

# The Right Space

Job Satisfaction at Architectural Practices

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## Biographical Note

My undergraduate degree is a Bachelor in Arts in Industrial Design, from the Rhode Island School of Design.

I graduated in 2005.

Since then, I have been working in design and architecture in Texas and Massachusetts for a variety of firms including Coteria + Reed Architects, IDEO, Ann Beha Architects, and Elkus Manfredi Architects, where I am currently employed.

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Introduction

## **Summary of Problem**

There seems to be a crisis in architectural practice, brought on by unprecedented changes in the AEC industry. This research began when I noticed through my interviews with architects, old and young, a reluctance to participate in the profession, and a worry that it is increasingly difficult to find and retain the best talent. This research serves to identify some of the factors which influence if an architect is satisfied in their work, and the likelihood they continue to contribute to our built environment.

## **History of Problem**

Previous work discussing the sociology of architectural work has created a historical context for understanding the profession and the environment that nurtured current experienced practitioners. Much of this research comes in the form of firm profiles, as in the case of Dana Cuff's work. Other works on architectural practice are composed of anecdotal essays which describe the history of architecture firms, focusing on the distinct features of architectural practice, such

as mentorship and teaching, and the genealogy of architectural firms. Little attention has been given to the specific conditions of the practitioner in the current day. I make the argument that there have been dramatic transformations to the field of architecture in the past decade or so.

## **Significance of this work**

Significance to those running architectural practices

Many people responsible for staffing architectural practices express frustration – the adage that it's 'hard to find good people' seems unusually pronounced. My research has indicated that the problems extend deeper than the inability to find people with the exact right skills. I have heard managers report that it is difficult to find architects with about ten years of experience, or "not quite gray-hairs," as one manager put it.

The difficulty finding staff fitting this demographic description points to a larger issue of architects who have dropped out of large practices – in many cases, they drop out to work for smaller practices, where they may enjoy greater autonomy. The latest AIA firm survey notes that about one-fifth of all architects are employed in practices of fewer than 10

people<sup>4</sup>, which may imply that they are seeking employment at smaller practices.

Finding the right people is one problem, but keeping them is quite another. My research has indicated that the expectation that an architect stay at a single firm for an expected period has been upset recently, and many managers that I interviewed complained about retention. Some firms have specifically hired experts to develop firm culture and to understand the complaints voiced by younger staff, in the hopes that they will be continue to grow in the firm and form the next generation of project managers.

There is yet another category of architects who should concern hiring managers – qualified, often very capable architects who never consider employment at a large firm, or even working in architecture proper. I have conducted several interviews with graduates of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, who, for a variety of reasons, decided that although they maintain affection and respect for architecture, they're better off applying these talents elsewhere.

Last year, I conducted several interviews with local architects which demonstrated to me the diversity of options

available to architects today, which are summarized in Appendix 1.

Significance of this work in 2017

Architecture is affected by boom and bust cycles, and this is one of the reasons I have heard architects give for their decision to leave large firms to work for themselves, or leave the profession altogether. However, I believe that there are new factors at play which make the present distinct from that in times past.

There are several major changes which make our time distinct from, say, the 70s or 80s. The first is the increasing polarization of the sizes of architectural firms. The previously mentioned AIA Firm Survey notes that although there are many architects working in small practices, the portion of architects working in medium sized practices (10-49 employees) is diminishing, with these firms representing a smaller share of total billing than in 2013. This trend is perhaps explained by the fact that, according to an article in *Architect*, the Zweig group reports that in 2015 78% of design firms were considering a merger or acquisition in their future<sup>1</sup>.

This trend makes the need for an analysis of large architectural practices especially pressing, since these large practices will be employing a greater number of people in the future.

The second distinct change I see is the rapid adoption of BIM as a standard working method. BIM, and associated software technologies, represents a fundamentally new way of working than the traditional drawing – red line – correction model used in the AutoCAD days. This model of drawing generation was of course analogous to the methods used when hand drafting was the standard, but BIM breaks this lineage decisively. This causes several problems – for one, older staff members at a firm may not be immediately able to stay in touch with the state of a drawing set, although tools are evolving to help this. Another problem is that the process of drawing mark-up and correction represented the way younger architects were trained. The mentorship process in architecture traditionally began with the correction of drawings. With BIM, this mentor link between older and younger architects is strained, causing strain between production and management staff at architecture firms.

Another change implied by BIM is that it allows for a degree of collaboration between entities which have traditionally been separated contractually. Although BIM is frequently used as a drafting tool, albeit a very flexible one, it opens possibilities for project delivery which could not have been imagined twenty years ago, such as integrated project delivery. One project manager I spoke to about this subject acknowledged the importance of this trend, but said the adoption of these methods was limited not by him and his staff, but by the legal apparatus of his firm, and their ability to officiate dramatically different relationships with clients. I believe that this change has not come to fruition yet – most firms I interviewed did not operate with this model.

Another change unique to our time is the widespread use of social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Facebook. I believe that these platforms contribute to greater staff mobility. Continued social connection with ex-classmates and professional contacts keeps practitioners constantly aware of the career progress of their peers, and offers them an easy way to reach out to acquaintances – not just close friends – who may be able to tell them if the firm across the city is hiring, and how much they pay. An employee with below average

social facility is now as empowered as the best-networked employee would have been in years past. Staff are no longer part of a community in their workplace, but part of a 'soft union' of peers throughout the world.

These are merely a few of the unique conditions of architectural practice in 2017. Others which deserve mention are the rising cost of architectural education, and the fact that the aforementioned software tools allow for greater productivity not just for those at large firms, but for those at small, or even tiny firms. My friend Jeff Nunez, another BAC student, has recently completed thesis work exploring the entrepreneurial possibilities which now exist for young architects. My work focuses on the health of large practices.

Significance to thesis students

One of the reasons I decided to undertake this work is because I felt that the research format offered a useful alternative to a conventional design project. Rather than trying to demonstrate all I know about architecture within the space of a single semester, I decided to use my limited time to learn

as much as possible about a specific condition within the industry.

The research process is exciting and social in a way that studio design work has not been, in my experience. However, accomplishing any useful body of research within a single semester is not an easy task, and as a result, a substantial portion of my discussion here relates to the methodology I developed to learn about the architectural profession. My hope is that future thesis students may find this discussion useful if they decide to use their time in Thesis to accomplish goals like mine.

Significance to young practitioners

Those who stand to benefit most from this work are young architects who are trying to decide where to work next. We do not all have the luxury of being able to ask questions about many different architectural practices – typically, if we have a series of job interviews, we only meet a handful of prospective employers, and even then, may not know the best questions to ask. By interviewing many employers, and the staff whom they employ, I hope to give young practitioners a better idea

of the questions they should ask to choose the best firm, to figure out how to succeed there, and to anticipate how their needs may change.

#### Personal significance

It is important to reflect on work with personal significance, since thesis work is self-directed; to find a question to which one wants to find the answer. Even a question which seems in one's self-interest (e.g. where should I work?) turns out to have broad implications as a field of inquiry and deeper significance than anticipated.

This work was motivated by, and is dedicated to, all the architects I grew up around, and with whom I have worked during my time at the BAC, who have experienced periods of frustration with their careers. We spend so much time working, yet we spend so little time reflecting and asking questions about the satisfaction our work brings us.

## Methods

Developing a methodology for this investigation represents the largest part of my work, and is perhaps the most significant part of this research. Unlike the studio work I have done, which has an intangible element that can be hinted at and hunted after, every part of this project invites critical scrutiny. This has forced me to remind myself to continually return to the questions that I have an earnest interest in answering. There is very little about this project that is self-expressive, other than the decision to undertake it initially. Any student considering a research project should be aware of this limitation.

### How a methodology was created

The methodology was improvised through the semester, but basically went from an exploratory mode to one that was driven by specific goals. I decided to approach the problem of gathering data about job satisfaction by first familiarizing myself with forces within the industry, then developing a set of questions that touched on some of the structural anxieties within the profession, as well as complaints I have heard

multiple times in my (more anecdotal) research before the semester began.

I decided to use the large Boston firms as the subject for my research, and that face-to-face interviews would be the best way to get detailed and nuanced information about the firms, as opposed to a questionnaire or some other method of inquiry. As a result, the development of questions to ask was critically important to this project, and took up a good part of the semester. Alongside my own research, I conducted a series of preliminary interviews and question forming exercises to synthesize and refine the questions I would use for my research, before I deployed them in the field.

The process of developing a set of interview questions was a long and fruitful exercise because it not only provided a basis for a comparative analysis, but forced me to describe what it was exactly that I wanted to know. Indeed, the questions limit the possible use of this research – if an issue is not represented in the questions, it is not in the work at all.

## Preliminary Interviews

The purpose of preliminary interviews is to gain an understanding of firm operations that is deeper than I am capable of as a junior architect. For example, even though I read about the history of BIM and how it is potentially changing our industry, the specific anecdotes provided by the CIO of my firm helped form a very incisive question about technological culture at Boston firms. Interviews with older practitioners helped me better understand the importance of design quality as a factor leading architects to pursue their own practices. Finally, conducting more casual interviews with other young architects helped me better understand the sorts of concerns younger staff had when deciding which firm to offer their time to, and which questions they generally ask during interviews.

## Forming Questions

The best source of information about question-forming comes from people who develop questionnaires<sup>10</sup>. This study was fruitful because it helped reveal how the formation of questions ultimately determines the scope of the possible responses, and thus the entire field of inquiry. What makes

this study especially confounding is that to discuss potentially contentious or difficult subjects – those that we are not used to talking about – it is important to not ask about a topic directly, but ask around it. In the same way that a series of plans can describe a building, a series of questions can portray a subject's opinion more accurately than a single response.

One of the reasons for this is that it is very easy to answer big questions with generic responses. For example, if one wants to investigate the degree to which an office is a collaborative environment, it may not be worthwhile to simply ask if it is a collaborative environment. Almost any design professional would respond affirmatively, and in their mind, they would not be wrong, since they could easily point to any number of examples where promising ideas came from an unlikely direction.

