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# EQUITY AT WORK

Designing an Inclusive and  
Equitable Workplace Culture

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## Land Acknowledgment

This research was conducted on the traditional and present land that touches the shared waters of the Duwamish, Puyallup, Suquamish, Tulalip, and Muckleshoot Nations, who have stewarded the land and waters since time immemorial. I gratefully honor the Indigenous communities of this land, stolen through colonial violence.

## Positionality

I am white and most of the research team throughout this process is white. It is important to acknowledge positionality in a study which addresses both workplace culture and racial equity. The very professional cultures I endeavor to change grant me increased access due to my whiteness and my maleness. My privileged position enables me to conduct this research and it is my central goal to leverage that privilege to identify, challenge, and remove white supremacy from built environment design practice. To achieve this, it is vital to engage with critical reflexive thought and seek feedback to illuminate whiteness in my own processes and biases. With the help of many, and with careful consideration of my own positionality, this research engenders a more inclusive, equitable, and just workplace within design practice.

With Gratitude,  
*Jake Minden*

## Abstract

This research investigates perceptions of workplace culture in the built environment design professions to determine how to foster more equitable and inclusive workplaces for employees from underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups. A national survey gained valuable insight into workplace culture using questions about demographics, employment history, and professional values. The survey was distributed widely to professionals from Building Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Design and Planning, and received 575 responses. Ten survey respondents volunteered to answer several semi-structured interview questions relating to their experience of workplace culture. Through various methods of data analysis, three core findings emerge from the survey data. The first finding shows nearly all respondents, independent of racial and ethnic identity, identified similar cultural factors that require the most improvement. The second finding describes an uneven experience of work between white respondents and Respondents of Color, based on statistically significant differences in survey responses.<sup>1</sup> The third finding characterizes two different types of cultural factors, tangible and intangible, from the first and second findings respectively, and suggests that intangible factors are more closely associated with longer employee retention rates. All three primary findings inform a list of ten recommendations to catalyze a more equitable and just workplace culture.

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1. Following the example of landscape architect, educator, and writer, Jennifer Low, this research does not capitalize 'white,' for the capital W's association with references to white supremacy. Non-white racial identities are capitalized, including the terms "People of Color" and "Respondents of Color." Low, "Design Is Political: White Supremacy and Landscape Urbanism."

## How to Use this Guide

A core goal of this research is to share the findings widely and legibly for design firms that are diverse in size, geographic location, and discipline. To achieve this, the findings have been packaged as a guidebook to help different workplaces make improvements based on this research and their own findings. The recommendations created from the findings provide several options for fostering equity and inclusion in the workplace.

The first section of this guide outlines background information on the topic of equity within built environment design practice. The second section includes a description of the research methodology. The third section continues with a description of the initial survey findings and a more in-depth analysis of the results. Lastly, the guide presents a set of 10 recommendations to assess and shift workplace culture to be more equitable and inclusive.

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# INTRODUCTION—

Why Equity Matters

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Retention then Recruitment

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## Why Equity Matters: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Built Environment Design Practice

The United States legacy of racism and white supremacy is long and deep. The violent implications of white supremacy are manifested in space, and often dangerously entangled in the institutions, professions, and designers who design and construct built environments. According to architect and advocate Craig L. Wilkins, “space is life.”<sup>1</sup> Wilkins explains that when access to space is restricted, the quality of our lives is restricted too. Our lives exist within built spaces, whether interior or exterior, hard or soft scape, private or public, and experienced by car, bus, bike, or foot. Built environments determine how we live, and built environment design professions such as building architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, and urban design and planning are responsible for creating the spaces we inhabit. Unfortunately, limited access to the built environment for racially, ethnically, or culturally marginalized groups is often by design. Who designs our spaces (representation), and how they’re doing it (equitable/inclusive practice) has a huge impact. To be specific, built environment design professionals have been, and continue to be responsible for the myriad spaces that contribute to positive or negative effects on societal health, wellbeing, and happiness. An effort to dismantle white supremacy in the built environment begins with dismantling white supremacy in the design professions.

To identify and dismantle white supremacy in the design professions, this research builds on the previous work done by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in the Guides for Equitable Practice, as well as the AIA San Francisco’s Equity by Design (EQxD) 2018 Equity in Architecture Survey. The AIA Guides to Equitable Practice establish five cases for equity in architecture: moral, ethical, business, professional, and societal.<sup>2</sup> Independent of

1. Wilkins, “It’s Time for Architects to Accept Responsibility.”

2. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, “Guides for Equitable Practice.”

which case motivates equitable practices it is important for firms to identify specific areas for improvement and the larger goals that underlie a shifting practice.<sup>3</sup> The 2018 Equity in Architecture Survey reveals findings that inspired research questions for this project, as well as an insight into survey design around topics of equitable practice and workplace culture.<sup>4</sup>

## Equity at Work

For the purposes of this research, built environment design professions refer to Building Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Design and Planning, and in terms of equitable practices, these professions have trailed behind other service professions, like medicine or education, for many decades in terms of equitable representation and treatment in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> At the 1968 annual convention of the AIA, civil rights leader Whitney M. Young Jr. informed the nearly all white male audience of their reputation; “You are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of civil rights. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence.”<sup>6</sup> Over 50 years later, built environment design professions have made significant progress, yet have a long way to go to meet the challenge of Whitney M. Young Jr.

The barriers to more inclusive and diverse built environment design practice begin far before entering the workforce. Built environment design professions experience a low visibility within K-12 educational institutions, especially among BIPOC youth.<sup>7</sup> This leads to smaller applicant pools of underrepresented minority groups for post-secondary degree programs and subsequently entry level positions in the professional world. The problem of low visibility is partly ameliorated by programs such

3. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, “Guides for Equitable Practice.”

4. Pitts et al., “2018 EQxD Survey.”

5. Nicholson, “Where Are My People?” Black in Architecture

6. “Introduction | AIA & Whitney Young Jr.”

7. Anderson, “How Can Architecture Schools Increase Diversity?”

as ACE Mentoring, a national organization which supports students from historically underrepresented groups in following built environment career paths through exposure, instruction, skill-building, and advising.

The high cost and long duration of post-secondary education required to practice within the design professions is prohibitive for many prospective design students.<sup>8</sup> Many design schools have historically failed to enroll, support, and graduate students from underrepresented minority groups. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) make up only 14% of schools with accredited architecture programs but enroll 49% of Hispanic and Latinx students.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) represent 5% of accredited architecture programs and graduate 32% of Black students.<sup>10</sup> These statistics indicate that non-HSI and non-HBCU accredited institutions enroll and graduate a disproportionately low percentage of Hispanic, Latinx, and Black students.

Once an individual enters the workforce, there are several ways in which professional design practice remains inequitable as a result of white supremacy in the workplace. Professional inequities include recruitment and onboarding practices that favor white professionalism, the division of design labor which contributes to one's perception of having meaningful work, informal advancement and promotional mechanisms that rely on inaccessible and often white social networks, a lack of representational mentorship, and a lack of diversity within leadership roles.<sup>11</sup> All of these factors reinforce and influence one another to further marginalize professionals from underrepresented minority groups.

One of the most visible and overarching aspects of inequity within built environment design professions is the underrepresentation of non-white professionals. According to the 2020

8. Griffin and Yang, "Inclusion in Architecture Report."

9. Nicholson, "Where Are My People?" Hispanic and Latinx in Architecture

10. Nicholson, "Where Are My People?" Black in Architecture

11. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) By the Numbers report, less than 40% of new building architects are women, and less than 20% of new building architects identify as a racial or ethnic minority, or non-white.<sup>12</sup> Comparatively, the US population is 50% women and 40% non-white.<sup>13</sup> 86% of all interior design professionals are white.<sup>14</sup> Roughly 10% of landscape architects identify as Hispanic or Latinx, compared to 18% of the national population, and 3% of landscape architects identify as Black or African American, compared to 14% of the national population.<sup>15</sup> In urban planning, 60% of practitioners are male, and nearly 76% are white.<sup>16</sup> Though identifying and closing gaps in representation is an important goal of equity and inclusion practices, this research targets strategies that can improve workplace conditions to indirectly increase representation.

### Retention then Recruitment

To ameliorate underrepresentation of minority groups, built environment design professions often target recruitment strategies. This includes the auditing of biases in hiring processes, extending job searches beyond personal networks, making connections to academic design programs at HBCUs and HSIs, or implementing blind assessments of candidates.<sup>17</sup> While equitable and inclusive recruitment practices are important, without a significant investment in retention strategies, recruitment efforts prioritize surface-level quotas and ignore important onboarding and career development processes. Designing equitable and inclusive workplaces by emphasizing retention practices benefits all employees, especially those from underrepresented minority groups.

12. "2020 NCARB Demographics."

13. "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts."

14. "Interior Designer Demographics."

15. "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion | Asla.Org."

16. "Urban & Regional Planners | Data USA."

17. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

*"Trying is going to be better than not trying, and it's not going to go perfect, and there's going to be some pain, and there's going to be some awkwardness, and there's going to be some tears, there's going to be emotion, there's going to be all of that, but we've just seen the benefit in our work culture and the trust amongst people."*

-Interviewee on equitable practice process, *Equity at Work, 2021*

While recruitment often emphasizes diverse hiring for performative metrics, a high retention rate requires providing employees what they need to be engaged and successful. According to the AIA Guides for Equitable Practice, some factors affecting employee engagement include perceptions of meaningful work, a sense of belonging, psychological and physical safety, access to resources, and feeling valued.<sup>18</sup> A lack of employee engagement can have a detrimental effect on a workplace. In a study of employee engagement, organizations with disengaged employees were found to have 18% lower productivity and 16% lower profitability.<sup>19</sup>

High employee engagement and positive retention rates can be useful recruitment strategies as well. A workplace's reputation for having an open and accessible culture with

18. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

19. Seppala and Cameron, "Proof That Positive Work Cultures Are More Productive."

engaged employees will attract diverse and talented candidates.<sup>20</sup> Rather than focus on recruitment as a tool to increase diversity in the workplace, built environment design professions should prioritize retention as a tool for equitable and inclusive practice.

### Culture Fit vs. Culture Add

If employers emphasize recruitment and hire for diversity, successful candidates from underrepresented minority groups can be expected to assimilate to onboarding practices and workplace environments that are exclusive and inequitable. Assimilation into a considerably white workplace culture can be harmful and hostile. Should those new employees reject hostile workplace practices, they can be at risk of losing their jobs or inadvertently tasked with

20. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

*"Sometimes the kindness and niceness of the people ends up favoring the status quo and not having difficult conversations when they might need to be had. There's not nearly as much positive support or positive reinforcement as I might have hoped for."*

-Interviewee on the culture of support,  
Equity at Work, 2021

shifting the practice to be more equitable. This model of assimilationist onboarding practices can be understood as 'culture fit'.<sup>21</sup> A culture fit model centers diversity as a goal and reifies employees as unemotional data points of behavioral sameness.

Instead, a 'culture add' model celebrates difference and encourages new hires to bring their whole selves to their position, which increases cognitive diversity and innovative thinking.<sup>22</sup> By shifting the emphasis from recruitment to retention strategies, the culture add model refocuses equity as a goal and positions diversity as an outcome.<sup>23</sup> Centering and improving workplace retention requires a deeper understanding of each workplace and how it is perceived by employees.

21. Cheng, Deep Dive: Building Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Organizations.  
22. Snow, "Culture Add."  
23. Cheng, Deep Dive: Building Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Organizations.

## Workplace Culture

Workplace culture is the implicit set of values and beliefs that guide an organization's social environment and shape perceptions and behaviors.<sup>24</sup> Workplace culture is manifested through accepted behavioral norms, emotions, communication styles, internal messaging, rituals, traditions, and celebrations.<sup>25</sup> Culture is traditionally seen as top-down and defined by the leaders of a firm or organization. However, as workplaces become increasingly adaptable to a rapidly changing world and workforce, employees are expressing more agency in shifting workplace cultural norms and expectations. Independent of who creates workplace culture, it is ubiquitous to all firms and organizations, unspoken, and dynamic.

The impacts of a strong and positive workplace culture are numerous and significant. A positive workplace culture is defined by the

24. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."  
25. "Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture."

presence of trust, caring, support, forgiveness, flexibility, regular feedback, shared values, and other attributes.<sup>26</sup> Positive workplace culture is shown to increase employee engagement and wellbeing, productivity, and creativity.<sup>27</sup> Research on ten years of awards from Glassdoor's Best Places to Work survey reveals a strong connection between positive workplace culture, satisfied employees, and a company's performance.<sup>28</sup> Engaged and satisfied employees benefit more than the internal culture, as the reputation of positive culture extends beyond an organization or firm to clients and prospective employees, increasing profitability and recruitment efforts.

