THE WELLBEING
of ARCHITECTS
culture, identity
+ practice.

in collaboration with Parlour

Psychosocial & Psychological Safety

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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.

Psychosocial & Psychological Safety: A Guide to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

The Wellbeing of Architects: Culture, Identity + Practice

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Psychosocial & Psychological Safety

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

Overview

'Psychological safety' and 'psychosocial safety' are closely connected but distinct concepts that can help cultivate healthy working conditions, and respectful and inclusive workplaces. This guide introduces and explains these terms, offering suggestions about creating psychologically safe work environments that prioritise open communication, inclusion, belonging and general wellbeing. It outlines legal obligations and explains how to identify and eliminate psychosocial hazards.

Architecture practices have a vital role to play, and bear the burden of legislative compliance, but the actions of individuals can also have a dramatic impact. At the same time, the wider profession can model good behaviour and assist in building awareness, educating and supporting healthy workplaces.

Psychological safety intersects with cultural safety, supporting neurodiversity in the workplace, and many other factors. These topics are not covered in detail in this guide. This is an area that warrants future study and development.

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 policy on wellbeing, employment and human resources, as well as advice about particular situations, from their legal, 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?

Psychological safety and psychosocial safety are related terms that have distinct meanings and operate in different spheres. It is useful and important to understand the exact definitions.

Coined by Amy Edmondson, the term *psychological safety* comes from the world of organisational psychology and brings a focus on cultivating work cultures and environments in which people can thrive.

Psychosocial safety is embedded in work health and safety legislation and brings a focus on managing risk and eliminating hazards. Both are important, and together these concepts offer great insight into creating and maintaining positive workplace cultures.

What is psychological safety?

Psychological safety is about individuals feeling safe to be themselves at work, to voice their ideas, concerns and questions without fear of humiliation, discrimination or penalty.

Psychologically safe workplaces are places of open dialogue. They give people the freedom to be open and honest, innovative and creative, to try things out and take risks, with positive impacts on performance, job satisfaction and general wellbeing.

Psychological safety at work is beneficial for all, but it can have particularly significant impacts on individuals from under-represented groups.

What is psychosocial safety?

Psychosocial safety covers broader working conditions and the prioritisation or support for mental, emotional and physical health.

Work health and safety legislation in Australia prescribes how employers must identify and manage psychosocial hazards and risks in the workplace.

Key elements of a psychosocially safe practice include reasonable work hours and life balance, role clarity, autonomy at work, fair and reasonable task allocation, recognition and reward, strong workplace relationships and interactions, social support, professional development opportunities, and the prioritisation of fairness and justice.

Healthy workplaces have a zero tolerance policy on psychosocial hazards, such as bullying, harassment and violence, which can have severe impacts on the wellbeing of individuals as well as general workplace culture.

How do psychosocial hazards impact wellbeing?

Australian Work Health and Safety laws require that psychosocial hazards and risks are eliminated or minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

Psychosocial hazards can cause significant harm to an individual's wellbeing when not managed. Exposure to psychosocial hazards can result in burnout, stress, anxiety and depression; feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem and social isolation; behavioural issues, such as aggression, absenteeism, short-temperedness and substance abuse; exhaustion, poor decision-making, memory loss and reduced productivity. Identifying and managing psychosocial hazards in practice is crucial to promote wellbeing and prevent harm.

Hazards take many forms and it is critical for everyone in architecture practice to be cognisant of the risks. Some hazards may not constitute a psychosocial risk on their own, but become damaging when combined with other hazards. Examples applicable to architecture practice include long hours, micro-management, lack of role clarity, unreasonable job demands, poor support, inadequate reward and recognition, conflict, intimidation, bullying, harassment and a poor physical environment. Some of these hazards have been common in some architecture offices, and have even come to be seen as habitual or standard practice.

Being vigilant about psychosocial hazards and addressing them as they arise helps improve the workplace environment and culture, increase morale, energy and creativity, and make an architecture practice a healthier, happier place to work.

See also the *Rights and Responsibilities* section at the end of this guide.

"I have purposely sought out this practice and stayed with them because they align with my ethics, social conscience etc. This gives me a wellbeing 'boost' as I feel part of a community of like-minded people, working towards something decent."

**— Team member in private practice,
6–10 yrs experience, WA, 2021**

"Architecture is a team pursuit. The ability to get on with each other, support and encourage each other in a practice is what I believe creates a feeling of wellbeing."

**— Director in private practice,
21–30 yrs experience, VIC**

"I've been lucky so far in my career to have worked with supportive and motivated leadership groups including owners and partners that value and invest in their teams. However, it's never perfect and this demonstrates the complexities of leadership and guidance of practices."

**— Project manager in private practice,
11–20 yrs experience, VIC, 2021**

2. Why does it matter?

An increasingly complex construction industry, dramatic technological advancement, the climate crisis and a constantly evolving employment landscape continue to challenge the architecture profession, with intense competition, adversarial relationships and other disruptive forces creating additional stress.

Fostering *psychologically* safe environments will be essential for resilient and flexible organisations to meet the coming challenges, and to retain staff. Strong collaboration, communication, flexibility, creativity and innovation have never been more important. Providing open, inclusive and supportive workplaces will be key to the future success of the profession.

Psychologically safe and inclusive workplaces are better for everyone – better for creativity and innovation, better for performance and outcomes, and essential for employee wellbeing.

