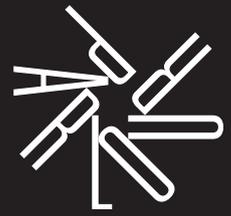


06. Career progression:



: women,
equity,
architecture.

Every career is different. It's often more than a single, rising trajectory – it can involve pauses, shifts in intensity and different types of work over a lifetime. There is more than one career model and different models suit different people and life stages. Research indicates that women are more likely to have complex 'non-standard' careers and to experience delayed career progression.

This guide looks at how careers might be considered and navigated. It offers suggestions for supporting women's professional development and career progression.

This includes supporting women with 'traditional' architectural careers in private practice, and those with more complex 'flexible' careers.



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Are women's career paths different?

The career development of women in architecture is influenced by a set of related factors. These include available career models and the way they are valued; promotion and development opportunities; and differing definitions of career 'success'.

Traditionally careers are understood as a constant climb from lower levels of a profession to the top. In architecture this might mean ascending to the top of a larger practice, or establishing your own successful practice. This linear path suits those who have no need to step off the ladder for periods of time, who can give a similar level of commitment over the course of their career and are available to work long hours.

Career patterns A substantial body of research indicates that women in architecture (like other professions) are more likely to have non-linear careers. These may feature multiple breaks, lateral moves, a mix of full-time and part-time employment, and work in different sectors.

Many women also have fairly fluid ideas of what a career might be, and this may involve working in both standard and non-standard ways at different times and in different industries and environments.

Research in other industries indicates that many women without children also experience delayed career progression. Responses to the Parlour surveys suggest that this is also the case in architecture.

Flexible careers A flexible career may better accommodate many women's circumstances. It may also suit many men.

A flexible career is one that has different intensities at different times. It may be rapid and fast-paced initially, but can slow down for a time (maternity leave, career breaks) before cranking up again to full intensity as other commitments recede. At a time when many older full-time architects are feeling burnt out and looking towards a gradual slowdown to retirement, others (often parents, often women) of a similar age may be ready to throw everything into their work once again. A flexible career could also involve working in different sectors at different times.

In the contemporary work environment, being flexible, having diverse skills or being able to laterally transfer skills is a positive attribute.

Children Caring for children has a specific, marked effect on many women's careers. Our research indicates that many women find it very difficult to continue with a satisfying and meaningful career in architecture after having children.

Many of the respondents to the Parlour survey report being stunned and surprised by the extent of this impact. (In contrast, this topic was hardly raised by the male respondents.) This is due to structural issues within the profession; it is not the result of a lack of commitment, talent or expertise.

What is 'success'? Paula Whitman's report, 'Going Places', identified that many women in architecture define career success in quite nuanced ways. That is, they may value the quality of the work over climbing the ladder, or client satisfaction or community contribution over winning awards. Whitman also found that the majority of women would sacrifice career progression for the sake of achieving 'balance' in their lives.



Why does it matter?

A richer understanding of career paths and models can enhance engagement in the profession for many architects. This has specific potential for improving the career prospects of women in architecture, but it has benefit for all.

In contrast, limited career paths and opportunities can be devastating for the individuals concerned, but it also means that practices are missing out on highly experienced and knowledgeable architects, and that the profession suffers from a loss of diversity and skills.

Practices

Practices that understand the complexities of women's careers, and the potential of flexible careers, are in a better position to benefit from the expertise, knowledge and experience of these women.

A well-managed, diverse team, with a broad range of experience, leads to more inventive approaches and creative problem solving – which are of significant benefit to architectural practices.

Employees

Narrow, linear career models do not offer the flexibility that many women need to construct a rewarding and successful career. This is particularly the case for those with caring responsibilities (although it is not limited to them).

Those women who commit to traditional careers may nonetheless also experience bias in relation to promotion and career development opportunities, which can limit options for advancement.

The profession

Limited career paths within architecture mean that some women move into other fields and professions that better align with their values, or offer more conducive career paths. In other professions or sectors of the construction industry there are often more opportunities to have impact and effect. This loss of talent is to the detriment of the architecture profession.