A strong and positive workplace culture is human-centered, which places value on the safety, comfort, inclusion, and happiness of its employees.<sup>29</sup> Positive workplace cultures are also action-driven and prioritize making change over stating positive intentions, a common pitfall of hollow equity efforts. These aspects of positive workplace culture figure prominently in the goals of racial equity and justice. As firms seek to improve their equitable practices and increase their support and representation of employees from historically excluded racial, ethnic, and gender minority groups, human-centered and action-driven workplace cultures are crucial. A strong and responsive workplace culture is often co-created by a range of employees that are diverse in identity and position but share values. This co-created culture increases loyalty and retention and helps to reduce involuntary turnover.<sup>30</sup>

A negative or weak workplace culture is one that is exclusive, harmful, unproductive, and experienced unevenly along spectrum of identity including race, ethnicity, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, and others.<sup>31</sup>

26. Seppala and Cameron, "Proof That Positive Work Cultures Are More Productive."  
27. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."  
28. Chamberlain and Muniyikwa, "What's Culture Worth?"  
29. Seppala and Cameron, "Proof That Positive Work Cultures Are More Productive."  
30. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."  
31. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

Exclusive workplace cultures are harmful to all employees, not just those excluded. Firms or organizations characterized by exclusive, inequitable, or unsupportive workplace cultures are often permeated with unchecked or unmitigated white supremacy culture. White supremacy is the constructed delusion that places white people at the top of an imagined racial hierarchy in order to subjugate and enact violence against People of Color for social dominance. As described by Tema Okun and her colleagues, "white supremacy culture is the water in which we all swim."<sup>32</sup> The often ineffable and invisible nature of workplace culture enables the continued embeddedness of dominant white supremacist culture in professionalism. It is important to label and be explicit about the ways workplace cultures are either complicit in or oppositional to the advancement of white supremacy. Naming characteristics of white supremacy culture is a method of accountability and is useful in identifying areas of improvement in terms of racial equity.<sup>33</sup> For examples and further explanation of characteristics of white supremacy culture in the workplace, see Tema Okun's article, referenced in the footnotes.<sup>34</sup>

Positioning workplace culture as a tool for or against white supremacy in the workplace places significant social and ethical responsibility onto those designing or influencing workplace culture. This research asks built environment design professionals to identify weaknesses within their workplace cultures and to empower professionals with information and concrete options for improving equitable practices. Shifting workplace cultures to be more equitable to, and inclusive of employees from underrepresented minority groups is better for everyone. Positive workplace cultures increase employee engagement and retention, boost company profitability and reputation, and are crucial in advancing racial justice.<sup>35</sup>

32. Okun, "White Supremacy Culture Characteristics."  
33. Okun, "White Supremacy Culture Characteristics."  
34. Tema Okun's White Supremacy Culture Characteristics: <https://www.whitesupremacy-culture.info/characteristics.html>  
35. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

## Research Questions

Data collected by EQxD's 2018 Equity in Architecture Survey revealed two findings related to retention and workplace culture that are significant to the development of this research. The survey found that the youngest professionals, which are most likely the earliest in their career, were the most diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. These employees were also least likely to be retained by their current workplaces.<sup>36</sup> Is there a connection between a younger, more diverse group of professionals, and lower retention rates in building architecture? To investigate this question and the relationship between employees, workplace culture, and retention, perceptions of workplace culture are considered and inform the research questions and subsequent methodology.

The following research questions were developed according to existing literature on the topics of equitable practice and workplace culture. The research questions shifted and narrowed over the course of the project to more accurately address gaps in previous research. They guided the design of the methodology and specifically informed the content of both the survey and the interview. The three research questions are:

1. How do perceptions of workplace culture differ between racial, ethnic, and gender groups?
2. How can design professionals from underrepresented minority groups be better supported by workplace culture?
3. How can perceptions of workplace culture be translated into a set of recommendations to make workplace culture more inclusive, equitable, and just?

36. Pitts et al., "2018 EQxD Survey."

## Defining Workplace Cultural Factors

Workplace culture is difficult to name, identify, and measure. Using literature on workplace culture, and numerous resources and definitions, 23 workplace cultural factors were identified.<sup>37</sup> The survey collected perceptions of the 23 cultural factors to provide a relatively comprehensive assessment of workplace culture. The interviews helped to reveal relationships between aspects of workplace culture and axes of identity, including race and gender. Clearly understanding the workplace cultural perceptions of employees from underrepresented minority groups enables positive shifts to be made within the workplace for firm success, employee happiness and engagement, and racial equity and justice.

37. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice.", Chamberlain and Munyikwa, "What's Culture Worth?", Corritore, Goldberg, and Srivastava, "The New Analytics of Culture.", Pitts et al., "2018 EQxD Survey.", Seppala and Cameron, "Proof That Positive Work Cultures Are More Productive.", "Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture."

## Workplace Cultural Factors



Figure 1. Workplace Cultural Factors

# METHODOLOGY—

**Methodology Overview**

**Distribution, Sample Size, and Anonymity**

**Survey**

**Interviews**

**Data Analysis**

## **Methodology Overview**

After narrowing the scope to focus on workplace culture as a determinant of equitable design practice, it was necessary to understand the current conditions and perceptions of workplace culture in the built environment design professions. To ascertain a clearer picture of how contemporary workplace culture is perceived, surveys and qualitative interviews were identified as primary research methods. A survey enabled a wider sample of professionals to answer a set of questions related to the 23 workplace cultural factors. Semi-structured interviews illustrate personal anecdotal data, which proves valuable as this research is deeply connected with personal experience. Detailed survey and interview goals and procedures are described on the following pages.



## Distribution, Sample Size, and Anonymity

Respondents were asked to share potentially sensitive information and therefore anonymity was central to the design of the methodology. Throughout the survey, no identifiable information was collected, and all responses were kept in password protected accounts. Though an email address was required to sign up for and conduct an interview, all email addresses have been decoupled from their audio recordings once a certain time period has elapsed, as required by state law. All quotes or anecdotal information collected in interviews have been analyzed before use in this guidebook, and any identifiable information has been discarded.

To further protect respondent anonymity, the survey was distributed to a large number of potential respondents to increase the data sample size. Even without identifiable information collected through the survey, local professional networks can be small and insular, which can lead to a breach of confidentiality. Small sample sizes also present a higher risk to confidentiality for individuals with underrepresented identities. In some instances, groups of respondents were aggregated in the analysis to increase anonymity.

A larger sample size was achieved by accessing various professional networks and asking others to share the survey widely among their personal networks. Professional organizations that aided the distribution of the survey included the Landscape Architecture Foundation, the Washington Chapters of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the Northwest Chapter of the National Organization for Minority Architects (NOMA), and the UW's College of Built Environments alumni networks. Other distribution strategies included various social media platforms, and through many personal networks. The goal was to distribute the survey widely enough to collect over 500 survey responses.

## Survey

The survey was designed with four goals in mind: to be accessible to many people, to effectively capture the nuance of workplace culture, to allow the disaggregation of data by respondent subgroups, and to be short and clear. The survey launched in early February 2021 and remained open through the end of April. It eventually received 575 responses from individuals spanning multiple built environment professions and representing places from all across the US and into Canada.

### **To be accessible for many different people with various work experiences.**

The survey was meant to apply to individuals within the built environment design professions previously identified. While members of these professions are frequent collaborators and often work in integrated offices, the differences between professional cultures manifest in their personal reputations, the language they use, and the styles of work. For example, early on in the survey development, it was necessary to shift away from using 'firm' or 'design office' to 'workplace' in order to be more inclusive of office types. It was also important for the survey to be relevant to the experiences of entry level professionals and those in leadership roles and near the end of their career. This, along with other varying respondent qualities, required each question to be carefully considered to accommodate several points of view.

### **To capture the nuance of workplace culture perceptions.**

Workplace culture, while ubiquitous and typically perceptible, is infamously difficult to measure.<sup>1</sup> Measuring perceptions of workplace culture is a more concrete metric to understanding culture. Since culture is in part created and understood collectively, compiling respondents' perceptions of workplace culture provides an appropriate lens to view built

<sup>1</sup> Corritore, Goldberg, and Srivastava, "The New Analytics of Culture."

*"The best ideas are going to come from a wider group of people with different perspectives and different opinions. That's where you get true innovation."*

-Interviewee on difference,  
Equity at Work, 2021

environment design professions at a large scale. Measuring individual perceptions of culture required a breakdown of factors that contribute to culture and are more easily identified. Elements of workplace culture were extrapolated from relevant literature as well as previous research surveys, including Equity by Design's 2018 Equity in Architecture Survey.<sup>2</sup> Some of these factors of workplace culture include trust in colleagues, psychological safety, input in decision making, mentorship, and internal communications. The full list of factors can be seen in Figure 1.

Many survey questions regarding nuanced aspects of workplace culture were placed on a Likert scale, which included 5 options that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents rated to what extent they agreed that of each cultural factor was present in their workplace. All of the questions were framed with an assumed positive position, and without the use of double negatives, to make

<sup>2</sup> Pitts et al., "2018 EQxD Survey."

sure that respondents could move quickly through the questions without confusing the positive or negative connotation of a factor. For example, a question about mentorship did not ask if the respondent had mentors. Instead, the question asked the respondent to what extent they agreed with the statement, I have mentors. Several of the Likert Scale cultural factors were rated through the frequency of a factor, rather than its presence. Shifting questions to include information about frequency allowed for more subtlety to be collected from respondents.

### **To enable the disaggregation of data to understand how groups experience workplace culture differently.**

The survey begins with two sections asking about demographics and workplace experiences. The demographics questions asked about age, race and ethnicity, gender identity, geographic region, and highest level of education. The employment questions asked about the respondent's profession, years of practice, position in their workplace, if they are

*"You have to start trusting each other enough to be able to have these really deep and meaningful and difficult conversations."*

-Interviewee on equitable practice process,  
*Equity at Work, 2021*

licensed or accredited, and how many hours they work weekly on average. The employment questions also asked respondents about the presence of multiple offices, what professional disciplines are represented at their workplace, how many people are employed, and if the workplace is in the public sector, private sector, or is a non-profit.

These first two sections were critical because they allowed for a disaggregation of survey results to learn more about how various groups perceive elements of workplace culture differently. For each question it was possible to see how the complete set of respondents answered versus how a subsection of the respondent's answered. For example, perhaps entry level professionals spoke highly of the workplace culture far less than the professionals within leadership. Or perhaps male respondents reported higher levels of mentorship than their female counterparts. Trends identified within and between groups paint a clearer picture of how to shift workplace culture to be more equitable and inclusive of more professionals.

#### **To be short, clear, and easy to complete.**

The survey was repeatedly edited for clarity, conciseness, and legibility. The survey began as a large set of questions and was routinely narrowed down and reorganized. It was important that each question was independently in service to the research questions. Feedback on the survey questions was collected from academic and professional partners before compiling the final survey.

In order to achieve the goal of a sample size of 500 respondents, it was necessary to create a survey that could be taken in under 10 minutes, was clear in its question structures, and was sharable. The survey was created as a google form with an easily shareable link and was typically sent out with a few short paragraphs briefly explaining the research. This concise packageable information, the link and blurb, which can be found in the appendix, allowed for the survey to be distributed quickly and widely among personal and professional networks, which increased the number of respondents.

## **Interviews**

At the end of the survey, there was an option for respondents to schedule an anonymous, semi-structured interview to further discuss the topic of workplace culture and their experiences or perceptions. These qualitative and semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to connect personally with various professionals to gain insight into how workplace culture was experienced, created, and contested.

Conducting interviews incorporates elements of reciprocity within the research process. Semi-structured interviewing techniques require the researcher to listen closely to the interviewees, to follow their narrative while reshaping questions in time. The act of deep listening on the part of the researcher and the dedication of time to perform that listening can be beneficial to the interviewee, who has already offered their time and vulnerability. In this way, the interview process may be mutually productive, instilling reciprocity into the process.<sup>3</sup>

Ten interviews were conducted, and interviewees ranged in their age, race and ethnicity, gender identity, profession, position in their workplace, and work experiences. Interviews were between 20 and 90 minutes, and a wide selection of topics were discussed, all of which were mostly relevant to aspects of workplace culture. Each interviewee was read a short preamble that contextualized the research and the role of the researcher, informed them on how their answers would be used, requested consent to record the interview, and provided a chance to ask their own questions about the research, the researcher, and the interview process.

Developing brief yet authentic relationships with volunteer interviewees is an important aspect of research on equity and inclusion as oftentimes individuals' experiences are reduced to a set of statistics. Keeping a personal aspect of this process as much as possible was important to the goals of the research.

<sup>3</sup> Galletta, "Conducting the Interview."

The recorded interview data was used in compiling the recommendations by determining what strategies were successful for designing more equitable and inclusive workplaces. Respondents often anecdotally reported ways in which their workplaces supported their employees through shifting workplace cultural practices. Many respondents discussed the importance of open and vulnerable conversation, opportunities for listening and accountability by leadership, and the presence of supportive knowledge sharing groups.

## **Data Analysis**

Once the survey was closed and 10 interviews had been conducted, the survey respondent data was "cleaned" by removing duplicate responses, separating short answer responses into more useful formats, and other small changes to enable analysis. Answers from the Likert Scale questions, which asked specifically about workplace cultural factors, were converted into numeric values. Strong disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neutral = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. For questions that asked about frequency of a cultural factor, never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4, always = 5. Once the responses were converted to a numeric value, the values could be averaged and compared for both different subgroups of respondents and different questions (Figure 2). The averages were used for two types of analysis, a ranking analysis, and a discrepancy analysis.

In much of the analysis, some subgroups of respondents with identities that are underrepresented in built environment design professions had very small sample sizes. This included subgroups such as Native American, American Indian, and Alaskan Native respondents, and Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, and 2-Spirit respondents. While responses from the small subgroups are invaluable, their small numbers do not enable rigorous analysis. For this reason, and for increased anonymity, subgroups were aggregated in some instances. Subgroups

were aggregated depending on whether they occupied privileged or non-privileged identities. Respondents of Color were aggregated in some analysis as they are not white, which is the privileged racial identity in workplace culture. For questions about gender, non-male subgroups were aggregated as they were not male, the privileged gender identity in the workplace. This includes women respondents, Non-Binary respondents, Gender Non-Conforming respondents, Genderqueer respondents, and 2-Spirit respondents.