At the same time, removing or mitigating *psychosocial* hazards by maintaining fair, reasonable working conditions is essential to protect the mental wellbeing of people in practice. Open and supportive workplaces, with reasonable workloads and boundaries, help people to manage their working lives, build resilience to cope with stressful situations, be collaborative and participate in healthy interpersonal relationships.

Legal obligations

Australian employers are required by law to ensure the physical and psychological health of their workers, so far as is reasonably practicable. Managing psychosocial risks and hazards at work is a Work Health and Safety requirement that took effect on 1 April 2023.

See also the *Rights and Responsibilities* section at the end of this guide..

Inclusive workplace cultures

The benefits of diversity in practice are well-known. Diverse teams bring diverse perspectives and ways of doing things, which better reflect the diverse needs and experiences of clients, other stakeholders and wider society. Psychological safety is an essential component of inclusive workplace cultures. Everyone in practice needs to feel supported and included, regardless of their gender, age, race, and/ or cultural background.

Staff recruitment and retention

Poor mental wellbeing is one of the reasons practitioners leave the architecture profession. Retaining architects and supporting a healthy, thriving industry is a major challenge for the profession.

In today's employment landscape, architectural staff increasingly prioritise workplace culture when determining who they choose to work for. Employees with supportive, open workplace cultures are more likely to stay than those who are stressed, overworked and experiencing difficult, combative work environments. High employee turnover can be crippling for practices – the costs of recruitment, interviewing and re-training have a significant financial impact. High turnover can also impact team morale and project outcomes.

"One office I worked at would tell the staff to go home at 6pm, nearly every day. Sometimes there was a bit of overtime, which was fine. 'Go and live your life', they would say. It was my first job and I've never forgotten it. It is how I would hope to run a practice. No resentment through overworking in that place!"

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

Leadership pipeline / succession planning

People are a practice's strongest asset. A key priority must be securing a pipeline of future leaders with strong skills and corporate knowledge, good inhouse relationships and strong connections to clients, consultants and the wider community. Maintaining a healthy workplace and prioritising the wellbeing and development of everyone helps retain and develop future practice leaders.

Engagement and focus

When employees feel safe at work, they are more likely to contribute successfully in team meetings, work collaboratively with their peers and problem-solve effectively. Engaged individuals are more likely to be focused, productive and present when completing tasks, inspiring others to do so. Highly engaged employees will speak up if they identify an issue and help strategise and problem-solve to keep a project on track. This can help practices avoid costly mistakes in the long run.

Creativity and innovation

Creativity, innovation and fresh perspectives thrive in environments of trust and psychological safety, often leading to stronger performance and outcomes. If individuals feel unsafe in the workplace, they're often over-cautious, avoiding taking risks or challenging the status quo for fear of humiliation or reprisal.

Professional growth and development

Personal growth and achievement at work helps to improve job satisfaction, engagement, confidence, purpose and a sense of belonging. When people experience psychological safety, they are able to share their ideas, build their confidence levels, engage in candid feedback and grow professionally. Professional growth and development is easier in an environment of open communication and support.

Coping with stressful situations

By its very nature, architectural practice includes periods of intensity and stress – to some extent this is normal and inevitable – but it must be managed in a safe way. In a psychologically safe workplace, people are more able to communicate openly about the stresses and help each other deal with them. Sharing work or personal stresses early helps teams stay in control, addressing minor problems before they become major concerns. Setting boundaries around work patterns and hours available can also assist. Proactive coping mechanisms can be put in place to navigate challenging work situations, helping to avoid further anxiety and burnout.

"The greatest challenge for architects' wellbeing is finding their niche and fit in an office that suits them and provides longevity, support and aspiration. I am fortunate to be in an office with an excellent and supportive work culture. I have worked in a highly competitive office before and once I had two children, I could not cope with that sort of work environment. I left the profession for a year or two as a result."

— Director/principal in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, SA, 2021

3. What can we do?

Everyone can have an impact in fostering psychosocial and psychological safety in the architectural workplace – practices, individuals and the profession as a whole. This is a continually evolving process that needs to be monitored, assessed and adapted as circumstances, people and practices change and grow.

The following suggestions for Practices and Individuals are split into two sections – the first addressing psychological safety, the second psychosocial safety.

— Practices
— Individuals
— The Profession

"Leaders need to frequently speak about mental health and wellbeing to their team. Promote an open culture that enables people to feel safe."

— Project manager in private practice, 11–20 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Practices

There are many strategies that practices can put in place to improve psychological safety, address psychosocial hazards, and identify how wellbeing may be improved overall.

Psychological safety

Foster open communication

Open communication is critical for ensuring psychological safety in the workplace. Everyone in practice should feel supported in speaking up, collaborating openly, and sharing experiences, ideas and strategies.

✱ Build a workplace culture of active listening. Encourage all in practice to share different experiences and perspectives. This can be through regular team meetings, feedback sessions or listening and learning workshops. Give people space to talk.

✱ Encourage leaders to ask their people what their aspirations and work preferences are, rather than to assume.

✱ Have a clear complaints policy, so people can raise issues confidentially if poor workplace behaviour occurs. Note that this can prove more difficult to manage in a small practice.

✱ Create an environment where people are comfortable to ask questions or request help when needed.

