

Leadership

Supporting guidance for the Architects Code of Conduct and Practice

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1. Introduction

The Architects Registration Board (ARB) has developed this guidance to support architects in meeting their professional obligations under the Code, particularly Standard 3 (Competence), Standard 4 (Professional practice), and Standard 6 (Respect).

Standard 3 requires architects to be competent, work within the limits of that competence and encourage the professional development of those they supervise.

Standard 4 requires architects to carry out their work effectively, exercising skill and diligence. This includes properly planning, monitoring and managing their projects with sufficient resources and capacity.

Standard 6 requires architects to treat everyone with respect and to contribute to a positive and inclusive working environment where unfair discrimination is not tolerated.

This guidance explains how architects can demonstrate effective leadership in practice. It highlights behaviours that support professional competence, responsible project delivery and respectful working environments. While the examples focus on architectural practice, the principles are relevant to architects working in any setting.

Effective leadership is fundamental to achieving these standards, as architects in leadership roles set the tone for their teams and those they work with, while influencing the culture and performance of their workplace.

While principals and directors have a responsibility to provide direction and uphold professional standards, there are different levels of leadership, which is not limited to only those in senior roles. Leadership in professional practice does not depend on job title. Architects may demonstrate leadership at different stages of their career by influencing decisions, supporting colleagues, and raising concerns where professional standards may be at risk.

This guidance outlines practical ways in which architects can exercise positive leadership in practice. Compliance with this guidance is not mandatory, but any architect who departs from it should be prepared to explain their reasons, having used their professional judgement.

In this guidance, "must" is used where there is a legal or regulatory requirement. "Should" describes conduct that ARB would normally expect of architects in meeting their obligations under the Code. "May" is used where the appropriate course of action will depend on the circumstances or where a particular outcome is not inevitable.

2. Leadership as a professional competence

Effective leadership in an architectural practice sets the tone for everything that follows. Good leadership fosters an ethical, motivated and high-performing team, and improves the culture and quality of the practice. Poor leadership or poorly managed hierarchies can create a harmful culture in which people will struggle to thrive and quality deteriorates. Ultimately, effective leadership enhances staff well-being, improves project outcomes and drives overall business success.

Architectural practice often operates in a commercially demanding environment. Practices may face tight programmes, small margins, fluctuating workloads and difficult staffing decisions. Leadership in this context can involve balancing competing pressures, including client expectations, business sustainability, staff wellbeing and professional responsibilities. Effective leadership does not remove these challenges, but it helps ensure that decisions are taken thoughtfully and responsibly.

Leadership in professional practice also involves exercising judgement when difficult or uncomfortable decisions arise. This may include addressing conflict within teams, challenging unrealistic client demands, or declining work where there are serious concerns about safety, legality or professional standards. In these situations, leadership and professionalism are closely connected: architects who demonstrate

leadership help ensure that professional obligations and the public interest remain central to decision-making.

Example:

During construction, a contractor proposes a lower-cost alternative to an agreed product or detail. The architect identifies that the proposed change may affect the building's safety strategy and convenes an appropriate technical review, seeking specialist advice where necessary. They explain the risks and available options to the client, record their advice clearly, and do not endorse the change until they are satisfied that it is safe and compliant.

3. Develop leadership as a professional skill

Leadership is a distinct professional skill that requires conscious development over the course of an architect's career. While leadership is often associated with seniority, this does not always have to be the case, nor does seniority of experience necessarily make someone an effective leader. Strong leadership can help prepare someone to manage people, set a healthy culture, resolve conflict, delegate effectively, or guide a team through uncertainty. While 'nice' leadership is not always good leadership, you should always remain fair and respectful when leading others.

You should therefore approach leadership as an ongoing competency which requires regular development:

- Develop your skills on topics such as people management, communication, conflict resolution and inclusive leadership
- Identify colleagues or external figures who lead well and analyse what they do differently
- Seek opportunities to learn from others, including peers, mentors or professional networks
- Reflect on what is working in your leadership and what is not. Welcome and act upon feedback from your team and peers
- Look to understand how you can improve on your leadership skills by assessing how you may have dealt with challenges or decisions in the past. This continues to build upon your leadership skills and improves your decision-making

4. Lead by example and uphold professional values

Lead with integrity and values that encourage those you work with to follow suit. Always act with honesty and fairness, setting an example that inspires your colleagues. Engage your team in defining the core values of the practice and ensure those values guide everyday decisions. By setting an example and upholding professional standards yourself, you build trust and set a strong ethical tone from the top.

5. Be visible and approachable

Be accessible to your team. Good leaders are present and approachable. Make time for informal interactions with staff at all levels – for instance, chatting over lunch or coffee – to break down hierarchies and show you are available. Being visible in the day-to-day life of the practice helps build rapport and trust.

Promote open communication. Encourage your team to raise questions or concerns early, and respond supportively when they do. Make it clear that no one will be punished for admitting a mistake or reporting a problem — this helps prevent a culture of fear.

6. Creating an inclusive and respectful workplace

Set the tone from the top. Champion an inclusive, respectful culture through your own actions. Make it clear that discrimination, harassment and bullying have no place in your practice, and that everyone must be treated with respect. Leaders who demonstrate respectful and professional behaviour set expectations for everyone in the workplace.

7. Be consistent

Consider your working practices (flexible working policies, office hours, project allocation, promotion criteria) to ensure they do not create unintended barriers for colleagues in the profession or your workplace.

Embrace diversity and fairness. Strive to make your workplace welcoming to people of all backgrounds. Implement fair recruitment practices and ensure everyone has equal opportunities to grow: consider whether pay, promotion and development opportunities are fair and transparent.