These aggregated subgroups form the basis of the ranking analysis and the discrepancy analysis. It is important to this research to not erase responses from any individual or subgroup, regardless of size, and to be transparent about why aggregating subgroups was necessary. Of course, workplace cultural factors are deeply nuanced and experienced on individualistic levels, which vary by racial, ethnic, and gender identity (among other aspects of identity). The aggregation of certain subgroups is reductive to an extent. With a greater capacity for survey distribution and data analysis, future research will be able to disaggregate respondents to a higher degree for more specific findings.

The ranking analysis compared the averages for each question between different subgroups of respondents. The values were then ordered to determine the highest and lowest scoring factors, identified by how respondents agreed or disagreed that a factor was present. This revealed a ranking of cultural factors that received the lowest scores, indicating the areas of workplace culture that need most improvement. Comparing this ranked list between different respondent subgroups illuminated trends in how different groups of people perceived workplace culture. The first subgroup comparison was between white respondents and Respondents of Color. The second subgroup comparison was between male respondents and non-male respondents.

The discrepancy analysis used t-tests to determine statistically significant differences in the way subgroups responded to cultural factors. Determining how different subgroups responded in relation to one another regarding questions about cultural factors revealed a different list. This list was less connected to the overall score of each factor instead generated by the degree of difference in the answer by each subgroup. To perform the t-test, the average score for each subgroup, the number of respondents in each group, and the standard deviation of the subgroup responses are entered into an online calculator. The resulting p-value determines the statistical significance of the different subgroup responses. P-values lower than .05 are statistically significant.<sup>4</sup> The p-values for each cultural factor were then assessed and placed in descending order. This new list begins with the cultural factors that had the highest degree of statistically significant difference between subgroups.

Not all factors that are featured on the list of highest discrepancies were scored low on the Likert scale. Some of the factors received high average scores for all respondents, but the significant differences in how subgroups rated them revealed an uneven experience of work, through the perception of workplace culture. This resulted in two stories further discussed in the findings.

4. Gallo, "A Refresher on Statistical Significance."

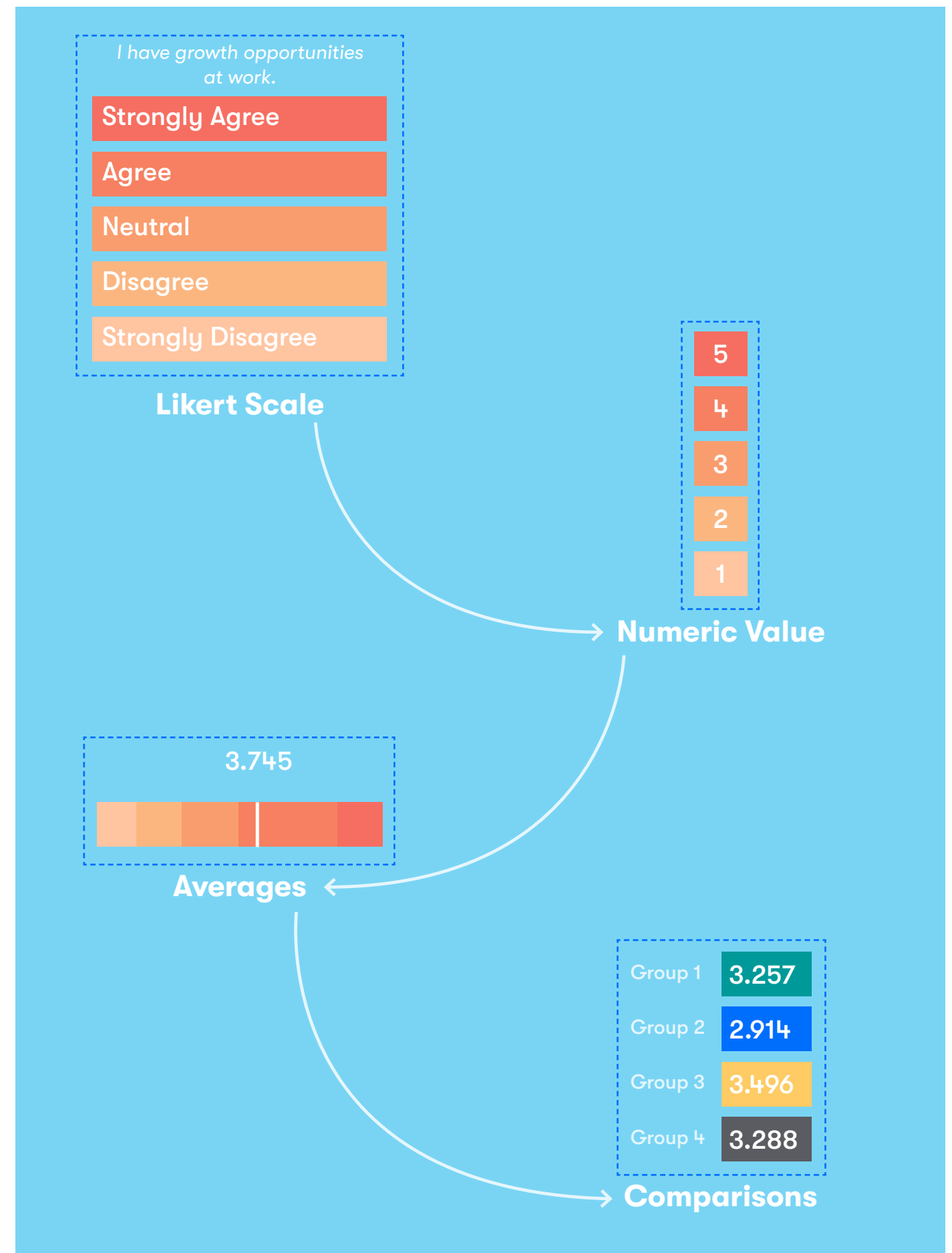


Figure 2. Analysis Process

# FINDINGS—

Findings Overview

Demographics

Position and Tenure

Retention

Primary Conclusions

Summary of Findings

## Findings Overview

The analysis dissects the perceptions of workplace culture from various respondent subgroups in order to inform equitable and inclusive workplace cultural shifts. The findings first show the demographic range of all respondents and briefly illustrate the need for this research through a snapshot of workplace representational gaps which reinforce previous research findings. Survey responses from respondent subgroups, analyzed by race and ethnic identity and gender identity, are compared and contrasted to reveal two simultaneous yet divergent stories of workplace culture. The first finding tells a story of alignment where the lowest scoring cultural factors are agreed upon by nearly all respondents, independent of race and ethnicity. The second findings tells a story of discrepancy which describes an uneven experience of work using statistically significant differences in the perceptions of cultural factors between respondent subgroups. These two stories discuss the presence and perceptions of different types of cultural factors, tangible and intangible, defined in Figure 13. While both types of factors are important, the data shows that intangible factors relate more strongly to predictions of retention and issues of equity. The improvement of both intangible and tangible cultural factors are important in designing a more equitable and inclusive workplace culture within built environment design practice.

## Demographics

### Respondent Race and Ethnicity

Out of 575 survey respondents, 415, or about 72% percent, identified as white. Many of the non-white racial and ethnic identities of the respondents are simultaneously under-representative of national demographics and aligned with demographic data from the architecture field, according to the EQxD 2018 survey. The little racial and ethnic diversity of respondents is indicative of issues of equity and diversity within built environment design professions.

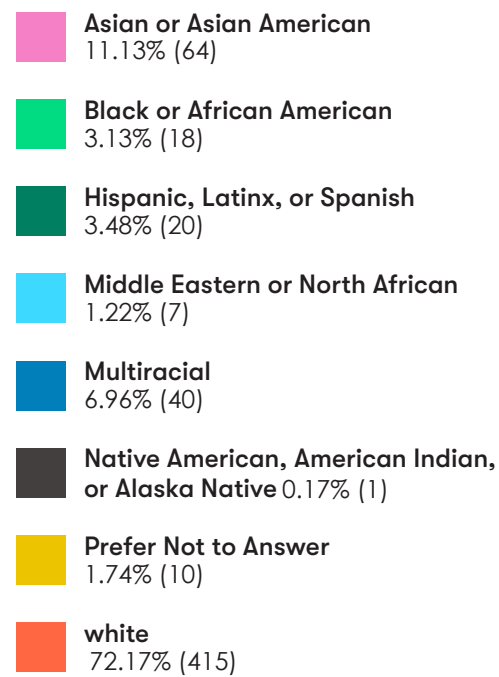
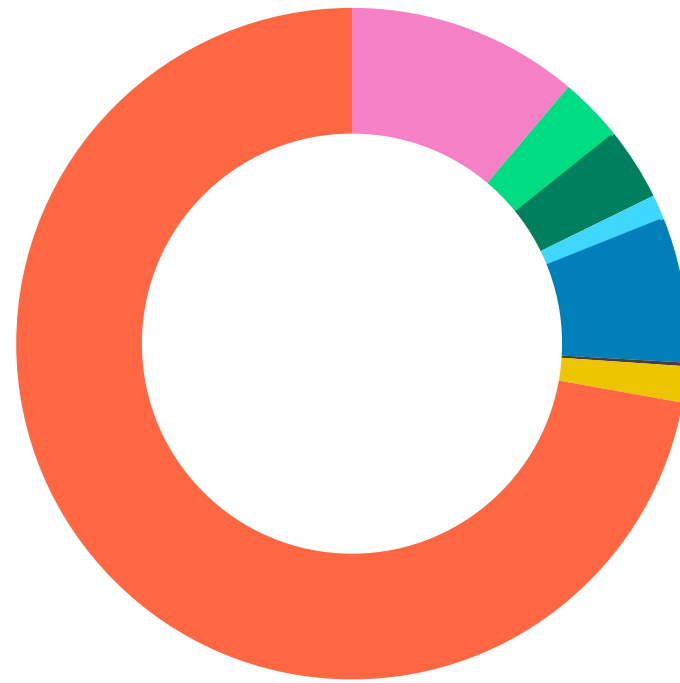


Figure 3. Respondent Race and Ethnicity

### Respondent Race and Ethnicity (Aggregated)

Just over one quarter, 26% of survey respondents, identified as People of Color. Respondents of Color were aggregated here to enable more rigorous comparative analysis, which is difficult with small sample sizes from several racial and ethnic identities. Aggregating small sample sizes protects individuals with increased anonymity.

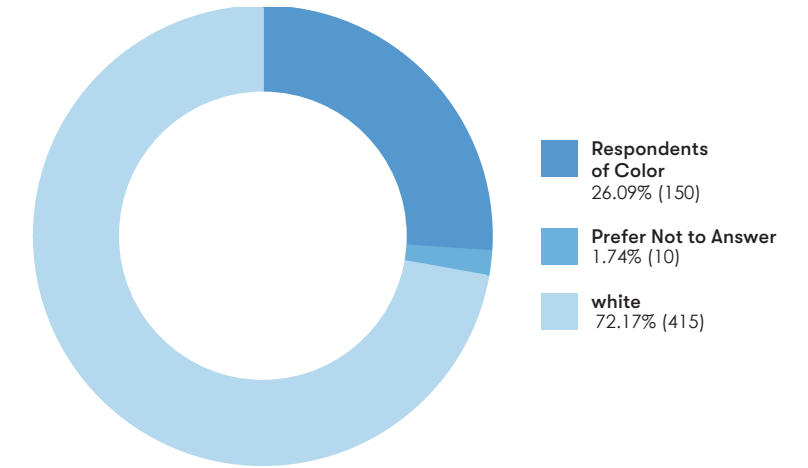


Figure 4. Respondent Race and Ethnicity (Aggregated)

### Respondent Gender

Nearly 60% of survey respondents identified as women and about 2% of respondents identified as Gender Non-Conforming (GNC), Non-Binary (NB), or 2-Spirit. The high percentage of women respondents illustrates progress of gender equity within built environment design professions. Women and GNC, NB, and 2-Spirit respondents were aggregated in the analysis to include respondents with small sample sizes and to protect individual identities with increased anonymity.

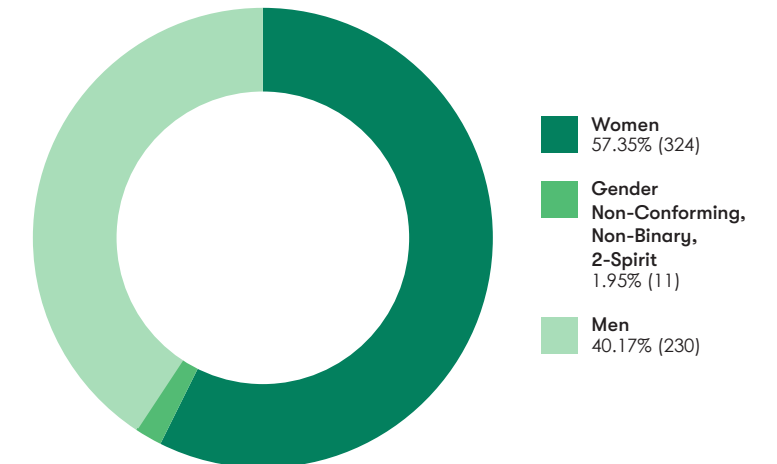


Figure 5. Respondent Gender

### Respondent Profession

The majority of respondents practice architecture and landscape architecture, each discipline representing around 40% of respondents. This is in part due to the survey distribution methods and the size of various professional networks. Subgroups of Interior Designers, Urban Designers, and Urban Planners are quite small and less representative of entire disciplines than architecture and landscape architecture. Specific disciplines were not dissected in the primary findings.

