



Diversity
Roundtable
Elevate • Inspire • Empower



CONVERSATIONS TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE PRACTICE

28 January 2019 / Workplace Culture

COMMON THEMES

- Changes to workplace culture need to come from those in a position to make the change.
- The values & goals of a company should be clearly outlined for everyone to see. (Sometimes there is a difference is the outlined policy versus the actual culture.)
- Feedback forums on a regular basis are key to ensuring a good workplace culture and making sure voices are heard.
- It is important for employees to be able to see themselves represented in the firm leadership.
- Balancing a career & home life (tends to be more of a burden on women than men).
- How to outline / clarify what exactly is the firm culture? More than just fun events, like happy hours, but rather how people interact on a daily basis to get the work done & how a job well done is rewarded (and what is recognized as a job well done).

NOTES BY GROUP

Group 1:

- Planting seeds for a change early (at young age)
- Try to break the stereotypes in the field (e.g. math is required in architecture)
- There is no such thing as a “good fit” (in terms of hiring the right people)/unbiased hiring
- Architects have a very exclusive culture (architecture as an “elite” work environment)
- The education of architects takes a lot of time and the work load is high, many students don’t have time for extracurricular activities and that automatically creates situations in which “others” are excluded
- Architecture education is often expensive which exaggerates the elite situation (country role models where education is for free, e.g. Germany)
- Architects exclude minorities, especially those who come from “lower” backgrounds

- Architecture firms are not necessarily a family-friendly environment (long working days, working on weekends)
- Create a workplace culture in which feedback is welcome (architects often don't give (good) feedback (because they feel too uncomfortable))
- General practice approx. 50/50, but those who hold the power are still white man
- Change needs to come from those in power

Group 2:

- Employees can talk about their work place, they can talk about their projects, but they don't necessarily know something about the values of the company
- Employees do not want to be hired just as part of an agenda
- "Make it a cultural add, not a cultural fit" in order to create true diversity
- Morale challenges (by a lack of moral) based on bad client relationships
- "Pattern of skills" on a project (man skills vs. women skills)
- Chances to create a positive change
- Power to speak for the firm builds (positive) reputation
- All group interview (employee driven growth)
- Put the value of the company at the top of the website to show your partners and clients who you really want to be
- Create the feeling that the firm is in your corner if problems should arise

Group 3:

Clarity:

- How does a firm invite and encourage young people to stay with architectural work force?
- The firm culture is ok BUT the client is not on board with the firm culture
- Does the firm support you?
- Don't be afraid to ask, even if leadership don't want to talk to you, keep on asking!
- Lack of value in what we do, clients/contractors usually want more for less
- Passion – take high design for a low pay vs. lower design – greater profits
- "Culture mentor program" (share experiences)

- Women in leadership/seniority are hard to find/still seem to be a minority (lack of diversity on that matter, not enough female mentors on that level)
- Government investments (student loans, maternity/paternity level) – follow examples of other countries (e.g. Iceland)

Firm Culture:

- Male ambitions tend to be rewarded vs. “quieter” nature of women (not asking for raises, lack of transparency about pay, “hear the squeaky wheels”, women tend to find their voices later than man)
- Importance of mentoring
 - Not necessarily within the firm
 - Long-term implementation, break down into manageable segments
 - Regular feedback intervals
 - Conduct happiness surveys
 - Be able to find yourself in people in leadership
- Culture reflects in what is happening – Problem: how to ask the right questions in order to develop a culture?
- How to stay in your career vs. other demands?
- How can a workplace culture set? How can disparity be created? What happens when it is there?
- Retaining vs. supportive politics (depending on company size)

Group 4:

- Take risks, QC process (communicate mistakes early, often, informal), share office standards
- Describe the workplace culture – difference between different studios, different persons, based in company tenets
- Policy vs. culture – firm goals or true beliefs and values? Have it in a written format, Hold the firm accountable for their doing, Define metrics to measure it
- People are the most expensive investment, how to balance people leaving with benefits, respect and value goes a long way
- Hiring the right fit:
 - Expressing thoughts in a respectful way
 - People who think differently are assessed as risky hires

- 6 months trails – coaching
- Soft skills training
- Formal mentoring as part of the professional development
- Inclusive activities:
 - Thinking beyond the happy hour
- Acknowledge behavior:
 - Opening communication pathways
 - “Kudos” to team members

Group 5:

- What is culture?
 - Fun stuff vs how we work
- Transparency
 - Understanding goals & direction of the firm
 - Open Mic Friday
 - Pay parity & sharing process; transparency of structure
 - Bottom-up: only one individual drives VS
 - Top-down: too “corporate”
 - Overhead time for culture
 - Everyone contributes
 - Nobody makes culture for you
 - Make culture collectively together

Group 6:

- Balance of speaking own experience & representing entire demographic
- Assumptions about architects’ skills & services (inside & outside of office)
- Assumptions about individual’s skill set
- Clearly defining roles & expectations in an office
- What do you already know vs. what do you want to know
- Peer-to-peer training
- Design process share weekly (internal lunch & learn, “an hour with an expert”)

- Value of support roles in office
- Empower staff to be able to work autonomously
- Support PMs in delegating
- Be okay w/ it being done differently
- How scale workplace culture convos with firm sizes

Group 7:

- Cultural Differences
 - Can sometimes be misinterpreted (affecting behavior)
 - Adjust behavior to “fit in”
 - Be willing to be receptive to others
 - Be aware of any bias (find an ally to help with messaging)
 - Leadership needs to set an example for “good” behavior at all times
- Self-Promotion >> Equitable Promotion
 - Outline clear expectations for promotion (is this clearly communicated to all?)
 - Assigned mentor There can be a lot of pressure
 - Set goals (individuals) & be held accountable
 - Find mentors outside of firm
- Can you describe your culture?
 - Yes, but only 85% of the time
 - How do you acknowledge when its not?
 - Gray areas.... Promotions
- Why did I leave the field?
 - Work for adjacent fields
 - Self-reflection
 - Hard to leave people that they were mentoring (can still mentor)
- Small firm vs large firm
- Leadership connection with employees
 - Need to be on the same page
 - Address pressure points
- Minorities in the workplace

- How do you promote the profession & firm & keep minorities in the workplace?
- Regional differences?
 - Title & weight on that vs knowledge

Group 8:

Clarity

- Annual meetings to discuss culture
- Internal committees consisting of all levels
- Cultural opportunities
- Depends on office size
- Transparency
- Diverse leadership

Power

- Transparency in salaries
- Professional development
- People in power need to align with firm's goals / directions

- Innovation grants (all-office input on research grants)
- Firm retreats (out of office activities)
- Collaboration needs to be open to all & happen
- No divide between production & design

Connections

- Mentors & advocates & allies
- Push-backs need to be supported
- Retention / personality of firm leaders / keep best people (salaries & benefits)

THANK YOU FROM YOUR SESSION LEADERS



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