


THE WELLBEING
of ARCHITECTS
culture, identity
+ practice.



The Wellbeing of Architects
Report on Focus Groups
with Practitioners

Colophon

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We acknowledge all members of the research team for their contributions. We are incredibly grateful for the engagement of the many members of the Australian architectural community who gave up their time to participate in the focus groups.

Funding

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council, who have provided funding for this project through the Linkage Projects Scheme (project number LP190100926, 2020-2023).

The project has been materially and intellectually supported by industry-based research partners. These include private architecture practices (in alphabetic order): BVN, DesignInc, Elenberg Fraser, The Fulcrum Agency, Hassell, and SJB. It has also been supported by peak industry bodies: the NSW Architects Registration Board (NSWARB), the Australian Institute of Architects, and the Association of Consulting Architects (ACA), as well as the Association of Australasian Schools of Architecture (AASA).

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Citation

To cite this report:

Kinnaird, B., Battiston, L., Stead, N., Gusheh, M., Robberts, J., Shea, T., Cooper, B., Orr, K., Cox, J. W., (2023). *The Wellbeing of Architects: Report on Focus Groups with Practitioners*, Caulfield East, Australia: Monash University.

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Introduction

For further information on the practitioner survey completed in 2021, please see the Primary Report here: <https://thewellbeingofarchitects.org.au/publications/the-wellbeing-of-architects-2021-practitioner-survey-primary-report>

This report presents the findings of a series of focus groups conducted between May and June 2022, with people working in the architecture profession in Australia, and addressing work-related wellbeing for this group.

The focus groups built on a major survey conducted in 2021, which indicated the wellbeing of people working in architecture were affected by a range of issues, including time management (deadlines, long hours, overtime), financial and resource management (fees charged, remuneration paid), and the broader societal and individual valuation of architectural services.

The focus groups set out to examine these themes in more depth: to explore a more nuanced, qualitative and conversational approach to those themes, through the lived experience and direct expression of people working in the architectural profession. The ultimate aim was to explore ideas for solutions and resources to better support wellbeing in these areas.

The earlier survey and these focus groups were part of a larger research project titled Architectural Work Cultures: professional identity, education and wellbeing, funded by the Australian Research Council between 2020 and 2023. The project also (separately) surveyed architecture students, and conducted focus groups with students, academics (sessional and ongoing) as well as academic leaders – the findings from these other focus groups and survey are reported separately.

This report is a detailed account of the design and findings of the practitioner focus groups. It begins with an executive summary, followed by a description of how the focus groups were designed and undertaken, and an overview of who participated. The report then presents the findings in greater detail, organised in chapters addressing each major theme, with a final chapter reporting on some possible solutions suggested by focus group participants.

We acknowledge the generosity and engagement of the many members of the Australian architectural community who gave their time to participate in the focus groups.

Executive summary of findings

The focus group findings help us understand the many aspects of architectural work that have a positive and negative affect on people working in architecture. They highlight that many positive aspects interact in complex ways with negative experiences, and show that improving the situation will require a collective response at all levels of the profession.

Positive experiences

The most common theme expressed among participants was a sense of passion and fulfilment gained from contributing to people's lives and communities through their work.

Participants also found satisfaction in the process of the work itself, including complex problem solving, close collaboration, the continual learning involved, and the diversity of roles available in practice.

Negative experiences

Participants reported a range of complex issues negatively impacting their wellbeing. These included the ways that time and labour are managed in practice, stressors within the wider industry such as low fees and procurement practices, and negative perceptions of value.

Overwhelmingly, the perception is that architectural practitioners have little or no formal management training, and this is the source of compounding issues at many levels of experience.

The correlation between low fees and the compromised capacity for a practice to appropriately fund labour was emphasised and seen to have a flow-on effect of long-hours, unpaid labour, financial losses, exploitation of younger workers, and stress and anxiety.

Procurement practices were strongly associated with negative impacts on wellbeing. This included problematic tendering processes, a lack of longevity or security in projects, and the negative effects of value-management.

The responsibility and risk associated with providing architectural services was not seen as commensurate with pay or status within the wider industry.

Suggestions for improvement

There was a perceived need for greater transparency and collective action among architectural practices and organisations to normalise widespread sharing of workplace practices and policies, supported by professional bodies, advocacy organisations and media outlets.

Notably, there was a perceived need for clear guidance and platforms that give individuals, practices, and professional organisations the skills, resources and agency to support and improve work-related wellbeing in the profession.

About the focus groups

For further information on the ethical considerations and harm minimisation, please see the Appendix.

Recruitment and structure

Participants for the focus groups were recruited from those who had completed the primary survey conducted in 2021 and indicated an interest in participating in future focus groups.

There were 12 focus groups that ran between May 16 and June 27, and one interview (one-on-one) conducted on June 28. In total 67 people participated in the focus groups. The focus groups were intentionally designed to be 'mixed', meaning that each focus group would – as much as possible – include diverse representation in gender, location, role/position, and tenure within the industry.

Focus groups were conducted via teleconference (using Zoom software), with 3 - 8 participants, and in most cases 2 facilitators per group. Focus Groups were 90 minutes in duration, followed by separate debriefing meeting between facilitators (a maximum of 30 minutes). Video, audio, and automated transcripts were recorded for each session with written consent of all participants.

The project was approved by Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 30496), and all respondents were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity.

Focus group questions

The focus groups used a semi-structured question method with a range of follow-up prompts as needed. The focus group discussions were organised in four main parts, with questions about:

1. Aspects of architectural work that had positive impacts on wellbeing.
2. Participant's views about recommending architecture as a career.
3. Aspects of architectural work that had negative impacts on wellbeing, specifically:

- Time management
- Financial and resource management
- Value and valuation of architectural services
- Industry factors (such as fee-undercutting)

4. Suggestions for what could improve wellbeing for all in architecture.

This fourth stage was important to fulfil the aims of the focus groups, namely to contribute directly to the ultimate goal of the larger project: the development of tailored resources or initiatives to support individuals, architecture-based workplaces, professional organisations and education providers to work towards improving occupational wellbeing through cultural change.

Defining wellbeing

In these focus groups wellbeing was defined broadly, encompassing subjective factors that contribute to a person's perception of a healthy, fulfilling, satisfying, and meaningful life.

The Victorian government describes wellbeing as “not just the absence of disease or illness [rather] a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors... In short, wellbeing could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.”

These focus groups were particularly interested in the ways in which work affect wellbeing - how individuals feel about themselves and their work, and which aspects of architectural work, education, and culture might have effects on wellbeing.

About the participants

The demographics of the focus group participants were, in general, reflective of the respondents of the survey. Just over half (58%) of participants were women, and 42% were men. The majority of participants were located in either New South Wales or Victoria - again reflective of the primary survey - with representation (at least one person) from each state and territory in Australia. The participants brought perspective from a wide range of roles, practice types and years of experience. The demographic information of the focus group participants is shown in the figures below.

Figure 1.
Gender of participants.
This indicates a skew toward women which was also present in the 2021 survey cohort.

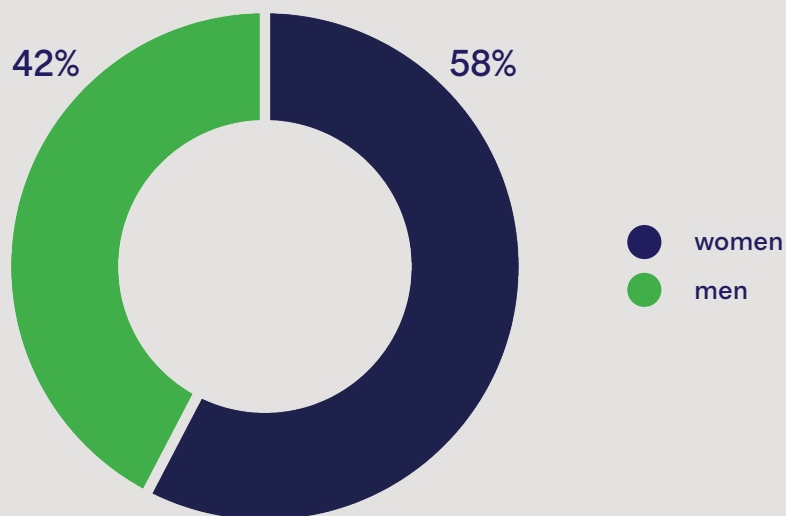


Figure 2.
Location of participants.
 Broadly speaking, this approximates the distribution of architectural workers in Australia, which was also reflected in the 2021 survey cohort.