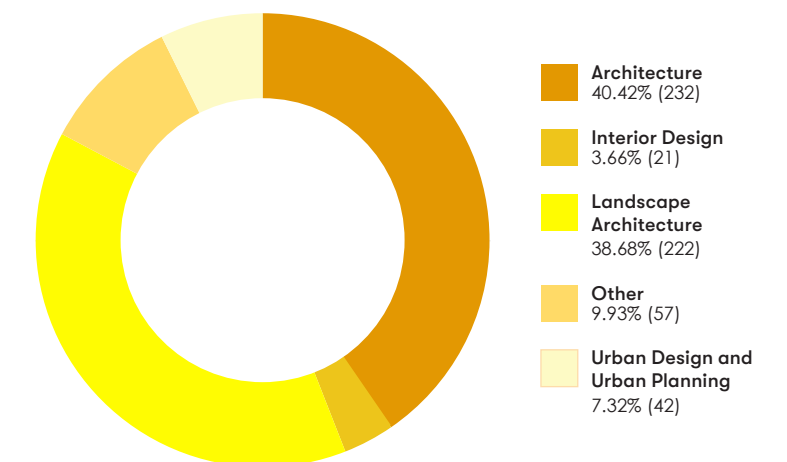


Figure 6. Respondent Professions

## Position and Tenure

### Race and Ethnicity in Workplace Position

Racial and ethnic minorities that have been historically excluded from built environment design professions are underrepresented in important professional metrics. This is true for position in the workplace. Aligned with findings from the 2018 EQxD survey, the percent of white employees in leadership and senior positions is disproportionately higher than the percentage of Respondents of Color. Entry level employees, however, reported proportionately higher representation of racial and ethnic minorities when aggregated. For some racial and ethnic subgroups, Black or African American, and Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish, representation is still far behind national demographic statistics.

- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Multiracial
- Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native
- Prefer Not to Answer
- white

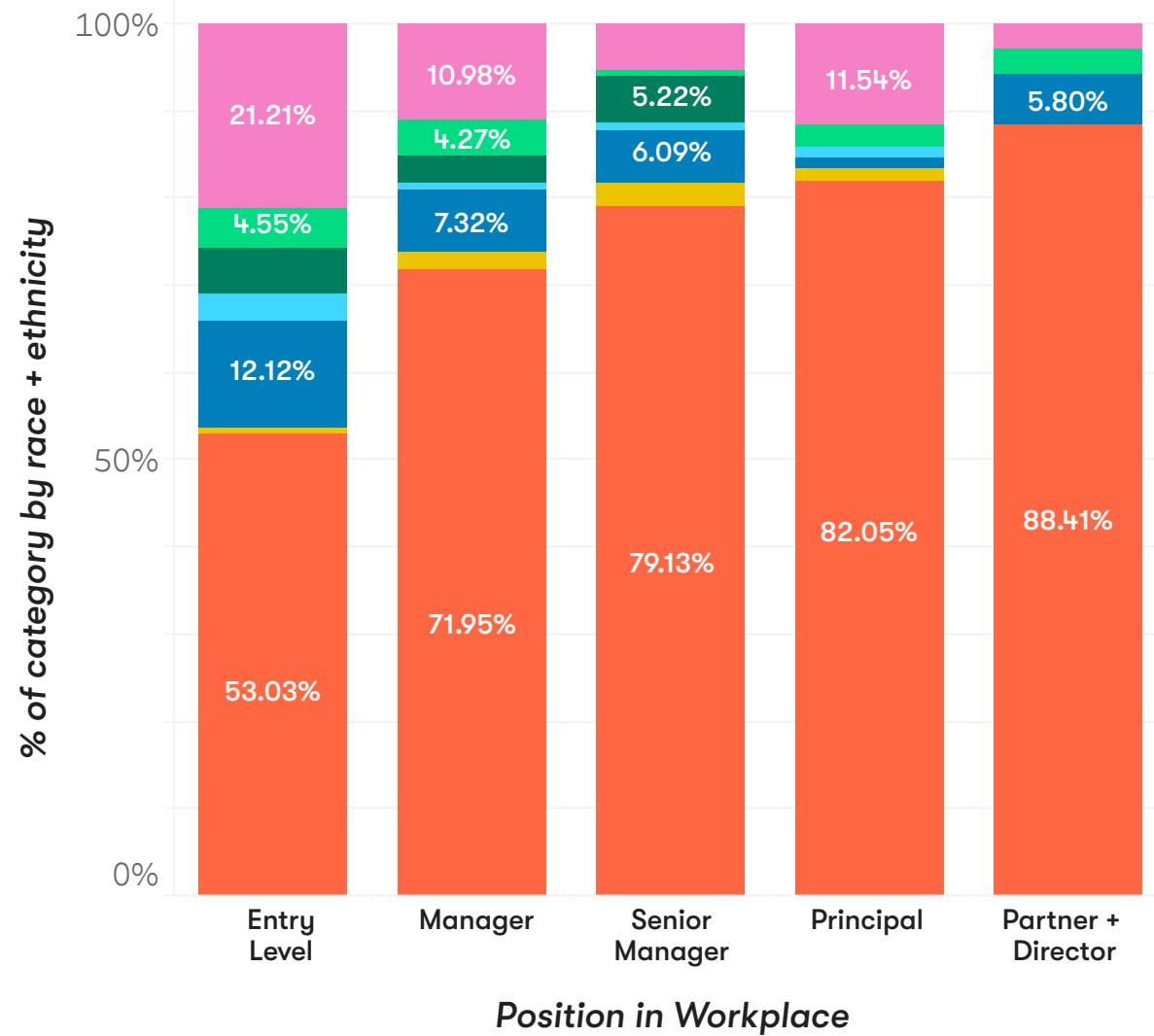


Figure 7. Position in Workplace by Race + Ethnicity

### Race and Ethnicity in Workplace Tenure

Similar patterns of underrepresentation exist in workplace tenure. The longer an employee has been practicing, the more likely they are to be white. At least 80% of employees who have practiced for 20 or more years are white. Employees who have been practicing for 1-4 years are 50% white, indicating a more racially and ethnically diverse cohort of employees than previous cohorts.

- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Multiracial
- Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native
- Prefer Not to Answer
- white

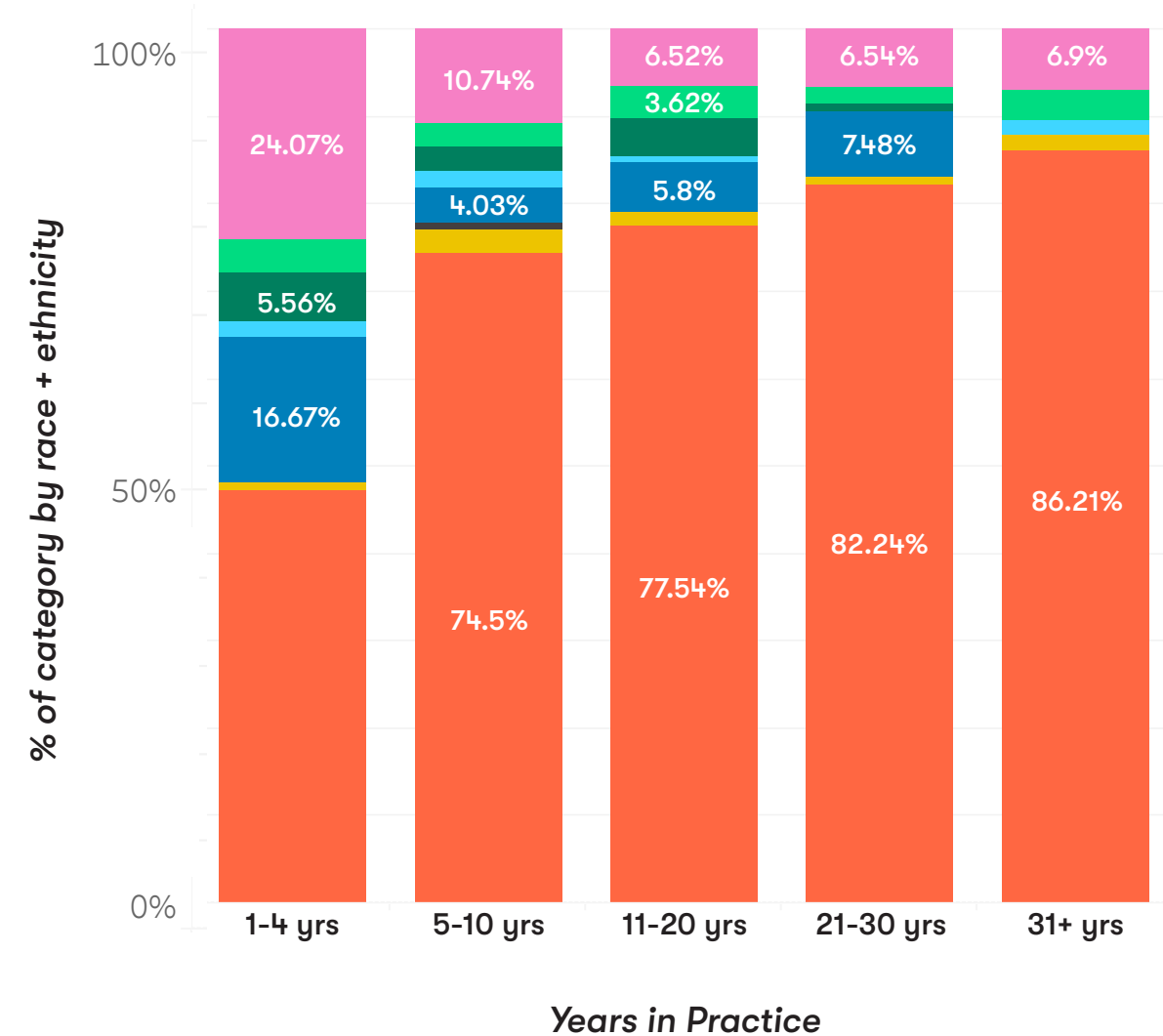


Figure 8. Years in Practice by Race + Ethnicity

## Race, Ethnicity, and Retention

Respondents reported how long they planned to stay at their current workplaces, which is an indication of predicted retention. When respondent's plans to stay are broken down by race and ethnicity, it is clear that white respondents report generally longer predicted retention rates. Nearly 60% of Respondents of Color have plans to leave their current workplaces within 5 years compared to only 38% of white respondents. 53% of white

respondents reported no plans to leave their current workplaces, compared to only 32% of Respondents of Color. From previous graphs (Figures 7 + 8), it is clear that employees entering built environment design professions are increasingly more racially and ethnically diverse. However, those employees are less likely than their white counterparts to be retained by their current workplaces.