✱ Conduct engagement surveys that cover belonging and psychological safety. There is nothing more powerful than having data to act on. Ask about psychological safety at a team level and a practice level – these are two different aspects and are influenced by different people. If issues are raised in the workplace, make sure they are acknowledged, addressed and communicated back. There is no such thing as survey fatigue; it's lack of action fatigue. If you ask people for feedback, you must demonstrate that you have heard them and do something about it wherever possible. Otherwise, they won't bother telling you when asked again.

✱ Provide regular feedback and assessments of performance.

✱ Schedule one-to-ones between leaders and their teams monthly to help build trust between them. This creates a safe space for team members to share feedback, their wellbeing, ideas etc. Trust can't be switched on by a leader. It needs to be earned through an investment in their team, which takes time.

✱ Communicate openly and regularly with staff to ensure achievements are recognised and celebrated, and problems are addressed as they occur.

✱ Ensure there are communication channels available for those working remotely or by themselves. Regularly check in.

✱ Promote transparency in communications – this builds engagement and trust.

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

"Stipulate time in your workday to take breaks for other activities. Establish and promote psychological safety within architecture practices."

— Project leader in private practice, 11–20 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

"We as a business have chosen to create good work conditions for our staff as a priority. As a result, we have a very high staff retention rate, job satisfaction, and the bulk of staff are now shareholders."

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

Build cultures of open, productive critique

The architecture profession is experiencing constant disruption and rapid technological change. Create a practice environment where processes are productively critiqued on a regular basis and different points of view are valued and welcomed.

✳ Ensure input and feedback is sought regularly throughout the various stages of a project. Extend the invitation in meetings but also have an open-door policy for people who prefer to communicate one-on-one. Be explicit about wanting to avoid group think and seeking inventive thinking.

✳ Ensure that meetings are not dominated by a single outspoken voice. Encourage all to participate and express their views. Ensure that leaders speak last. Let others raise different perspectives without being influenced by what the leaders has said upfront. Understand your people – if there is a shy person, give them a heads up that you'd like to hear their views, so you don't put them on the spot and they have time to prepare.

✳ Make it clear that not all ideas will be incorporated, but all ideas are valued and valuable.

✳ Cultivate an environment of healthy dissent, with robust but respectful dialogue. Lean into values-based decision making – encourage people to be curious about different perspectives and never make a counter argument personal.

Foster a culture of innovation

When people are able to take risks and learn from mistakes, they feel empowered to continually learn, to seek better ways of working and doing things. Fostering a culture of innovation ultimately drives success for individuals and the practice.

✳ Create a safe environment where employees feel comfortable taking risks, learning new skills and experimenting with new ideas. Be clear that failure is a natural part of the innovation process and encourage learning from setbacks rather than punishing mistakes.

✳ Create a culture where mistakes are ok and the team can discuss openly – mistakes are essential for innovation, growth and change. This helps discourage people from hiding their failures and mistakes, which can have costly consequences in practice.

✳ Ask questions – What can we learn from this? What can we do differently? How can we do this better? Start with "what happened?", not "who did this?".

✳ Foster collaboration and cross-functional teamwork to spark creativity and exchange diverse perspectives.

✳ Provide opportunities for employees to develop their innovation skills and stay up to date with emerging trends and technologies.

✳ Embrace diversity and inclusion as essential components of innovation. Support diverse perspectives, backgrounds and experiences within teams to drive innovation and creativity.

✳ Encourage and celebrate lifelong learning.

Promote diversity and inclusion

Promoting diversity and inclusion within a workplace is critical to creating an environment where everyone feels safe and has a sense of belonging.

✳ Ensure the practice has a diverse representation of leaders and managers in decision-making positions – this includes recruitment, promotion and policy development.

✳ Ensure under-represented people and groups are included when communicating with staff. Ensure that a diverse range of perspectives is shared.

✳ Implement inclusive chairing of meetings. Ensure that everyone has a chance to speak in meetings. Invite people to contribute who might not usually participate.

✳ Consider offering different ways to contribute or give feedback, such as surveys, email or chat apps, ensuring that you cater for people with different communication preferences.

✳ Consider enabling people to submit suggestions anonymously.

See also *Parlour Guides: Leadership, Recruitment*.

Build a culture of appreciation

Recognising people for their contributions, helps boost morale and motivation. It validates an individual's efforts and reinforces their sense of value within the practice, often leading to increased job satisfaction and engagement.

✳ Recognise and celebrate team and individual achievements regularly.

✳ Publicly acknowledge and value achievements of different types and in different realms.

✳ Celebrate career milestones and progression.

✳ Reward new ideas, risk taking, honesty and innovative thinking.

Embrace humour and camaraderie

Incorporating humour and a sense of fun into the workplace can be a powerful stress reliever with proven positive impacts on mental wellbeing. This can be a tricky thing to achieve and, when done badly, can feel corny and forced and sometimes trigger cynicism. However, the physiological benefits of laughter are undeniable. It can improve motivation and morale, foster a sense of belonging, strengthen personal connections and collaboration, and create a more enjoyable and productive workplace where people can thrive personally and professionally.

✳ Cultivate a relaxed, welcoming environment. Encourage humour and the sharing of laughter.

✳ Make space for downtime, socialising and casual interactions between staff. This can help build camaraderie and mutual respect across the practice. It can also spark new ideas, perspectives and solutions to workplace challenges.

✳ Celebrate achievements and milestones with humour.

✳ Avoid inappropriate or hurtful humour. Be mindful of banter that can quickly become toxic. Ensure that people are respectful and inclusive of others.