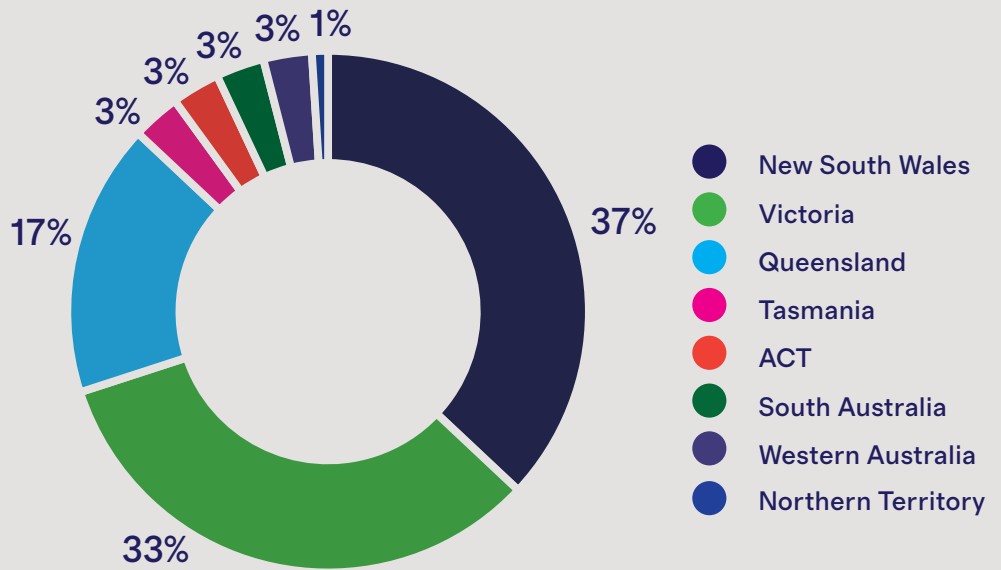


Figure 3.
Role of participants.
 The participants represented a diverse range of roles and levels of seniority within practice.

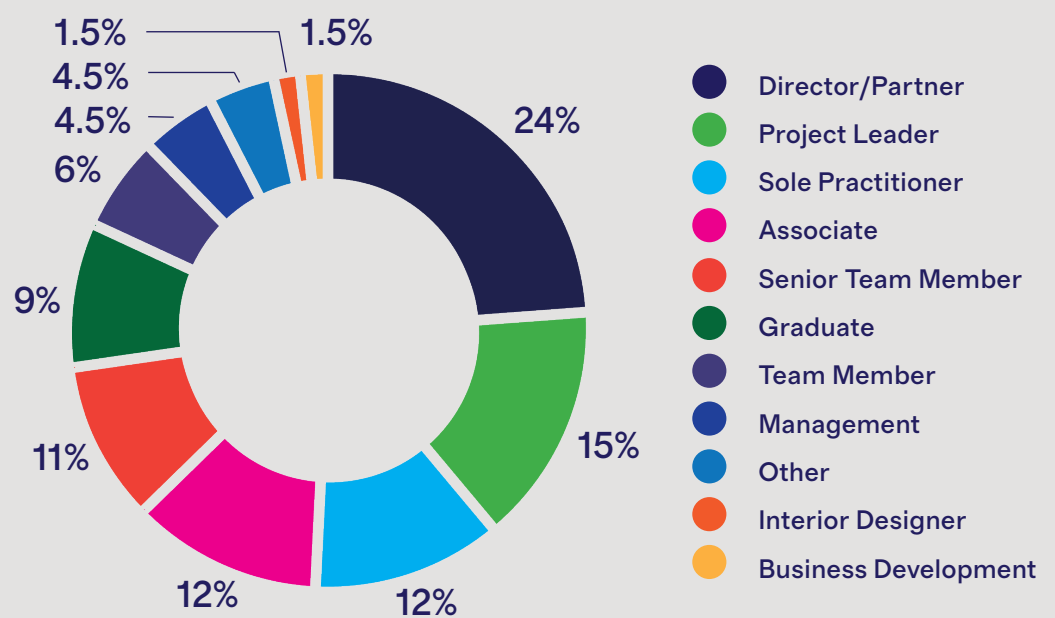


Figure 4.
Organisation type of participants.
 While the majority of participants worked for architectural private practice, several worked in government or multi-disciplinary organisations.

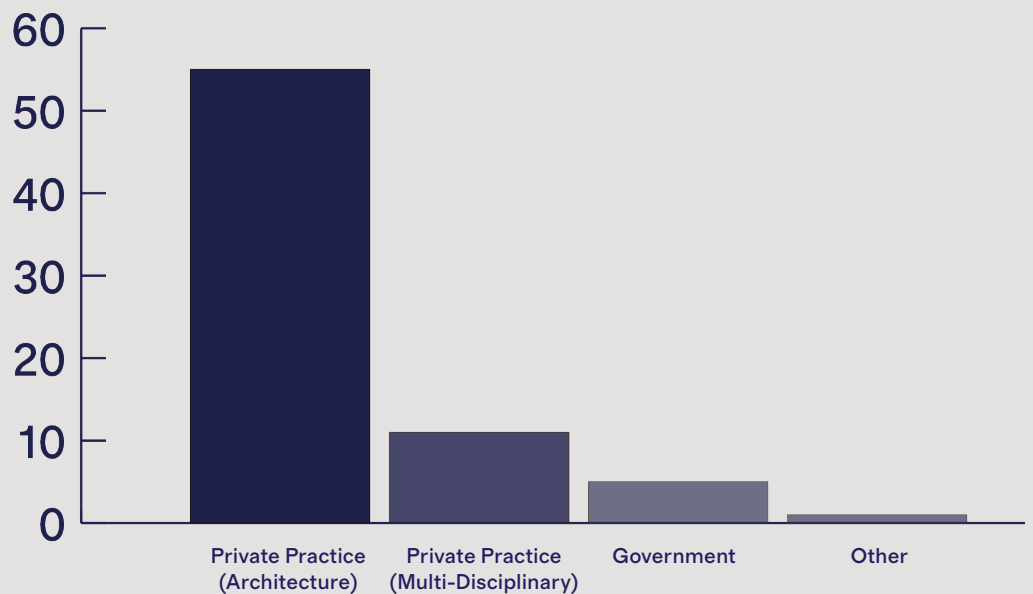


Figure 5.
Tenure within the industry of participants.
 Participants reflected the full spectrum of practice, from those who had recently graduated, through to those with more than 30 years' experience. This demographic mix generally reflects the cohort of the 2021 survey.

