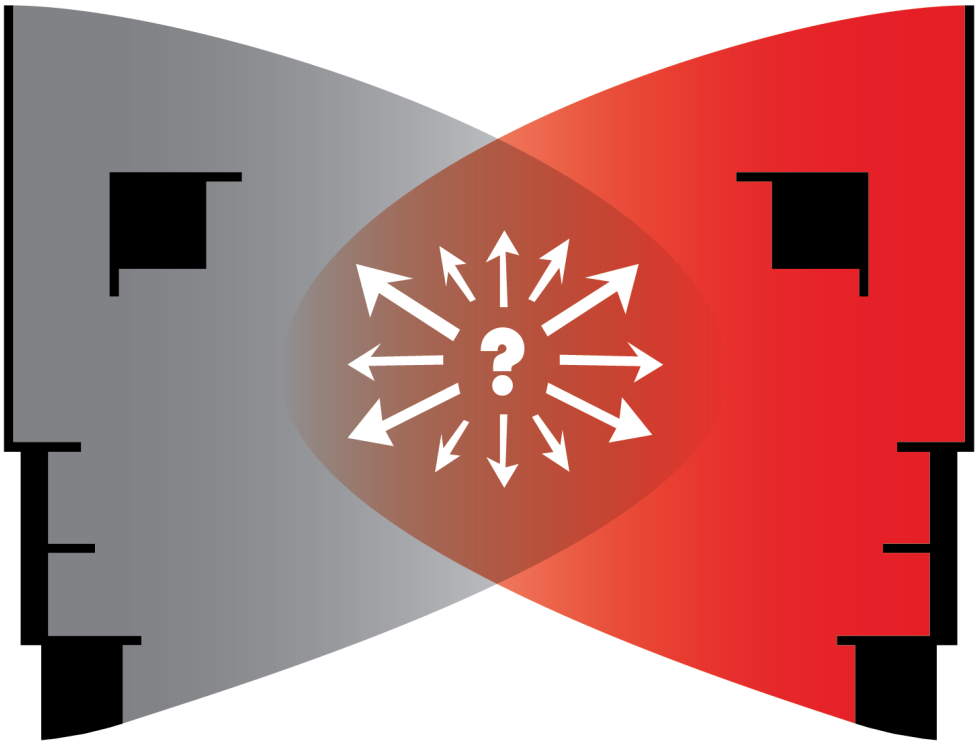
AIA KANSAS CITY: 2021 STRATEGIC ACTION INITIATIVE CHARTER

A HEALTHY DIVERGENCE

CREATING MORE WITH LESS THROUGH A WELL-BEING LENS



INTRODUCTION

What is more relevant and critical than ensuring our response to a world-wide pandemic is a mindful shift in our practice? With a current societal emphasis on the importance of mental well-being, we must be intentional about how we move forward while ensuring the individual and their mental wellness are a priority.

The way the architecture community has reacted, embraced, and rethought our typical processes has impacted and will continue to impact our profession and our office cultures for generations to come. As new disruptors appear, technologies advance, and practices evolve, it is imperative that we are guiding community decisions that will influence our future, not only as a profession, but as a society – in a healthy way.

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OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Why?

In March 2020, our profession changed. We are still looking for the "best" way forward, which has resulted in self-reflection on individual, office, city, state, and national levels. After the initial shock, it was time to react, either by embracing or rejecting what was in front of us. Some call this our "new normal". But there is nothing normal about it; our present state should not be our new standard. Not all disruptors are Covid-related, but perhaps Covid-accelerated. As architects, we are problem solvers and innovative thinkers. We need to take this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine how we will transform and enhance our profession, instead of trying to fit our pre-pandemic world into our current one. Though we aim to remain trusted advisors to our clients and our communities, the pandemic reinforced ways our prior processes were inefficient and our commitment to self-care was lacking. Now that we are faced with impending change, how do we tackle it moving forward?

Why are these disruptors essential to address? Because they will shape the rest of our careers and the next generation of architects. There will always be new opportunities and challenges. We must proactively recognize these disruptors and assess our next steps. Architects are highly collaborative and have traditionally had a more prevalent work/life imbalance; setting up a unique industry opportunity for us to reverse the norm and take a more mindful stance that other industries can relate to and be inspired by. We need to embrace, challenge, and rethink our methods to ensure we are at the front lines of decisions and policies that will directly and indirectly affect architects and our profession.

So, what is the purpose of this paper? The following chapters explore how we can embrace, enhance, and reimagine the future and potential disruptors. How will we challenge disruptors that threaten to devalue our role in society? How do we break down issues beyond the architecture profession and find solutions specific to our practice? Are we asking the right questions or can we ask better ones to push a new mental health/mental wealth initiative? This is only a starting point. Everyone's voice will be needed to help us coalesce and create a new way of thinking. Not only is it critical that we speak up, but also we are looking at firm leaders and next-generation leaders to make the conscious decision to take a stand and make the changes in their companies and communities. Focusing on mental wellness is the right thing to do, but further discovery of these topics will also build a business case to show the immense benefits and profitability to be gained.