A better way of determining this information would be to rather ask about what sacrifices the firm makes to allow collaboration, inviting a comparison between this firm and another. Is company time devoted to project presentations, where anyone can see and comment on current design work? Has the office been spatially configured to privilege casual

encounters over team efficiency? Questions should be phrased in such a way as to elicit this kind of response – one which asks a subject to report on what happens, not on what would happen ideally.

These questions allow a useful basis for comparison, but they still present one more problem because they imply a positive response and a negative one. One of the greatest challenges in question-forming is asking in such a way that interviewers do not imply what is the ‘right,’ or most ideal, response. To use the previous example, “Does your office value collaboration?” is not ideal, since a negative response would be, to the ears of most design professionals, an indication of an inferior design culture. Rather, one should ask a question that implies both a high and low degree of collaboration have benefits. One might ask, for example, whether teams are intimately connected, working with focused isolation, or if project input comes from a wider array of sources. Simply by phrasing the question differently, you can derive more accurate responses. This not only gives the respondent an opportunity to ‘save face,’ it also invites them to create a more precise and nuanced characterization of their office than they would if faced with a more direct question.

One of the key metrics of a research question for interviewing is how decisively it can be answered. Questions that can be easily answered with one-word responses make for very easy analysis after the fact, but reveal very little about the stated, or unstated, attitudes that I am trying to scrutinize. On the other hand, a question that invites long narrative answers becomes overly personal and begins to speak not of the general attitudes noted in an experience in a workplace, but of a personal experience.

Deciding how to strike this balance is not a trivial problem, especially given the time limit I imposed on myself for these interviews, which took between 30 and 50 minutes. However, I realized in my introductory interviews that if you are speaking to someone in person, you can ask a question that tends to be relatively closed in format – enabling, for example, a short reply, but these limited replies can be addressed in two ways.

First, since you are speaking in person, you can ask a follow-up question, which can more specifically address the individual you are interviewing. You may rephrase the question, for example, in a way that ties it to some specific

aspect of their experience. This will enable an interviewee, who may not be used to even thinking about the cultural ecosystem of their firm, to reflect on their personal experience. After they have reflected on their own experience, they may be more comfortable making a statement about what is generally true about their firm.

Second, closed-form questions can still render very detailed responses if they give the interviewee the opportunity to express something which they may rarely have an opportunity to express. A project manager, for example, who staffs projects, may feel odd knowing that he does not ask his staff for more input into what they want to be working on, despite this being the norm at his firm. Simply asking a simple question about whether his team has any input on staffing gives him a chance to answer this question not only for the interviewer, but for the subject as well.

The task of question forming is somewhat distinct from the task of interviewing. Specific notes on the interview process are provided in Appendix 2.

## The Interview Questions

I narrowed down from a lengthy list of potential areas of interest 12 questions that I hoped could give a good profile of each of the firms I interviewed. A discussion of each question follows. In some cases, there are two questions listed – these are questions whose form differs depending on whether the subject is a junior or senior staff member. In each case, the question posed to the senior staff member is given first.

**1a. What is the most important quality for an applicant to have?**

**1b. Were you hired to do a specific thing? Are you still doing that thing?**

The purpose of this question is to get a picture of what the gatekeepers of the firm value. Are job applicants hired to contribute to a larger culture of collaboration, or are they hired to be a part of a machine that requires parts with certain skills? The answers to this question begin to also paint a picture of training and mentorship. Firms that are less inclined to train staff will be more likely to bring in people with specific skills already possessed, whereas other firms will first consider

cultural fit and hire someone without knowing exactly what they will be working on in the long term.

This question goes to the heart of anxieties regarding firm loyalty, as well. Workers who are treated as possessors of skills are more likely to sell these skills to another firm, but workers who are treated as contributors to a shared purpose cannot as easily transfer these relationships to a new context.

**2a. When staffing projects a long way out, do you ask staff about their preferences?**

This question serves to test the responses of question 1. The most efficient way to staff projects is to simply use the skills that staff members already possess, rotating them as that skill is needed in a certain project. As a result, employees at such firms will have trouble developing as architects, since they will be only expanding their skill set by accident or by advocating for themselves. In general, firms want staff to have broader experience, since this makes staffing easier in the long term, but are they willing to make monetary sacrifices to bring this about?

***2b. What does the firm do to develop staff, and has it been successful?***

The second phrasing of this question, which is posed to employees, asks what efforts the firms make to develop staff. Most firms offer some sort of gesture toward staff development, but it is important to note that architectural experience cannot be gained with lunch-hour seminars or other easy solutions – it is traditionally attained by allowing less experienced staff to work with more experienced staff, retarding their work, or, conceivably, by contributing to their schooling, as in the case of the BAC.

***3a. Apart from creating contract documents, what does your firm do with BIM models?***

During the transition to Revit, which is not yet complete in many firms, older production staff members had to learn new drafting tools. That was a difficult enough task, but Revit represents a far greater advance in architectural practice than simply more efficient drafting. The first question, posed to managers, asks specifically if the firm takes a leadership position, or even has an awareness, on the project delivery

methods that Revit makes possible, and which are already transforming our industry.

***3b. Do you feel the firm is technologically advanced compared to other firms?***

For younger staff, I ask simply if the firm is technologically advanced. I have phrased this question in a vague way, because I am not particularly interested in specific technologies that the firm uses. Rather, I am attempting to ascertain whether the staff feel that their skills are becoming outdated because the firm gives them no opportunity to practice them. This anxiety is inevitable, to a certain extent, since technology, especially parametric modelling tools, have an outsized influence in student work. However, as students become employees, they can compare the technological savvy of their firm to that of others.

Regardless of whether they like using these tools, or even find them important for design, it cannot be denied that it is preferable to work for a firm at the forefront of technology than one that is lagging, since it affects employees' competitiveness when they seek new work. Older, managerial employees feel this pressure far less, since they either do not

anticipate needing new work, or see themselves as designers rather than draftspeople. This is troubling, since to deny the importance of technology to one's own practice demonstrates an inability to see how BIM is affecting the profession at all levels: the demands of our clients, the working methods of our consultants, and, not least, the professional needs of young staff.

#### ***4. To what degree does your work lend itself to working from home?***

Working from home, or from a shared workspace or café, is an image that represents the idealized working methods of some entrepreneurs and people working in the digital realm. While it is rare, although not unheard of, for an architect to assume this working method, it is inevitable that a young architect has some peer who works in this context of freedom and self-reliance. The architectural office, and the fact that staff's time is planned for them, can appear unappealing in comparison. Some of my previous research indicated that the dynamic working methods employed by start-up culture are part of the motivation for some young architects to eschew

architectural work. This question, posed to employees, asks if this working method holds any appeal to them.

To managerial staff, the connotations of the question are somewhat different, having some similarities to the previous question. Does a project manager have enough comfort with technology to accomplish work that would otherwise require their computer, pens and paper? Or, do they feel that architectural work, for whatever reason, can only be accomplished in the office?

This question has a particular relevance to how a firm accommodates the lives of their staff. If a worker is also the caregiver of a child, can they easily take a day off to care for their child when sick? Can they take a day or two off, regularly, and not only get work done, but also maintain the esteem of their coworkers and manager? Do the staff themselves see this as a valuable freedom?

#### ***5. How and in what way are principals involved in day to day project management?***

This is part of a two-part question that ascertains the subject's relationship with the people at the very top of the

firm. First, it asks them to characterize the actual activities of these people – are they contributing to design, do they spend all their time doing operational work, or are they out giving speeches and finding work? It is useful to get an idea of what they spend their time doing, since there is nobody preventing them from doing whatever they like – a principal could, if they choose, be very involved in one or two projects, or none. This attitude is less mediated by a sense of responsibility to a prescribed role, and acts as good indicator of the general attitudes of the decision makers in the firm.

This question also brings up the issue of the principal's accessibility as people – are they actively communicating with their staff, or there is not only a professional barrier (responsibility, skills) but also a personal one (social)? The history of architecture shows that the proprietors of many successful architectural practices are independently wealthy. Can they relate to the daily life of a staff member with student loans, who may never make enough money to comfortably retire, much less start their own competitive practice? A principal with a different background, with a lifestyle to which an average staff member can scarcely imagine (security, experiences) may not be able to communicate with their staff

as an equal. Indeed, if their perspectives are sufficiently different, significant communication may be impossible; the attitude toward taking risks between someone who depends on a paycheck and someone who does not may be completely at odds.

It is important to note that although the idea of a remote and disinterested principal may be unappealing, this may not always be the case, and the phrasing of the question deliberately avoids assigning a value to different ways of being a principal. A principal who has social connections to wealthy people, for example, can assure a steady stream of profitable work, which is in the interest of all staff. A principal who is not at all involved in design may simply trust their project managers, giving them the time and resources to do great work.

***6. Do you see yourself one day being a principal at this firm or somewhere similar?***

This question is a continuation of the previous one, asking staff and managers alike not simply if they feel a kinship with the existing principals, but whether they feel that they could achieve the same prominence in the firm. This question

measures, among other things, where staff see their progress leading. Is being a principal off limits? Or perhaps a project manager? An associate? Their optimism, pessimism, interest, or disinterest in progress toward the firm is indicated in their answer to this question.

It also allows the subject to express their attitude toward the leadership of the firm they are giving their time to. A subject who sees themselves as one day contributing to the firm's management is invested in the firm in a fundamentally different way than simply contributing architectural skill.

### ***7. What do you think is the most unique thing your firm offers clients?***

This question has two purposes. First, it provides an idea of the firm's profile – the sort of work it excels at and whether the staff member has any personal pride born out of their contributions to this work.

The second purpose is to gauge the subject's relationship with the outward face of the firm's management – their marketing efforts. A staff member who can easily and expertly list the reasons for the firm's excellence, in the same way a

principal or marketing expert might, has a clearer connection to the firm. If a staff member cannot easily and specifically give some unique reason for the firm's success in a certain realm, it may indicate at the very least that they are not involved in the process of securing work, or acting as a representative of the firm.

