The AIA Minnesota Culture Change Initiative

Research findings & next steps
AIA Minnesota Culture Change Initiative

Transform the culture of the profession of architecture:

Examine Current Culture

Accelerate Change

Define Desired Culture
AIA Minnesota Culture Change Initiative

Planning Team:

Staff
- PaviElle French
- Mary-Margaret Zindren, CAE

Leadership
- Emilie Kopp, Assoc. AIA
- Anna Pravinata, AIA, NOMA
- Elizabeth Turner, AIA

Contributors
- Sara Du, Assoc. AIA
- Nick Hoffman, Assoc. AIA
- Alejandra Cervantes Enriquez
CCI Research: March 2018 – October 2020

#MeToo
Richard Meier, FAIA
“Shitty Architecture Men” list
AIA Code of Ethics revision
AIA anti-harassment policies

Culture Change Initiative chartered
Foundational precursors: AIA MN WIA,
Diversity Task Force, Strategic Planning;
AIA San Francisco Equity X Design

Primary Research:
Culture Change Resource Team:
70+ members of MN arch community
Augmenting Interviews:
- Greater MN (2019)
- Expanded conversations with Black architects and designers (2020)

Secondary Research:
AIA Guides for Equitable Practice
Media interviews and columns
Academic papers, books, articles on:
- Systems theory
- Complexity theory
- Adaptive Leadership theory
- Intercultural Development theory
CCI Research Findings

1. Culture change is possible now
   - Catalyst & Business Case

Aim for AEC
- Authentic
- Equitable
- Collaborative

2. Apply systems thinking
   - Leverage Points Analysis Mindsets

Culture change is cultivation
- Seed, Nurture, Weed, Harvest

3. This is everyone’s work
   - Opportunities to contribute
   - Community of practice
Culture Change is Possible Now

Catalyzing convergence

- #MeToo Movement
- Systemic Racism
- Climate Change
- COVID-19 Pandemic
Culture Change is Possible Now

**Business Case:** Firms positioned for success

- Demographics reflect population
- Partnerships with women- and BIPoC-owned firms
- Strong intercultural and collaboration skills
- Flexible, outcome-based approaches
- Skilled in climate-oriented and equitable design
Business Case: Benefits of a culture of belonging

High sense of belonging linked to...

- 56% increase in job performance
- 50% drop in turnover risk
- 75% reduction in sick days
- 167% increase in willingness to recommend company to others
- Received double the raises and 18 times more promotions

https://hbr.org/2019/12/the-value-of-belonging-at-work
Aim for AEC

- Authentic
- Collaborative
- Equitable

Desired Culture
Aim for AEC

- Openness
- Trust
- Candor
- Self-Expression

MINNESOTA:
- Avoid conflict
- Candor is rude
Aim for AEC

- Recognize differences
- Fair outcomes
- Change accelerants and hindrances
- Beliefs and framing
- Adapt toward difference
Aim for AEC

- Intent vs. impact
- Teamwork prioritized
- Mutual respect
- Listen to understand
- Comfort not knowing
- No one right way
Culture is built every day

Aim for AEC

Culture is built every day

- Intent vs. impact
- Teamwork prioritized
- Mutual respect
- Listen to understand
- Comfort not knowing
- No one right way

Culture is built every day

- Openness
- Trust
- Candor
- Self-Expression

- Recognize differences
- Fair outcomes
- Change accelerants and hindrances
- Beliefs and framing
- Adapt toward difference

MINNESOTA:
- Avoid conflict
- Candor is rude

Desired Culture

- Authentic
- Collaborative
- Equitable
Apply Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking: Philosophy, Diagnostic Tool, Way of Seeing

Leads to solutions that are holistic, expansive, interconnected, and courageous
Problems ideal for a systems intervention:

• Issue is important
• Problem is chronic
• Problem is familiar
• People have unsuccessfully tried to solve the problem before
Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System
Apply Systems Thinking

Low Impact

- Constants, Parameters, Numbers
- Buffers, Stabilizers
- Structures
- Delays
- Balancing Feedback Loops
- Reinforcing Feedback Loops

High Impact

- Information Flows
- Rules
- Power to Change
- Goals
- Mindsets, Paradigms
- Power to Transcend Paradigms

Low Impact vs. High Impact
Most interventions are designed around this point

- Constants, Parameters, Numbers
- Buffers, Stabilizers
- Structures
- Delays
- Balancing Feedback Loops
- Reinforcing Feedback Loops
- Information Flows
- Rules
- Power to Change
- Goals
- Mindsets, Paradigms
- Power to Transcend Paradigms
Pipeline efforts are crucial – but not enough
We have to change ourselves