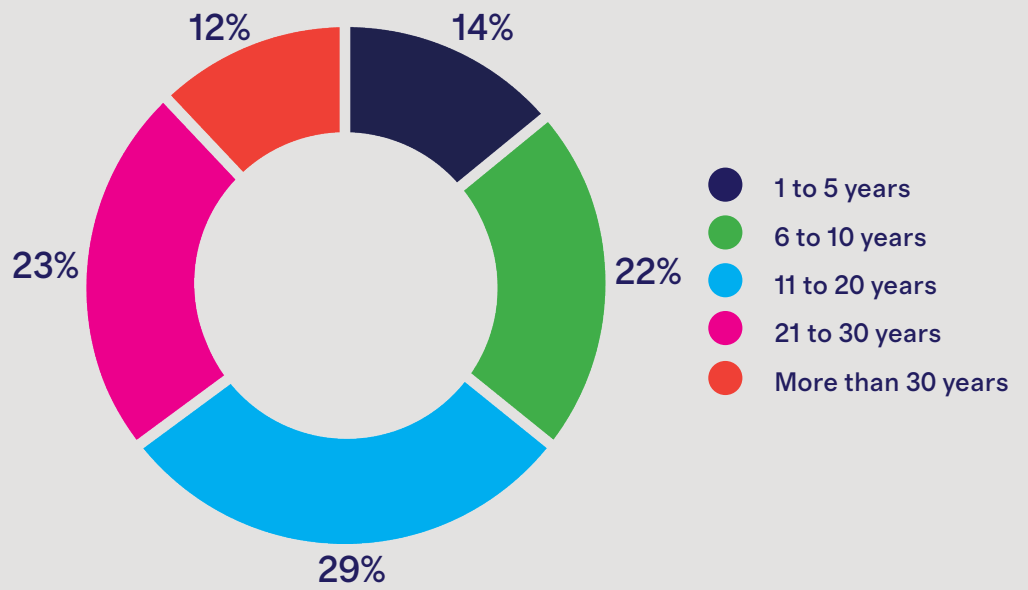
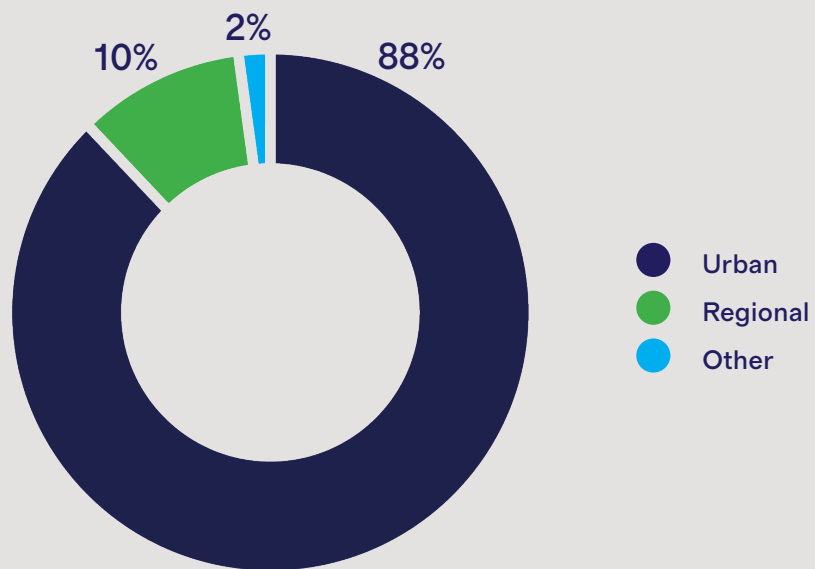


Figure 6.
Urban and regional location of participants.
 While most of participants of the focus groups worked in urban locations, a small percentage were from regional areas.



Focus group findings

This section reports the findings of the focus groups, and is organised around the four main lines of questioning. Common themes that emerged in the analysis of each question are listed below, and are reported in detail in this section.

1. Positive impacts on wellbeing from working in architecture

- Contributing to people's lives and communities
- Process and realisation of architectural projects
- Professional collaboration with the wider industry
- Lifelong learning and competence in architectural practice
- Satisfaction with problem solving in architectural practice
- A sense of autonomy in architectural work
- Workplace flexibility that has been accelerated by COVID-19

2. Recommending architecture as a career

- Ambivalence about recommending architecture as a career
- Dissuading people from a career in architecture
- Recommending architecture as a career

3. Negative impacts on wellbeing from working in architecture

- Poor practice management in architecture
- Poor time management in architectural practice
- External industry factors that impact architectural practice
- Societal and professional questions of value in architecture

4. What could be done to improve the wellbeing of architects?

- Architectural education and ongoing professional development
- Valuing architectural practice
- Healthy workplace
- Healthy profession

Positive impacts on wellbeing from working in architecture

Each focus group started with a question exploring the aspects of working in architecture that had a positive impacts on people's wellbeing.

"It's always about making the world a better place. Everything that we do is about improving things."

"What you're doing is contributing to others' wellbeing."

"I think one of the things I liked most about it is the intangible things, and the value that we can add as design professionals to a project. So the way we situate buildings, or the way we plan space, that impact people without them even knowing it. [...] I really love the value that we can provide."

"There are so few professions where an idea can be translated, not only into something drawn, but something built, and I think that's an incredible privilege that we have as a profession."

"It feels like a super power!"

"I get joy out of the process more than the product, where it's such a long process, and you get to know people, you get to know their strengths, and you get to work through problems with them."

"The ability to work across such a range of disciplines within the industry, and the opportunity to lead within that space is very rewarding."

The 2021 survey had provided some insight to this question already – in particular the view that many of the positive impacts from working in architecture were tied to negatives, or were expressed with some degree of caution.

The findings here are encouraging, and provide useful insights to the aspects of architectural practice that can be further supported to improve the wellbeing of people working in architecture. The following positive themes emerged from the discussion.

Contributing to people's lives and communities

The most common theme expressed among participants was a sense of passion and fulfilment gained from contributing to people's lives and communities through their work.

This was expressed sometimes as an intangible value added to a project (an impact they had on clients 'without them even knowing it'), and a sense of altruistic achievement, where participants felt they were making the world a better place, and contributing positively to people's lives and communities. This also manifested in a sense of pride seeing occupants inhabit spaces and benefit from their work, such as children in schools, or residents in aged care.

Process and realisation of architectural projects

Many participants spoke of the positive experience taken from the architectural process, that is, seeing ideas being realised from idea through to built work, and the variety and challenge of the stages involved in this work.

This was expressed variously as a passion for specific parts of the process (such as a love of drawing, or detailing), or specifically being a part of an idea's realisation by 'getting your boots wet' onsite, and more broadly working at the intersection of creativity, technology and functional requirements.

One participant made a keen observation that a strong sense of their satisfaction is seeing their work come to realisation – and that some younger practitioners may not experience as much early in their career when specialised in certain roles – "they're not seeing or experiencing the whole."

Professional collaboration with the wider industry

Many participants expressed the positive impact and value of their professional relationships, which included their workplace colleagues and team members, the wide range of allied professionals, and the client-side interactions with clients and the wider community. The diverse nature of these communities was something that was highly valued for many.

“I love that our discipline operates at the intersection between people and communities, different places, and different cultures.”

“I think on a personal level I feel very privileged to be working in a job where I learn something new every single day. I still feel like I’m on this enormous learning curve... There’s just so much to develop all the time, and every day is different.”

“I found working quite hard up until maybe two years ago, and then I just hit a point where just seemed like everything made sense, and it just seemed less scary and less stressful.”

“I think that architecture is an inherently positive profession, people come to us with problems and we solve them.”

“One of my experiences was realising when I was self-employed that I could actually sack clients, which of course when I was working for other people I couldn’t.”

“I work on my own because I had two children, previously I’d worked in a big office where you were expected to work overtime a lot, and I didn’t think that was going to work. Working for myself I have freedom to do a few other things now.”

An important aspect of professional relationships (colleagues and allied professionals) was the positive and fulfilling experience of collaboration toward an outcome in the complex environment of projects.

Reflecting on client and community relationships, many participants expressed a strong sense of fulfilment in working closely with clients and communities to provide meaningful outcomes for them, and witnessing that satisfaction. A similar sentiment of fulfilment was made by those who contributed back to students through teaching.

Lifelong learning and competence in architectural practice

Another common positive impact of architectural practice was an experience of continued learning, made possible by the variety in work, complex projects, specialisation, and the evolution of relevant skills and knowledge.

