and transparent discussions about complex or 'taboo' topics (mental health, remuneration, hours, how practices are managed, bullying, unhealthy leadership).

✴ Foster a culture of collaboration among architects, engineers, construction professionals and contractors to help promote a shared sense of transparency, responsibility and accountability.

✴ Actively seek feedback for improvement.

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 change regularly and are advised to check current legislation to stay up to date.

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.

Employment contracts must outline the terms and conditions of employment, including duties, responsibilities and remuneration. Clarity and transparency in employment contracts contribute to a trusting workplace.

In December 2022, Pay Secrecy laws were introduced in Australia as part of Fair Work Amendment legislation, giving employees the right to share (or not share) information about their pay. It also banned pay secrecy terms in employment contracts, aiming for increased transparency around pay rates.

The Privacy Act 1988 regulates the collection, use and disclosure of personal information, including employee information. Employers are obligated to handle employee data responsibly and transparently.

In February 2024, further amendments to the Fair Work Act incorporated the Right to Disconnect, which gave employees the legal right to disengage from work-related communications outside their standard work hours. This includes the right to not monitor, read or respond to any form of contact by their employer or a third party related to work matters, unless their refusal is unreasonable. The right to disconnect will commence on 26 August 2024 for most Australian employers (with more than 15 employees) and 26 August 2025 for small businesses.

Note: These rights and responsibilities are 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. 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.

Leadership: Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice
Parlour

This guide addresses the obstacles women may face in attaining seniority, offers tips on positioning for leadership roles, provides guidance on promoting and supporting women, and outlines the role leaders in the profession can play in facilitating change.

What is Listening and Learning and
Listening and Learning – How it works
Monica Edwards
Parlour, April 2022

Listening and Learning is fundamental to the Champions of Change Coalition approach. In a series of articles, Monica Edwards outlines the four-step process, describing it in relation to design processes already familiar to architects and built environment professionals. She also summarises the objectives and outcomes of the Listening and Learning process. Edwards writes, "Through listening, the lived experience of life in a practice is revealed, which is often different to the stories we tell ourselves."

Enhancing workplace communication
Anwyn Hocking
Parlour, February 2021

Anwyn Hocking unpacks the detail of the Work & Wellbeing Survey, with a focus on workplace communication. Large numbers of survey respondents indicated that improved communication between staff, leadership teams and the profession would enable people to work more effectively and would enhance wellbeing overall. Improved communication was seen as benefitting employees and the practices and organisations they work for.

Enhancing management and leadership
Anwyn Hocking
Parlour, February 2021

Anwyn Hocking unpacks the detail of the Work & Wellbeing Survey, with a focus on management and leadership. The article summarises some of the excellent recommendations made by survey participants, including: develop and provide leadership training; increase diversity at leadership levels; trust, support and respect staff; clearly define roles/responsibilities and resource effectively; and champion the professional development of staff.

Further reading

Making space for leadership
Michael Lewarne, *ACA*, March 2023

Michael Lewarne explores what good leadership might look like in practice. Key messages include: communicate openly and honestly, be prepared to delegate, listen, embrace transparency, give feedback, step back and gain perspective.

Got transparency? Why trust does more for workplace culture than flashy perks
Jim Link, *Forbes*, March 2020

"Transparency breeds trust. Without transparency underpinning an organization's culture and how it operates, even the most incisive employee attraction and retention initiatives can seem like empty gestures."

The Neuroscience of Trust: Management behaviours that foster employee engagement
Paul J. Zak, *Harvard Business Review*, February 2017

Paul J. Zak investigates the neuroscience of trust, measuring oxytocin and stress hormones in workers and assessing their productivity and ability to innovate. He identifies eight management behaviours that foster trust. These include recognising excellence; giving people discretion in how they do their work; sharing information broadly; and intentionally building relationships at work.

The Power of Small Wins
Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2011

This article highlights the importance of "making progress in meaningful work" for staff engagement and motivation. The authors also explore the behaviours of the "model manager" and offer a Daily Progress Checklist to review the day and come up with a managerial plan for the next day.

Proven Ways to Earn Your Employees' Trust
Carolyn O'Hara, *Harvard Business Review*, June 2014

In this practical article, O'Hara lists advice on how leaders can reinforce trustworthiness, provides a list of do's and don'ts, and offers some case studies.

3 Practical Ways Leaders Can Give Employees More of the Autonomy They Crave
Liz Kislik, *Forbes*, June 2022

Liz Kislik explores the impact of the pandemic on autonomy at work. She identifies three practical ways leaders can demonstrate their willingness to provide autonomy to their team members.

The Importance of Autonomy in the Workplace
Matchr, December 2023

This article investigates how workplace autonomy can empower employees and increase their sense of job satisfaction, motivation, creativity and wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

The Wellbeing of Architects: Culture, Identity + Practice

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