Architects are burning out, the delivery process is inefficient, we are losing or stand to lose ground to other fields, and there's new technology that is uprooting normal processes. Current disruptions must be leveraged to create more meaningful, balanced careers while delivering higher quality services faster using the benefits of technology, being more transparent, and reassessing how we work to create more humane, healthy workplaces and careers. An energized, prepared workforce is critical to solve the problems that our cities, society, organizations, and individuals are facing.

We hope our metro leaders, future Strategic Action Initiative groups, the AIA Kansas City board, and our peers can can form programs or task forces to create awareness campaigns, protect the health and well-being of our professionals, give architects a platform for conversation, explore initiatives to expand on this paper's topics, and then execute and implement. The resiliency of our practice depends on it.

DISRUPTORS, OPPORTUNITIES, & IMPACT

Technological Advances & Accessibility

Technology is the backbone of any contemporary process. In architectural practice, it exists to support not only the outcomes of the work, but also the individual. In our field it can be utilized in support of a theoretical exploration, a fact-based analysis, a series of project-based communications, or a creative process, to name a few. It can be the work itself, the inspiration behind the work, or the resultant construction.

Both the way we create and think, and what we are working towards, are fundamentally influenced by technology. Foundational skills must reflect our commitment to the technology that supports us, while we use the lessons of the pandemic to adjust our relationship to advances and innovations. Simply put, we must adapt the way we adapt to technology, staying ahead of its integration into our practice.

Foundational Skills Must Underline Technological Advances

Many architects are not permitted to use digital technology to design until midway through our university studies. Why didn't our professors allow us to utilize all of the current digital technology that was available to us? We were allowed to use the modern advancements of erasers, pens, and t-squares, but not the instantaneous ease of computers. Computers and other digital advancements are doing more of the 'thinking' for us now. As we embrace these technologies, we must still be established in the foundation and rigor of thinking. These skills are what set us apart from those not traditionally trained. The feeling and act of being inspired can also be limited when we rely on technology. The internet itself has taken away perceived randomness, as we search for things we already know about. To make new connections and have breakthrough inspirations, we need that randomness.

As architecture expertise evolves, we understand more about our effect on human interactions and mental health. However, we may not understand the extent of that impact until decades later. There is a constant evolution of what we find to be true and we continue to create lists of lessons learned. For example, daylight and air quality directly affect mental well-being and health, whereas that connection was not fully understood several decades ago. If architects say something is "true" and is based on research, but then research changes, we must now pivot, and then trust dissolves with the general public. How do we balance this evolution of knowledge and ensure we are proactively assessing and researching now instead of reacting later?

Is it enough for society to know we are using architecture as our research as we aim for the ideal solutions? Even if this results in trial and error as we push the envelope to develop greater environments? If we lean on our expertise, will we be perceived by society as leaders for asking the right questions in our search to identify best practices? Will it be enough if we don't always have the answer? Technology can support our ideas of advancement and help validate our assumptions. We can now model and experiment simulations to help us figure out ideal situations, before anything is built. Virtual reality, light studies, and other

technology experiments can all be used as we explore solutions, but it is our foundational expertise that drives design and advancement, not the other way around.

Embrace Technology Advances to Create More with Less

How do we embrace technology without it controlling us and causing us to do more? With technological enhancements come more capabilities. Just because you ***can*** create more, ***should*** you? Do we really need 400-page document sets, when a structure can be built with less? How can we create succinct drawing sets that will not result in increased submittals / RFIs and will instead provide more collaboration throughout construction? As a profession, our work seems never-ending. If a tight deadline is given, we produce what we are able. If an extension is granted, we expand efforts to fill the extra time to document more. Are we documenting better though? Is a high-level of quality still maintained? We need to embrace technology as a support tool, use it intentionally, and not be dependent on it. As referenced above, in school, there was an expectation that you learn the fundamentals before being allowed to use computer software to supplement documentation. Do we need to revisit these fundamentals as our baseline in the professional environment?

How do we automate our manual processes, freeing us up to innovate, be inspired, and refine design solutions? What are ways we can embrace Artificial Intelligence and machine learning to create 'smarter' in a fraction of the time? How can we implement Lean Design / Lean Construction methodology into our traditional workflows? Can we change expectations from our profession, consultants, contractors, and clients to do more with less? How do we redefine model reliance and expectations?

As the accelerating technology affords more capabilities (BIM model sharing and Augmented Reality), our clients and contractors are developing an increased expectation that these types of abilities are included as base services. How should the Standard of Care terms in our AIA contracts be updated to counter this mentality? Architects cannot make this decision on our own. Many professionals are fighting this battle on a project level, but it should be addressed at a national level. This national involvement should address the appropriate level of documentation and advance the Standard of Care language for model reliance that allows for future flexibility. An example could be how to sufficiently show intent with notes and tags without modeling every detail. If an architect is expected to produce a detailed modeling for a contractor, how should this affect the fee to reflect the additional liability?