Leaders have a responsibility to take concerns about behaviour seriously and to respond appropriately when issues are raised. Concerns may relate to bullying,

discrimination, harassment, unethical conduct, safety risks, or behaviour that falls short of professional standards.

Example:

During a site visit, a client makes sexist remarks about a member of the project team. The architect challenges the behaviour calmly and makes clear that it is unacceptable. They check privately what support the colleague wants, keep an appropriate record of the incident, and consider whether further action is required under the practice's policies or the terms of the working relationship.

When concerns are brought to your attention, you should listen carefully, consider the information independently and take reasonable steps to understand what has happened. Ignoring concerns or dismissing them without proper consideration can allow harmful behaviour to continue and may undermine trust within the workplace.

Those who raise concerns in good faith should be treated fairly and should not be disadvantaged for doing so. By addressing issues openly and constructively, leaders help maintain a respectful working environment and demonstrate a commitment to the professional values set out in the Code.

8. Supporting and developing others

Mentor and train others. A key part of leadership is helping others to grow. Good mentoring and training does not always need to be formal. Make time to mentor junior staff by reviewing their work, providing constructive feedback and guiding them through new challenges. By investing in your junior colleagues' development, you build a more competent and confident team.

Example:

A senior architect notices that a colleague's technical information has become inconsistent and that deadlines are regularly being missed. They arrange a supportive one-to-one discussion, clarify expectations, agree practical support and increase appropriate checking of the work. They also review whether workload, supervision or resourcing needs to change so that quality and wellbeing are protected.

Effective leaders delegate work in a way that supports learning while ensuring that tasks are carried out competently. When delegating work, you should ensure that

those carrying out tasks have the appropriate supervision, support and resources to do so safely and effectively.

Establish structured onboarding and progression. New employees will join your practice at different stages of their career and with different levels of experience. For some it might be their first time in a workplace. Welcome new employees with a proper induction that introduces them to the workplace's standards and culture. Ensure that you set clear expectations around professional conduct, and outline transparent paths for career progression and ongoing training. When people see that leadership is invested in their development from the outset, they remain engaged and motivated to excel.

9. Develop future leaders

Watch for team members who show initiative and reliability, and give them chances to take on leadership tasks (such as leading a small project or supervising an intern) in a supported way. These experiences will help develop the next generation of leaders.

10. Managing work and resources responsibly

Excessive workloads increase the risk of errors, compromised design decisions and poor professional judgement. Leaders should therefore plan work realistically and monitor workloads to reduce these risks.

Manage projects with an eye on your team's workload and well-being. Model a healthy work-life balance yourself that sets the approach for others to follow —for example by limiting out-of-hours communication.

When scoping new work, ensure the plan and fee allow enough staff and time to do the job effectively. By planning realistically and staffing projects appropriately, you reduce the risk of burnout and mistakes caused by fatigue.

Set clear expectations with clients and plan for change. Where you can, use written agreements to define the scope, timeline and procedures for changes so that your team is protected from unrealistic demands. Agree in advance how to handle any project changes (for example, through a change control process or additional fees) to avoid last-minute pressure on you and your team. By anticipating changes and establishing clear boundaries, you can adapt to evolving needs without compromising your team's well-being.

Example:

A client asks for a significant package of work to be completed within a timescale that would require sustained excessive hours from the project team. The architect explains the risks this creates for quality, safety and staff wellbeing, and seeks agreement on changes to scope, programme or resources. Where the deadline cannot change, they prioritise work appropriately and make sure the client understands any resulting limitations or risks. They advocate on behalf of their employees to their external clients.

Ensure accountability, not blame. If you are in a senior leadership role, make sure project roles and decision-making responsibilities are clearly defined, but also ensure that you and other senior architects ultimately take responsibility for overall outcomes. Leaders should create a culture where junior staff are not left carrying blame for issues beyond their control. If problems occur, focus on solving them rather than finding a scapegoat. By supporting your team and accepting responsibility, you build trust and loyalty.

11. Reflecting and improving leadership

Seek feedback on your leadership. Periodically ask your team for input on your leadership and the workplace culture. Be open to constructive critique and use it to improve your approach. Create an environment where your colleagues feel safe to give open feedback and let them know what changes you will make as a result of their feedback to show you take their views seriously.

Review and adapt your workplace's culture. Regularly assess whether your workplace culture aligns with your values and the Code's Standards. If you notice unhealthy or outdated attitudes (for example, expecting new recruits to tolerate unreasonable workloads as you may have done), take action to change them. Regularly assess whether your workplace's culture (for example 'presenteeism' or expectations to work late) may be disadvantaging particular groups.

Lead by example in driving change. Embrace the role of leadership and its power to make positive changes that will benefit you and others. Effective leaders proactively champion improvements that benefit the wider public and profession – whether it's improving equality and diversity in the team, adopting more sustainable design practices, or raising safety standards. By taking the lead on these broader issues, you demonstrate the profession's core values in action and inspire others to do the same.

Reflection on leadership practice can form part of your continuing professional development.

You should aim to have resources easily available if your staff feel they have been discriminated against in the workplace. You can share the ARB Guidance on Raising Concerns and Whistleblowing¹.

12. Summary

Effective leadership supports not only the success of individual practices, but also the reputation and standards of the profession as a whole. Architects who demonstrate responsible leadership help ensure that architectural services are delivered competently, ethically and in the public interest.

¹ [Architects Code: Standards of Conduct and Practice](#)