It is also telling what aspects of the firm a subject is proud of. The relationship between an architect and a client is very complex and potentially very personal. Does the subject only mention the ways that clients are satisfied, or do they mention the team they work with as having a quality that is a competitive asset? Firms that invest in their staff and culture can use this to market their work to other clients who have the same attitude toward their staff.

### ***8. How is the firm organized spatially? About how many distinct team/areas?***

The spatial organization of a firm is itself telling. Is there a hierarchy of staff connoted by a spatial hierarchy, implying that staff, as they progress and gain responsibility, will sit in different rooms with different people? Are staff segregated by

skill, or are technical architects mixed with less technical, operational staff?

Another dimension of this question is that it gives architects an opportunity to offer opinions about how they relate to the firm in general. This line of questioning might not be fruitful for most people, but since architects are designers of space, the feelings that they have toward the space itself give some illustration of how they feel about the firm. Do they feel able to change the location of staff, or do they feel like the space is unchanging? Do they feel a sense of ownership over their immediate surroundings?

***9a. What are the common reasons for a younger staff member to leave this firm?***

This question ties into the previous questions about how staff see their future at the firm – who they would like to be, rather than who they are. I ask managers the relatively direct question – why do staff leave? The reasons why a staff member leaves are extremely complex, and the reasons they provide a manager or HR staffer during an exit interview may differ from the real reasons – if they are aware of them

themselves. What matters is what people emphasize and deemphasize.

On a surface level, the reported reasons may indicate a problem with the firm in that area. A staff member in fact need more money, or broader experience, and their decision may not be motivated by a rejection of the firm’s culture but simple necessity. On the other hand, if a manager responds to this question quizzically, it may indicate that they don’t know or understand the reasons why staff are leaving.

This question also gives managers an opportunity to reflect on the issue of staff loyalty, about which I have heard some older managers complain. The expectation that a staff member work for only one or two firms for their whole career is still apparent in the attitudes of some, generally older, practitioners, although this expectation is by no means universal in my introductory research. Particularly, practitioners who were affected by one of the recessions of the 1970s or 80s may not feel like they can ask their staff or their peers to remain loyal to a commercial enterprise.

***9b. What would the firm have to do to keep you on for six more years?***

To younger staff, this question gives them an opportunity to reflect on the long-term viability of their employment. Are there specific things the firm could do to nurture this loyalty, to make it a job worth keeping? Or is the attraction of money and varied experience too great to keep an employee at one firm, even if that one firm offers everything that employee could want?

***10. What are the challenges facing women at your firm?***

This question is deliberately phrased in a general way to broach the subject of gender in the architectural profession and how the subject feels about the firm's attitude toward gender equality.

Architecture has not traditionally been a profession that attracts and retains women. Ascertaining precise causes for this within an individual firm is not the purpose of this question – indeed, some of the firms I visit may have a female-majority staff. Instead, this question asks subjects to reflect on the traditionally masculine attitude of the old architectural

practices, which asked long hours, total devotion to the work and almost militant camaraderie. I have heard many coworkers and subjects of my introductory interviews reflect on enjoying this aspect of the work. At the same time, one must presume that some people may dislike this aspect of the work, preferring to put their family life before their work.

Other anecdotes in my introductory research indicated to me that one of the problems with architecture being a male-dominated profession is that the modes of communication more common with men – a loud tone, being unwilling to admit ignorance of an issue, preferring to express surety – may alienate some people who prefer to communicate in other ways. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to say that a thoughtful designer, who must consider opposing notions in every decision, is unlikely to be the sort of person to speak with unshaken certainty. This question asks the subject – does your firm allow different people to express themselves? Are the people with the most bravado also the people who advance in the firm, or does the firm value quiet people?

Perhaps more directly, it gives the subject an opportunity to report on the number of women in leadership positions at the

firm. Can you raise a family and still become a principal in the firm, without relying on the income of another spouse to help solve life's challenges as they arise? Is devotion to one's family, or life outside of work, considered distinct or continuous with the interests of the firm?

**11a. If you have children, how did your attitude toward work, and your role, change?**

**11b. If you were to have children, how would your attitude toward work, and role change?**

This question is in some ways a continuation of the previous one. This question asks the subject to reflect on whether a staff member can have a child unnoticed and if child-rearing staff are treated the same and behave the same as those without children. I ask this question because, in my introductory research, I heard several times the story of a male staff member, who, after his partner bore a child, decided to take their work much more seriously, working longer hours, or doing whatever it took to assume a higher compensating position in the company, to better provide for his child.

I have also heard the story of architects who, after having a child, decide that they need to switch into a more lucrative profession, often going into construction management, for example, or becoming an I.T. consultant.

I also have heard, repeatedly, the story of an architect who, being the primary care giver of a child, found that their need for greater flexibility with regard to working hours retarded their progress within the profession, even if their level of architectural expertise continued to grow.

The attitude towards child-rearing staff can be thought of as belying the attitudes the firm (as an institution) has with people who put aspects of their life other than work first. All firms emphasize the need for a 'work life balance' but where one strikes this balance is a personal decision which may not confer with the preferences of their employer.

**12. About how many hours do you work in a normal week? Do you feel that you need to work a certain number of hours to advance in the firm?**

The immediate purpose of this question is to ascertain attitudes toward working in tangible terms. Does the answer

to this question comport with other questions assessing attitudes towards work/life balance? Besides offering some idea of which firms do not feel the need to ask excessive time from their staff, this question allows me to see if the opinions toward work/life balance with the staff in general apply to the respondent his or herself.

This question also asks the subject to reflect on the amount of time they contribute to the firm, and how they feel it compares to their peers.

The final reason I ask this question is to see if there is a dramatic divergence between younger staff with less responsibilities and managerial staff with more. Do they work the same hours? Are staff assessed according to their sheer effort, or is there a more nuanced way of expressing effort to the firm's ends? The culture of architecture school tends to emphasize the primacy of working long hours, producing a lot, rather than working at a sustainable rate. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this question summary, but this question seeks to show if the firm has broken with this tradition or sustains it.

## **The limitations of interviews / other research**

Given the short amount of time I had to do this work, I set up a timetable to develop, ask and interpret questions. However, I realized that it would not be wise to entirely rely on responses to questions as the entirety of my research, even if they are the only comparative data I have about specific firms. As a result, I decided early on to research topics I felt were related to the subject at hand, in the hopes that they would inform my work later.

The subjects I decided to investigate were the sociology of architectural practice, the history and best practices of BIM, modern project delivery methods, research into group dynamics and teamwork, and research on question forming and interviewing. I have already summarized some of the useful information I learned in the latter category.

These various sources were chosen blindly, and some were more useful than others, but the process of this research was interesting in retrospect in how it mimicked previous design work I have done. Initially, it can be good to cast a wide net and to assemble a wide body of general knowledge, which can be selectively deepened as time passes. To give an example,

the reading I did on the sociology of architecture firms, particularly the tradition of mentorship, was very useful as it helped me understand the mindset of the older architects I interviewed, since they learned from the architectural practices described in those works.

Research into the history of BIM was useful since I realized that many of the forces forming the profession are technological. Understanding how technology not only changes the day-to-day work of architects, but also changes their contractual relations to the rest of the AEC industry, is key to appreciating the seismic changes happening to our profession, even if we are not immediately aware of them<sup>5,3</sup>.

I also did some research into the field of organizational dynamics and teamwork. This related to an earlier ambition I had to compare the delivery methods of architects to other professionals who deliver large, technically complex work. What I learned from this research was a better understanding of the factors contributing to job satisfaction, such as familiarity, autonomy, curiosity, and so on. Reading about how successful collaborative organizations operate and how they differ from most architectural practices was useful in

forming questions about how employees feel values and productive in the workplace<sup>8,9</sup>.

This research began three semesters ago with an analysis of John Portman's architectural practice. During that research, I found a writer whose research in many ways inspired mine. Dana Cuff's work characterizing architectural practice from a sociological standpoint offered me the possibility of getting into architectural firms and asking useful questions. Cuff's methods and purposes differ greatly from mine, however. Cuff spent time shadowing staff at a series of different architectural practices, studying their culture from a sociological perspective. Her aim was to draw a link between design quality and firm practice, and her work is very convincing. However, I found myself frustrated reading it, since I felt it had limited utility to insiders – people who were practicing, or on their way to practicing within the industry. The goals of my research are to offer a method by which younger practitioners and senior hiring staff can better understand their own practice, not how they can better explain their practices to the public at large.

## Results

On the following four pages, I have reproduced two versions of the responses I received from my interview subjects.

The first set of responses shows paraphrased responses, where I selected what I thought was the most essential part of the response, or some comment which I found particularly illuminating.

The second set of responses is a simplified matrix of responses, where I looked for patterns in the responses to each question and simplified the responses so similarities and differences were more pronounced. This is the data which I will use for comparison, since it contains less personal anecdote, and reflects more the essential condition of the staff member being interviewed.

There are five total firms represented in these results (A, B, C, D, E) with two interviews conducted at each. One interview is with a junior staff member, having perhaps two years of experience, and the other is a project manager or other senior staff member who is responsible for hiring and staffing projects. In each case, the junior staff member's responses are marked with a J (A<sub>J</sub>) and the senior staff member's responses are marked with an S (A<sub>S</sub>).

These charts represent a dramatic reduction in the data, from interviews full of anecdote and nuance to data. The purpose of publishing these results is not to show what conclusions can be definitively drawn from them, only to show what sort of conclusions are possible when this sort of data is collected.