Software Companies and External Tools

Large software companies have significant influence on the architecture and design industry. Who really holds the power and makes decisions? As organizations such as AutoDesk, Bentley, and Adobe dictate the trajectory for design professionals and what we produce, our voice as architects diminish. Companies with in-house platforms may have a software that is initially relevant and competitive, but over time will become outdated due to not having the same level of research & development resources. An industry giant such as AutoDesk can continue tweaking, evolving, and creating new programs that clients and contractors come to expect.

Subscription and fee structures for these software tools have evolved over the years as well. Initially, an individual or company would purchase a license, and the software had no expiration. If a new version came to market, that individual or company would be able to purchase it or keep their older version. Now, most of these industry staples require subscriptions to cloud-based licenses. With this come annual renewals, required upgrades, and an inability to choose another option. Large software companies know that their products are standard, can hold us hostage, and can increase fees without any significant pushback. A company could threaten to stop using the software, but they will be faced with the reality that another option will likely be inferior. Many clients are versed enough to understand the known capabilities of softwares and may dictate they be used on projects. Can the AIA facilitate pricing negotiations on a national, state, or large-city level for their members? Would this provide enough pressure to create change on a large scale?

Virtual Connections

With the normalcy of virtual meetings comes a great opportunity to engage those not in our community network. We should expand our pool of speakers and experts. Thinking big and not limiting ourselves to simply the next state over. What opportunities open up from a market or region perspective? Does national or international work now become more realistic and appealing? Virtual client presentations and conversations are more accepted, so can they be more inclusive and not rely on travel logistics? How can we encourage more client interaction using virtual platforms and make the connections we need to be making?

Diversity in who a firm hires can also be expanded by reaching out to non-regional pools of candidates. A company is no longer tied to local universities or existing relationships for potential applicants. The equity pipeline needs to be addressed as well having an honest socioeconomic discussion. What firms need to do is take advantage of these virtual tools and utilize them to the fullest, for the betterment of production, culture, and the profession.

With this opportunity also comes the realization that too much virtual interactions can cause fatigue. How do you quantify overall success and consequences of utilizing technology so heavily? As a society, there is still a need for human and in-person interaction. Perhaps the virtual environment can open doors to new possibilities, but we need to balance the ease of desktop interactions with face-to-face options. We need to assess if this is really what society wants and understand how it is impacting and affecting our relationships. One avenue we can explore is engaging with other disciplines and industries. Instead of only surveying AIA members, we should investigate how the medical, legal, civic, non-profit, and other industries function and utilize these forms of collaboration / communication.

Wide-Spread Accessibility

At the dawn of computer-generated documents, most users were professionals and organizations. As programs and softwares have become more accessible, wide-spread, and popular, we see many users are outside of the design professional realm, such as contractors, clients, and the general public. With online tutorials and how-to videos, you can teach yourself to use Revit, Photoshop, and other programs. A contractor or engineer can

produce the same documents or floor plans, so why not save some money on an architect and use other industry representatives?

Architects can list off the numerous advantages and skill sets we provide; the “why you should hire an architect.” But how is that message being shared with the broader public, clients, and future clients? How do we represent ourselves as a necessity and not a luxury? How do we prevent this loss of control? How do we prevent peers from giving away free services to be competitive or win a job, while directly diluting our value as an architect? How do we compete with the Do-It-Yourself movement and the Rejection of Expertise mentality? HGTV has taught us that we can do many things by ourselves, so why hire a professional? Economic divides also prohibit some from employing professionals unless they have to. How do architects fit into this space and demonstrate how our skillsets result in better environments, higher quality products, and worthwhile investments?

The reality is that architects must be better at our craft and focus more on fundamentals and the intangible qualities that we bring to the table. Without this foundation, society’s trust in us is eroded and the belief that anyone can do what we do is strengthened. Enhancing the perception of our value is critical. Showcasing that the tools help us communicate and support our ideas, rather than dictating the result is a definitive differentiator.

Design Processes & Workflows

Technological advances are only as meaningful as their implementation and integration. Having the ability to expedite, simplify, or refine an outcome requires careful understanding of the process. How we get from a design problem to ribbon cutting and beyond, and how we account for the human side of this process is the next step in learning from the last couple of years.

The how and the what of the design delivery process is a critical piece that allows us to begin applying what we have learned and what we are learning about technology and accessibility, especially as these two relate to the well-being of individuals in our profession. High concentrations of stress can be found at any point along the path of project and design delivery; project timeline, internal team structure, client interface, and design execution all lead to high-stakes moments and weighty decisions. In a recent architecture industry report by Rebecca Hey, *The State of Burnout in Architecture 2021*, 225 architects were surveyed to better comprehend the current state of burnout in architecture. Of these 225 individuals, 96.9% experienced burnout in 2021, and 64.4% said,"...inefficient workflow is a major contributor." One goal is to explore how these things are affected by the deliberate and sometimes overbearing process. Are there ways to adopt technology to simplify the process and workflow with the human component of the design professional in mind?