For some, the variety of work itself was important, while for others it was the specific idea of ‘learning something every day’ in response to new challenges. Interestingly, this theme was not articulated in connection to the regulatory requirement for formalised continuing professional development.

More experienced practitioners expressed a positive association with a sense of competence, having overcome stresses associated with inexperience within the profession. Having confidence in this capacity was associated with the satisfaction of running bigger projects and teams, and with being able to mentor others.

Satisfaction with problem solving in architectural practice

Participants found great satisfaction in their capacity to solve problems, particularly expressed in association with the unique or complex needs of a project or client. More than once this was expressed as a kind of altruism of the profession – that by its nature it is inherently positive because it solves the difficult challenges faced by others.

Not to overemphasise an outcome-driven model of practice, in some instances participants expressed the problem-solving process itself as the most satisfying aspect, not necessarily the built outcome.

A sense of autonomy in architectural work

One theme that emerged specifically from sole practitioners, was a sense of enjoyment in the freedom and autonomy provided by the nature of their work arrangement, and their agency over variables such as work flexibility, typology of work, and the autonomy to be selective with clients.

Workplace flexibility that has been accelerated by COVID-19

While not a common theme of discussions, it was notable that some felt that the COVID-19 pandemic had opened up opportunities for ‘doing things differently’, primarily through flexible work arrangements that were previously uncommon, and that this ‘reset of management structures’ provided an opportunity for further positive changes.

Recommending architecture as a career

“I think firstly identity is really powerful, and I think that may also go to a sense of how you feel supported as an architect by the institutions around you. Because when you identify in that way, the organisational arms of that identity are very important to you.”

“I recently did a careers night, with all girls between year 9 and year 12, and it was really interesting talking with them about why they were interested in architecture. [...] I found myself dispelling myths, but also trying to give sage advice, and also to encourage people at the same time, it was quite a performance!”

“It’s not for everyone, I think you have to have that passion for the industry, and I think you have to make some sacrifices, either investment of your time or a monetary return on investment.”

“All the people who have been asking me recently, ‘Should I do architecture?’ have been female, and I’ve told them upfront, it’s just not a conducive work environment to having a family.”

“I wouldn’t recommend architecture to anyone unless they were super passionate about the job. The study is long and time consuming and at the end of the day, it doesn’t pay well.”

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

One unexpected finding that emerged in our 2021 survey was a relatively positive sense of career commitment and fulfilment, contrasted with a low perception of working in the profession – that many would not recommend architecture to others. To explore this further, we asked whether participants agreed or disagreed with this, and why they thought this finding had emerged.

Ambivalence about recommending architecture as a career

When presented with this finding, participants expressed ambivalence about recommending architecture as a career to others because there were inter-related positive and negative aspects to the work that were difficult to reconcile.

On the one hand, they spoke of a strong sense of identity that they get being connected to architecture, through a sense of passion, achievement and contribution. However, this came at a certain cost, expressed as a sacrifice, financial cost, or considerable personal investment.

Participants said that the impacts of this commitment could extend beyond the workplace, to broader feelings of professional pride and identification with the architectural community and its institutions. For some, the extent of this identification had impacts on their lifestyle and personal relationships, in both positive and negative ways.

More directly responding to the question of recommending architecture to others – namely prospective students, a consistent theme was the observation that there is a gap between the perception of architectural practice and its reality, and that this was particularly hard to articulate or give the proper emphasis.

Dissuading people from a career in architecture

Participants who would not recommend architecture as a career path pointed to the negative aspects of the profession that were commonly discussed in the focus groups: high responsibility, significant time demands, and a relatively low income. Participants with this view were less likely to see the ‘benefits’, such as vocational fulfilment, as being worthwhile – as one said, “Passion doesn’t do it any more for me. It’s not enough. You have to get paid.”

Some felt very strongly that they would not recommend architecture to others. On two occasions a cynical joke referring to financial sacrifice was used: “An architect wins the lottery – they keep working until they’re broke.”

Further elaborating on the ‘value proposition’ of a career in architecture, many expressed the reward for time-commitment as being hard to sell, not only because of the duration of study, but also the extended period toward registration, and ultimately more time to feel ‘truly competent’.

A notable theme that emerged in the focus groups was the idea of class and accessibility – that the high-risk environment and low reward (financially, especially) was not deemed safe or worthwhile to lower socio-economic or middle-class communities.

“I would recommend this job to almost everyone, because it’s so much fun.”

“I would definitely think that architecture is an amazing job for people, but you have to be able to connect both sides of the brain, and if you can do that it’s fantastic.”

“I think you need to love a deadline. There’s a performative aspect to the work. I do feel at times there is this need to be willing to take on the deadline and the performance of presenting design work.”

“I’ve recommended it to some people, and I’ve strongly said don’t do it to others. To be an architect you need to be someone who I think is a leader, someone who can take control, and to lead a design or lead a group of people, or lead an idea. You need to be able to be accountable for the decisions you make and the words that you state, and it’s all-encompassing, and that’s a beautiful thing and a terrible thing.”

“I don’t know that it’s possible to find a job where you’re working on the type of projects that you want to be working on, you’re in the environment you want to be in, and you’re getting paid what you’d like to be getting paid, but I feel like two out of three is not bad!”

Recommending architecture as a career

Despite some strongly held views in the negative, there were equally positive advocates for a career in architecture.

Participants who would recommend architecture to others spoke of the strong sense of fulfillment that architectural practitioners can get from their contribution to people, communities and society, being arbiters of good design and leaders in the improvement of the built environment.

Participants also spoke of the satisfaction to be had in working between the creative and the technical, being a somewhat unique characteristic of the profession.

Some highlighted the diverse pathways through architecture as being attractive to many types of skillsets and interests, providing diversity and mobility in career paths. Participants noted that there was a challenge in effectively communicating these diverse pathways, as they were not well marketed or understood by prospective students, or even early career professionals.

Some respondents identified quite specific attributes that might attract some prospective students or practitioners, such as the performative aspect of presenting and arguing for their work, or the pressures of deadlines and project-based work (as a positive), or those who might love the challenge or commitment associated with architectural practice.

While there were strong negative and positive views expressed by participants about recommending architecture as a career to others, there was a lot of ambivalence during this particular discussion, highlighting a complicated balancing act that architectural practitioners appear to experience.

Negative impacts on wellbeing

This section reports on a series of questions that addressed four major themes about aspects of architectural practice that were negatively impacting the wellbeing of people.

These themes were the core of the focus group discussions, and were explored with the understanding that these issues are complex and intersectional. Analysis of the discussion identified a range of sub-themes which are explored here.

They are:

Poor practice management in architecture

- No formal management training given to architects
- Lack of transparency
- Exploitation of employees
- Practice management and identity

Poor time management in architectural practice

- Long hours culture and identity
- Poor time management practices

External industry factors that impact architectural practice

- Procurement practices
- Fees
- Responsibility and risk

Societal and professional questions of value in architecture

- Value of architecture
- Valuing architectural services

Poor practice management in architecture

“From my experience of thirty-five years working in practices and now my own, I think there is almost no formal management training given to architects. Architects’ main resource is other architects. It’s not a factory, we’re working with people. And I just don’t think we value the concept of management.”

“I feel like there’s been a systemic problem with the lack of business acumen for generations of architects.”

“Often people will go into management positions because they’re good architects, not because they’re good managers, and the two are different things.”

“I am someone who thoroughly enjoys working for someone else, so I don’t have to deal with those stressors that I hear so much about.”

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

“As a junior I’m rarely involved in how fees are set, so when you’re given an allowance of hours, you ask ‘How did you come up with this?’ And when I ask the question sometimes I feel silly, but I would just love a bit more transparency about how architects allocate fees to deliver something.”