	1. Hire for what?	2. Staff Development	3. Technological Position?	4. Working from Home?	5. Principals Involved?	6. Will you be a Principal?
<b>Firm A</b> A <sub>1</sub>	Hired for skills, not project. Using those skills. Has since been moved around projects.	Has classes and councils with uneven attendance. Does not attend.	Yes; management less aware but firm as a whole is.	You could; she doesn't matter of trust; doesn't want to.	Some principals check in each day. Once a week will chat about work.	No. People say I'm suited to smaller firm. All men principals. Not interested.
A <sub>5</sub>	Someone with 10 years experience. Inexperienced staff don't know end product.	Staff not involved. Asked at annual reviews. Project >employee	No real answer - sold to facilities. Not in Revit model.	Work from home when I want. Somewhat effective but not preference.	Not involved, have pet projects, out giving speeches getting work. Interests of principals are diverse.	Yes, in next few years. Enjoy designs so no changes yet. Plateaued in happiness.
<b>Firm B</b> B <sub>1</sub>	Hired as an artist, said they liked her and found a place for her. Hired because of who she was.	Working on it. Hired Sandra. Have reviews once a year with advo and support, very available. Takes initiative.	Working on it. Have a fab lab. Incubator space for outsiders. Have a software research team. Not a big priority.	Soon will have laptop. Will work from home then. Working style will change then. Lots of people take 1 day off.	Depends on project. Currently monthly contact. Some accessible.	Wants to be principal. Hopeful at prospect. It's like having your own firm with more support.
B <sub>5</sub>	Looking for a broad range of skills. Want to create a diverse group of talent.	Talk to staff a lot about preferences. Want to prevent churn. Reflection and Planning. Better than average retention.	100% BIM, since 2006. On executive council of Autodesk. R&D Revit.	On the road a lot; is capable of being effective. Value of face to face is paramount. Encourage attendance.	Principals are all connected to projects - studio basis. Transition to principal very easy.	Is a principal. Always wanted to be.
<b>Firm C</b> C <sub>1</sub>	Hired to do revit templates - since moved on to architecture. Still at BAC. Hired through BAC connections.	P&W U, very impressed. Classes on all matters. Generally attended by younger.	Managers have tried to learn about what Revit can do. Managers behind but willing to learn.	Have worked from home. Work best when together.	Don't talk to principals here. Not very involved in projects past schematic.	Tough job. Not sure I want to get into it. It's a possibility but not desirable, less design. More business. "High up"
C <sub>5</sub>	Wants to hire future leaders, independent and flexible people.	Accommodating to an extent. Bad attitude is bad for project. Ask what type of work is for them. People want to make a difference.	Use as design tool. Use for estimates. Contractors are starting to want the model.	I can work from home. Working on small teams. Everyone is on Skype. IM. Can't work %100 from home. Travel makes it needed.	Smaller projects, no principals. Oversight or meddling - their input is not always appreciated.	Would hope so. Can't control it, would like it. Is a long term employee.
<b>Firm D</b> D <sub>1</sub>	Hired into specific technical track which develops into architectural role	Firm has a specific role in mind, so development is rigid but supportive	Yes, very much so. Strong technology leadership from heads of firm. VR actively used.	Very easy to work from home, but I rarely do it due to distractions.	Principals often travelling, on site. Works in schematic design more and getting work.	Attainable; principals are trained from staff.
D <sub>5</sub>	Wants people who can learn, and who are good with customers. An attitude. Has very clear expectations.	Try to observe what people are interested in, observing them over time and putting them in the best position.	VR. Models are used for design review for clients and staff without revit expertise.	Very easy. Works from home once a week, typically.	Not very involved, pretty big divide between management and design.	Not interested due to how different the work is, but certainly an attainable goal.
<b>Firm E</b> E <sub>1</sub>	Hired to help with specific projects initially	New review process - no specific programs apart from this	Younger staff have good technical skills but older non technical designers dominate	Working from home is not done; is possible but it is not commonplace	Principals sometimes check in to certain projects, but are not particularly involved in architecture	Probably not; principals have different background and have given their lives over to firm
E <sub>5</sub>	Looking for range of experience, people who have stayed at somewhere a long time. Likes well designed resumes, stable people. Younger	Staff are not asked about their preferences. Some staff do ask. Maybe 5% ask.	Used for renderings and 3d visual studies. Contractor takes over model. Reluctant to oversell work. As project delivery methods evolve	Doesn't work due to intensity and team atmosphere. Work is very fast and fluid. Would like to be able to but does not seem likely.	Depends on principal philosophy. No involvement day to day unless big problems arise. Doesn't look at drawings.	No interest. Prefers being on projects. Working on 3-5 projects ebbing and flowing.

Paraphrased responses to questions 1-6

7. Most unique quality?      8. Spatial Organization ?      9. Why do people leave?      10. Challenges for women?      11. Changes with Children?      12. How many hours?

<b>Firm A</b> A <sub>1</sub>	Respect for design quality over streamlining work. No clear marketing driven response.	Segregated. Do not encounter other people. Hard to make friends.	Likes job security. Likes how limitations are accommodated. Greater client contact would cause her to stay.	No female principals. More women in interiors. Introverted men do well. Prefers working with men.	Many younger staff having kids; hard to say who does not seem that their lives are overly impacted.	Gets work done @35. People know she does her work. PMS held to another standard.
A <sub>5</sub>	Speed agility, # of ideas, good client relations. Not very specific. Had to think of answer.	On separate floors. Complaints of divisions. Have events to help that.	Don't communicate, those who do stay, might be better off at a smaller firm.	Carrier interruption with kids hurts. Not many successful women here. Some optimism for future. Interiors/Urban different.	Took it more seriously. More \$ conscious. Annoyed at staff who waste \$ on design.	Never more than 60. Normally 50. Write down 46. Hours not a problem.
<b>Firm B</b> B <sub>1</sub>	Integration of urban landscape arch. Multidisciplinary.	No closed office. Organized by project but others move more. Becoming more mobile. Everyone moves constantly	Be on projects I want to be on. Roles are multifaceted, feel like she has contributed to design. Design is #1.	Lingering implicit sexism, but apart from this, things are good. Feels heard. More than 1/2 female.	Working here has made her want to have children more than before. Not sure how.	40. Lots of flexibility.
B <sub>5</sub>	Consistently hear that firm is multidisciplinary.	Nightmare. V shaped, people cut off. Office is frumpy. Nice to be able to change things. Like to be downtown.	Sometimes he encourages people to leave and grow.	Reluctant to discuss - women are culturally the child care giver. Have not found perfect solution. Hard time for work outside of Boston. Travel	Became more flexible in hours. Wife had demanding job as well.	Try not to think about it in those terms. 60 hours. Work is a lifestyle. Working on 5 projects.
<b>Firm C</b> C <sub>1</sub>	Diversity of firm and of staff. Many sectors means security. Work in many areas.	Typical layout. Not a lot of space. Center is common area. Organized by sector. Try to keep teams together. Has had to move around more than he'd	Constantly learning new things. More responsibility. Moving 'up'.	Happy with the amount of women. More women in interiors but spread in each department. Not many female principals or PMS	Schedule would change. Doesn't think attitude towards work would change - can't tell who has kids.	In school, around 40 hours. Did 50 during summer. Gets time and a half.
C <sub>5</sub>	Very complete and polished response. Experience and User focus. Not interested in design awards.	Generic. Open office. Designed to support teams. Get people away from desks. Evolving.	Money. Opportunity, experience.	Firm has made an effort. Women's events. Long way to go. Maternal and Paternal leave is the same.	Attitude didn't change much. Time efficiency and priorities changed. Wants to leave at same time.	40 to 60 billed. Works somewhat from home. 60 not the norm. Working from home helps.
<b>Firm D</b> D <sub>1</sub>	I don't know. The things we play to are not the things we should be doing. Tries to make money on additional services.	Open. Like and Dislike. Hard to concentrate. Likes lack of offices, informality.	Money. Very hard to make money in architecture without jumping around. The field pays very poorly. Wants to join union.	Don't perceive any particular problems - women are very well represented in firm.	Many people have kids. Some staff without kids are more work focussed - people don't work harder because they have kids.	Around 40. Any pressure to do more comes from within.
D <sub>5</sub>	Don't differentiate much compared to other firms. What differentiates is the people. Improvised response.	Everyone has laptops; people use each other's desks.	Projects take a long time to be completed. Doesn't seem like much progress is being made. Some people don't click with their managers.	Women well represented at firm in all areas.	People seem to be different after maternity leave; having a partner who can share the load contributes to this ease.	A lot. 60 to 70 hours generally.
<b>Firm E</b> E <sub>1</sub>	Longstanding relationships with certain clientele.	Three large studios. Staff generally stationary but occasionally moved into team groups.	Greater variety of challenges, more money, growth of knowledge and client interaction.	Maternal leave policy not very good, several women have left firm when they wanted to start families.	This would be a good firm to get a stable paycheck from; wouldn't be hard to make more money but would take a lot of time and energy.	40 due to school; probably more like 45 after that. Managers much more.
E <sub>5</sub>	Client service and responsiveness is the most marketable quality. Understanding of urban planning issues in Boston.	Everyone on one floor, easy interactions. Think the open layout works. A little noisy but apart from that I like it. Intentionally	Feel like their lost in a sea of people, no contact with future, no contact with principals. Worried about staff retention. Would like to build a team.	Firm seems fairly diverse, equal opportunity. Think with ability and work ethic women could go as far as anyone.	Didn't want to have kids because work came first. Hard to say how children would affect work.	50-55. Work at home half a day on weekends. Expectations for staff depend on approaching deadlines. Declines to make demands on