More efficient and impactful work, that is mindful of the human needs and balance of the individuals who make it possible, means refining and simplifying how we work, and what we are working towards.

Design Workflow Reimagination

Refining and simplifying how we work is easier said than done. Where to start? One of the larger areas to explore and put significant resources toward is rethinking how we structure our design phases. The traditional lines that separate Schematic Design, Design Development, and Construction Documentation phases have blurred together with advancements in technology. A Schematic Design document can look much more developed because documentation capabilities have improved, making it easier to draw more. Is documenting more, just because we can, the best approach? BIM is a database and so are specifications; why are we utilizing them both in antiquated documentation methods? While paying homage to our apprenticeship history, these approaches mount up on timesheets like the titans of old and bare down with fatigue in the guise of standard practice on our newest members. The separation can also lead to larger coordination issues, not to mention the loss in efficiency in duplication of work. With a focus on the health of our industry, should we try to maintain a standard structure, or is there a better way to organize ourselves and our deliverables while ensuring quality work? With our wide variety of building types, clients, and project-objectives, how do we persuade professionals, clients, and contractors to embrace a new way of thinking? Some radical suggestions even involve ridding ourselves of timesheets and instead directing our energy toward assigned tasks. Using performance metrics as opposed to number management. The question then is what type of business model can manage people and their efforts.

The world around us is not slowing to accommodate trade route interruptions or other unknowable, future disruptions, but rather demanding design be more accurate earlier, locking in budgets sooner, and providing procurement options to combat long lead times. We need to make "consolidating process" the trend of the day. How do we get from an initial concept all the way through commissioning and occupancy with the healthy mind of a trusted advisor and not the weary mind of a 'CAD-monkey'? These changes to our work process are a call to action for the definition of the true deliverable being provided and therefore a refresh to the workflow of our design process. As an action step that can provide a uniform direction for thought and conversation to the AIA collective, we can push for an update of the AIA Contract Template Language to define the resulting phases and deliverables as a method to reduce rework under the guise of design development without compensation and avoiding burnout of our teammates in the process. Is there a better way to deliver content, which is not tied to a standardized fee structure? For many clients, Schematic Design is worth a certain percentage of the overall fee, with subsequent phases being identified similarly with set percentages. This does not always align with the work being produced, especially with technological advances that push much of the effort up front of the project. A simple 'percentage of construction value' provides a dictated dollar value for design services, but it does not recognize the hours of effort needed to complete contractual obligations. What does this do to an architect's mental health?

So, how do we solve the 'fee for a service' struggle with our values being determined by external sources? How do we stop competing with each other for talent and projects, thus driving down our value and fees even further? Recently, there are major publications such as *The New York Times*, reporting how some architects want to unionize to counter being "pushed to the limits of our productivity and mental health." While there was recently an anti-union movement that stalled one of these initiatives, supporters believe "that if enough firms follow suit, the unions could help lobby city or state lawmakers to impose rules governing fees". Whether it is a union or another national standard that sets minimum fees and standard criteria, it may take this national level of mandating to make a true difference.

We need to think about how this affects our industry and also how other industries steal talent from the architectural field. Venture Capital companies have an increased focus on the construction industry and how to expedite, enhance, and decrease cost for future buildings. These VC firms and various political action committees (such as Construction and Technology PACs) can oftentimes pay better and offer more enticing benefits.

As an opportunity to explore this effort further, does AIA National have a desire to move away from the traditional structure? Updating and creating a uniform National AIA platform could help avoid duplication of efforts by focusing on collecting content and un-siloing information. What do professionals and the AIA see is already happening? What do we think might occur in the future? This is an opportunity to investigate and create initiatives to progress any "what if" scenarios, as it relates to both what we've encountered and what we believe could happen.

Machine Learning and Utilizing Efficiencies

As technology advances and design tools become more sophisticated, we can anticipate that automation will increase. Through leveraging technology to reduce excess time expended,

this is an opportunity for the profession to re-focus work effort and energy towards elevating the value-add that designers provide to their clients.

Creating an efficient workflow to reduce time first requires an identification of manual tasks in the design process that can be executed by algorithm and in turn abbreviate excessive hours spent on the identified tasks. The industry has started to move towards a level of machine learning through optimization techniques and scripts like Grasshopper and Dynamo that are being leveraged to generate optimal and efficient solutions or geometry. In recent years, industry professionals have also begun using tools to assist in analysis of various aspects of a design (namely in the realm of energy building analysis). It is in the best interest of the industry to embrace more aspects of the tools already at its disposal to clearly identify portions of the design process that can be delegated to machine learning, because it will immensely alleviate the aspects of the process that humans over-spend time on (assessment and application of code requirements, generation of standard building details, creation of coordination product specification, etc.). Contrary to some hesitation that relying heavily on more automated and machine learning aspects of design may position the architect out of its value in this market, it will rather provide additional time for designers to lean into the invaluable aspect of an architect. Creative problem solving, design, and overlaying a human-centric perspective is where an architect's highest and incomparable expertise lies. Kaley Overstreet wrote in an *ArchDaily* article about why it's unlikely for robots to replace architects by explaining: "The reason that architecture won't become automated is because of the human skills that the job requires, like meeting with clients, consultants, and the intense collaboration that goes into each and every project. There's also an aspect of emotion that can't be registered by computers."