The ways that architectural practice is managed was a frequent source of negative experiences and had an adverse impact on the wellbeing of participants. The issues were complex and often intersected with other themes discussed in this report.

Overwhelmingly, the perception was that architects had little or no formal management training, and that this was the source of various compounding issues at many levels of experience.

No formal management training given to architects

This issue was resoundingly the most common observation when discussing practice management. Many stated that universities had an opportunity – or duty – to introduce or emphasise explicit practice management skills to students, however many noted that the issue seemed systemic, and required intervention at all levels of the profession.

Participants observed that there were impediments to this challenge. Partly that there seemed to be an embedded culture that did not value management, possibly due to a valorisation of creative practice (that is incompatible with corporate/business sensibilities), but also, that a lack of exposure to external expertise in this field led to a situation of ignorance and ad-hoc management. As one participant said, the solution has been to just “throw hours at it”.

Speaking to this point, participants made an insightful observation that one of the factors contributing to the lack of practice management competency was a flawed model of career advancement, where successful architects would be promoted into leadership or management positions that they were not necessarily trained for.

Those who had gained expertise in practice or business management (or experienced well-managed practices) spoke highly of the benefits of this to their productivity and capacity to understand the relevant business issues and its impact on their work. This knowledge led to improved wellbeing of themselves and their workplaces.

Lack of transparency

A source of anxiety and stress, especially felt by junior employees, was a lack of any transparency around decisions, resourcing and project management that affected their workload, leading to uncertainty and a lack of agency. Participants who were experiencing this noted that it not only affected their general stress and anxiety levels, but it made it difficult to self-manage their time and meet the expectations of their supervisors, because they were unaware of priorities or how projects were tracking.

Some reflected that instances of this lack of transparency were being used intentionally by employers to restrict exposure to management skills and practices, impeding opportunities for promotion or career support toward leadership roles.

“I think that there are many employers out there who are not interested in their staff knowing more than a certain amount about managing the business, or how a business works, because they’re worried they’re going to become more competent at it than they are, and that they’re going to lose them.”

“I found that managers would take advantage of a young person’s inability to time manage, and say ‘you do this by this date’, and you go ‘okay’, and they you realise actually that’s going to take me 40 hours of work instead of 20 hours of work, and they know that, but they make you feel like they don’t know that, and it’s your fault you aren’t doing it fast enough.”

“Management isn’t sexy. That’s not who we are, I think our identity doesn’t often involve managing people, our identity is often about working together as this team, you know, working all night if we have to, that’s sexy.”

“Every year, I have a handful of students saying this is such a stupid assignment, why do I have to do this, and I have to explain to them that it’s eighty percent of their job understanding the NCC and how to interact with other professions. The design aspect that you love is probably only five-percent of what you do in the practice.”

Conversely, employers made salient observations that managing a practice (regardless of size) can be incredibly complex and challenging, and that employees don’t always have empathy or recognition of this, nor would it necessarily be appropriate to make managerial decisions transparent.

Exploitation of employees

Worryingly, some participants spoke of instances of bullying and inappropriate behaviour within practices – some said it was common, particularly for early career professionals who were being ‘used up’.

Participants expressed frustration that there seemed to be little avenue for complaint or accountability – particularly in smaller practices where there were no dedicated HR personnel. Participants questioned whether codes of conduct published by the Australian Institute of Architects and architect registration boards were sufficiently scoped to protect employees in these cases. This revealed some misunderstanding of the legislative codes of conduct operated by architect registration boards that are in place for consumer protection, not the protection of architects or their workplaces.

Younger practitioners also spoke of a fear of reprisal for raising complaints or concerns. They were particularly concerned about the implications for their career, noting that the close-knit community of the profession (their potential employers) made them feel vulnerable.

Practice management and identity

One of the more complex issues identified in this discussion was a perceived cultural misalignment between the identity of the profession and management culture. When asked why this gap might exist, participants expressed management or ‘business’ culture as being incompatible with more ‘idealistic, romantic or creative’ attributes of the profession.

Discussions about the emergence of this culture pointed to the university environment as a possible source, noting the general absence of formal management training in architectural education as mentioned above. Many observed that the ‘business of architecture’ was not featured enough in the curriculum, or highlighted as being as important as it should. Many suggested business and practice needed to be present from ‘day one’.

One practitioner significantly involved in education highlighted a cognitive gap in education and the culture of students, where students were enthusiastic about the idea of starting their own practice, but did not correlate this to ideas of management and business, and instinctively rejected assignments on these topics, highlighting again a degree of cultural misalignment in the profession.

Poor time management in architectural practice

There were two major discussion points on this matter: poor time management being established during architectural education, and the impacts of insufficient workplace practices around time management.

“The head of school said ‘you have to spend a lot of time completing your work and there’s no time for your girlfriends or boyfriends’. My partner was sitting next to me. That year there was a suicide attempt, and a young lady took her life.”

“I’ve had to resign after a mental breakdown because I wasn’t getting enough sleep. The impact on my personal wellbeing and my family was intense. Doing 17 hours a day, seven days a week after nine months you just collapse. You can’t keep doing it.”

“Many young people feel that they’re not good at what they do, and get into the habit of working overtime to compensate for taking a long time to do stuff. Often the overtime habit sets in, and even once practitioners have gained more skills and experience they still feel inclined to habitually overwork. You’ve really got to check yourself and your habits.”

“Every time I tried to work more flexibly to accommodate for parental caring responsibilities they’d offer me a pay-rise at work, but I’d still be working way more hours than I wanted to.”

Long hours culture and identity

Participants were emphatic that long hours culture was responsible for negatively impacting wellbeing from the outset of architectural education. Many participants referred to the prevalence of ‘all-nighters’ at university, associated with pride or a ‘badge of honour’. Some expressed the tacit (and sometimes overt) encouragement from tutors to participate in these practices, associating it with a sense of commitment to studies and the profession.

Participants suggested that the absence of time management skills were carried through to architectural practice, where they had become culturally engrained.

One participant observed insightfully: “Architecture is never described as a job - always as a lifestyle. That your life doesn’t matter except for architecture.”

Poor time management practices

The overwhelming view was that architectural workplaces were not well skilled in practices of time management. While this was expressed as a matter of competence and skills in time management, there were also references to the nature of collaborative and highly contingent work being difficult to manage. They referred to shifting external factors that were difficult to control making it ‘more of an art, than a science’.

Poor time management was also discussed from the perspective of early career professionals, who felt vulnerable to exploitation by employers (as well as subjecting themselves to a kind of self-disciplining) due to their lack of knowledge, experience, or power.

Poor time management in the profession had significant impacts on work-life balance. Worryingly, some participants pointed to the significant negative impact that architectural practice was having on their private lifestyles and relationships. Some said that architecture didn’t allow time or flexibility for family or children – which was disproportionately affecting women, but all young parents in general.

Some participants suggested that a sense of perspective is important, “no-one’s going to die” one said, suggesting that the motives for the intense pressure and stress should be checked. It was suggested that this lack of perspective could also set up unhealthy expectations for the client, where firmer (and realistic) boundaries needed to be set.

External industry factors that impact architectural practice

Participants said there were significant stressors in their work associated with industry conditions that seemed out of their control or power. These were particularly challenging to individuals because they seemed difficult to resolve at an individual or even practice level. The three major themes identified by the participants were procurement practices, fees, and risk.

“The procurement process in public projects is deeply problematic. In my experience, projects always go to the cheapest tenderer. As a result, graduates are forced to meet ridiculous deadlines, enforced by people who don’t know how long things will take, and the human resources that are required.”

“Our hourly rates are just so stupidly low. How can we be coordinating all of these people who are more expensive than us? I don’t get it.”

“If there’s a proper fee to do good work, and you know that you’ve got the job for two years, jeez it makes a difference.”

“I sat in a meeting where my directors agreed to take a \$300,000 fee down to \$200,000. And we all went ‘Yes, we’ll reduce our scope of work’, but you can’t reduce your scope of work. You can’t not draw that drawing.”