Paraphrased responses to questions 7-12

		<i>1. Hire for what?</i>	<i>2. Staff Development?</i>	<i>3. Technology?</i>	<i>4. Working from Home?</i>	<i>5. Principals involved?</i>	<i>6. Will you be a Principal?</i>
<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	hired for skills	no 1 on 1 engagement, seminars	Younger staff push technology	Based on trust, not wanted	Principals occasionally involved	Does not seem likely
	A <sub>S</sub>	looking for skills	not specifically engaged with staff	No specifics	Effective but not preferred	Not involved	Seems inevitable
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	hired for character	engaging, trying to do more, seminars	Technology institutionally supported	Free to work from home	Leadership contact varies, mostly superficial	Seems possible
	B <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	specifically engages with staff	Technology major concern of mgmt	Necessary due to travel	Leadership contact varies, mostly superficial	Was inevitable
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	hired for skills	no 1 on 1 engagement, seminars	Younger staff savvy	Effective but not preferred	Not involved	Seems possible but not desirable
	C <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	partially engaged	Technology institutionally supported	Effective but not preferred	Minimally involved, input not welcomed	Seems inevitable
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	hired for character	engaging but rigidly so	Technology institutionally supported	Effective but not preferred	Not involved	Seems possible but not desirable
	D <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	specifically engages with staff	Technology major concern of mgmt	Effective and regularly practiced	Not involved	Possible but not desired
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	hired for character	not specifically engaged with staff	Younger staff savvy	Not realistically possible	Not involved	Does not seem likely
	E <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	not specifically engaged with staff	Conservative attitude towards technology	Not effective for most tasks.	Rarely involved	Possible but not desired

*Simplified responses to questions 1-6*

		7. Most unique quality?	8. Spatial Organization?	9. Why do people leave?	10. Challenges for women?	11. Changes with Children?	12. How many hours?
<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	No specific response	Dissatisfied - hard to make contacts	Not getting experience	No female leaders perceived	no marked change	35 is enough
	A <sub>S</sub>	No specific response	Dissatisfied - hard to make contacts	They don't communicate	No female leaders perceived	became more serious about \$	50-60 out of necessity
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Clear response (multidisciplinary)	Satisfied but dislikes constantly moving	Not getting experience, being heard	No problems perceived	no marked change, has made her want kids more	40 with flexibility
	B <sub>S</sub>	Clear response (clients report: multidisciplinary)	Dissatisfied - space is old, divides staff	They ought to leave sometimes.	Maternity causes problems	changed, needing more flexibility	60+ out of necessity
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	No answer; responded with anecdote about stability	Satisfied but dislikes constantly moving	Not getting experience	No female leaders perceived	see changes in terms of needing flexibility	50, but gets time : 1.5
	C <sub>S</sub>	Polished response	Slightly dissatisfied - space is evolving	They leave for money and experience	No female leaders perceived	changed, needing more flexibility	40-50 out of necessity
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Candid non-response	Slightly dissatisfied with lack of privacy	Need to make more money	No problems perceived	no marked change	Around 40. Any pressure to do : more comes from within.
	D <sub>S</sub>	Candid non-response	Satisfied with flexibility	Not getting experience, slow pace of work	No problems perceived	see changes in terms of wanting flexibility	A lot. 60 to 70 hours generally.
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Clear response	Satisfied but slightly impersonal	Not getting experience, money	Maternity causes problems	no marked change	40, would be recognized for more
	E <sub>S</sub>	Clear response	Satisfied but seems noisy sometimes	Feel lost in large firm	No problems perceived	hard to say	50-55 out of necessity

*Simplified responses to questions 7-12*

## Analysis

### Frameworks of Analysis

I considered several techniques to help bring this data to life and provide some sort of useful analysis to job seekers, project staffers, and anyone interested in the quality of their architectural workplace. I determined two metrics, one which came from a superficial analysis of the data presented here, and one which came from both subject responses, especially to question 9 (common reasons to leave) and reading I did into the subject of team dynamics.

### Motivational Analysis

In *Team Work and Group Dynamics*, the authors propose an interpersonal interpretation of a team, where members are motivated to join and maintain teams for several reasons, each represented in greater or smaller proportion in each member. The reasons they suggest are *affiliation*, which they define as a social context within which diverse needs, such as the need for praise, or protection, can be met. The second reason they suggest is the need for *power*, the desire to control or effect other people. Another reason is affection, the desire to form

positive emotional bonds with people. Lastly, they cite the need for *information*, or the desire to understand the context that they are operating within – how to succeed, and where they stand relative to others<sup>9</sup>.

I compared the motivations I heard expressed in my interviews to these categories and found that they fit architectural practitioners well, and decided that I would use these categories of motivations as guides to rate the suitability of a workplace to a certain architect. I did, however, make some changes to allow for more generalizable results, as well as to move away from the psychological language used in *Team Work*.

The categories I suggest are as follows:

#### ***Autonomy***

Someone motivated by autonomy is working to support a life outside of work. For them, to support their family or lifestyle is of primary importance. They are likely to be willing to do the work which someone motivated by learning or self-expression may eschew.

Monetary compensation is likely to be their greatest concern, if they are at a relatively advanced stage in their career – if they

are not registered yet, they may consider the need for learning to be of primary importance instead, not for the sake of learning, but as a path to greater autonomy in the future.

Someone motivated by autonomy benefits from working at a large firm because it offers stability, and a predictable path to greater compensation. At the same time, the desire for greater autonomy is often expressed by the willingness to change firms, or to strike out on their own.

### ***The Work***

I suspect that many architects can report a time where they felt that their day just melted away as they spent it working on some architectural puzzle – something which was difficult enough to be stimulating but not so challenging as to cause frustration. When I describe someone motivated by the work, it's the satisfaction of task completion that I am referring to.

These people are motivated not necessarily by expressive design, but by the opportunity to design and build buildings. They may define themselves socially as a great problem solver, taking pride not in their seniority, but in their expertise.

People who are chiefly satisfied by the work are likely to become a project manager, or some sort of operational leader in a larger firm, but may not be attracted to the prospect of taking on the leadership tasks of a principal.

### ***Camaraderie***

The motivation to have camaraderie roughly corresponds to the previously described need for affection or affiliation. This person enjoys being part of a team, developing deep relationships with their colleagues over the years. These people are concerned with the social environment of the workplace.

Their desire for social connection in a workplace may put them at odds with the structure of a larger firm, which may assign staff to tasks dynamically, rather than trying to maintain distinct teams. As a result, someone chiefly motivated by this desire may be happiest at a small firm. Nevertheless, camaraderie is something which must be nurtured in large firms, since all people have a desire for camaraderie to a greater or lesser degree.

## ***Learning***

Architectural work by nature requires constant learning, since even a modest building has a vast number of components and multiple trades involved. The desire for learning, and experience, is common to all architects, and an essential motivation for young architects who want to become registered quickly. However, the desire to learn is a strong motivator for many architects, who may eschew greater compensation for the opportunity to work in new areas.

Architects who are motivated chiefly by learning may step out of the profession entirely, to stay in academia, or may prefer to work in a technical capacity, since technology is ever-changing. These architects may not be attracted to the idea of doing the same thing very long. As is the case with those motivated by camaraderie, this motivation needs to be represented at large firms, but large firms may not be the best environment for these architects.

## ***Expression***

This motivation is somewhat distinct to creative work, and is not adequately described in the reading I have done on team

formation. The desire for personal expression, to contribute to the shared design culture of architectural history, is something which motivates many architects. In my preliminary interviews, I was surprised to see that this was the motivation for several people to leave the large-firm ecosystem, and strike out on their own.

Architects strongly motivated by expression may be willing to accept lower pay for an opportunity to work with a renowned architect, or the ability to realize a great design. At the same time, they may feel that accepting lower pay early in their career, working for a famous architect, may be a path to greater income later in their career, as they employ that design experience at another practice.

The desire for expression is often reported as a reason to enter the profession – it is one of the most satisfying aspects of architectural schooling, for example. It may also be a cause of great frustration, especially at large firms, since on large projects, individual efforts are rarely visible in the final product.

## Usefulness of Motivational Analysis

It is important to note some of the limitations of this list. Firstly, it is not exhaustive, and there may be other major motivations which may exist in certain individuals. Nevertheless, I feel that it is a useful starting point to analyze one's own reasons for being at a firm, or to better understand what a firm needs to do to nurture the right people. Second, nobody is motivated by one motivation – we are all motivated by a combination of motivations. Our desires may be at odds with each other, which is why it is important to consider all these motivations when a decision is to be made. Third, these motivations change over time. A younger architect may desire self-expression, but may find that after working in the profession long enough, they realize that they value relationships with their colleagues more. Similarly, the desire for broad experience may motivate an architect trying to complete their IDP hours, but after having a child, they find that their desire for autonomy becomes paramount.

## Motivational Conflicts

One of the useful characteristics of using these five motivations as a basis of analysis is that although they show that some mix of motivations is within us at all times, they also bring to mind conflicts between motivations which we must resolve in order to keep staff happy, or find the best positions for ourselves. For example, to be motivated by money and self-expression is a classic challenge for architects; since so many architects will compete to do expressive work, the potential compensation for this work is diminished. This helps explain the poor wages endured by the subject of one of my case studies when she found work at her dream job. Conflicts between any of these motivations must be resolved on a case-by-case basis – either one must accept a degree of frustration in their work, or one must find or create an opportunity where these conflicts don't exist.

I believe that the task of identifying and resolving these conflicts within large creative organizations is the logical next step for this work, after my methodology and question forming becomes more refined.

## **Analysis of Conflicts**

One of the striking aspects of the data which I found was that it clearly showed instances where there was either a striking similarity or conflict between responses reported by junior and senior staff. I believe this is a very revealing indicator of the health of an architectural organization, since it shows the degree to which decisionmakers understand and report the concerns of production staff, and the degree to which production staff understand their place in the firm, and the importance of their work. A certain degree of conflict is inevitable, since junior and senior staff occupy dramatically different statuses within the firm – generational, motivational, and so on. Nevertheless, I believe that if all members of an organization are to have a common goal, it is important for them to all have the same understanding of the organization they are contributing to.

I do not believe that one firm is markedly superior in this regard than any other – all showed dissimilarities in roughly the same proportion. However, different subjects reported conflicts in certain patterns; for example, one firm showed greater conflicts on questions relating to maternity and issues facing women, but marked similarity in responses to firm

operations and delegation of responsibility. For another firm, the conflicts followed a different pattern.

I believe that visualizing the conflicts reported by respondents is an excellent way to not only show the key issues the firm needs to devote attention to, but an effective way of developing a future methodology for profiling firms in general – creating a taxonomy of firms.