Machine Learning can also be used to coordinate a more seamless connection between design disciplines throughout the evolution of the design. The prospect of also generating elements that can build a 'schematic form' through parametric computations and algorithms. Imagine that once an architect updates the shape of a roof or building, MEP and structural elements re-generate to update themselves through an algorithm to be reaffirmed by the engineer.

Automation and machine learning still allow architects to control the set of criteria that can generate thousands of solutions to provide a baseline for the architect to further enhance and refine while still exercising their professional design expertise. Ultimately, if the industry is able to create efficiency in its workflow, designers can then re-allocate those efforts to elevate the most valuable portions of their skillset, and in turn reap better compensation relative to time spent on projects.

BIM to Reduce Documentation + Time Expenditure

The inefficiencies and time expended in the workflow of communicating a building design mostly occurs in the Construction Document and Construction Administration phases. In the most ideal method of a design workflow, hours or weeks spent doing a single task like iterations on a façade, detailing a roof structure, or assembling specifications, would be seamlessly developed from concept into reality in the most stream-lined and accurate way. The energy and effort spent documenting a schematic design into cohesive documents that align with code requirements, consider system transitions, specifications, MEP and structural

coordination, addressing and mitigating construction conflicts is where the architecture industry can embrace more stream-lined design processes. There is a movement to create a bridge from designs that only live in machines, to become more interconnected, precise, and accurate to how they are built in the physical realm. According to Nour K. in a Parsons Corporation article, "The concept of a "digital twin" has been in use for decades, particularly in the aerospace industry. Defined as a dynamic digital replica of a product, process, system, or facility, a digital twin can be used to imitate real-world situations and help optimize systems and processes." This presents a potential evolution to BIM technology used in architecture, because the 'Digital Twin' would be an exact model and replica of all elements to be realized in construction and would change the project delivery process of document sets containing sheets, to providing a model with embedded data-filled components that communicate all aspects of a traditional construction set. What an adoption of this type of workflow would consist of would likely be a refinement of the processes that designers use between all of the different software in the toolkit, rather than relying on a catch-all proprietary software that results in a twin model. Regarding how the industry can realistically move towards creating twin models, Simon Evans in a *Design Build* article noted that "there is a misconception that a digital twin is a specific type of technology you can buy off-the-shelf, but rather, it is a combination of technologies."

Digital Native vs Analog Onboarding

For a design process to realize a level of aspirational seamlessness, the proficiency of architects at all levels of experience when it comes to design software and tools would need to be at a similar base-line level. When considering processes that lend to efficiency and removes duplication, that is easier done when the language (format, program, vehicle) in which the work is being done is easily transferable to the next phase.

There are distinguishing levels of familiarity and comfort in using computational software that is stratified based on generation. A European Commission article delineates that stratum as: "digital natives (those born after 1980), digital immigrants (those born in the 1960s-70s) and analogue natives (those born before the 1960s)," with a digital native being a person born or brought up during the age of digital technology and therefore familiar with computers and the internet from an early age.

The understanding of the varied generational experiences can influence areas of improvement to allow a move towards stream-lined work processes through the assessment of team collaboration and production and how it may help or hinder the process. The way many studios are structured is in such a manner where information, work, and knowledge is fragmented based on experience level and or project role, and then re-worked or disseminated to another designer or architect to progress the work. A simple example of this would be information that is created in an excel file for program requirements, needs, or code constraints could be logged into software from the onset that progresses into the next phase of generating computational studies to begin the next phase of design rather than there being a fragmented approach to the translation of this information. Therefore, in conjunction with a proposed technological move to have software become more integrated, specific, and accurate, would be to provide training for all designers involved in the process to be able to best leverage the capabilities of the tool.

People-Focused Leadership

Adapting and advancing technology integration and design processes will only go as far as the efforts of the individual architect - and the pandemic has demonstrated how important it is to see the architect as a complete person. Our profession already has a deep mythology of all-encompassing dedication, of the practice taking over and becoming an architect's life. These lines, already blurred or non-existent, were further erased during the pandemic.

Overcorrection can be detrimental, too; simply taking a giant step back can affect other areas that influence an architect's well-being. Less in-person work can change or lessen a firm's culture, for example. But recognizing the importance of the last two years, and using the collective experience to understand the complexities of supporting the individual while focusing on the work, is the challenge in front of us.

Implement Real Work/Life Balance

We've all been there – commiserating to our fellow peers about our late night preparing for a presentation or comparing the number of hours we work in a week to our friends in less-demanding industries. There can be a twisted sense of pride in sharing your hard-work efforts, somehow validating and perpetuating the university culture. Why? Why do we not place significance on extra-curriculars, family time, or taking much-needed time off? For many of us, working from home over the last year and a half has reset our expectations. Many can argue that we have not been trained to balance our personal lives, beginning with the university years. Should academia be brought into this conversation?