“In one firm I worked in, they really did look at transparent fee discussions, and the value of time, and it was incredibly helpful. Being able to see where the fees are going and why has a large effect, and helps as an employee to understand the corresponding monetary fee of architectural labour.”

Procurement practices

Procurement practices were emphatically associated with poor wellbeing. Strong negative views were expressed about the impact on wellbeing of problematic tendering processes, namely the lack of security or longevity in contracts created by staged tendering practices, and the negative effects of ‘value-management’. Government clients were repeatedly identified as problematic, leading to suggestions of reform in this area that would instead model ‘best practice’ for procurement from government clients.

While some of these challenges originate outside of the profession, participants reported that these conditions had become reinforced internally, leading to unhealthy competitiveness and under-cutting of fees, to the detriment of the profession as a whole.

Fees

The theme of fees was a significant talking point throughout the focus groups, intersecting with many other issues such as time-management and value.

The correlation between fees and the capacity for a practice to appropriately fund the human resources required for the work was made very clear. Where fees were insufficient, many identified the flow-on effect of long-hours, unpaid labour, financial losses, exploitation of younger workers, and stress and anxiety. As one participant put it, “you need the time to do the things you need to do,” and that they needed the fees to support that.

As another participant reflected, when there is a good fee with the security and longevity of a project, the difference to wellbeing was palpable.

Many lamented the loss of fee-scales in the profession, and reported witnessing a significant lowering of fees in the last two decades in the absence of an established fee-scale. Participants shared a sentiment that more direct regulation could be a viable and impactful mechanism for systemic change regarding fees.

Participants spoke of regulatory changes that they had hoped would indirectly recognise the authority and skillset of architects and therefore provide leverage to set higher fees, such as the *Design and Building Practitioners Act 2020* (DBP Act) in NSW. This legislation aims to protect consumers by introducing compliance mechanisms to the design,

“10 or 15 years ago in the industry, we had fee scales. If it was a certain project type and a certain complexity, there was an expected fee. And if you look at those scales in terms of what people expected to pay then compared to now, those percentages have halved.”

“When you compare salary to similar effort levels of other people on the project, and the responsibilities that you carry on a project, and you’re key to so much of the drive, and then you’ve got some kid who’s got five years’ experience and calls himself a project manager, earns twice as much... it’s a little bit frustrating, you know. You’re sort of coaching them on their role and how to do their job.”

documentation and construction of certain types of buildings in NSW, and a registration scheme for all design practitioners, including a class reserved for architects. Participants said they had not seen any broad impact on fees as a result of this regulation, and did not say whether they had attempted to gain such leverage from it themselves.

Employees also called for greater transparency in the calculation of fees and how they translated to labour. Employees felt that fees and resourcing were rarely discussed, leading to uncertainty about priorities, efficiency, and their own self-management.

Responsibility and risk

A significant source of anxiety and poor wellbeing identified by participants was the risk associated with providing architectural services in an environment where their authority was diminished, and remuneration for such risk was not seen as commensurate.

Participants with this view noted that the sector had trended toward less satisfactory contractual and collaborative modes of work, often referring to the impact of project managers who were deemed as less experienced and less qualified. As an example of this imbalance, participants shared similar scenarios of being undermined ‘at the table’ until something went wrong or needed resolution, at which point the architect would be called upon to resolve the situation.

An exposure to risk, compounded with a depleted sense of authority, was expressed as being hugely problematic and unsustainable for many participants. One participant with a background of TAFE training recalled a lecturer saying to them: “Why do architecture when builders do much the same, with less risk?” While clearly untrue, the participant’s example highlighted a frustration that was expressed by participants who felt the role of the architect was poorly understood and actively undermined, while simultaneously being recognised as coming with higher responsibility and risk.

This example also related to a perception in the focus groups that the architect’s role in the industry was being eroded. Participants felt resentment toward what they described as an intrusion from builders and project managers into their traditional roles and responsibilities, with some saying they felt these others were ‘taking over’ and ‘eating them alive’.

Societal and professional questions of value in architecture

“We would probably all say the same thing, which is that architecture is not valued to the extent that it deserves to be. I think we’d probably also accept that it probably *is* really valued ... The question is *who* is valuing architecture. And I think these are really important because it goes back to the value that we get from being part of a profession.”

“there’s a societal lack of value in design in Australia. People just say ‘It looks like the stuff from Ikea, why would I do that?’ And I think that is reflected in the fees, people say ‘why should I pay for this?’”

“I think that architecture has a terrible perception problem amongst people outside it. And I think that everyone inside the profession is very insulated from it, because we largely spend a lot of our time with other architects.”

“Many people seem to care more about wanting return clients than adequate expectations and deadlines, but it’s just not feasible long term.”

“Our experience is that the clients we enjoy working with most do value what we do. I think it varies depending on the procurement methods, because I think DNC makes the design aspect, and what we do, a lot less visible to the client, we get buried behind others, which I think is to the detriment of the what we do in demonstrating our value.”

This theme is the most complex that was highlighted by participants as negatively impacting wellbeing of architectural practitioners. In part the factors are cultural: tied to histories and identity in the profession; in part they are societal: how the profession is portrayed and viewed by the public; and in part they are internalised by the profession itself.

For clarity, we divided these discussions of value into two sub-themes: how society values architecture, and how architects go about valuing themselves and their services.

Value of architecture

A recurring high-level narrative in the focus groups was that architecture is not well-valued by the public – and accordingly, the role and services of architectural practitioners is not well understood.

One participant noted that while this perception may be true, it was more accurate to say it is not valued to the extent that the profession wants it to be. And further, that perhaps it is in fact valued, but not in ways that the profession might recognise, because value (or ‘success’) is variously defined by different stakeholders. As another participant put it, a client may be happy with a project that the profession does not value.

Speaking to this notion, another participant highlighted the ‘perception problem’ facing architecture, which can be viewed as elitist and a ‘nice-to-have’ service which is often financially or culturally inaccessible to most people. Further, it was suggested that architects are insulated from this problem, because they ‘only spend time with architects.’ Several participants highlighted the exclusionary and classist attributes of the profession, which they identified as a threat to the profession’s reputation and future.

Value was also perceived as a factor when interacting directly with clients and contractors. Participants saw their value being undermined by clients or powerful contractors, and perceived that some practitioners were afraid to push back against client expectations or aggressive project managers. They felt a loss of control and authority, which had a significant impact on their mental wellbeing. Participants explained how these scenarios were complicated by the pressure to retain clients and work given the competitive and insecure nature of the sector.

On the other hand, some participants spoke of positive experiences of value, citing the importance of regulatory protections (through registration and other consumer-facing regulations such as the DBP Act and the State Environmental Planning Policy 65 – Design Quality of Residential Apartment Development 2002 (SEPP 65) in NSW) to uphold and promote esteem within the profession, and that this could be promoted and communicated to clients and the public more effectively. Building on this, many participants believed regulation and legislation was a viable option to mitigate against the negative systemic issues impacting the value of architectural practitioners.

“It feels like because you’ve selected a career that you are passionate about, or you have this intrinsic drive to do good, that you feel somehow that you’ve been exploited, and that you are offered as an industry a much lower salary than is reflective of the amount of responsibility and the value that you bring to projects.”

“We can be our own worst enemies sometimes. As an industry we’re definitely not a united front. We undercut each other, we’ll backstab each other, to do whatever it takes to get a job.”

Valuing architectural services

While external factors were challenging for practitioners to navigate or mitigate, participants expressed a range of internal challenges about the ways that architectural practitioners value their services, and see themselves.

There was a view in the focus groups that the profession could be ‘its own worst enemy’, that architects themselves had some responsibility to advocate and educate for the good of the profession. Some participants suggested that a contributing factor to the current situation may be that there is a dependency on representative organisations to do this on their behalf.