## **Analysis of each Question**

In the following section, each question will be analyzed using the simplified comparative response reported in the Results section. In each case, I will try to identify any patterns that I see, and mark each question according to the motivational profile it is especially relevant to. Someone primarily interested in autonomy, for example, would be best to examine the responses to questions dealing with work/life balance, whereas someone primarily motivated by finding a great design culture would want to examine questions relating to the space of the office, and how projects are staffed.

<b>Firm A</b>	$A_1$	hired for skills
	$A_S$	looking for skills
<b>Firm B</b>	$B_J$	hired for character
	$B_S$	looking for character
<b>Firm C</b>	$C_J$	hired for skills
	$C_S$	looking for character
<b>Firm D</b>	$D_J$	hired for character
	$D_S$	looking for character
<b>Firm E</b>	$E_J$	hired for character
	$E_S$	looking for character

### Question 1:

What is the most important quality for a job applicant to have? / Were you hired to do a specific thing? Are you still doing that thing?

Skilled architects motivated by autonomy may benefit from that allots work according to skill, rather than personality. The ability to demonstrate worth with expertise rather than cultural fit may be indicated by the answers to this question.

People motivated by camaraderie may benefit from a work environment where people are hired for character, since there may be a greater focus on building teams and keeping them together.

People motivated by learning will also benefit from these firms, since firms that hire people according to their abilities may be less nurturing and may put them only on the sort of projects they are already expert in.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	no 1 on 1 engagement, seminars
	A <sub>S</sub>	not specifically engaged with staff
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	engaging, trying to do more, seminars
	B <sub>S</sub>	specifically engages with staff
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	no 1 on 1 engagement, seminars
	C <sub>S</sub>	partially engaged
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	engaging but rigidly so
	D <sub>S</sub>	specifically engages with staff
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	not specifically engaged with staff
	E <sub>S</sub>	not specifically engaged with staff

## Question 2:

When staffing projects a long way out, do you ask staff about their preferences?

What does the firm do to develop staff, and has it been successful?

Architects motivated by autonomy may be indifferent to this question, since many highly compensating firms do not do a lot of outreach to their staff, either in the form of seminars and classes or input into staffing.

Architects who are motivated by the experience of work may also be indifferent, since they are interested chiefly in doing the work, not so much what the project itself is.

However, most other people, motivated by expression or learning, should be wary of firms that do not engage with staff about their preferences. Although all managers I spoke to prefer staff who speak up about the work they want to be put on, many considered it only incidentally important.

Regardless, these responses highlight the importance of articulating your desires within a firm, and encouraging staff to do so.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	Younger staff push technology
	A <sub>S</sub>	No specifics
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Technology institutionally supported
	B <sub>S</sub>	Technology major concern of mgmt
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	Younger staff savvy
	C <sub>S</sub>	Technology institutionally supported
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Technology institutionally supported
	D <sub>S</sub>	Technology major concern of mgmt
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Younger staff savvy
	E <sub>S</sub>	Conservative attitude towards technology

### Question 3:

Apart from creating contract documents, what does your firm do with BIM models?

Do you feel your firm is technologically advanced compared to other firms?

Architects motivated by autonomy will probably want to work for firms at the cutting edge of technology, since this keeps their skills relevant and their labor competitive.

Those motivated by learning will have the same priorities, since they may be curious about how technology effects their work.

Architects motivated by the work itself, or expression, may not find this question as relevant.

However, architects looking for camaraderie may be interested in the technological culture of a firm, since technical experts tend to work with each other in the development of technological standards for the firm, and may find long term collaborators in this effort.

<b>Firm A</b>	$A_1$	Based on trust, not wanted
	$A_S$	Effective but not preferred
<b>Firm B</b>	$B_J$	Free to work from home
	$B_S$	Necessary due to travel
<b>Firm C</b>	$C_J$	Effective but not preferred
	$C_S$	Effective but not preferred
<b>Firm D</b>	$D_J$	Effective but not preferred
	$D_S$	Effective and regularly practiced
<b>Firm E</b>	$E_J$	Not realistically possible
	$E_S$	Not effective for most tasks.

#### Question 4:

To what degree does your work lend itself to working from home?

This question is important for any architect interested in supporting a life outside of work, since it shows the firm's flexibility to life outside of work. Working from home makes many things easier, such as child rearing and travel.

Working from home also implies a technologically savvy firm – not all firms have the same technological infrastructure, and this may be an important indicator to someone wanting to stay abreast of current technology.

Architects motivated by learning and camaraderie may be reluctant to work for an office which works primarily remotely, although I have not observed an office operating this way yet.

Architects who are interested primarily in the work itself may benefit from greater flexibility, since it allows them to work at their leisure, on weekends, and stay connected to their work at their discretion.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	Principals occasionally involved
	A <sub>S</sub>	Not involved
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Leadership contact varies, mostly superficial
	B <sub>S</sub>	Leadership contact varies, mostly superficial
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	Not involved
	C <sub>S</sub>	Minimally involved, input not welcomed
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Not involved
	D <sub>S</sub>	Not involved
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Not involved
	E <sub>S</sub>	Rarely involved

### Question 5:

How and in what way are principals involved in day to day project management?

Having access to principals may not be relevant to architects who are motivated by simply completing the work, or creating a life for themselves outside of work.

However, for architects who are eager to learn, the opportunity to spend time with firm principals offers contact with a level of expertise which is likely outside of their experience. Despite being in contact with project managers, who may be very good architects, principals have different skills which are difficult to appreciate without consistent contact.

For architects interested in expression, a lack of contact may be either a blessing or a curse, depending on whether the relevant principal is supportive or dismissive of expressiveness in a design. This depends largely on the character of the firm's design leadership.

<b>Firm A</b>	$A_1$	Does not seem likely
	$A_S$	Seems inevitable
<b>Firm B</b>	$B_J$	Seems possible
	$B_S$	Was inevitable
<b>Firm C</b>	$C_J$	Seems possible but not desirable
	$C_S$	Seems inevitable
<b>Firm D</b>	$D_J$	Seems possible but not desirable
	$D_S$	Possible but not desired
<b>Firm E</b>	$E_J$	Does not seem likely
	$E_S$	Possible but not desired

### Question 6:

Do you see yourself one day being a principal at this firm or somewhere similar?

Architects concerned with autonomy may be interested in this question, depending on if they see the time cost of greater responsibility worth the monetary reward and employment stability afforded by a higher status. This is a personal question.

Architects concerned with expression may think that being able to have their own projects may afford them greater opportunity for expression, and at some firms this may be the case.

Those concerned with camaraderie may interpret this question differently – are principals cut from the same cloth as me? This question asks the subject to reflect on the culture of the firm, and how connected principals are to it. A firm where few people believe they can lead may also be a firm where people feel disconnected from the leadership of the firm in general.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	No specific response
	A <sub>S</sub>	No specific response
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Clear response (multidisciplinary)
	B <sub>S</sub>	Clear response (clients report: multidisciplinary)
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	No answer; responded with anecdote about stability
	C <sub>S</sub>	Polished response
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Candid non-response
	D <sub>S</sub>	Candid non-response
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Clear response
	E <sub>S</sub>	Clear response

### Question 7:

What do you think is the most unique thing your firm offers clients?

Despite all the firms being competitive enterprises, few staff could articulate some quality which distinguished their firm. Architects who are concerned with learning may find this troubling since it implies that marketing efforts are divorced from design efforts.

Architects concerned with expression may also be wary of a generic response, since it may imply that the firm does not nurture a strong design identity, rather focusing on great client service.

The value of this question is less in the responses given and more in the quality of the response. I noticed that junior staff generally had trouble articulating an answer, compared to senior staff. An architect wanting to work for socially connected firm may be wary of this conflict.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	Dissatisfied - hard to make contacts
	A <sub>S</sub>	Dissatisfied - hard to make contacts
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Satisfied but dislikes constantly moving
	B <sub>S</sub>	Dissatisfied - space is old, divides staff
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	Satisfied but dislikes constantly moving
	C <sub>S</sub>	Slightly dissatisfied - space is evolving
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Slightly dissatisfied with lack of privacy
	D <sub>S</sub>	Satisfied with flexibility
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Satisfied but slightly impersonal
	E <sub>S</sub>	Satisfied but seems noisy sometimes

### Question 8:

How is the firm organized spatially? About how many distinct team/areas?

This is another question which is largely personal.

Architects who are concerned with autonomy and work may prefer more stable space, since it can afford greater concentration and control.

Architects motivated by camaraderie may have a preference in a more open/closed or mobile/stationary space depending on how they prefer to work, and should observe the space carefully. A very mobile workplace may imply a staff which is constantly moving to new teams, preventing strong work relationships from developing.

Architects motivated by expression may want workspaces which enable some degree of expression, and some control of the office space itself may appeal to them.

Those motivated by learning, on the other hand, may relish the stimulation afforded by a dynamic space.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	Not getting experience
	A <sub>S</sub>	They don't communicate
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Not getting experience, being heard
	B <sub>S</sub>	They ought to leave sometimes.
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	Not getting experience
	C <sub>S</sub>	They leave for money and experience
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Need to make more money
	D <sub>S</sub>	Not getting experience, slow pace of work
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Not getting experience, money
	E <sub>S</sub>	Feel lost in large firm

### Question 9

What are the common reasons for a younger staff member to leave this firm?

What would the firm have to do to keep you on for six more years?

This is an important question to for all architects, since it reports on the basic satisfaction staff feel, and how their managers understand them.

Those motivated by autonomy should be concerned with workplaces where people leave to make more money or have more time off.

Those motivated by expression and learning may be wary of firms which people leave to do better design or to gather more experience.

<b>Firm A</b>	$A_1$	No female leaders perceived
	$A_5$	No female leaders perceived
<b>Firm B</b>	$B_J$	No problems perceived
	$B_S$	Maternity causes problems
<b>Firm C</b>	$C_J$	No female leaders perceived
	$C_S$	No female leaders perceived
<b>Firm D</b>	$D_J$	No problems perceived
	$D_S$	No problems perceived
<b>Firm E</b>	$E_J$	Maternity causes problems
	$E_S$	No problems perceived

## Question 10

What are the challenges facing women at your firm, if any?