As a profession, we need to recognize this shift in priorities and embrace it. As we are witnessing the "Great Resignation" era of 2021, the need for reimagination is more evident than ever. With employees leaving firms, it is now affecting the bottom line. If this financial driver is what facilitates change, at least we are talking openly about it.

In a 'Pulse Survey' study by Future Forum, commencing in June 2020, findings show that, in the United States alone, an astounding 4 million Americans quit their jobs in April 2020. Of those individuals within the survey, "76% of employees want flexibility in ***where*** they work and 93% want flexibility in ***when*** they work." There needs to be more of a true work/life balance. How can we work 40-hours a week (or less?) and make that the 'norm'. How do we become more efficient to ensure a real work/life balance? How does flexibility become a standard requirement in offices? These flexible work practices by now are so firmly held and valued, and expectations from employees are not wavering.

We can immediately influence the conversation by adjusting our messaging. Instead of 'sick days', what if they are 'wellness days' to put the focus back on the individual. Instead of telling young and new professionals what they need, we can sincerely ask for their feedback and be willing to adjust accordingly. If firms want to retain talent, they need to incentivise workers by doing better. Employees don't just stay for a salary; there are so many other drivers than what we are paid. Especially since there is a mentality that to make more money, you must leave a company. Working less, recognition, and a thriving culture are significant factors in retaining employees and these need to be acknowledged.

Remote Working

Culture

Architects utilize their creativity on projects, but many times are running on fumes by the time someone challenges us to be creative with processes, operations, culture, and taking care of our people. We need to focus our creative problem solving skills on these opportunities as well.

We need to continue to find creative ways to collaborate when not face-to-face. Remote working presents new challenges, but who better to figure them out than a group of problem solvers? How do we encourage and ensure over-the-shoulder training, mentoring, and sufficient on-boarding? How do we spur spontaneous interactions with co-workers? Let's face it – building general camaraderie or rapport with coworkers and clients is one of the main reasons for office work, so how can we regain a sense of culture in a remote environment?

Higher levels of accountability are needed in practice; things are different now. There must be much more professional trust latitude and flexibility that is built into our structures and how people work. How do you be comfortable and allow it to happen? How can you be inclusive, while having confidence in your staff? The key is for leadership to provide genuine transparency amongst its staff and opportunities for direct input or considerations of their preferences for policies that affect them. How do you measure success - is it based on the product or monitoring a staff's presence? According to the Future Forum Survey, "Managers must shift from monitoring traditional productivity inputs–such as facetime, presentee-ism, keystrokes or hours logged—to measuring outcomes, such as increased customer satisfaction and employee engagement.

With the positive flexibility and advantages that remote working can provide, it also can blur the lines and boundaries of an employee's work vs. personal time. When you are at the same desk for work hours as you are after hours, how do you draw the line? How do you set boundaries for yourself that you are "off-limits"? The effect and result of the pandemic has forced individuals to reevaluate their value of time, despite the result of employees potentially feeling the need to be accessible 24/7.

What is "culture" in a post-pandemic working environment and who defines it? Traditionally, culture was whatever the founders/ owners of the firm declared it to be after they've hung their shingle. Whether "work hard/ play hard," "corporate environment," "family-first" or other epithets, what a new employee typically walked into was a place where "who we are" was something that was pre-defined and not open to change. With external issues and factors such as sustainability, work/life balance and social equity at the forefront of both new grads and more experienced professionals, organizations need to look internally and not only test the culture they've created but engage the staff - those who actually make up the culture. Be open to hear and consider challenging questions and ideas around the possibilities that the firm culture isn't consistent, doesn't fall in line, or is perceived as exclusive. In order to sustain the growth and longevity of our profession, it will be critical to

understand new expectations around culture and how it is affected by flexible or hybrid models.

Evaluating how the AIA can create a culture, support group, or even a home base for the self-employed is also an opportunity worth exploring. How can the AIA provide opportunities for those who do not have a social/office culture? As the pandemic has made many professionals reassess their career and direction, we may see more "free agents" in the future. How can the AIA support the self-employed and avoid exploitation of these professionals? With a large number of architects across the nation not being AIA members, how can we address what is currently lacking to encourage their membership and engagement?

Types of Remote Working

Due to the 2020 pandemic, most professionals have come to experience and understand 'remote working' to be when work is done outside of a corporate office, whether part-time, full-time, or occasionally. Prior to this change in the business, remote working was typically assumed to be an employee that lived a significant distance away from a corporate office, and as a result, would have to work and collaborate virtually. Because of the flexibility offered in the ability to do work from anywhere outside of a firm's physical location, the definition has been expanded to include those working outside of the office either at home or another selected location (even when within a reasonable commuting radius), to those doing business from varying cities, states, or even countries away from the business that employs them. According to a recent Cameron MacAllister Group survey, out of 1,335 AEC professionals, 93% "would prefer to mix their time between remote and in-office settings going forward. Moreover, 1 in 5 professionals say that they are likely to leave their employer within the next 12 months if their preferred working arrangements aren't supported".