"Put down the mouse, the pen. Move away from the desk. Sit together with colleagues for a healthy lunch and a laugh."

— Principal in private practice, 21–30 years experience, VIC, 2021

Psychosocial Safety

Understand responsibilities under WHS legislation and demonstrate leadership in managing psychosocial hazards

It is important for directors and managers to have a solid understanding of their legal obligations regarding psychosocial safety, work to maintain these obligations, and allocate resources and establish systems to implement any required change.

This is essential for legal compliance, practice risk management and the wellbeing of all in the practice.

✱ Demonstrate leadership and commitment to managing psychosocial hazards in practice.

✱ Be proactive in gathering information about potential psychosocial hazards in practice.

✱ Ensure everyone has an understanding of the current legislation and have allocated time to keep up to date.

✱ Where possible, ensure that HR or practice management have resources, support and authority in place to manage work, health and safety processes and to manage known and/or emerging psychosocial hazards.

✱ Report regularly on work health and safety performance, and seek feedback from all in practice on how psychosocial safety can be improved.

✱ Ensure each individual issue or case raised is treated confidentially and assessed in a fair and non-biased manner.

See *Rights and Responsibilities* at the end of this guide.

Identify psychosocial risks

Identifying psychosocial risks and hazards is fundamental to managing and reducing them. Identification can be done through the following simple, straightforward steps.

✱ Conduct employee surveys and risk assessments. People at Work is a free, validated Australian psychosocial risk assessment survey to can help establish specific psychosocial risks in a workplace. (See the *Resources* section)

✱ Review incident reports.

✱ Run 'listening and learning' sessions with staff at all levels.

Consider the needs of all cohorts when identifying risks – for example, younger or older employees, people from diverse backgrounds, and those with previous exposure to a traumatic event.

Consider the following hazards:

— Unreasonable job demands – do employees work excessive hours, experience task overload, or struggle with managing demanding clients?

— Job autonomy – do staff work autonomously or is micro-management part of the practice culture?

— Resourcing – are staff supported and do they have the required training and resources available to complete tasks?

— Role clarity – are roles, responsibilities and expectations clearly defined on projects and across the practice? Is this consistently followed over time?

— Change management – if significant structural changes are occurring within the practice, has clear communication and consultation been prioritised?

— Recognition – is feedback regularly and effectively communicated? Is effort and accomplishment positively recognised?

— Organisational equity – are management decisions on policies and procedures equitable, fair and inclusive?

— Violent behaviours – have there been any instances of aggressive behaviour within the practice or from clients, consultants or other stakeholders? This can include verbal or physical intimidation.

— Bullying and harassment – are there any identified unreasonable behaviours or instances of harassment in the workplace? These can be directed at an individual or group as a result of personal characteristics, and can include unwelcome sexual advances.

— Interpersonal relationships – are there frequent disagreements or rude comments made between colleagues, consultants, builders and/or clients? Are individuals being excluded from workplace activities?

See the *Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice* for specific advice related to the above topics.

"Value our people and have a greater nuanced approach to mental health. Listen to our people. Develop meaningful policies to address wellbeing-related awareness."

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

Establish a consultation process

Before developing and implementing policies, or making significant changes, consult with everyone in the practice.

✳ Share any new information and enable the sharing of views and perspectives.

✳ Share proposed strategies for proactively managing and monitoring psychosocial hazards in the practice.

✳ Consider consultation for any new policies and procedures or changes to existing ones.

✳ Consider consultation for any practice restructures, relocations or changes to working arrangements.

Create and implement relevant policies and procedures

Establishing and implementing policies and procedures is an important aspect of minimising psychosocial hazards. Examples of relevant policies include Harassment and Bullying, and Sustainable Work Hours.

✳ Develop policies and procedures that address identified risks and hazards.

✳ Don't set and forget. Effective policies and procedures require ongoing communication and engagement.

✳ Regularly review whether policies and procedures are being followed. Consider if additional communication and training are required or if documents can be more user friendly.

✳ Continually update policies. Ensure that they continue to serve their purpose and reflect the needs of your people.

Monitor and evaluate

Regular monitoring and evaluation of progress around psychosocial safety is key.

✳ Conduct regular assessment to ensure healthy workplace culture is prioritised and potential hazards are minimised.

✳ Provide opportunities for staff to provide feedback and raise concerns.

✳ Track staff absenteeism, engagement and motivation, turnover rates and satisfaction levels.

✳ Track hours and monitor additional hours worked (as a percentage of contracted hours). This should be reviewed monthly with leadership to examine why people are working additional hours. Once established, demonstrate action to eliminate or reduce additional hours.

✳ Be aware of common failures in evaluation processes – for example, a focus on individual behaviours without also recognising psychosocial hazards across the practice.

✳ Be vigilant! Psychosocial hazards may combine over time to create new, different or greater risks.

See also *Parlour Guide: Long Hours*.

Offer training, support and resources

Prioritise training around workplace behaviours – including harassment and psychosocial hazards – to ensure everyone knows what behaviours are not tolerated.

It's one thing to have a policy but unless a practice lives the policy and puts resources into training its people, there is a risk of non-compliance, as well as poor outcomes. Training also helps raise awareness and promotes respect in the workplace.

Where practicable, offer access to workshops, training and resources on topics such as good workplace culture, communication and negotiation skills, unconscious bias and inclusion.

✳ Consider setting mandatory training for all people in practice around appropriate behaviour in the workplace. Cover harassment to ensure the practice is demonstrating a positive duty.