What can we do?

Career progression is a complex issue, and there are many factors at play. All the guides within this set cover material that is relevant to the topic and we encourage readers to refer to them as well.

There are two main areas of action.

1. To ensure that promotion and career development opportunities within traditional private practice are equitable.
2. To value other career models, including flexible careers, and ensure that these are not career dead-ends.

Increasing numbers of architects already work in ways that are outside traditional models – combining various mixes of private practice, teaching, further study or family responsibilities. The trick is to ensure that these models open up opportunities for all, including those with parenting responsibilities.

• See also Parlour guides: **Flexibility**, **Part-time work** and **Career break**.

Practices

Practices can make a big difference in both cultural and practical terms. Recognising the value of different career models, and understanding that different approaches may be relevant at different career stages, is of benefit to practices and their employees. Practices should also ensure promotion and development opportunities are equitable.

Recognise difference in career momentum

Career paths often look different for men and women. The traditional male model of workplace engagement is a hill shape, with increasing investment and remuneration, a plateau and then a decrease towards retirement. By contrast, women's careers may feature multiple pauses, lateral moves and part-time engagement. Women in the later part of their working lives may be more engaged, as children leave home and caring responsibilities reduce.

- Recognise the value of different career paths, and the knowledge and skills gained throughout a flexible career.
- Don't only look for employees with a linear, unbroken employment record.
- Recognise that a flexible career means differing levels of intensity and responsibility at different stages. An architect who has taken a step back for a couple of years may then be perfect for a demanding job that draws on prior experience.
- Don't assume that an architect who has taken a less demanding role for a period will not be willing and able to take on other intensive roles further on in their career.



Recognise skills gained outside the profession

Taking time out to do things outside architecture is often an opportunity for employees to grow personally, and much of that growth can benefit the business.

- See Parlour guide: **Career break**.
- Recognise the value of skills gained elsewhere. For example, employees who do volunteer work or manage a family are likely to develop time management, teamwork and organisational skills that are also extremely useful in a professional environment.
- Seek a diverse range of experience for a project team. This can be beneficial in bringing innovative approaches to work and avoiding 'group think'.

Have fair and equitable promotion procedures

Promotion and development opportunities play an important role in the development of a career, and should be available to all.

Many of the attributes of equitable recruitment also apply to equitable promotion. ● See Parlour guides: **Recruitment** and **Pay equity**.

- Ensure that all employees have equal access to promotion and development opportunities.
- Ensure that assessments for promotion are fair and equitable. Focus on skills, expertise and performance, not perceptions.
- Wherever possible ensure that you have at least one women involved in promotion decisions.

Set clear, transparent criteria for success

Bias can creep into performance assessments when there are no measures for performance or success, or where the measures are vague. Research from science

and technology fields indicates that when performance criteria are ambiguous, people tend to view women as less competent than men, regardless of actual performance. Setting clear and transparent criteria for success also assists in establishing fair negotiation environments.

- Have clear and transparent criteria for measuring performance and success in relation to particular roles and positions, and ensure that these are understood and accessible.

Use performance reviews effectively

Performance reviews play an important role allocating rewards and recognition. When conducted effectively performance reviews can help address performance issues, identify training needs and acknowledge development.

Performance reviews are required as part of the Architects Act.

- Ensure you have an objective performance review process. The following can help ensure an equitable process: clearly communicating expectations about the employee's tasks and performance; providing feedback, setting future goals, priorities and challenges; using measurable targets in association with each job and reviewing these annually; discussing professional development or training needs.
- Use performance reviews to encourage open, useful conversation that is productive for both the practice and the employee.
- Separate the discussion about pay from performance reviews – this can take the stress out of performance reviews for everyone.
- Try to have women involved in the performance review process.
- Use performance reviews as a productive part of a wider culture of mentoring and staff development. Don't treat them as a 'tick-box' exercise.