- Changing numbers ≠ culture change (e.g., missing 32%)
- Counterbalancing forces undercut outcomes, stifle recruitment
- K-12 and college recruitment is arms-length, doesn’t require change

A matter of integrity – recruit AND ensure strong chance to thrive
Apply Systems Thinking

Leverage points where small interventions can have significant impact
Apply Systems Thinking

Begin with focus on mindsets, paradigms
To change the culture, focus on mindsets:

- Grow self-awareness of existing mindsets
  - Individual and organizational
- Determine desired mindsets
  - Existing, new
- Spot patterns
  - Where mindsets show up in the system
**Examples of identified mindsets:**

**On balance, HINDERS desired culture**

- Long hours show dedication.
- Architects can design a better world.

**On balance, ACCELERATES desired culture**

- Long hours are unhealthy and don’t lead to quality work.
- The architecture community can design a better profession.
Culture Change is Cultivation

Create the conditions for change to take root and grow.

• Be adaptive and iterative

• Listen, observe, and respond
Culture Change is Cultivation

SEED

NURTURE

WEED

HARVEST
Culture Change is Cultivation

**SEED**
Inspire people to pursue architecture as a career
Incorporate new thinking into the work of architecture

**NURTURE**

**WEED**

**HARVEST**
CULTURE CHANGE IS CULTIVATION

SEED

SOIL
Provide supports & resources

NUPTURE

RAIN
Regularly question mindsets, beliefs, and assumptions

WEED

SUN
Shine light on efforts having desired impact

HARVEST
Create space for potential; challenge individuals and actions that crowd out AEC
Recognize outcomes; re-examine and rework cultivation approaches
Culture Change is Cultivation

SEED

NURTURE

WEED

HARVEST
This is Everyone’s Work

**SEED**
Inspire and work effectively with young people

**NURTURE**
Identify and provide supports to new people and efforts
Ask questions with openness, integrity, and humility
Maximize impact of those exemplifying desired culture

**WEED**
Create space and make the tough decisions

**HARVEST**
Examine outcomes; analyze, celebrate, and apply what is learned
Because cultivating culture change is everyone’s work, we’ve launched a Community of Practice
• Open to all who are committed to creating an authentic, equitable, and collaborative culture
• Have started with a focus on mindsets – pattern spotting around one pair (accelerate, hinder)
• Map observations to leverage points
• Develop and experiment with interventions
• Share learnings
• Keeping constant attention on this work
• Operate in a manner that reflects the desired culture
Examples of identified mindsets:

On balance, HINDERS desired culture:
- Individual achievement is primary (the “hero” architect).
- Pursuit of “legacy” is noble and individualistic in nature.

On balance, ACCELERATES desired culture:
- Collaboration is primary. Credit and legacy are team based and that team includes all aspects of the project.
Examples of identified mindsets:

On balance, HINDERS desired culture

People need to be both artistic and technically proficient to be successful students of architecture and successful in the profession of architecture.

On balance, ACCELERATES desired culture

Architects and designers can have strengths in various areas – we don’t all need to be great at all aspects of the work of architecture to be successful.
Examples of identified mindsets:

On balance, HINDERS desired culture

People who work in architecture are most successful when they tamp down or hide expression of their gender, culture, or sexual orientation, if they are not white, heterosexual men. Feminine expression means people will not take you seriously as an architect. If you are a “blank slate,” clients will trust you to bring their vision to life.

On balance, ACCELERATES desired culture

The work of architecture is best accomplished when we can bring our whole selves to our work. Diverse perspectives, life experiences, and cultures can lead to better design outcomes. Expression of those perspectives, experiences and cultures needs to be supported in order for the best in creativity and problem solving to come forth.
Because cultivating culture change is everyone’s work, we’ve launched a Community of Practice

- Open to all who are committed to creating an authentic, equitable, and collaborative culture
- Have started with a focus on mindsets – pattern spotting around one pair (accelerate, hinder)
- Map observations to leverage points
- Develop and experiment with interventions
- Share learnings
- Keeping constant attention on this work
- Operate in a manner that reflects the desired culture
Join the Community of Practice for Culture Change

PaviElle French  
french@aia-mn.org

Mary-Margaret Zindren  
zindren@aia-mn.org
THANK YOU!