Many participants expressed very personal experiences of negotiating and supporting their wellbeing, self-worth and value within the profession, which they often found challenging. Some described the profession as aggressive, harsh and neurotypical – and did not allow or accept any vulnerability, making such efforts even more difficult.

Participants raised an important theme of diversity and inclusivity within the profession, with some participants sharing their personal experiences of mental health or neurodivergent diagnoses, reflecting that the current culture and practices of the profession were still building capacity to support and value their contributions.

What can be done to improve the wellbeing of architects?

The following section is a collation of suggestions from the focus groups in response to being asked what might be done to improve the wellbeing for all in architecture, and specifically what resources, tools, new knowledge or actions could be taken by individuals, practices and the wider profession in order to achieve it.

They have been organised into four themes:

Architectural education and ongoing professional development

- Tertiary education
- Professional education

Valuing architectural practice

- Valuation of services
- Procurement and fees

Healthy workplace

- Practice management
- Support services
- Media
- Transparency and open communication

Healthy profession

- Leadership and governance
- Diversity
- Monitoring and feedback
- Wellbeing and balance

Architectural education and ongoing professional development

“It all starts with long hours culture, and I feel like universities have a real spot to take leadership in that area. To this day, it is still a badge of honour that people do all-nighters. That kind of behaviour gets pushed in to practice and people start working and almost expect this is normal.”

“I know from teaching professional practice that you always get quite a lot of shock from students, ‘Oh my gosh is this what I’m getting myself into?’”

“I’m someone who went back and started my MBA, and it was just incredible in terms of the level of self-reflection you’re able to do over your own experience.”

“What I learnt as I got more efficient, was that when you say ‘Actually that will take 40 hours’, no one can really do anything, it’s like ‘Okay, I guess we’ll have to pay you overtime now’, because I think they bank you just being a bit submissive.”

Tertiary education

- Introduce professional skills relevant to a service industry from ‘day one’ of education.
- Find ways to minimise the gap between expectations and the realities of practice – through courses, industry media, and encouraging working in the industry.
- Introduce training or qualifications for those who teach and lead, especially to ensure safety of students in matters of wellbeing and mental health.
- Promote diverse pathways from an early stage, to support the application of architectural expertise through allied industries and government, framing ‘traditional’ practice as one of many trajectories.
- Include more workplace rights curriculum in order to prepare students for practice.
- Establish hybrid education models to bridge the gap of expectations between study and practice. This could involve part-time study with a workplace apprenticeship model, recognising that the student is learning, not ‘work-ready’.
- Restrict studio access to reasonable times, while acknowledging the need for some flexibility, such as people who have work/caring responsibilities during some days.

Professional education

- Introduce short-courses (CPD) on identified areas of concern: workplace wellbeing practices, practice management, business management, leadership.
- Increase support for the registration process. This could include improving the accessibility and quality of preparatory courses, and improving feedback during the registration examination process.
- Develop programs to support students, recent graduates and early career professionals to understand their work rights, develop negotiation skills, and set professional boundaries.
- Support post-education mentoring that addresses practice management.
- Support training in specialisation and individual career paths, so that practitioners are enabled to be more intentional and focused in their careers.

Valuing architectural practice

“We would get paid a lot more if we marketed our technical knowledge and expertise on compliance, not just beautiful outputs.”

“One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was from a client. They said ‘you guys do not charge enough. Your clients, they’re asking us for a \$10 million-dollar house, they’re very successful people. And for them to see you at their level, you have to charge them enough money so that they think your advice is worth it.”

“We’ve been working pretty hard with our team to arm them with the data and the information to have really good talks to clients in terms of the value of design and what we do.”

Valuation of services

- Develop/support a program to promote/communicate value to the public and clients.
- Develop/support a program to promote/educate design literacy in the wider community.
- Communicate ‘what architects do’ – breaking down the outdated stereotypes of what an architect is, looks like, and does.
- Advocate for the value of architecture, particularly through leadership in the public sector (Government clients were commonly referenced in relation to this challenge).
- Recognise (award) projects based on public good and client satisfaction, rather than the criteria set by the profession.
- Reform how membership organisations market architecture – beyond elite and high cost projects.

Procurement and fees

- Reintroduce a Fee Scale, or equivalent model that wouldn’t be seen as anti-competitive.
- Support and advocate for industrial protections of architects and architectural labour (regulation).
- Regulate prices/fee structures so that architects are paid for their time
- Regulate procurement practices to support fair and equitable tendering.
- Encourage or lobby the public sector to lead by example when it comes to architectural procurement, particularly regarding fees and tendering.
- Promote case studies of practices with examples/best practice/solutions to these issues such as fees or sustainable hours policies.

Healthy workplace

“As an architect, as a manager, as an organization, you can certainly manage your client’s expectations better, and we can understand our people better. I think having the tools to do that would be a really good start.”

“We hired a business manager - and the experience was way better than it was before. We brought in expertise and the business management overhauled everything. We could finally charge more, and work on less projects. The amount of work was the same, but we were getting paid more once we established that our particular niche could and should be more profitable.”

“We don’t celebrate each other that well. Firms that are progressive with their parental leave policies, or flexible work, or focus on wellbeing, that’s not really celebrated as a good architectural firm.”

“I sat in a meeting with a director crying, just because it was too much - saying I can’t do it any more, and she was saying ‘What can we do?’ And I said, ‘It’s too late!’ I took six months off to rest and recover.”

Practice management

- Implement management tools and training for practice managers and architects in general.
- Introduce standardised reporting mechanisms for time/resourcing to inform realistic timeframes for managing projects. (Some noted this can backfire when people start logging their actual hours, and fear being reprimanded – when seniors tell them not to put down actual hours).
- Develop programs for reporting on mental health/happiness within office and across the profession.
- Incentivise and recognise good practice leadership and management through industry or external professional awards.
- Develop models for the inclusion of early career staff in processes/challenges/decisions. Noting that younger staff expressed more capacity/openness in discussing these issues and the value in doing so.
- Learn and practice setting professional boundaries with consultants and clients, to avoid over-delivery or exploitation.
- Implement a ‘sustainable hours policy’ to support appropriate work hours, and improved quality of life outside work.
- Implement policies for flexible work places such as 4-day weeks, and other models informed by known challenges such as family care, health needs, or impacts of commuting.

Support services

- Develop accessible EAP programs for smaller businesses and sole practitioners.
- Establish equivalent wellbeing guides to the *Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice* – the clarity and practicality of information being passed on made these useful and actionable.
- Provide more opportunities for social cohesion in the profession to mitigate social isolation, such as reinvigorating small practice groups, and having a forum for people to talk openly.
- Establish platforms for sharing knowledge and experience.
- Support and share models of mentorship programs within practices, which could be made more effective through ‘shadowing’ of the mentor, rather than infrequent, unstructured meetings.
- Improve education and training in preventative and critical care when urgent issues come up regarding mental health crises.
- Establish an equivalent ‘HR’ service for smaller practices to help navigate workplace conflicts.
- Avoid or review ‘support’ systems that could backflip to being complicit to poor work/life balance e.g. providing Friday drinks, meals when working late, staff events, which tacitly encourage staying at work.

“A breakdown or visualisation of what architectural practices look like would be good to have. For a sole practitioner, two, or 100 people. How it works, what the structure is, what do you need around you? What does each role work or contribute? This would really help people who are going out figure out what they want to do, and what they need to do that.”

“As a junior team member I’m rarely involved in decision making. I’d love to see greater transparency, and understand what negotiations are made between management and clients in light of new project developments, such as increased scope. Our hourly rates are already low, and when scope increases and we’re left to deal with the consequences as workers, it just gets worse.”

Media

- Develop visualisations of diverse architectural practice models – what are the types, what do they look like (size, structure, roles, diversity, expertise).
- Educate and communicate to clients through story-telling, narrative-driven communications and media
- Employ data and statistics as a tool to fuel advocacy and change.