**Predicted Retention of Respondents of Color**

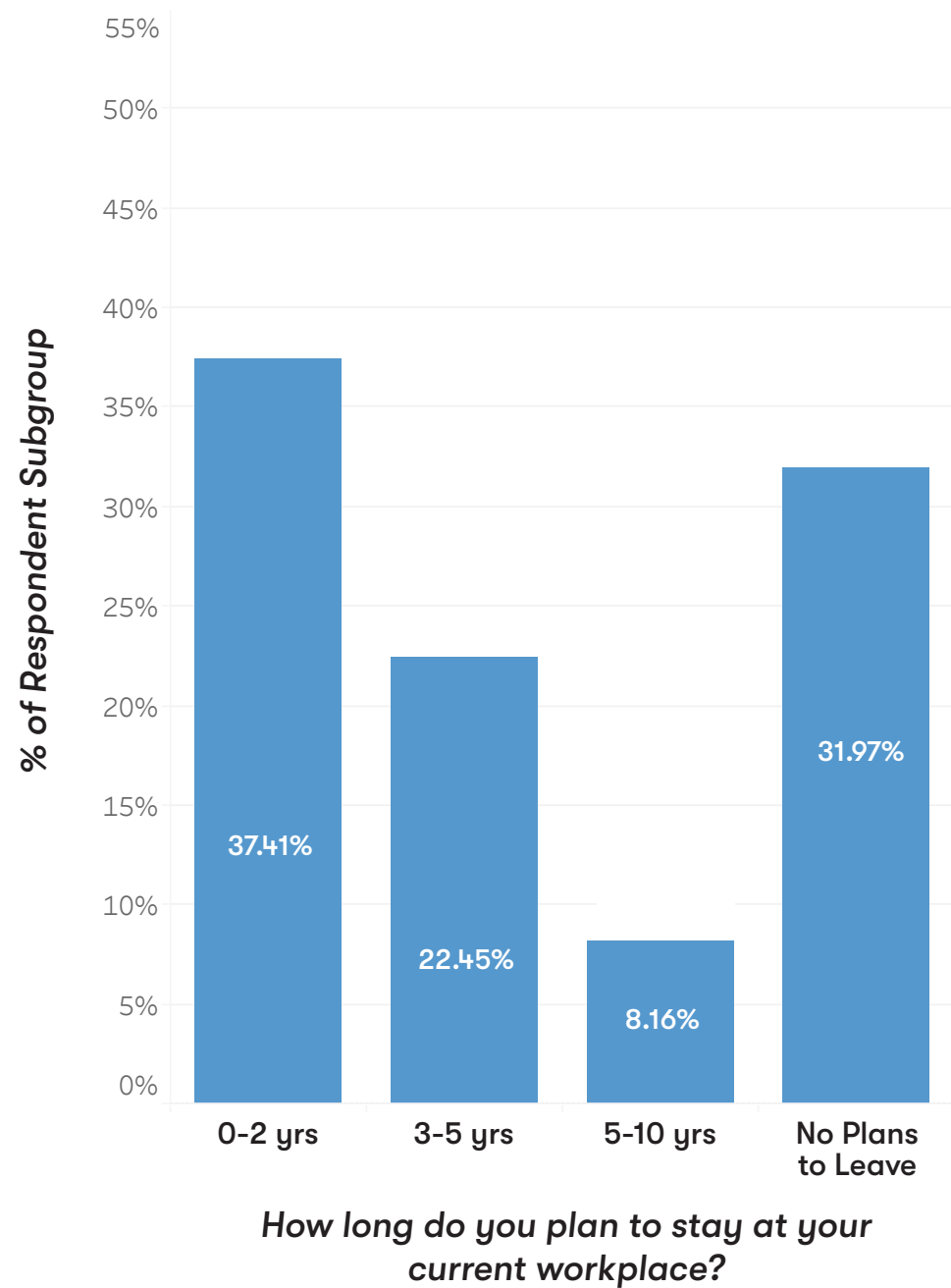


Figure 9. Respondent of Color Predicted Retention

**Predicted Retention of white respondents**

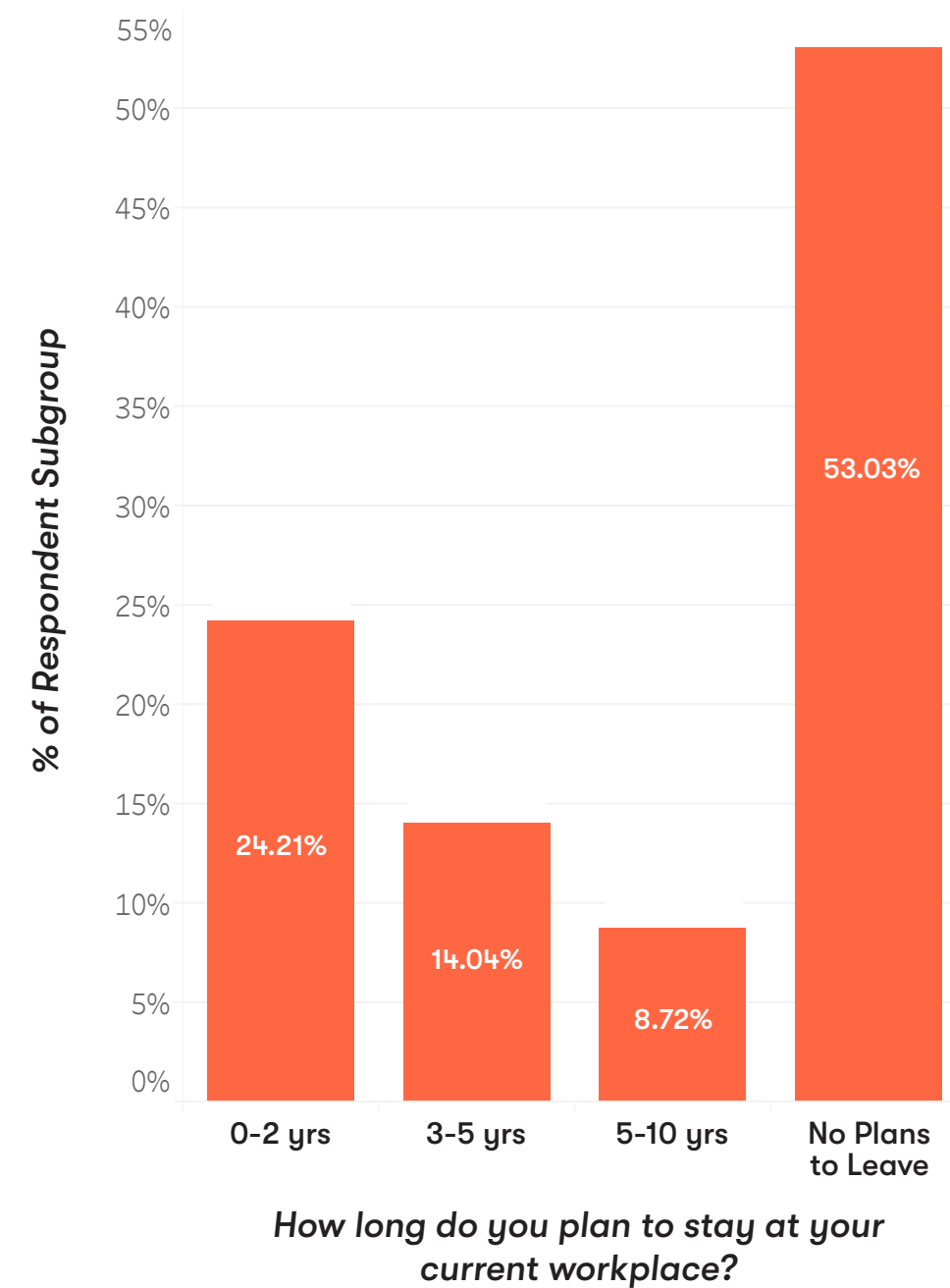


Figure 10. white respondent Predicted Retention

## Primary Conclusions—Finding #1: The Story of Alignment

The first summarizing analysis compared and ranked the lowest scoring cultural factors between different subgroups of respondents. Some of the cultural factors that received the lowest scores were still relatively positively ranked on the Likert scale. For the purposes of this study, the scores from Respondents of Color and white respondents were compared to determine how employees perceived and ranked workplace cultural factors based on race and ethnicity.

The ranking analysis revealed a highly similar list of factors that received the lowest scores between the two subgroups of respondents. The lowest scoring ten factors were compiled in order and compared. For Respondents of Color and white respondents, nine of the ten lowest scoring factors appeared on both lists, though occasionally in a slightly different order. The cultural factors that did not appear on both lists are marked in red. *Shared values*, which ranked 9th lowest on the list from Respondents of Color, did not appear in the top ten list from white respondents as it ranked 11th. Similarly, the cultural factor *input in decision making*, which was the 10th lowest factor for white respondents, ranked 15th for Respondents of Color.

On both lists, *pay scale transparency* and *work/life conflict* sat atop as the worst scoring culture factor and the second worst, respectively. *Clarity of criteria for success*, *internal communications*, and *feedback mechanisms* were all present in the five lowest scoring factors on both lists.

This demonstrates that most employees, independent of race and ethnicity, desire similar improvements to workplace culture. There is a general alignment in how people want to be treated at work and what individuals value, like equitable and transparent compensation systems, clear promotional criteria and feedback on performance.

It is also important to note that oftentimes by specifically accommodating the needs and improvement ideas of employees from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, workplaces can accommodate and improve workplace culture for everyone, including white employees. Shifting workplace cultures according to the list of lowest scoring factors by Respondents of Color would ameliorate negative aspects of workplace culture for white respondents as well.

Another important takeaway resides in the type of factors identified by these lists from the ranking analysis. Many of the lowest scoring factors have clearer and more actionable solutions than other cultural factors. Though the solutions to many low scoring factors are complex and nuanced, a path forward is more clearly identifiable. These are considered **tangible cultural factors**. They identify a specific need that can be ameliorated through a relatively short-term, low-expenditure effort that is more readily apparent. For example, the lowest scoring *pay scale transparency* can conceivably be fixed by making pay scales transparent. *Clarity of criteria for success* can be improved by providing a detailed rubric for promotion and advancement. *Workload manageability issues* and *work/life conflicts* can begin to be ameliorated through thoughtful managers and favorable policies around vacation or paid time off. Most respondents, independent of race and ethnicity, agreed that the tangible factors are in greatest need of improvement.

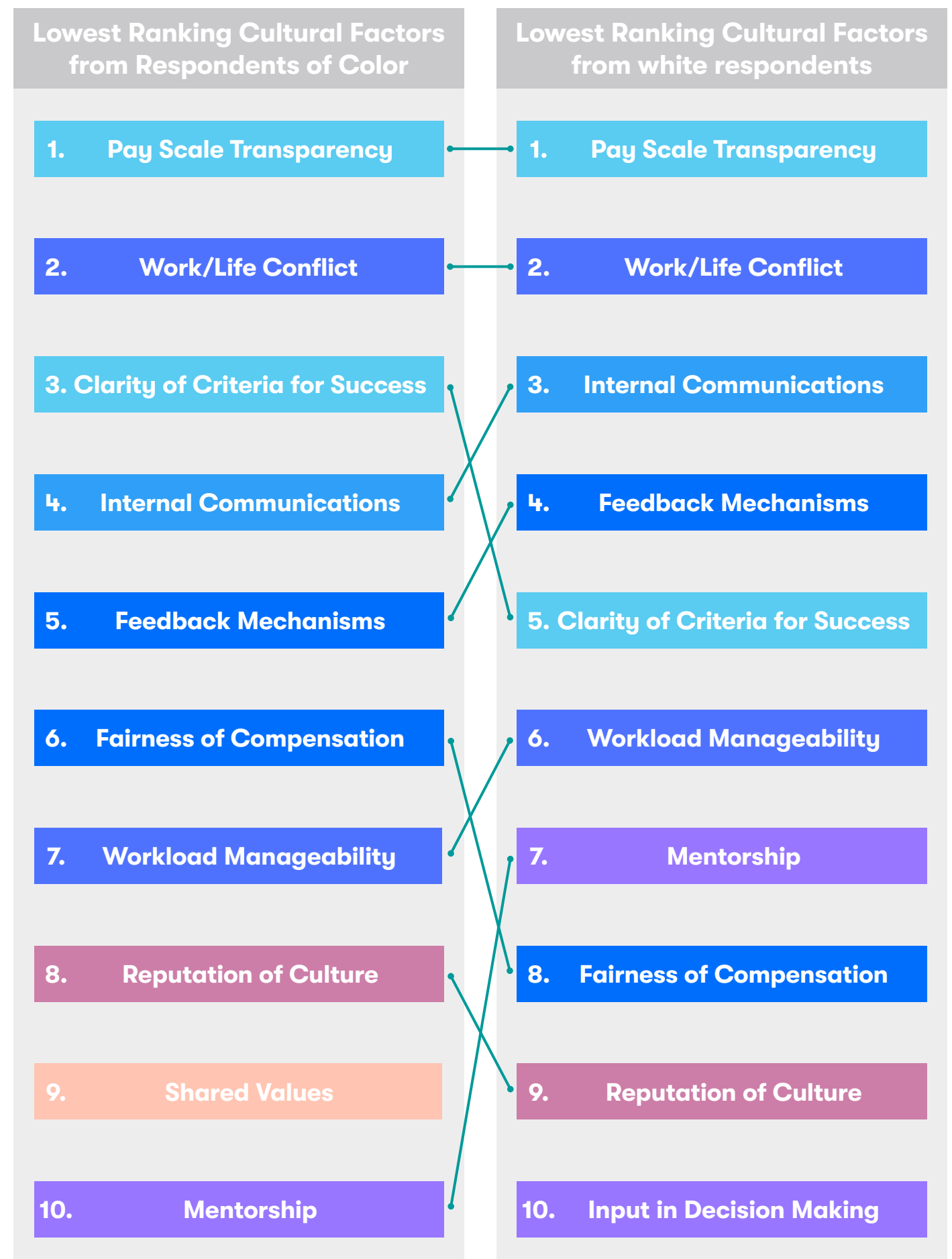


Figure 11. List of Lowest Ranking Factors by Subgroup



## Primary Conclusions—Finding #2: The Story of Discrepancy

The second summarizing analysis identified and ranked discrepancies in how different subgroups scored various culture factors. Rather than comparing average scores, t-tests generated a p-value to assess statistical difference in how the cultural factors were scored by different subgroups. The lower the p-value, the greater the statistical significance of a finding, and the larger the discrepancy in terms of score. Exploring the difference in how cultural factors were scored enables a closer look into the workplace perceptions of different subgroups. In this analysis Respondents of Color were analyzed in relation to white respondents, and women respondents (aggregated with GNC, NB, and 2-Spirit respondents) were analyzed in relation to men respondents.

At the top of the list for respondent subgroups by race and ethnicity is the cultural factors of *trust in colleagues*, *shared values*, *physical safety*, *opportunities to grow*, and a *sense of belonging*. For the list of greatest discrepancies between Women (+GNC, NB, 2-Spirit) and Men *psychological safety*, *harassment*, *input in decision making*, *workload manageability*, and *inclusion of all identities* illustrate the most divergent cultural factors.

Interestingly, although the type of factors on both lists are related, the two lists do not share more than three cultural factors. This provides evidence of two important ideas. Firstly, inequity in the workplace, expressed here as discrepant perceptions, are not the same for all respondent subgroups. Perceptions of workplace culture vary depending on the specific identities of a person including their race, ethnicity, and gender. By this logic, all aspects of identity would engender different workplace cultural perceptions. Secondly, through these lists it becomes readily apparent that the occupation of multiple identities which are historically marginalized or excluded within built environment professions would create a layered and compounding effect. Women of

Color, for example, could experience a greater number of discrepant perceptions based on their experience of workplace culture.

The differences revealed in these lists are in contrast to the previous lists generated by the ranking analysis which demonstrated alignment between respondent subgroups. In the lists of discrepancies a different type of factor emerges. The culture factors identified here are **intangible cultural factors**, which are typically driven by social and emotional experiences, and more personally determined. Intangible factors involve softer, more affective qualities like trust, shared values, growth opportunities, sense of belonging, inclusion, interpersonal relationships, safety, fairness, and finding work meaningful. Intangible culture factors do not have such simple fixes. They require a greater investment of time and thoughtfulness to build relationships and trust, align values, and feel belongingness and inclusion.

The discrepancy analysis generates findings central to racial equity and inclusion, as they deal concretely with an uneven experience of work. The findings from the discrepancy analysis inform the top four recommendations as building a culture of trust, aligned values, and positive relationships will benefit endeavors to improve tangible and other intangible factors alike.