As firms begin to consider 'return to office' plans, understanding what works best for your firm and employees will be critical. Many workers in America want flexibility that goes beyond the number of days you are in the office or at home each week. Whether you're an early riser or a night owl, how we run offices and projects to account for this flexibility is key. Gradual changes can be made in phases too, as ideas of "Flex Fridays" gain more momentum. Flex Fridays have been described as "a day to self-direct what you work on", whether it is work-related, exploring a new skill, or just a day for self-care. These days are looked at as "a way to take a break from back to back meetings and spend time developing as a PM or leader, in any way you see fit". For some companies, they are meant to create a better balance for the work week and professionals are invited "to openly share how they're spending [the day] with peers, and make suggestions for ongoing learning courses".

Is Remote Working Beneficial to Architecture Firms?

Many design studios have surveyed their employees and experimented with how much work-from home flexibility to provide employees. Providing a certain amount of flexibility is the direction that most companies and employees have realized they would like to keep as a benefit as we transition out of the pandemic lock-down. The presumed goal is to strike a balance between the draws and benefits of having the option to work from home

(un-interrupted focus time, malleable work time around other life priorities) whilst also maintaining the identity, culture, and collective business decision-making as a firm.

The trend that many offices are moving towards is a form of "structured flexibility" or "hybrid work from home" in which employees are requested to be in the office during a designated 2/3 days a week, when meetings can take place in a productive and concise manner. The rest of the work week is left up to employees to use as work from home or remote work time. The solution for most companies, thus far, has been to provide enough flexibility within a framework and structure to create routine and base-level dependability when it comes to in-person collaboration, mentorship, and social time.

Business Ramifications of Remote Work

Business + Client Relationships: At the cusp of trying to transition out of a COVID-ruled work economy, design firms held varying opinions on whether it made a difference to clients that their hired architecture firms have a full and active design studio for an opportunity to be face-to face vs. having on-line business relationships through a collective of remote designers that operate under the same firm name. The argument against the latter is the presumption that not having a physical location loses a necessary collective identity and face for a client and would result in a loss of the personal and humane facet of business interaction. In a *Forbes* article during the height of the pandemic, the notion that remote client relationships is not a negative prospect, and may even be beneficial was brought to light by Meena Krenek, Principal and Interior Design Director at design firm Perkins and Will in Los Angeles when she commented: "We're sharing more of our personal lives with others. While not wearing super corporate attire or makeup, often while simultaneously soothing a fussy child, we're learning new ways of social engagement with coworkers and clients that we can take back to humanize our work environments."

In our pre-Covid lives, the common-place perception was that face-to-face meetings offered intangible moments and nuanced human connections that were irreplaceable. However, there may be a new type of familiarity and personability offered by getting to know and interact with someone virtually and outside of their "formal work setting" through the subtleties of comments on their chosen home wallpaper or the audible background noise of their families or pets. All of these and more offer an additional layer of knowing someone and building personal connections through avenues that were previously not available as a novel behind-the-scenes lens.

Tax Implications: Even once a firm has sorted through and bought into the change in tide of having many employees working remotely, there are still hurdles and complications when it comes to payroll taxes. The complexities of corporate tax situations have been heightened through remote work and employees working for a firm with a physical location in one state and having their employee live and work for that firm in another location. Companies not previously set up to recognize and manage that complexity are faced with having to catch up, delineate, and understand the repercussions of a larger out-of-state employee demographic on their finances and project fees.

Effect on Project Travel

Depending on the market and type of projects that a firm pursues in its portfolio; it has not been uncommon for intermediate to advanced design professionals to get caught in the cycle of constant travel for interviews, site visits, and upkeep on client relationships. The move towards remote work at the studio level begins to challenge the notion of constant travel being a necessary component of the design industry. During the pandemic, some firms had to face the hurdle of conducting Construction Administration services using video 360 technology and depending more heavily on a local partner design firm on projects. Travel for face-to-face client time also scaled back, and as a result that budget line-item allocated for hotels, meals, and air travel resulted in some profit staying in the hands of many businesses. Like many changing factors in our workplace, the direction seems to be to strike a balance between the right amount of travel, so as not to exhaust employees, but also maintain an important level of project delivery and client relationships.

The 40-Hour Work Week

Employers must not only evaluate the flexibility of workplace location, but also employees' mental health and well-being. This includes the amount of weekly hours expected from the architecture profession. Historically, architecture firms benefited from working more than 40 hours a week. They were able to accomplish more work in seemingly less time. The ability to accomplish five weeks of work in four weeks was believed to increase profit, but further investigation has revealed that this may not be true. In multiple studies over the last century, psychologists have routinely found that no one benefits from having employees work over 40 hours a week, not the employees or the employers. Companies may not be receiving the full return on each hour worked if employees work 50 hours and only bill the client 40 hours. Yet, according to the CDC, "[t]he average number of hours worked annually by workers in the United States has increased steadily over the past several decades." In fact, a 2014 Gallup study found that "half of all full-time workers indicate they typically work more than 40 hours, and nearly four in 10 say they work at least 50 hours."