Transparency and open communication

- 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). Many noted the positive experience of participating in the focus group itself.

Healthy profession

“If it doesn’t come from the top down, it doesn’t get stomped out of practice.”

“I feel like a lot of the time employees don’t have a lot of empathy for the employer. There are people who care. I think empowering people – like learning negotiating skills, learning to manage up, encouraging people to think about how leadership works... it cannot just be employer lead.”

“I think as you work through [your career], you don’t necessarily have the tools to work out what kind of leader you want to be. What different leadership styles are out there? Maybe you’re better at people management, maybe you’re better at project management?”

“Not everybody plays lead guitar. I might get performance anxiety with the idea of playing lead, but I’m quite happy to be the one grinding away on levels of detail at the back. Now if I know that’s what architecture is about, I’m okay with that. The facets that come with diversity might make it okay for some to stick around.”

“For me, I think that exit interviews are too late. Practitioners should feel like they’re supported by managers to be able to talk about issues as they come up.”

“I say to my friends from architecture ‘we have to not talk about architecture. We have to talk about other things!’”

Leadership and governance

- Encourage diverse models of leadership (not just employer-led).
- Support career trajectories that feed into allied industries and government.
- Improve access to professional knowledge and expertise. Membership to the Australian Institute of Architects and their resources was described as cost-prohibitive for early career professionals.
- Strengthen the role and responsibility of the Australian Institute of Architects code of conduct.
- Join a union for architects, and build ties to existing bodies with expertise and membership (such as the ACA and AIA).
- Introduce and enforce regulation that improves conditions in the workplace.
- Recognise and award practices that demonstrate healthy workplace environments and support wellbeing.

Diversity

- Promote and make visible the diverse roles available to architectural practitioners.
- Role-model diverse and respectful leadership. Participants voiced their negative experiences of ‘blokey’ banter, loudness and dominant behaviour that had pushed some people out of the profession.
- Recognise and award practices that demonstrate accessible, inclusive and safe workplace environments.

Monitoring and feedback

- Undertake regular surveys on the wellbeing of architects.
- Develop a system of accountability for employers
- Undertake regular workplace reviews and exit interviews.
- Undertake and maintain ongoing benchmarking against other professions on issues such as wages, wellbeing, etc.

Wellbeing and balance

- Provide support and access to wellbeing services.
- Provide support and access to productivity and performance coaching
- Promote and support physical health outside the workplace.
- Promote and support boundaries between work and life.

Summary of findings

The focus group findings help us understand the many aspects of architectural work that have a positive and negative affect on people working in architecture. They highlight that many positive aspects interact in complex ways with negative experiences, and show that improving the situation will require a collective response at all levels of the profession.

Positive impacts on wellbeing from working in architecture

The most common theme expressed among participants was a sense of passion and fulfilment gained from contributing to people's lives and communities through their work.

They also found great satisfaction in seeing projects through from conceptualisation to realisation, noting the enjoyment of the challenge in accomplishing this. The diverse nature of the work was also enjoyed by participants, including working collaboratively with a wide range of consultants, opportunities for specialisation, and the unique variety found across types of architectural projects.

Recommending architecture as a career

Participants expressed ambivalence about recommending architecture as a career to others, despite having a strong sense of their own commitment to it. This ambivalence came about because the benefits and satisfaction of a career in architecture were perceived to come at some cost, either financial or personal, due to the negative aspects of architectural practice highlighted in this report.

Participants also observed that there is a gap between the perception and reality of what architectural practice is, and that it was difficult to articulate or emphasise this to prospective students or workers.

Negative impacts on wellbeing from working in architecture

Four major themes were identified as having a negative impact on wellbeing from working architecture: poor practice management in architecture, poor time management in architectural practice, external industry factors that impact architectural practice, and social and professional questions of value and valuation in architecture.

Overwhelmingly, there was a perception that architectural practitioners have little or no formal management training, and this is the source of compounding issues at many levels of experience, causing stress and anxiety.

Participants said there were significant stressors in their work associated with industry conditions that seemed out of their control or power. These were particularly challenging to individuals because they seemed difficult to resolve at an individual or even practice level.

The theme of fees was a significant talking point throughout the focus groups, intersecting with many other issues such as time-management and value.

Notably, the correlation between fees and the capacity for a practice to appropriately fund labour was made very clear, having a flow-on effect of long-hours, unpaid labour, financial losses, exploitation of younger workers, and stress and anxiety.

Procurement practices were emphatically associated with poor wellbeing. This included problematic tendering processes, a lack of longevity or security in projects, and the negative effects of value-management.

A significant source of anxiety and poor wellbeing identified by participants was the risk associated with providing architectural services in an environment where their authority was diminished, and remuneration for such risk was not seen as commensurate.

A recurring high-level narrative in the focus groups was that architecture is not well-valued by the public – and accordingly, the role and services of architectural practitioners is not well understood.

Participants also expressed a range of internal challenges about the ways that architectural practitioners value their services, and see themselves, noting that at times the profession could be ‘it’s own worst enemy’. They spoke of competitiveness, fee-undercutting, and a dependency on organisational bodies to address issues on their behalf. Participants agreed that these issues were not necessarily pervasive, but required a collective response at all levels of the profession.

What could be done to improve the wellbeing of architects?

There were a wide range of thoughtful, practical, and innovative suggestions made during the focus groups, and they can be collated into four main areas for improvement: education and professional development, valuing architectural practice, creating healthy workplaces, and creating a healthy profession.

Notably, there was a perceived need for greater transparency and collective action among architectural practices and organisations to normalise widespread sharing of workplace practices and policies, supported by professional bodies, advocacy organisations and media outlets.

Practically, there was a perceived need for clear guidance and platforms that give individuals, practices, and professional organisations the skills, resources and agency to support and improve work-related wellbeing in the profession.

Appendix

Ethical considerations

Participants for the focus groups were recruited from those who had completed the primary survey conducted in 2021. The survey provided an option to express their interest in participating in a future focus group. Those who voluntarily opted in provided a contact email which was separated from their initial survey responses to ensure their anonymity from previously collected data.

In April 2022, those who had volunteered to participate in the focus groups were invited to complete a preliminary screening questionnaire to gather basic demographic information (see below, 'About the participants'). This allowed the researchers to design focus groups with diverse participants.

Participants were then provided a plain language statement explaining the project and what their participation would mean, and were invited to complete a scheduling tool indicating their availability to participate. When a time had been confirmed, they were also required to complete a consent form, agreeing to the terms of participation. Participating in the focus groups was entirely voluntarily, and participants could opt-out at any stage of the process.

The project was approved by Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 30496), and all respondents were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity.

Harm minimisation

In order to minimise any exposure to harm or discomfort throughout the focus groups, a series of guidelines were established and shared with the participants to promote a safe and meaningful discussion. It was established that:

- The focus groups were a safe space to discuss and listen without judgement.
- Participants could say as little or as much as they felt comfortable saying.
- What was said needed to remain confidential, not shared, and not identified.
- Everyone would have time and space to speak.
- People in varying roles in architecture would have different perspectives- practice leaders may have a different take than employees, small practice than large practice, etc. Therefore, the aim was not for any one group to feel blamed or judged - it was important to share these perspectives openly and honestly so that we could all see the bigger picture.

After sharing these guidelines, participants were also invited to suggest any additional rules for the discussion.

At the beginning of each focus group, all participants were made aware of support services (such as wellbeing resources provided by BeyondBlue) should they need them. They were also reminded that their participation was

completely voluntary, and that they could choose to leave at any time or take other actions (such as turning off their camera or microphone) in order to feel comfortable and safe throughout the discussion.

There were 12 focus groups that ran between May 16 and June 27, and one interview (one-on-one) conducted on June 28. In total 67 people participated in the focus groups.