✳ Consider running clinics on relevant policies to ensure everyone understands that the policies exist, the protections they offer and the processes for using them. Make this training part of the induction process.

✳ Offer access to relevant information sessions and webinars, current publications and reports on psychological and psychosocial safety.

✳ Provide education on work-related bullying, harassment and conflict resolution for all in practice. Ensure people at every level of the practice know what is appropriate workplace behaviour.

✳ Offer access to Employee Assisted Programs (EAPs) where possible.

✳ Consider developing a program for confidentially reporting on mental wellbeing within the practice.

Be mindful of challenges of remote work

The proliferation of hybrid and remote working arrangements is generally positive, but the remote aspect can also be potentially isolating. This can have negative impacts on trust, collaboration, interpersonal connection and mental wellbeing if not managed well.

✳ Check in regularly with remote and hybrid workers.

✳ Upskill leaders so they can lead hybrid teams. It's a new skillset.

✳ Ensure people working remotely have plenty of opportunity to connect with colleagues in a range of environments and contexts.

✳ Acknowledge the challenges of remote work and discuss solutions openly with employees.

✳ Be open and honest. Create safe environments in which people at all levels of the practice, including leaders and senior managers, can share their own experiences of remote / hybrid work – both the challenges and effective strategies.

✳ Create an environment in which employees feel safe to disclose personal information that is relevant to their working situation.

✳ Trust employees to make the right choices for themselves, their families and their teams.

✳ Be open and transparent about the needs of the project and the team.

✳ Include remote workers in work events and activities wherever possible.

Actively observe

Observe workplace interactions and discuss challenges across the practice. Be alert to potential hazards and encourage open discussion about mitigating these risks.

Warning signs or things to look out for include:

— Tasks or projects that are mentally, physically or emotionally taxing and stressful.

— Frequent long hours, workload overload and fatigue. Be aware of staff concealing their long hours. Promote honesty in timesheeting.

— People avoiding tasks or taking shortcuts due to time pressure.

— People hiding their mistakes rather than discussing and learning from them.

— Under-resourcing or an imbalance of early-career staff working on complex projects without support.

— Significant changes in the behaviour of staff, increased sick leave or time away from work and low engagement.

— Poor reports of working conditions in exit interviews.

"I try to mentor staff who are less experienced than me and make sure they know they are allowed to have lives outside the office. In addition to this, when I am managing teams, I try to be understanding and balance what everyone needs in terms of growth opportunities while delivering the project to the best of our ability."

— Project Leader in private practice, 6–10 years experience, VIC, 2021

"Enable practitioners, especially junior, to participate in and pursue issues and initiatives that they are passionate about. Build in genuine time for things like competitions, research, teaching, mentoring – things that keep people excited and connected with the good parts of architecture."

— Reseacher In private practice, 1–5yrs experience, WA, 2021

Individuals

Everyone has a role to play in creating healthy, psychologically safe workplaces that foster open dialogue, innovation, diverse thinking, continuous learning and new ways of working.

At the same time, building an awareness of psychosocial risks and potential harms is the first step to avoiding them.

Psychological safety

Cultivate the art of listening

An architecture practice can be a highly competitive place with a focus on individual achievement rather than collective goals. Be curious about others' perspectives, value the ideas of others, and practise the art of listening.

✳ Ensure you give others the space to speak. Leaders should consider speaking last in meetings to allow everyone to share their perspectives without being influenced by the leader's initial comments.

✳ Between meetings, ask team members how the leader might be able to make them feel more comfortable sharing their opinions.

✳ Be curious about others' perspectives, ask questions and make sure you understand where they're coming from. Don't sit there preparing the next thing to say. Listen and learn.

✳

✳ Be empathetic and supportive if colleagues, staff or managers are struggling. Listen to their problems and see if you can assist.

✳ Be present in conversations and meetings, whether face-to-face or online. Don't get distracted by your phone or web browser (turn off notifications). Don't attempt to multi-task by continuing working during meetings.

✳ Remove visual clutter and distractions, so you can more easily focus.

✳ Problem-solve as a group.

Participate in open, constructive critique

Demonstrate your commitment to a practice culture of constant learning and open, productive critique. If you have constructive criticism or a new idea, be honest (but respectful), speak up and challenge practice or project strategies and processes.

✳ Don't simply follow the leader. Speak up if you have a question or an idea.

✳ If you are too nervous to tackle an issue or pose an idea in a meeting, seek out the decision maker or team leader later to share your feedback – or do it by email.

✳ Participate in practice surveys or chat apps if it suits your communication style.

✳ Don't dominate discussions or meetings. Ensure others have a chance to speak and share their opinions and ideas.

"The people in a working [environment] play a very important role in wellbeing in architecture. Being in teams with a great attitude and spirit is what influences the wellbeing of people working in the field."

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

Be willing to show vulnerability

People can be wary of being open and vulnerable in front of their colleagues, managers and staff. But building human connection and empathy by sharing vulnerabilities and imperfections can have powerful outcomes in the workplace.

✻ Be prepared to have open conversations, ask questions, demonstrate vulnerability and harness emotions in a positive way – it can be a sign of integrity.

✻ Leaders can set an example by admitting mistakes and talking through regrets and what could be done differently. This will demonstrate the desired behaviour and encourage others to do the same.

✻ Avoid group think. Invite input and be open to listening to other's ideas.