### Greatest Discrepancy Between Subgroups by Race + Ethnicity

- |                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Trust in Colleagues   | 6. Finding Work Meaningful       |
| 2. Shared Values         | 7. Inclusion of All Identities   |
| 3. Physical Safety       | 8. Relationships with Colleagues |
| 4. Opportunities to Grow | 9. Psychological Safety          |
| 5. Sense of Belonging    | 10. Fairness of Compensation     |

### Greatest Discrepancy Between Subgroups by Gender

- |                                |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Psychological Safety        | 6. Collaboration                    |
| 2. Harassment                  | 7. Trust in Colleagues              |
| 3. Input in Decision Making    | 8. Physical Safety                  |
| 4. Workload Manageability      | 9. Pay Scale Transparency           |
| 5. Inclusion of All Identities | 10. Clarity of Criteria for Success |

Figure 12. Lists of Factors with Greatest Discrepancies Among Subgroups

## Spectrum of Tangibility

The first two primary findings begin to categorize workplace cultural factors into categories, tangible and intangible. This subdivision can be conceived of as a spectrum of tangibility rather than a fixed binary. While some cultural factors fit squarely within the definition of either tangible or intangible, many more exist somewhere inbetween, often leaning

to one side or the other. This spectrum is useful in identifying different types of workplace cultural factors and sorting them based on their relative difficulty of implementation or improvement. Understanding the different implications of this spectrum can help workplaces know which workplace culture improvements are low hanging-fruit that would

appease everyone, versus those with complex social solutions that require greater investments of time, resources, vulnerability, and thoughtfulness. The following primary finding suggests a relationship between one side of the tangibility spectrum with predicted retention.

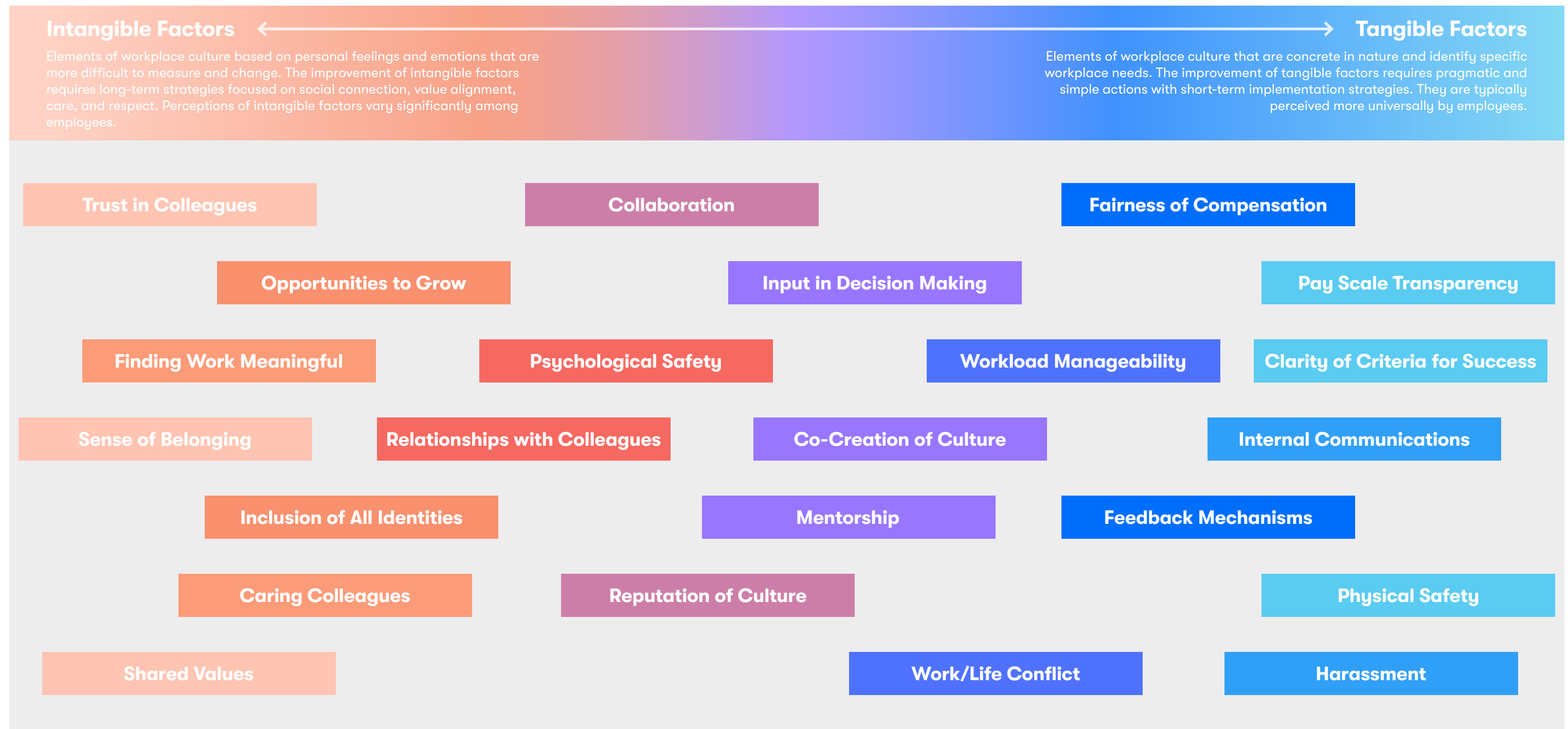


Figure 13. Workplace Cultural Factors along a Spectrum of Tangibility

### Primary Conclusions—Finding #3: Intangible Factors and Retention

When compared to the question about retention, intangible cultural factors displayed stronger relationships to predicted retention than tangible culture factors. The following histograms compare five intangible factors with five tangible factors. As shown in the legend, the darkest color represents the strongest agreement about the presence of a culture

factor. For intangible cultural factors, the column of respondents with no plans to leave has the greatest proportion of darker color bars. This means that the more likely someone is to feel the presence of intangible cultural factors, compared to tangible factors, the more likely that they have no plans to leave their current workplace.



Figure 14. Explanatory Sample Graph

### Intangible Factors

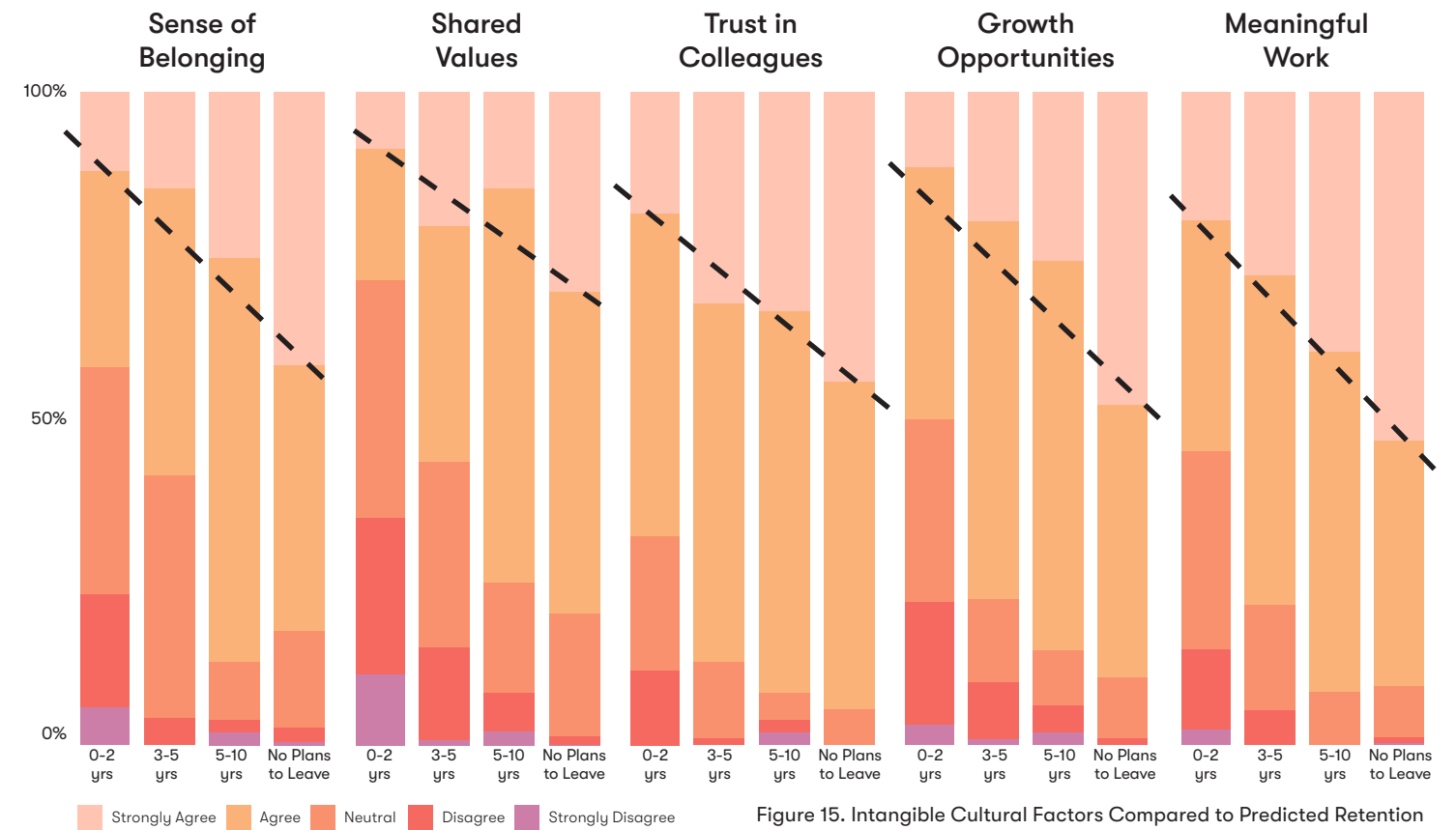


Figure 15. Intangible Cultural Factors Compared to Predicted Retention

### Tangible Factors

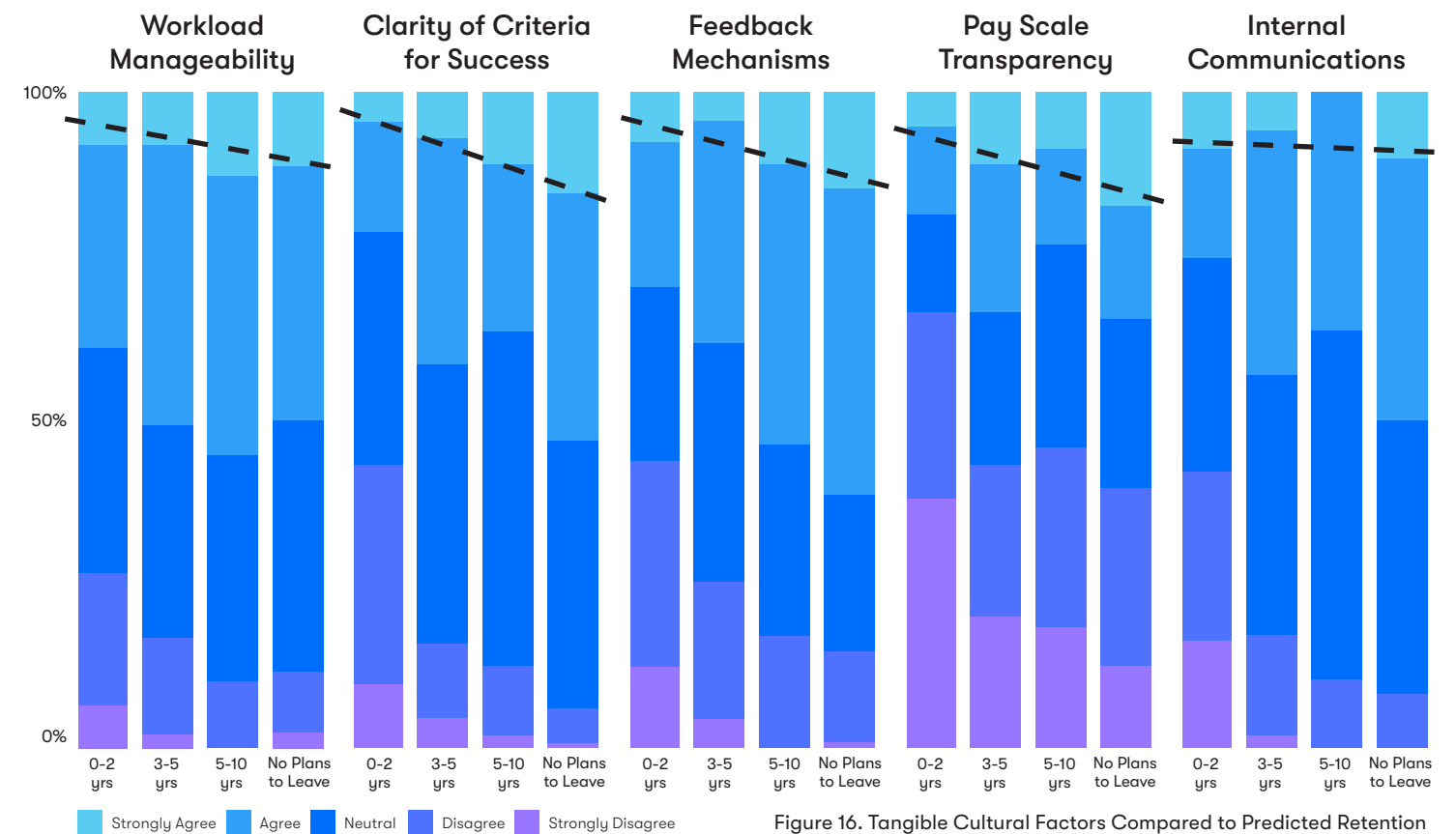


Figure 16. Tangible Cultural Factors Compared to Predicted Retention

## Summary of Findings

1. The **demographics** of survey respondents match previous studies of built environment design professions and are still far **behind national racial and ethnic demographics.**
2. The self-reported **predicted retention** (measured in number of years expected to stay at one's current workplace) is **higher among white respondents than Respondents of Color**, indicating equity gaps in overall retention ability of workplaces.
3. Two primary summary analyses revealed divergent stories—
  - A. The ten **lowest scoring cultural factors**, indicating high needs for improvement, were **similar among white respondents and Respondents of Color.** These factors tend to be 'tangible factors' with specific problems and more clearly identifiable, actionable solutions.
  - B. The **cultural factors** with the **most discrepant scores between subgroups**, indicating an uneven experience of the workplace, are categorized by **more personal, social, and emotional** qualities. These tend to be 'intangible factors,' and are less easily remedied and require less obvious solutions with greater time investments.
4. When **compared to** self-reported **predicted retention, intangible factors displayed stronger relationships than tangible factors.** This further emphasizes the important of intangible factors with an equitable and just workplace.