- Avoid making assessments based on what you think a staff member might do in the future (such as resign if they aren't promoted, or go on parental or travel leave).
- Where possible, conduct all performance reviews within a defined timeframe, by the same group of people. If it is too demanding in terms of time, schedule a series of review periods over the year but ensure that you have measures in place to enable ready comparisons.

Distribute 'stretch assignments' equitably

It's common to give 'stretch assignments' to ambitious employees who are seeking promotion. These are often projects or tasks that require the individual to develop and learn, and to demonstrate that they are ready to take on more responsibility. Research in other fields suggests that men are more likely to be given the 'hot jobs' that aid career development.

- Be sure to distribute 'stretch assignments' and 'hot jobs' equitably. The temptation to shield an employee from a difficult or unpleasant aspect of the job (such as firing an underperforming contractor) actually stunts professional growth in the long term, eroding skills and confidence.
- Ensure that decisions about who gets the 'hot jobs' are made on the basis of performance and skill, not perception.
- Consider assigning 'stretch assignments' according to both skills gaps and performance, rather than simply as a reward for ambition.
- Watch out for bored employees. They will be unproductive and may soon leave. Ask them what kind of work they would like to do to keep them engaged and challenged.

Ensure equity in redundancy

The idea of equitable redundancy might sound odd, but there are indicators that women as a group fare worse than men during economic downturns. This is particularly the case for unregistered practitioners and part-time employees. These same people may also find it harder to re-enter the workforce.

- Ensure you make decisions about redundancy in a fair manner by using similar assessment processes to recruitment and promotion – check skills and performance in relation to the job description.
- Remember redundancy must be 'genuine' and it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of gender or pregnancy.
- Understand your obligations regarding redundancy under the Architects Award and *National Employment Standards*.



Employees

A career does not make itself – it requires planning, political nous, ambition and perseverance. The statistics on women’s participation and the research on career progression and opportunities indicate a particular need for women to approach their career strategically.

Advantage and disadvantage are both cumulative. Many small things add up to create varying degrees of career ‘success’, and inequity can be experienced differently at various career stages.

Plan your career

Think about what you want and how you could get there. The better informed and prepared you are, the better you will be able to navigate both opportunities and difficulties or pinch points that may arise.

- Consider where you want to head with your career (don’t limit yourself to one option), then work out the specific skills and experience you need to get there.
- Assess what skills and experiences you have and what would you like to acquire. Plan to attain these skills and set yourself a timeframe.
- Use your network to contact people who have taken a similar career path and talk to them about how they got where they are.
- Understand your priorities and needs. A career is a long time and your priorities will change at different points.
- Recognise the pinch points that could occur along the way, and plan and strategise in relation to them. For example, this might include getting registered as soon as you can.
- Revise your plans and ambitions as you go. Remember that a career plan is something to help you strategise, not a straightjacket.

Explore different career models

Understanding the range of career models may be useful to your own strategic planning, and for negotiations with current and potential employers.

- Consider different career models and what will work best for you. This is likely to vary according to the stage of your career and differing personal circumstances along the way.
- Be able to articulate your career in these terms – especially if you have, or wish to have, a flexible career. This may help in negotiations and help establish professional credibility around a non-standard career trajectory.



Think laterally

A career won't always go according to plan – you won't always find the 'perfect' job, there may be unexpected setbacks or you might discover other areas that better match your abilities. There are many different roles within architecture, and some are more suitable to various career phases than others.

- Be open to unexpected opportunities – you might find them in unusual places.
- Don't expect all jobs to be perfect, but consider what each might offer – what might it add to your skills and experience?
- Try out different kinds of offices if you can, especially early in your career when you are more likely to have fewer external constraints. The right fit will be out there in one of the many different practice types that populate the profession.
- Think laterally about how you might use and develop your skills at different phases of your career. Be proactive and flexible in exploring the roles that this may open up for you.

Strategise career transitions

Most contemporary workers will experience multiple career transitions over the course of their working lives, and a flexible career is likely to involve even more changes. These may be voluntary or involuntary, but all involve stress.

- Expect to experience stress and some emotional turmoil around transitions and anticipate what mechanisms you can put in place to help deal with it.
- Seek support. Others will have experienced key turning points as well. Find out if there are groups or forums where you can share similar experiences. Or you could start a group – or a blog. You won't be alone.