In an article published by Okta, several studies have been conducted regarding the 40-hour work week and how to define the perfect workweek:

> *"A 2004 report published by the CDC's Department of Health and Human Services provides a summary of 52 applied psychology studies on the impacts of extended shifts and regular overtime. Across the board, the studies found the impacts were negative—both for employers and employees:*
>
> - *People who regularly work overtime are less healthy than those who don't. They're more likely to gain weight, fall ill, and get injured on the job.*
> - *People are less alert and more likely to make mistakes after the 8th hour of work.*
> - *People who routinely work extended hours and overtime are less productive than those who work eight hours a day and 40 hours a week.*

After embracing flexible work styles during the pandemic, some companies are now taking it even a step further by embracing a shorter work week. With the pandemic sending stress levels through the roof, some companies are looking at this shorter work week while maintaining an employee's same salary. The results show that employees are recharged by Monday, and production levels are equal if not better than during the traditional five-day work week.

Widespread publications are highlighting alternative work day schedules that challenge the American idea that we must work longer hours. *The New York Times* recently found that "[d]riven by the flexible work arrangements and bonus days off that were introduced during the pandemic, concern for burnout and empowerment of employees in a tight labor market, companies are embracing a shorter work week."

The world can take note of countries, such as Ireland, who have initiated shorter workweek trials. A study published in June 2021, demonstrated that from 2015-2019 "[p]articipating workers took on fewer hours and enjoyed greater well-being, improved work/life balance and a better cooperative spirit in the workplace — all while maintaining existing standards of performance and productivity." In fact, at the time of publishing, "86% of Iceland's working population are now on contracts that have either moved them to shorter working hours, or give them the right to do so in the future. These trials are therefore an incredible success story of working time reduction, of interest to campaigners and workers worldwide".

The Gallup study mentioned above found that employees working four-day weeks "had significantly higher levels of well-being and were less likely to feel chronically burned out." However, a shorter week is not without its challenges. The same study found that there were "higher levels of active disengagement", especially for those who already felt a disconnect. As firms aim to attract and retain employees, this is something to consider. One suggestion from Gallup's workplace management practice is "for companies to offer flexible schedules rather than four-day weeks, so that workers can tailor their hours to their individual circumstances." Generational differences / preferences may also be a critical factor in this assessment, as younger generations are believed to need more personal interactions on a daily basis than their older counterparts.

NEXT STEPS

A white paper is only the beginning. The SAI charter wants to continue this dialogue with you and hear your feedback. We ***need*** your engagement and participation. AIA Kansas City is committed to furthering these ideas and developing meaningful and relevant action, initiatives, or programs that address how we can facilitate change. Join the conversation and ask how you can be part of the solution. Our call to action is to develop these ideas and implement them in your own practices. We need to ensure AIA Kansas City's culture focuses on honest conversations and centralized communications from its many committees and task forces. There may be overlap in work that can work synchronously within various groups.

Join an existing program, board, or council leading policy or process change. Start a grass-roots initiative to spread awareness to keep exploring and expanding on these topics. Let's not settle for how we used to do things, if we can make them better. Always ask "why." Challenge the norms. Open yourself up to conversations. Raise your hand. Your peers and the next generation of architects depend on it.

As we navigate doing more with less in our post-pandemic world, while focusing on both the individual and raising our profession, we need to be asking the right questions. How can we work better and more efficiently? How can we emphasize mental health in each initiative? What can we do to motivate and engage our AIA Kansas City chapter to be leaders in change? Whether it be identified actionable steps, or topics that need further exploration by the AIA board/committees, below is a summarized Top 5 list of suggestions to consider:

1. Panel discussion (or a series) with emerging & firm leaders on white paper topics. Intent is to invigorate the mental health conversation. Timeframe tentatively planned for Fall 2022.
2. Provide education & mentorship opportunities to identify & emphasize foundational skills. Whether in-person or section of AIA Kansas City website for questions, progress reports, materials/resources to be shared.
3. Form a task force to assess phase deliverables and advocate for a uniform platform.
4. Data Gathering; Survey of work/life balance, remote working, flexibility, retention, culture, profitability, mental health, burn out, and emergent practices (technology utilization).
5. Post-survey round table discussions with various generations to voice needed changes, sharing of information, suggestions for flexible work environments.
6. Track local initiatives & results from next steps to provide guidelines for other AIA chapters.

Longer-term actions can manifest in a series of lectures/panels, an annual symposium, or a recurring program/committee creating initiatives around relevant topics with a mental health focus. Broadening our outreach to other chapters and up to National for wide-spread change is the end goal. We must shake up the 'norm', incentivize firms to partake in these initiatives, and provide something tangible and thought-provoking for our members.

AIA KANSAS CITY: 2021 STRATEGIC ACTION INITIATIVE CHARTER

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