*"The high tide  
will raise  
all boats."*

-Interviewee on motivating principles,  
*Equity at Work, 2021*

# RECOMMENDATIONS—

**Recommendations Overview**

**10 Recommendations**

**Further Reading + Resources**

## **Recommendations Overview**

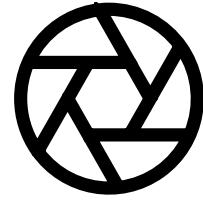
The resultant recommendations come from both stories in the findings. The first four recommendations attempt to ameliorate negative workplace perceptions identified in the story of discrepancies by focusing on intangible factors. The specific actionable items are extracted from anecdotal interview data, where interviewees described measures taken within their workplaces that were successful in building trust and aligning values.

The remaining six recommendations are pulled from the lowest ranking cultural factors that emerged from the ranking analysis. Though their execution will be nuanced and complex, these recommendations address specific and clear issues identified by all respondents. These tangible factors can be shifted on a shorter timeline and with more understandable causes and effects.

Each recommendation is laid out on the following pages with brief descriptions and links for further learning and research. Exploring specific execution of the recommendations was beyond the scope of this project, but future endeavors around these topics and the implementation of the recommendations is exciting, highly important, and full of potential.

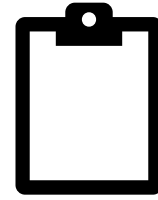
The set of recommendations is intended to be used in whatever way is most useful for each workplace. Workplaces are highly varied in their structures, sizes, cultures, equity efforts, and goals. By creating a menu options of equitable workplace cultural practices, workplaces are able to pick and choose one or more recommendations to implement, discuss, or explore based on their own internal analysis of their workplace culture.

## 1. Form a Justice and Equity Committee



The creation of a justice and equity committee (often J.E.D.I. Justice Equity Diversity Inclusion) is an important first step in advancing equitable practice within any size or type of firm or organization. JEDI Committees are useful in identifying weaknesses surrounding equity in the workplace, developing a cohesive and responsive action plan, engaging leadership, and helping to enact change in the workplace. The investment of company time and resources into a JEDI committee is an important demonstration of commitment to equitable practice by a firm or organization.

## 2. Assess Workplace Culture Regularly



The survey for this research is valuable for its approach at an industry scale, but it is important to measure perceptions at a firm level in order to know how best to move forward with shifting culture. Performing regular cultural assessments allows for increased levels of employee feedback and provides metrics for measuring improvement. Regular cultural assessments can be done through an external consulting practice or through an internal mechanism. If assessments are performed internally, it is important for feedback to be collected anonymously to protect individuals and elicit honest feedback.

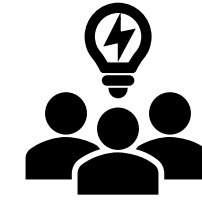
## 3. Conduct Listening Sessions



Interview and anecdotal data revealed the importance of being heard. Employees frequently reported that conversations, especially conversations where leadership was doing much of the listening, were highly productive in aligning values, sharing important experiences, and bridging cultural divides. According to author and business consultant Janice Gassam Asare, “Listening sessions can be an instrumental way to support employees following a highly traumatic event, especially employees from marginalized and underrepresented racial groups.”<sup>1</sup> Conducting listening sessions can ameliorate tense working environments, provide employees an opportunity to be heard, and hold leadership accountable to problems within workplace cultures.

1. Asare, “3 Considerations To Make When Conducting Employee Listening Sessions.”

## 4. Create Coalition Groups



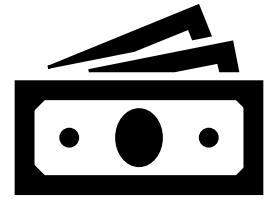
Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and Affinity Groups are popular methods of bringing together employees with similar backgrounds and identities within a workplace.<sup>1</sup> While traditionally created to provide comfort and support to employees from underrepresented minority groups, ERGs and Affinity Groups have been criticized for siloing important conversations about identity, and further marginalizing some employees.<sup>2</sup> Coalition groups are based on ideas, values, and oriented around specific goals within the realm of equity and inclusion.<sup>3</sup> A coalition group can be a book club, conversation group, safe space for BIPOC employees, or other organized groups. To avoid siloing of efforts, company sponsored time should be dedicated for the sharing of productive findings. Interview data revealed the success of these groups in various built environment design practices. Individuals labeled coalition groups as helpful in initiating conversations and aligning values among employees and leaders.

1. Taylor, “Today’s Affinity Groups.”

2. Young and Hockfield, “Bringing the Curtain Down on Affinity Groups.”

3. <https://sites.google.com/view/antiracismeveryday/home>

## 5. Address Pay Scale Transparency



Pay scale transparency as a workplace cultural factor received the lowest scores from all subgroups of respondents. This indicates that the absence of pay scale transparency was noted more than any other factor. According to New York Times journalist, Kristin Wong, pay scale transparency motivates employees to be more productive, collaborative, and to work harder.<sup>1</sup> Pay scale transparency removes the mystery associated with compensation that often reinforces discrimination and gendered and racial wage gaps. Of course, pay scale transparency does not ensure pay equity, nor does it prevent company in-fighting over compensation. However, worker's rights advocates, and according to this research, built environment design professionals, urge firms and organizations to adopt transparent pay scales.

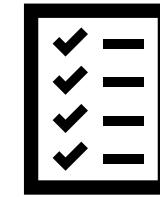
1. Wong, "Want to Close the Pay Gap?"

## 6. Address Work-Life Conflicts



Work-Life conflict is a common issue within built environment design professions. Long work weeks and demanding deadlines quickly create cultures of over-working and often end in burnout. Work-life conflicts can prevent an employee from being productive and engaged. Work-life conflict was a workplace cultural factor that received low scores among survey respondents. To ameliorate negative effects of work-life conflicts, some organizations increase flexibility around work schedules, including arrival and departure times, as well as hours worked per day or week. Updating vacation policies and paid time off policies is important in supporting employees in managing their own work-life conflicts as well. Other strategies involve different kinds of social support to help employees feel more connected to both work and home by enabling folks to perform work tasks at home.

## 7. Clarify Criteria for Success



Within this research, 'clarity of criteria for success' received the third lowest score of all cultural factors by respondents. A similar finding emerged from the 2018 EQxD survey, where 35% of respondents reported not knowing the criteria for promotion.<sup>1</sup> According to the AIA Guides to Equitable Practice, the presence of clear promotional criteria better supports the career advancement of employees from underrepresented minority groups.<sup>2</sup> When left unclarified, promotional criteria often defaults to informal professional and social networks which tend to be more insular and homogeneous. The clarification and documentation of promotional rubrics furthers the goals of equitable practice by removing unconscious bias and selecting individuals on objective talent and fulfillment of clear criteria.

1. Pitts et al., "2018 EQxD Survey."

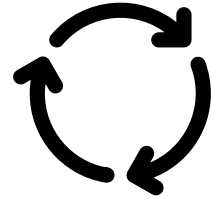
2. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

## 8. Unify Internal Communications



Inequitable access to information is damaging to positive workplace cultures and leads to misunderstandings and confusing messaging. Those without required information are left out of important decision-making opportunities or can be socially and professionally marginalized within a workplace. Clarifying and unifying internal communications is a way to provide inclusive access to knowledge and information within a workplace.

## 9. Tailor Feedback Mechanisms



As the workplace becomes more inclusive of diverse employees, it can be expected that the ways in which employees desire feedback will diversify as well. Respondents from the survey reported low scores for satisfaction with the level of feedback they receive. Tailoring specific feedback mechanisms allows managers and employers to cater to varying needs of employees around feedback. Allowing flexibility and agency in feedback frequency and delivery can empower employees to get the support they desire and improve at more personally targeted rates. Furthermore, employers who are responsive to the feedback needs of employees are able to advance equitable practices by providing workers exactly what they need to be successful.

## 10. Formalize Internal and External Mentorship Programs



The presence of mentors was the 6th lowest scored workplace cultural factor. Mentorship is highly important in the development of professionals early in their career and for their workplaces. Formal mentorship programs attract more diverse talent as it demonstrates a commitment by the firm to professional growth and cultural inclusion.<sup>1</sup> Providing pathways for employees to seek mentors with aligned identities or experiences can help retain and recruit employees. Extending mentorship beyond the workplace into youth mentorship programs can influence a younger generation of future employees.

1. AIA Equity and Future of Architecture Committee, "Guides for Equitable Practice."

*"We can sit  
in the  
uncomfortableness  
together."*

-Interviewee on equitable practice process,  
Equity at Work, 2021



## 1. Form a Justice and Equity Committee

### —JEDI Collaborative

<https://jedicolaborative.com/how-of-jedi/>

This downloadable guide outlines a step-by-step process to creating a JEDI committee and provides useful considerations.

### —Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committees: Getting Started Guide

<https://equity.ubc.ca/resources/activating-inclusion-toolkit/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-committees-getting-started-guide/>

A tool from the Equity and Inclusion Office at the University of British Columbia to support units, departments, faculties, and divisions in forming equity, diversity, and inclusion committees.

## 2. Assess Workplace Culture Regularly

### —Organizational Cultural Evolution Assessment Navigator (OCEAN)

<https://cultureevolution.com/>

Online workplace culture benchmarking tool that facilitates a connection to a culture consultant or provides a free assessment tool.

### —MyHub Cultural Audits: How To Assess Your Workplace Culture

<https://www.myhubintranet.com/cultural-audits/>

Useful article explaining the utility of a cultural audit and how to begin the process, including what kinds of questions to ask.

## 3. Conduct Listening Sessions

### —3 Considerations To Make When Conducting Employee Listening Sessions

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2021/01/07/3-considerations-to-make-when-conducting-employee-listening-sessions/?sh=666a9ae66aa2>

Janice Gassam Asare provides three tips for successful listening sessions: enlist the help of a

professional, make it optional, and don't soften language or police others' tone.

### —Leadership Is a Conversation

<https://hbr.org/2012/06/leadership-is-a-conversation>

Authors Groysberg and Slind outline four strategies for organizational conversation and tips for listening actively and intentionally.

### —Six Ways to Run a Listening Session

<https://training.npr.org/2016/02/16/six-ways-to-run-a-listening-session/>

Alison Macadam provides important considerations when planning a company listening session including choosing a clear goal and clarifying the role of a moderator. Six options for listening session activities are explained.

## 4. Create Coalition Groups

### —Bringing the Curtain Down on Affinity Groups

<https://diversityjournal.com/20594-bringing-the-curtain-down-on-affinity-groups/>

Stephen Young and Barbara Hockfield critique ERGs and Affinity Groups and suggest Cultural Equity Teams to specifically address issues of equity within the workplace.

### —Today's Affinity Groups: Risks and Rewards

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/affinity-groups-risks-rewards.aspx#:~:text=Affinity%20groups%2C%20also%20known%20as,several%20legal%20and%20practical%20issues.>

Mishell Parreno Taylor outlines the risks and rewards of affinity groups in today's professional cultural climate including social media considerations and issues with discrimination.

## 5. Address Pay Scale Transparency

### —Should You Share Your Salary With Co-Workers? Here's What Experts Say

<https://time.com/5353848/salary-pay-transparency-work/>

Samantha Cooney from Time Magazine weighs pros and cons of pay scale transparency.

### —Want to Close the Pay Gap? Pay Transparency Will Help

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/20/smarter-living/pay-wage-gap-salary-secrecy-transparency.html>

Kristin Wong of the New York Times positions pay scale transparency as a method of closing the wage gap, and as a starting point for equitable workplace practices.

### —How Transparent Can Managers Be About Pay?

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/people-managers/pages/pay-transparency-and-managers.aspx>

An article from the Society of Human Resource Managers strikes a balance between publishing individual salaries and providing transparency at a group or pay grade level. Some companies provide transparency around how salaries are determined, and bonuses are calculated.

## 6. Address Work/Life Conflicts

### —Reducing Work-Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't?

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/reports-publications/occupational-health-safety/reducing-work-life-conflict-what-works-what-doesn.html#a3>

An in-depth study of work life conflict from the Canadian Federal Government. The report suggests organizations implement alternative work arrangements, flexible hours, and supportive management and policies to ameliorate conflicts.

### —From Understanding Work Life Conflict to Having Work Life Counterbalance

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/from-understanding-work-life-conflict-having-korican-lajtman-phd>

Professor Mirna Korican Lajtman offers counterbalance as a goal to ameliorate the negative effects of work life conflicts, such as under productivity and detrimental health effects.

### —The Three Faces of Work-Family Conflict

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2010/01/25/7194/the-three-faces-of-work-family-conflict/>

A comprehensive history of work life conflict in the US since the 1970's, broken down by low-income, middle-income, and professional working classes. The authors include suggested policy changes and structural support for US workers.