Articulate your skills

Being able to clearly articulate your skills and expertise is essential to explaining how they might be transferred to different contexts. This can be particularly useful for re-entering practice after a break, or negotiating part-time work, but is also helpful in developing a more traditional career, including navigating performance reviews and promotions.

- Understand your skills, abilities and experience, and develop ways to discuss these outside the specifics of particular projects.
- If looking for part-time work, consider how your skills could be applicable to specific roles within a team.

Seek and give help and advice

Many people have gone before you and many will follow. Seeking advice and being generous about helping others can be very helpful in navigating a career. This could be done through mentoring programs, or informally through architecture's many social and professional networks.

- See Parlour guide: **Mentoring**.

Speak up / put your hand up

Being visible, having something meaningful to say, and actively showing an interest is a vital part of developing a career. Research indicates that many women tend to wait to be asked, or until they are certain they have all the skills required, while many men put themselves forward regardless. Don't be trapped by these behavioural patterns.

- Put your hand up for opportunities that interest you – try to say 'yes' as much as you can.
- Where possible, take on or ask for projects or positions that will develop your abilities and expand your skill base. Recognise that your capacity for this may vary over your career.



- Contribute to discussions, both in the office and in professional environments. All kinds of opportunities arise if you are visible and show yourself to be thoughtful, smart and articulate.
- Remember that by putting yourself forward you are also paving the way for other women.

Be competent and confident

Being confident and competent are important parts of being an architect. Competence is clearly important for doing well, but it is also a good way to command respect from colleagues and is key to your own confidence.

- Be good at what you do – you don't need to excel at everything but being competent is important and valuable.
- Try to gain a range of experience early on in your career, including experience on site.
- Be confident and articulate about your knowledge and experience, and the contribution you can make. This is particularly important when negotiating a new part-time role or a return after a career break.

The profession

Professional bodies can advocate and educate about diverse career models, and actively assist architects to stay connected across the stages of a career.

Educate about equitable career progression

Professional bodies can help educate architectural practices about equitable promotion and career development.

- Include material about equitable promotion and careers in continuing professional development programs and HR resources.
- Consider identifying and publishing case studies and other resources.

Support diverse career models

Many of the membership and fee structures within professional bodies are framed in terms of linear, fairly traditional career models. This can make it difficult or expensive for those who are in less intensive stages of their careers.

- Ensure that organisational requirements and fees accommodate those at various career stages.
- Ensure committees and events are run in a manner that enable women to participate.



Credits

The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice are an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011–2014), led by Naomi Stead of the University of Queensland.

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Further resources

Going Places: The Career Progression of Women in the Architectural Profession

Paula Whitman, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 2005

<http://www.archiparlour.org/going-places/>

ACA HR Policy Templates

Association of Consulting Architects

<http://aca.org.au/article/hr-policy-templates>

The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?

Catalyst research report, 2011

<http://www.catalyst.org/publication/509/the-myth-of-the-ideal-worker-does-doing-all-the-right-things-really-get-women-ahead>

Further reading

'The Questions to Ask'

Ann Lau, Parlour, 2012

<http://www.archiparlour.org/the-questions-to-ask/>

'10 Lessons'

Kerstin Thompson, Parlour, 2014

<http://www.archiparlour.org/10-lessons/>

'The Core Team'

Kendall Strong, Parlour, 2012

<http://www.archiparlour.org/the-core-team/>

'Mummy, I Want to be an Architect'

Rebecca Graham, Parlour, 2013

<http://www.archiparlour.org/mummy-i-want-to-be-an-architect/>

'Going Far Together'

Antony Di Mase, Parlour, 2012

<http://www.archiparlour.org/goingfartogther/>

'Performance Reviews'

Association of Consulting Architects

<http://aca.org.au/article/know-your-award-performance-reviews>

See Parlour  for further articles about career paths in Australian architecture.

<http://www.archiparlour.org/topics/workplace/career-paths/>

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