This question should concern all architects, but especially women, since they benefit or are harmed by the phenomena reported by this question.

Those motivated by autonomy may be concerned with workplaces which make maternity and paternity difficult, since many architects motivated by autonomy are caring for children.

A lack of female leadership may indicate a social schism in the firm, where experienced women are for some reason held back from advancement.

Architects motivated by learning should also be concerned with this phenomenon, since to be held back professionally is to also be held back from experience and exposure to new challenges. A firm having problems in this area may be harming all staff in this way, not just women.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	no marked change
	A <sub>S</sub>	became more serious about \$
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	no marked change, has made her want kids more
	B <sub>S</sub>	changed, needing more flexibility
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	see changes in terms of needing flexibility
	C <sub>S</sub>	changed, needing more flexibility
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	no marked change
	D <sub>S</sub>	see changes in terms of wanting flexibility
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	no marked change
	E <sub>S</sub>	hard to say

### Question 11:

If you have children, how did your attitude toward work, and your role, change?

If you were to have children, how would your attitude toward work, and role change?

This question is of chief importance to autonomy minded architects, regardless of whether they want or have children. Children may be the most common and perhaps the most understood priority outside of work, but they are not the only one. Architects with hobbies or ambitions apart from their work (such as schooling) should take note of the attitudes expressed by this question.

<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	35 is enough
	A <sub>S</sub>	50-60 out of necessity
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	40 with flexibility
	B <sub>S</sub>	60+ out of necessity
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	50, but gets time 1.5
	C <sub>S</sub>	40-50 out of necessity
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Around 40. Any pressure to do more comes from within.
	D <sub>S</sub>	A lot. 60 to 70 hours generally.
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	40, would be recognized for more
	E <sub>S</sub>	50-55 out of necessity

### Question 12:

About how many hours do you work in a normal week? Do you feel that you need to work a certain number of hours to advance in the firm?

This question is important to autonomy minded architects, since they desire flexibility, and do not want to work somewhere where long hours are expected.

Architects motivated by learning may also be wary of long hours, since long hours are rarely spent learning about new challenges, but in executing work.

Those motivated by camaraderie, on the other hand, may relish the possibility of a workplace that is working long hours together, developing deeper relationships as team members sacrifice their time to accomplish their goals.

The divergence in hours reported by junior and senior staff may, however, concern these architects, since it implies a difference in attitudes towards the work, with senior staff contributing more, and junior staff doing only what is required.

## Analysis of Conflicts

The following diagrams highlight conflicts reported between junior and senior staff. The interpretation of a conflict is somewhat subjective, and is not simply based on the information here, but the overall responses given to me by each respondent.

The purpose of this chart is to show that all firms have some areas of conflict reported between junior and senior staff, and that some issues report more conflict than others.

The question about why staff members would/do leave shows dramatic conflict at almost every firm. This highlights the importance of this examination, since it implies that the grievances of departing staff are not being communicated to those responsible for hiring and staffing.

There are some surprising results, as well. I sensed little conflict over the issues of working remotely, with most respondents having a negative attitude towards the practice. It seems as if all of my respondents would prefer to work in the office as much as possible, although the convenience afforded by mobility should not be underestimated.

Questions about child-rearing showed some conflict, with junior staff generally reporting that staff with kids seem largely similar to those without, but with senior staff noting that their work lives changes dramatically when they had kids, either by working longer hours or by needing greater flexibility.

There is also great conflict in the number of hours subjects report working, with junior staff working far shorter weeks than senior staff. It should be noted, however, that no junior staff reported a pressure to work long hours, and senior staff did not report having expectations that their employees work long hours.

		1. Hire for what?	2. Staff Development?	3. Technology?	4. Working from Home?	5. Principals involved?	6. Will you be a Principal?
<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	hired for skills	no 1 on 1 engagement, seminars	Younger staff push technology	Based on trust, not wanted	Principals occasionally involved	Does not seem likely
	A <sub>S</sub>	looking for skills	not specifically engaged with staff	No specifics	Effective but not preferred	Not involved	Seems inevitable
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	hired for character	engaging, trying to do more, seminars	Technology institutionally supported	Free to work from home	Leadership contact varies, mostly superficial	Seems possible
	B <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	specifically engages with staff	Technology major concern of mgmt	Necessary due to travel	Leadership contact varies, mostly superficial	Was inevitable
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	hired for skills	no 1 on 1 engagement, seminars	Younger staff savvy	Effective but not preferred	Not involved	Seems possible but not desirable
	C <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	partially engaged	Technology institutionally supported	Effective but not preferred	Minimally involved, input not welcomed	Seems inevitable
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	hired for character	engaging but rigidly so	Technology institutionally supported	Effective but not preferred	Not involved	Seems possible but not desirable
	D <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	specifically engages with staff	Technology major concern of mgmt	Effective and regularly practiced	Not involved	Possible but not desired
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	hired for character	not specifically engaged with staff	Younger staff savvy	Not realistically possible	Not involved	Does not seem likely
	E <sub>S</sub>	looking for character	not specifically engaged with staff	Conservative attitude towards technology	Not effective for most tasks.	Rarely involved	Possible but not desired

*Simplified responses with notable conflicts shaded, questions 1-6*

		7. Most unique quality?	8. Spatial Organization?	9. Why do people leave?	10. Challenges for women?	11. Changes with Children?	12. How many hours?
<b>Firm A</b>	A <sub>1</sub>	No specific response	Dissatisfied - hard to make contacts	Not getting experience	No female leaders perceived	no marked change	35 is enough
	A <sub>5</sub>	No specific response	Dissatisfied - hard to make contacts	They don't communicate	No female leaders perceived	became more serious about \$	50-60 out of necessity
<b>Firm B</b>	B <sub>J</sub>	Clear response (multidisciplinary)	Satisfied but dislikes constantly moving	Not getting experience, being heard	No problems perceived	no marked change, has made her want kids more	40 with flexibility
	B <sub>S</sub>	Clear response (clients report: multidisciplinary)	Dissatisfied - space is old, divides staff	They ought to leave sometimes.	Maternity causes problems	changed, needing more flexibility	60+ out of necessity
<b>Firm C</b>	C <sub>J</sub>	No answer; responded with anecdote about stability	Satisfied but dislikes constantly moving	Not getting experience	No female leaders perceived	see changes in terms of needing flexibility	50, but gets time 1.5
	C <sub>S</sub>	Polished response	Slightly dissatisfied - space is evolving	They leave for money and experience	No female leaders perceived	changed, needing more flexibility	40-50 out of necessity
<b>Firm D</b>	D <sub>J</sub>	Candid non-response	Slightly dissatisfied with lack of privacy	Need to make more money	No problems perceived	no marked change	Around 40. Any pressure to do more comes from within.
	D <sub>S</sub>	Candid non-response	Satisfied with flexibility	Not getting experience, slow pace of work	No problems perceived	see changes in terms of wanting flexibility	A lot. 60 to 70 hours generally.
<b>Firm E</b>	E <sub>J</sub>	Clear response	Satisfied but slightly impersonal	Not getting experience, money	Maternity causes problems	no marked change	40, would be recognized for more
	E <sub>S</sub>	Clear response	Satisfied but seems noisy sometimes	Feel lost in large firm	No problems perceived	hard to say	50-55 out of necessity

*Simplified responses with notable conflicts shaded, questions 7-12*

## Conclusions

The responses I gathered give a good, if incomplete, picture of what it is like to work at each of the firms interviewed. I believe that even this picture is of ample utility to both potential job applicants and managers trying to staff projects.

To those trying to decide where to work, these questions, and their responses, should show which questions are truly individually important, highlighting the essential features of the firms they would like to work for. They should also highlight the potential sacrifices which might need to be made in order to find a good fit.

However, they also show that there are some people who may not benefit from working for a large firm at all. The range of responses shows great similarity in response, as well as differences, and there may be some people – for example, motivated by individual expression and the ability to learn – who may benefit from employment at a smaller, more dynamic practice, or something more similar to freelance work.

To those trying to hire the right people, the motivational profile of the staff member is of key importance. Ideally, we

would like to be able to attract staff who are open to learning, satisfied with putting work first, willing to work with anyone at any time, willing to do any project, accepting modest compensation. Unfortunately, this person doesn't exist, and a similar set of sacrifices must be considered.

Is a staff member who can accept not being exposed to new experiences worth a short period of employment? Is a staff member who is primarily concerned with making money and leaving at 5 worth the potential harm to workplace culture and camaraderie – or is this the sort of culture desired?

Those responsible for running firms have the opportunity to shape the workplace, and are empowered to resolve these sorts of conflicts by more nuanced means than simply accepting one harm for some benefit. Since firms have many projects, often with different character, it is possible to create smaller sub-firms which have different cultures, each satisfying different types of people.

An obvious example of this phenomena is the quality control group, a group of experienced architects who are motivated by technical learning and autonomy, but who are not as concerned with individual expression or exposure to

new experiences. This group may work together, aiding less experienced architects who may be working on more expressive, design focused work.

However, to enact initiatives such as this, a much better idea of the motivational profile of one's staff must be developed. By being open to different working styles, the stigma associated with certain preferences (working reasonable hours, prioritizing learning over work, preference for technical rather than expressive work, etc.) can be diminished, and the lines of communication can then be opened, connecting junior to senior staff.

I do not, however, believe it is simply enough to reduce stigma – specific forums must be introduced to allow communication between junior and senior staff. Tying this communication to annual reviews is also problematic, since it reinforces the idea that a staff's working preference is immediately tied to their compensation.

I do not believe that any of the firms I interviewed are better or worse than any other. I am even reluctant to rank the responses according to how they may suit architects of a certain motivation, since they are all large enough to benefit

from almost any sort of architect. Some may be more efficient, and some may produce better design, but I firmly believe that each is a good environment for a certain sort of person. I would then suggest one metric of evaluation – that which is implied by the degree of conflict in reported answers.