✻ Recognise the benefits of robust discussion and diverse ideas.

✻ Learn from others – both older and younger members of your team.

✻ Help to build a culture where no-one has all the answers and everyone has valuable input to share.

✻ Create an environment where people are comfortable to ask for help when needed.

Be calm and respectful of others

In a challenging work environment, it's easy to let your frustrations get away from you. Are you angry and grumpy at work? Do you thrive in chaos? Learn how to manage your emotions and consider the effect you are having on others in the practice.

✻ Be self-aware about your emotions. Try not to be defensive or reactive. Be aware of others' sensitivities and how you might inadvertently cause humiliation or embarrassment.

✻ Be honest with yourself and others about how you are feeling.

✻ Work on remaining calm. Take breaks. Go for walks in the fresh air and recharge the batteries. Prioritise sleep so you are well rested.

✻ If you feel yourself getting angry or frustrated, consider removing yourself from the situation for a few moments. At the very least, don't react immediately. Take a few deep breaths and reflect before responding.

✻ Don't send the angry email. Wait until the next day before pressing send.

Support diversity and inclusion

The practice can set up expectations around diversity and inclusion, but individuals have a very important role to play in creating a safe, inclusive workplace for all.

✻ Be mindful of your own biases and stereotypes, and actively challenge them.

✻ Reflect on your personal actions and role modelling in the workplace. Are you opening up opportunities for others? Are you listening to and amplifying the voices of people who are different to you? Are you supporting or hindering the creation of an inclusive workplace?

✻ Make an effort to get to know people outside your immediate team. Seek out connections with people who are different to you, whether it be a different race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or other characteristic.

✻ Speak out against discriminatory behaviour or comments, and offer support and solidarity to those who may be marginalised or under-represented.

✻ Use inclusive language that respects people's identities and avoids stereotypes or offensive terminology.

✻ Participate in and support diversity initiatives and awareness raising.

Psychosocial safety

Understand the rules

Under WHS Legislation, it is the responsibility of employers to provide a psychologically safe work environment, free of psychosocial hazards and risks. However, it's important for everyone to have an understanding of WHS rules and ensure they are supporting practice policies and priorities around psychosocial safety. All in practice need to be cognisant of the risks and their potential impacts, from the graduate right up to the director. Working together to create a safe and healthy workplace should be a priority for all.

✳ Get up to speed with current legislation and follow the procedures and policies in your workplace.

✳ Speak up if you identify a psychosocial hazard that needs to be addressed.

✳ Engage with practice policies and surveys, and provide feedback.

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

Model good behaviour

At every level of the practice, people can be personally proactive and make a positive contribution to creating a safe and healthy workplace. Being personally open, communicative and respectful to all helps improve the culture of a practice.

✳ Be a role model – behave fairly, be considerate of others, actively listen.

✳ Ensure your own role descriptions and responsibilities are clear.

✳ Do not take part in toxic, unfair and discriminatory workplace practices.

✳ Be aware and responsible for your own impact on workplace culture.

✳ Consider your role in workplace banter. Is this banter respectful? Are you excluding others or discriminating against them?

✳ Seek feedback from others on how you come across in the workplace and whether you can make any improvements.

✳ Value the contributions of others. Recognise and acknowledge their achievements.

✳ Be willing to provide suggestions for improvement. Communicate clearly so your feedback is understood.

✳ Show care for the wellbeing of others.

> *"Ask everybody to learn kindness, empathy, understanding, gratitude and remember to be a human first."*
>
> **— Project leader in private practice, more than 30 yrs experience, WA, 2021**

Build awareness and self-care

Burnout, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem or low motivation can creep up over time. It is important to protect and nurture personal wellbeing so this does not occur.

Different people respond to stress at work in different ways. This may mean that some are more susceptible to harm than others. Be aware of your own wellbeing needs, create and protect personal boundaries, and build emotional self-management skills. This can help to navigate your work and personal life on a more even keel, and to avoid tipping over into crisis.

✳ Be open about difficulties you're experiencing. For example, consistent long hours, lack of tangible support or poor workplace relationships are all psychological triggers that can impact wellbeing. Work with your practice to mitigate these risks.

✳ Speak to a trusted colleague if you need additional support. Do this in a timely manner. Don't let it boil over.

✳ Utilise an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available to you.

"I have spoken to a counsellor and have reduced my work hours so I can allocate time to pursuing study in my areas of interest, so I can grow my professional career elsewhere instead of feeling so stuck in my current role."

— Associate in private practice, 21–30 years experience, QLD, 2021

✳ Build personal awareness – identify your strengths and areas for professional development, foster relationships, prioritise positive thinking, find meaning and purpose at work.

✳ Consider upskilling in self-awareness and self-regulation practices, such as mindfulness or self-compassion.

✳ Prioritise life balance.

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

Actively engage in the practice

Participate in the life of the practice, build relationships with people throughout the practice at every level, and learn and engage with policies and feedback loops wherever possible.

✳ Participate in practice surveys. Take the time to provide feedback – especially around working conditions and how they have affected you personally, both positively and negatively.

✳ Be supportive and understanding of all in practice. Be aware that personal challenges may not always be visible.

✳ Be mindful that new policies and procedures will take some time to be effective. Support practice managers, HR and/or leadership in this process.

✳ Have open and respectful conversations about the challenges and potential in practice. Don't be afraid to pose ideas or make suggestions for improvement.