A firm which markets itself as one thing but acts as another creates problems for clients, who may be disappointed. A similar sort of disappointment may be experienced by an architect who feels they have been hired to do one thing but end up doing something else. Inevitably there is some work which few people want to do, but this compromise should be understood by employer and employee both. Even if one doesn't enjoy working, for example, on rapidly developing projects, never contributing much in terms of design, and working long hours, there is some comfort in knowing that this is how the job was described. To find yourself doing work you never wanted to do - or imagined yourself doing - is bad enough. If there is limited recourse or ability to change the conditions of your work, you will probably leave at the earliest opportunity.

My goal is not to suggest specific measures that can create a better work environment, only to suggest that asking questions like these, either of one's self, or of one's architectural practice, can better clarify the sacrifices one is willing to accept. Some degree of conflict is inevitable, but transparency is better than the alternative.

I will finish by commenting on a subject which I think is key to understanding job satisfaction: time. The senior staff I interviewed were all at one point junior staff, perhaps of a different era, but similar in ambition and experience to the people they now manage. If they give dramatically different responses to these questions, it may be partly due to the professional era we live in being different than the one they developed in, but it is also largely because they themselves have changed. We must remember that our priorities, and those of our staff, evolve. An employee who never wanted children, committed to their work, has a child. An employee who was planning on moving to a city with more exciting work learns to love local clientele. An architect who was just trying to survive in school decides they want to design great buildings, regardless of personal cost.

We must keep in mind that the priorities of ourselves and our staff are, and should be, constantly evolving (one manager I spoke to even reported that he encourages staff to leave if they would learn more elsewhere). We must make sure, as individuals, that we are not evaluating our life according to standards we developed when we were different, younger people. Similarly, when we nurture the culture of a firm by deciding who it should be composed of, we must not hire only the kind of people who contributed to our success in the past. We must reflect on what success means to us now, and may mean in the future, to build a practice which will continue to contribute to the lives of its participants, and the built environment in general.

## Next Steps

Ideally, an architectural thesis should become a project which the student continues to pursue long after schooling has ended. In my case, this was my ambition from the start. The purpose of this study is not to definitively answer how to best choose the architecture firm you should work for, or how to find the best people to staff your firm, but to put together a series of tools which allows these questions to be pursued.

My plan is to summarize this research and return it to the firms I interviewed with. My hope is that they will allow me greater access to their staff, so I can develop a new, more focused set of questions, relating more directly to the analytical framework I developed in response to these questions. After new data is gathered, I could then further refine the analytical framework, allowing for better questions and so on.

The task of turning these tools into convincing and useful research is not easy, but I think it will become easier if I keep pursuing the questions central to this study. What is distinct about architecture as a profession? How are we different from other professionals? What does it take to keep creative people

happy and productive as they execute large scale, collaborative and technical work in an increasingly competitive world?

Another option which has been suggested is to approach some institution, academic or otherwise, who could assist in the development of this study, perhaps by finding people who could help gather and interpret more data.

My personal wish is that I continue this research in parallel with my architectural practice. I feel very strongly that whatever credibility I can have as I approach architects comes from the fact that I have made sacrifices which they can relate to, in the form of all the dues-paying we do in this profession. I believe that by approaching the architectural institution as an insider, rather than an outsider, I can ask better questions and listen better than someone from without could.

On many occasions in interviews, I got the impression that I was hearing someone express their thoughts on some aspect of their workplace for the first time, and they were eager to be heard. I believe that the latent potential for change within the profession is considerable, and represents a great opportunity for someone who is interested in bringing it out.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project has been a rewarding and exciting process for me. I was apprehensive about doing writing for my architectural thesis, and many people shared this apprehension. I hope that my experience that the requirements of an architectural curriculum can be satisfied through this kind of project.

More than any other project I have done at the BAC, this work was made possible by the generosity of many people. I was surprised and honored to find out how many people were eager to help me with this research – responding to my questions, giving feedback, suggesting future possibilities and setting up meetings. This project has emboldened me to approach people who know things I want to know about.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to my Thesis group, who contributed to discussions of my work each week and to my thesis advisor, Russ Feldman, who guided me through this process. Thanks, Russ.

## Appendix 1: Initial Case Studies

### *Case study 1: Steven*

Steven graduated from the GSD in the early 2000s, and worked for three large Boston firms for a period of about 15 years. Motivated entirely by a desire to work for himself, he first tried to start a firm overseas, which did not meet his expectations. Undeterred, he returned to a large Boston practice, only to leave again soon after to begin a small practice with friends. Despite taking on greater risk, Steven is primarily motivated by the desire to spend his time doing the best design possible. He feels that he has no place in the large firms.

### *Case study 2: John and Douglas*

John and Douglas graduated from the GSD at the same time. John had experience working for large firms, but decided to abandon this career path, instead working with his friend Douglas to form a small construction and design firm serving their peers. Their clientele is generally younger and entrepreneurial, and they work out of a shared shop space which brings them into contact with other fabricators. Neither

have expressed any regret that they are out of the profession, and their business is succeeding. Their example shows a recurring theme: Architectural training often offers greater rewards outside of the profession than within it.

### *Case study 3: Beth*

Beth graduated from the GSD at the same time as John and Douglas, and got a job at OMA. This was her dream, and the significance of this opportunity was not lost on her. However, the long hours and poor pay offered by OMA were enough to turn her away from the profession entirely, even though she still considers herself an architect. She has found that her skills have found a home in high tech, and now works for a major IT company in Austin, Texas.

I later interviewed a consultant at one of the large Boston architectural firms who was responsible for cultivating and forming a company culture which nurtured and rewarded younger talent. She noted that although it was unusual for people in her profession to offer consultation to architects, it was completely normal in the high-tech industry.

#### *Case study 4: Joe*

Joe graduated from the GSD in the mid-1980s and currently works for a large Boston firm. I use his experience to illustrate the possibility that retention problems may date back further than the current era. Joe has worked for a series of Boston firms, but felt betrayed when he was laid off during a recession. Since then, he has acted as a self-described 'mercenary,' eschewing leadership roles but asking greater and greater salaries from whichever firm will pay them. He attributes his ability to work this way to not having children, a decision which he feels has allowed him greater freedom to pursue the fairest compensation.

## Appendix 2: Notes on Interview Technique

### The Interview Process

One of the surprising aspects of the interviewing was learning how willing respondents were to meet me. Despite not being able to offer them any immediate benefit, I noticed that every one of the people I contacted, either directly or through an intermediary, was sympathetic to my needs, and was willing to meet with me on relatively short notice. Without exception, each of the interviewees expressed an interest in seeing this data once it was collected. This is encouraging, since it belies a broad interest in this subject matter.

Unlike an interview for news, I was interested not in reporting a narrative or a perspective on a current event; rather, I was asking a set of both personal and generic questions to a carefully chosen group of people. In preparation for this task, I read a guide to interviewers which was surprisingly useful, despite not being written for my task. The main takeaway of this work is the simultaneous importance of preparation, listening, and contextual awareness<sup>7</sup>.

By preparation, I mean the preparation of questions to which one wants to know the answer. What distinguishes this sort of interview from a journalistic one is that although I want respondents to answer openly, and to meander in their responses, I am trying to guide their responses into a form that allows comparison to other responses.

The second important task is listening. Everything your subject says is an invitation to reveal even more. The use of periods of silence is a very powerful tool to compel certain interview subjects to reveal more than they initially did, although it can raise the level of tension in the room.

The issue of tension is key to appreciating the context of an interview. In conducting these interviews, I became aware of several factors that affect the quality of the responses I received. These include:

- Who introduced you? Are they a close friend for whom they are doing a favor, or are they acting out of a sense of responsibility? The social context of the interaction can determine the enthusiasm a respondent has towards the process. This is especially important with regard to responses to the first questions you ask, since

it takes some time for the subject to develop a sense of comfort with you.

- Where are you interviewing? I tried to interview people in private rooms, but this is not always possible, and the feeling that ‘the office is watching’ may affect certain responses. I found, for example, that when especially candid or controversial statements were made, respondents would sometimes lean in toward me, as if to distance themselves from their workplace. If possible, the best room is quiet and private.
- What do they know about the project? Many subjects wanted a clear idea of the questions they would be asked before they agreed to be interviewed. This is to be expected, but it is important to not reveal too much about your agenda, since the element of surprise is important to revealing candid, unrehearsed answers.
- What do you stand to benefit from the interview? Most of the manuals written about professional interviews, which I briefly reviewed for this project, are written for people who want give the best impression possible to managers in a job interview. The job interview is one of

the most common interaction a manager will have with a third party in their own office, so it is good to anticipate how this may affect your interactions.

Specifically, it is important to approach the subject as an equal, rather than as someone who can benefit you with employment, networking connections, or advice.

These examples illustrate some of the factors that either put a subject at ease, as if they were around a friend, or on the defensive. Subjects who are at ease are likely to offer very candid responses, some of which are not entirely flattering to their professional practices. Subjects who are more reserved are more likely to reproduce the company line. Of course, it is impossible to say if a subject is offering a generic response – they may have a generic opinion – and it is impossible, furthermore, to ascribe their responses to a feeling of comfort or discomfort toward the question. Indeed, it may not even be relevant for this research, since the ‘company line’ may be as telling as a more candid response. Nevertheless, it is best to be conscious of the specific social and spatial context of the interview.

## Bibliography and Suggested Reading

The works cited below have been useful during this research, as inspirations for the work, evidence for phenomena I have noticed, or aids in the analysis of the reported data.

I have decided to not include citations of the interviews I conducted, since they would have to be anonymized anyway. In general, the 'case study' interviews were conducted in 2016, and were either recorded or done via email correspondence. The introductory interviews and data collection interviews were all conducted in early 2017. There were ten interviews conducted in total, all recorded, each lasting from 30-50 minutes.

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