✳ Remember that there is strength in numbers. If you're having issues, other colleagues are likely to be experiencing the same, and may be keen to discuss. Speak to a trusted colleague or manager as a collective.

Seek out education and training

Gaining experience and training in psychological or psychosocial safety at any level of your career can be valuable for your personal wellbeing as well as your positive contribution to the workplace. Start by identifying any skill gaps – remember that education and developing new skills is a continuous process.

✳ Be open to learning new skills and seek these out. Continuous learning is essential for career development, job satisfaction and building confidence.

✳ Participate in CPD webinars or courses on identified areas of concern: workplace wellbeing practices, unconscious bias training, bullying, harassment and violence in the workplace.

✳ Upskill in emotional intelligence training and awareness to understand and manage your own emotions while empathising with others.

✳ Attend workshops, seminars or webinars that focus on psychosocial safety in the workplace. Explore online platforms and resources outside the profession.

✳ Seek guidance from mentors, colleagues or other professionals with experience in psychosocial safety management. See Parlour Guide: Mentoring.

✳ Regularly reflect on your skills and what could be improved, making adjustments to education and training based on these observations and experiences.

The Profession

Professional organisations play a significant role in supporting industry standards and practices.

By promoting the importance of psychosocial and psychological safety in practice, these organisations can establish ethical and moral standards for the profession, facilitate positive change within practice and the wellbeing of its employees, and encourage a stronger reputation for the profession as a whole.

Work to ensure awareness of legislation

Continue to publicise and communicate the requirements of the psychosocial legislation to members and the profession.

✳ Publicise changes to or developments in workplace legislation related to psychosocial safety.

✳ Run events and share resources unpacking the requirements of the legislation.

Set the tone and model good behaviour

Prioritise psychological and psychosocial safety within your own workplace, ensuring that the organisation is walking the talk and modelling good behaviour.

✳ Conduct regular assessments within the workforce to ensure healthy workplace culture is prioritised and potential hazards are minimised.

Recognise and promote best practice

Lead cultural change by celebrating practices that prioritise wellbeing.

✳ Provide incentives and recognition through industry or professional awards.

✳ Promote case studies of practices with workplace cultures that prioritise psychological and psychosocial safety.

Educate through practical resources

Use institutional platforms to develop and expand the resources available.

✳ Support and share exemplar behaviour from those working to eliminate psychosocial hazards in practice.

✳ Establish or support affordable platforms for sharing knowledge and experience (with small practices in mind).

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

✳ Build awareness about employer WHS obligations, ethical practice management and mental wellbeing initiatives through articles, CPD events and training.

✳ Develop programs that support people to understand their WHS rights, and to help them set professional boundaries.

Reporting and guidelines

Professional bodies play a vital role in developing guidelines and reporting mechanisms for psychosocial safety.

✳ Develop mechanisms for reporting on wellbeing within the profession.

✳ Support and participate in research and encourage members, partners and networks to participate.

✳ Support, extend and publicise available HR services for smaller practices.

✳ Provide guidelines to assist practices in the development of psychosocial hazard identification and procedures in practice.

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.

Psychosocial safety

The Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act) is the primary legislation that sets out the legal framework for workplace health and safety across Australia. It outlines the duties of employers and workers in relation to health and safety. Each State and Territory has its own regulatory authority responsible for enforcing workplace health and safety laws.

Safe Work Australia is the national policy body responsible for the development and evaluation of the model WHS laws, which are comprised of the: model WHS Act, model WHS Regulations, and model Codes of Practice.

In 2022, Safe Work Australia published amendments to the model WHS laws, including provisions that defined psychosocial hazards and psychosocial risks. Managing psychosocial risks and hazards at work became a Work Health and Safety requirement that took effect on 1 April 2023.

The NSW State Government introduced legislation around eliminating or minimising workplace psychosocial risks in late 2022. SafeWork NSW developed the Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work. It is an approved Code of Practice under section 274 of the NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

Employers have a duty to ensure the health and safety of workers and others affected by the work. Workers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, and to ensure that their actions do not adversely affect others. Employers are required to identify hazards, assess risks, and implement control measures to eliminate or minimise risks as far as reasonably practicable. Employees have the right to refuse work if they believe it poses a serious risk to their health and safety.

Anti-discrimination and harassment

Employers Australia-wide must comply with anti-discrimination laws and promote a safe and inclusive work environment. Employees have the right to be treated fairly and without discrimination or harassment in the workplace. Legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act, Racial Discrimination Act, Disability Discrimination Act, and others prohibits discrimination based on various grounds in the workplace. The Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Act 2022 and the Respect at Work Amendment Act have wide-ranging impacts on employer obligations regarding sexual and sex-based harassment. They impose a positive duty on employers to take proactive and meaningful action to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and victimisation from occurring in the workplace or in connection to work.

Psychological safety

The 2021 National Standard of Competency for Architects (the NSCA) identifies the skills, knowledge and capabilities required for the general practice of architecture in Australia, encapsulated by three Professional Capabilities – Professionalism, Communication and Environmental Practice. The Professionalism capability encompasses the capacity to understand and enact the role and responsibilities of an architect within evolving architectural, social, cultural, ethical, legal, technical and business contexts. This specifically includes Bullet point 6 – Supporting and promoting healthy workplaces that are inclusive, safe and respectful.

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 & reading

Psychosocial Safety

Psychosocial Hazards
Safe Work Australia

Model Code of Practice: Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work
Safe Work Australia, 2022

Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011
Federal Register of Legislation
(in force 31 October 2023)

Code of Practice: Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work
Safework NSW, 2021

Employee and Workplace Rights
Victorian Equal Opportunity Human Rights Commission

A Best Practice Guide for Flexible and Work-From-Home Arrangements
Edith Cowan University, Southern Cross University, The University of New South Wales, Live Better
NSW Government Centre for Work Health and Safety, 2021

Positive and Healthy Workplace Cultures Guide
Queensland Government, 2018

People at Work

People at Work is a free and validated Australian psychosocial risk assessment survey, which assesses some of the most common psychosocial hazards and factors. It is part of a five-step process that can be used to identify, assess and control risks to psychological health at work.

On completion of the survey, participants receive a report that compares the organisation's results against a benchmark of Australian industries. The survey is designed for medium and large workplaces. Responses from a minimum of 20 workers are required for a report to be generated.

Understanding Bullying and Harassment
Champions of Change Architecture Group, Parlour
Parlour, 2022

This article was developed as part of a set that draws on Champions of Change material with the aim of sharing knowledge and experiences within the architecture and built environment professions.

The Champions of Change Coalition makes a compelling argument that sexual harassment must be addressed as an issue of leadership and organisational culture, and that framing must shift from a focus on workplace grievances to one of health and safety.

How to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace
Champions of Change Architecture Group, Parlour
Parlour, 2022

This article introduces the Champions of Change Coalition's Disrupting the System principles, outlines concrete actions that can be taken by leaders and organisations, and links to tools and resources that may be adapted or adopted by practices to their specific contexts.

Advice includes: 1. Elevate the prevention of sexual harassment and early intervention as a leadership priority; 2. Address sexual harassment as a workplace health and safety issue; 3. Introduce principles on confidentiality and transparency; 4. Inform, empower and expect everyone to speak up and take action on sexual harassment in the workplace; and 5. Listen to, respect, empower and support people impacted.

Psychological Safety

Psychologically Safe and Inclusive Workplaces: A guide for public sector agencies
Western Australian Government

An excellent guide, which outlines the benefits of creating safe and inclusive workplaces; and offers links to resources, tools and advice.

What Is Psychological Safety?
Amy Gallo with Amy Edmondson
Harvard Business Review, 2023

Why is psychological safety important? How has the idea evolved? How do you know if your team has it? And how do you create it? Amy Gallo interviews Harvard Business School Professor Amy Edmonson on the latest thinking around psychological safety.

Fearless Organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation and growth
Amy Edmondson
Wiley, 2018

Amy Edmonson has been researching psychological safety for 30 years. In this popular book, she writes about the concept of psychological safety within organisations and teams, and offers practical examples on how to create positive change in the workplace.

The Psychologically Safe Playbook
Karolin Helbig & Minette Norman
Page Two Press, 2023

The Psychological Safety Playbook is a practical guide containing 25 psychological safety real-world skills that every leader can learn and practise. Each section has a description of why to try it with references to the supporting research and step-by-step instructions on how to do it. Aimed at executives, managers or anyone who cares about building a healthy culture in which everyone can fully contribute.

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety
Timothy R. Clark, *Porchlight*, 2020

Timothy Clark writes that psychological safety is a condition in which you feel 1) included; 2) safe to learn; 3) safe to contribute; and 4) safe to challenge the status quo. He explains that fear in the workplace freezes initiative and creativity, and represses innovation. This article offers tips on conducting a personal inventory of your behaviour and how you can improve your work relationships and your contribution to a psychologically safe workplace.

Psychological Safety and the Critical Role of Leadership Development
McKinsey & Company, 2021

The findings of a McKinsey Global Survey show how leaders can create a safer and higher-performance work environment by demonstrating supportive, consultative behaviours and creating a positive team climate.

Resilient Organizations Make Psychological Safety a Strategic Priority
Maren Gube & Debra Sabatini Hennelly
Harvard Business Review, August 2022

In this article, the authors explore the obstacles to investing in psychological safety and illustrate how senior leaders can overcome these obstacles to boost resilience. They emphasise how integrity, innovation and inclusion can sustain business continuity, competitiveness and growth. They write that organisations need to look beyond individual wellbeing and make psychological safety a strategic priority, creating a culture where employees can comfortably raise concerns, contribute ideas, and share unique perspectives.

Why Great Leaders Take Humor Seriously
Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas
TEDTalk, August 2021

There's a mistaken belief in today's working world that leaders need to be serious all the time to be taken seriously. The research tells a different story. This nine-minute TEDTalk is based on a course at Stanford's Graduate School of Business by behavioural scientist Jennifer Aaker and corporate strategist Naomi Bagdonas. Here they discuss the surprising power of humour: how it build bonds, power, creativity and resilience, and ways to incorporate it into the workplace.

What is Listening and Learning +
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. Monica writes, "Through listening, the lived experience of life in a practice is revealed, which is often different to the stories we tell ourselves."

Why Inclusive Leaders Are Good for Organizations, and How to Become One
Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus
Harvard Business Review, March 2019

Juliet Bourke is a professor of practice in the School of Management and Governance, UNSW Business School, UNSW. Andrew Titus is a consultant at Deloitte and PhD candidate in Organisational Psychology at Macquarie University. This discussion of their research shows how inclusive leaders can improve company performance and offers suggestions on how to make a start with creating an inclusive culture.

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