## 7. Clarify Criteria for Success

### —Clarify Your Promotion Process!

<http://eqxdesign.com/actions/2017/2/28/clarify-your-promotion-process-publish-written-criteria-for-promotion-within-your-office-or-encourage-your-employer-to-do-so>

This brief article from EQxD explains why this action is important and provides further resources and encouragement on how to bring about this change either as an employer or employee.

### —How to Make Your Company Less Sexist and Racist

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/03/how-to-make-your-company-less-sexist-and-racist/388931/>

Writer Katherine Reynolds Lewis offers examples of bias interrupters for both employers and employees. She further discusses the nuanced differences of how employees with different gender and racial identities behave around topics of promotion and advancement.

## 8. Unify Internal Communications

### —Equity, Power Hoarding, and Internal Communications

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/equity-power-hoarding-internal-communications-stephanie-j-ramos>

Mount Sinai Health System's Director of Internal Communications, Stephanie Ramos, discusses internal communications in the context of equity and power hoarding. She suggests standardizing communication channels and providing equitable access to information.

### —In the Loop | Why Internal Communications Matter

<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/why-internal-communications-matter>

Writer Yejin Lee provides useful tips for building inclusive workplace cultures through internal communication practices.

### —Best Practices for Effective Internal Communications

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2016/08/12/best-practices-for-effective-internal-communications/?sh=6c72af4d7292>

Rebecca Liff suggests internal communications best practices such as giving employees a voice, paring down communications, and being clear and specific about target audience and intention of message.

## 9. Tailor Feedback Mechanisms

### —Giving Feedback: 5 Elements Of A More Inclusive Approach

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hannahart/2021/05/13/giving-feedback-5-elements-of-a-more-inclusive-approach/?sh=42ff685a37fa>

Executive coach and writer, Hanna Hart, describes the importance of specific, consistent, clear, and equitable feedback. She demonstrates how to acknowledge power differentials, either in identity or job position, and challenges employers and managers to check biases and assumptions.

### —Women of Color Get Less Support at Work. Here's How Managers Can Change That

<https://hbr.org/2019/03/women-of-color-get-less-support-at-work-heres-how-managers-can-change-that?registration=success>

An article by Zuhairah Washington and Laura Morgan Roberts discusses the difference in workplace support received by Women of Color in the form of lack of mentorship or sponsorship, credit where due, and honest feedback.

## 10. Formalize Internal and External Mentorship Programs

### —Mentorship as a Tool for Growth, Inclusion, and Equity

<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/mentorship-diversity-inclusion>

Career coach and writer, Yejin Lee, discusses strategies for harnessing mentorship programs to achieve equity and inclusion within the workplace. Lee explores the idea of reverse mentoring, where mentorship is positioned as mutually beneficial as the mentee has something significant to offer the relationship. This asset-based strategy is equitable as it figures new talent, regardless of professional experience or personal identity, as important and valuable.

### —How Mentorship Can Make Workplaces More Equitable

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebekahbastian/2019/08/26/how-mentorship-can-make-workplaces-more-equitable/?sh=48717f8126c2>

Rebekah Bastian discusses the role of representation within mentorship programs. The dramatic underrepresentation of racial and gender minority groups in leadership or high-level positions creates a negative loop, where it becomes harder for younger, and more junior employees to find mentors with similar identities.

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# APPENDIX—

Survey Materials

Additional Data Visualization

## Survey Materials

### Equity at Work: Designing an Inclusive and Equitable Workplace Culture

Hello!

Your input is needed for an academic survey on equitable design practice. This survey seeks to identify perceptions of workplace culture held by a wide range of design professionals in the fields of Architecture, Urban Planning and Urban Design, Landscape Architecture, and Interior Design. Your contribution will help generate recommendations to assess design practice workplace culture and make changes towards a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

The survey asks demographic questions; however, no identifiable information is collected. All responses are anonymous. Completing the survey should take less than ten minutes to complete.

At the end of the survey, there is an opportunity to sign up for an online interview if you would like to share more information on the topic. You will be asked to use an email address to schedule and conduct the interview. Your email address will be unattached from any data you provide and discarded at the end of the records retention period, as required by state law.

**Follow this link to the survey.**

Your participation is greatly appreciated! The survey will remain open until the end of March. For questions about the research, see contact information below.

**Student Researcher:**

**Jake Minden**, MLA Candidate, Department of Landscape Architecture.

This research is part of the Applied Research Consortium (ARC) through the University of Washington College of Built Environments.

### Workplace Culture Survey

Your participation is greatly appreciated! The input you provide is anonymous and will contribute to a student research project aimed at assessing and improving workplace culture for more just and equitable design practice.

Completing the survey should take less than 10 minutes. At the end there is an option to schedule an anonymous interview should you like to share more.

To answer this survey, please consider your workplace as it was pre-pandemic. If you have any questions, please reach out to [Jminden@uw.edu](mailto:Jminden@uw.edu).

### Demographic Questions

All results are anonymous and demographic information will not be used to identify respondents.

1. What is your race or ethnicity? Select all that apply.
  - a. White
  - b. Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish
  - c. Black or African American
  - d. Asian or Asian American
  - e. Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native
  - f. Middle Eastern or North African
  - g. Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
  - h. \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Prefer Not to Answer
  
2. What is your gender identity?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-Binary
  - d. Gender Non-Conforming
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Prefer Not to Answer
  
3. What is your age?
  - a. 18-30 years
  - b. 31-40 years
  - c. 41-50 years
  - d. 51-60 years
  - e. 61+ years
  - f. Prefer Not to Answer
  
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - a. High School

- b. Bachelor's Degree
- c. Master's Degree
- d. PhD or Higher
- e. Prefer Not to Answer

5. Which region best describes where you primarily live and/or work?
- a. West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)
  - b. Midwest (IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI)
  - c. South (AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV)
  - d. Northeast (CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT)
  - e. Outside of the US
  - f. Prefer Not to Answer

### Employment Questions

Reminder to consider your workplace pre-pandemic, if possible.

1. Which discipline best describes your profession?
  - a. Architecture
  - b. Urban Planning or Urban Design
  - c. Landscape Architecture
  - d. Interior Design
  - e. Other
2. How long have you practiced in this profession?
  - a. Less than 1 year
  - b. 1-4 years
  - c. 5-10 years
  - d. 11-20 years
  - e. 21-30 years
  - f. 30+ years
3. Which title best describes your current position?
  - a. Intern
  - b. Entry level
  - c. Manager
  - d. Senior Manager
  - e. Principal
  - f. Partner/Director
  - g. Retired
4. How long have you worked at your current workplace?
  - a. Less than 1 year
  - b. 1-4 years

- c. 5-10 years
- d. 11-20 years
- e. 21-30 years
- f. 30+ years

5. Are you a licensed or accredited practitioner of your profession?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. What disciplines are represented at your workplace? Select all that apply.
  - a. Architecture
  - b. Urban Planning or Urban Design
  - c. Landscape Architecture
  - d. Interior Design
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Which of the following sectors best describes your workplace type?
  - a. Public Sector
  - b. Private Sector
  - c. Non-Profit Sector
8. Are there multiple offices or locations within the structure of your workplace?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. How many people work at your workplace? (If there are multiple locations, consider that which you feel most closely connected to.)
  - a. 1-4
  - b. 5-20
  - c. 21-50
  - d. 51-100
  - e. 101-200
  - f. 201-500
  - g. 500+
10. How many hours do you typically work in one week?
  - a. Less than 20
  - b. 21-30
  - c. 31-40
  - d. 41-50
  - e. 51+

**Workplace Culture Questions**

1. Please describe the culture at your workplace in 3 words.

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your workplace?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I trust the people I work with.					
I have opportunities to grow at work.					
I find my work meaningful.					
I feel a sense of belonging at work.					
I consider myself a co-creator of workplace culture.					
I feel fairly compensated.					
Pay scales are transparent.					

3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your workplace?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have positive relationships with the people I work with.					
My workplace is inclusive of all aspects of my identity.					
People at work care about me.					
My relationships are more collaborative than competitive.					
I have mentors.					
I am satisfied with the amount of feedback I receive.					
Harassment of any kind is not tolerated.					

4. How often are the following statements about your workplace true?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I speak highly of the workplace culture to others.					
My input is valued in decision making.					
The criteria for success is clear.					
My workload is manageable.					

Internal communications are consistent regardless of source					
My work and life are in conflict.					
I feel physically safe at work.					
I feel psychologically safe at work. (defined as: comfort in making mistakes, pointing out others' mistakes, or speaking up about work-related issues)					

5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your workplace?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My values are shared by those who I work closely with.					
My values are shared by my superiors at work.					
My values are shared by leadership at work.					
My values are aligned with the workplace culture.					

6. Who at your workplace would agree with your perception of the culture?

- a. No one
- b. Some people
- c. Most people
- d. Everyone

7. How long do you plan to stay at your workplace?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-5 years
- d. 5-10 years
- e. I have no plans to leave

8. Which aspects of workplace culture could be improved? Select all that apply.

- a. Trust
- b. Interpersonal Relationships
- c. Acceptance of Diverse Identities
- d. Growth Opportunities
- e. Clarity of Criteria for Success
- f. Feedback Mechanisms
- g. Mentorship
- h. Consistency of Internal Communications
- i. Decision Making Process
- j. Co-creation of Culture
- k. Conflict Between Work and Life
- l. Expected Hours Worked
- m. Pay Scale Transparency
- n. Physical Safety
- o. Psychological Safety
- p. Other \_\_\_\_\_

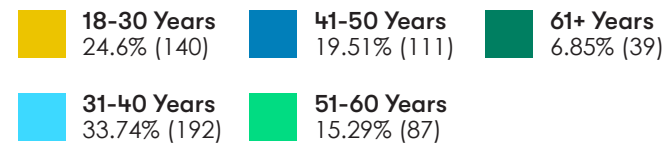


## Additional Data Visualizations

The survey yielded a bounty on interesting data, some of which was not summarized in the primary conclusions. Additional graphs and survey responses are featured here.

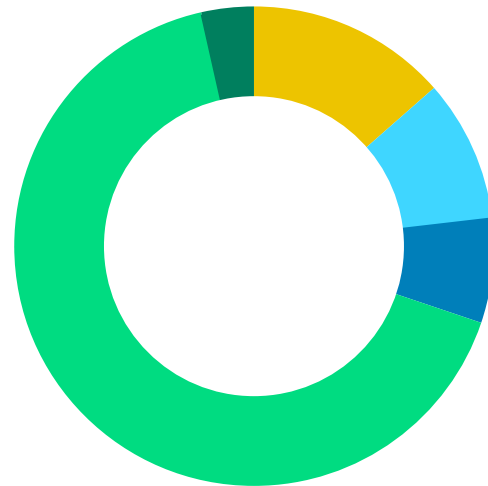
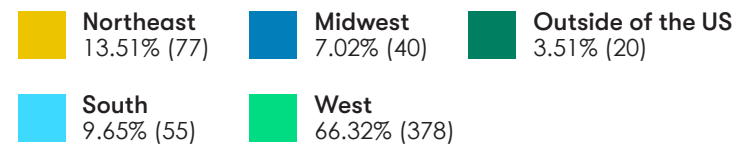
### Respondent Age

Over 50% of all respondents reported being between 18-40 years of age. The smallest subgroup was the age group over 61 years of age.



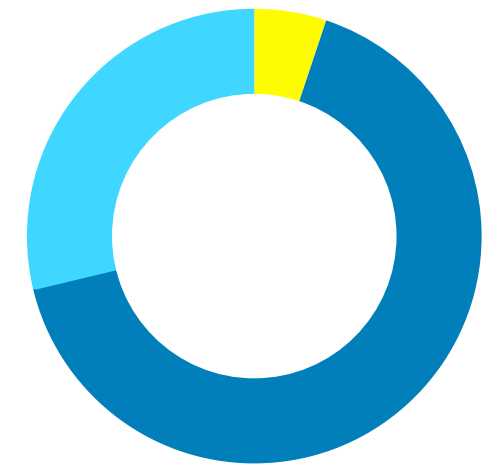
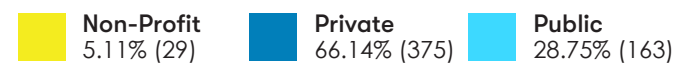
### Respondent Location

About two-thirds of respondents live or work in the Western US. About 30% of respondents are split between the Northeast, South, and Midwest. 20 respondents live outside the US.

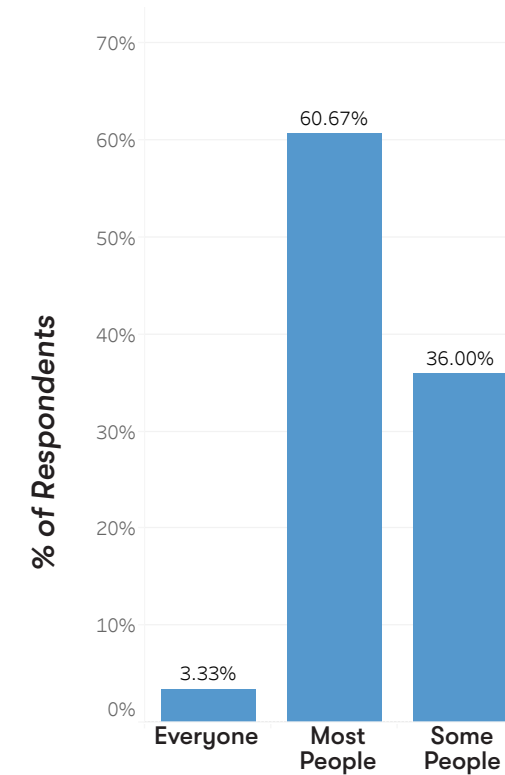


### Respondent Location

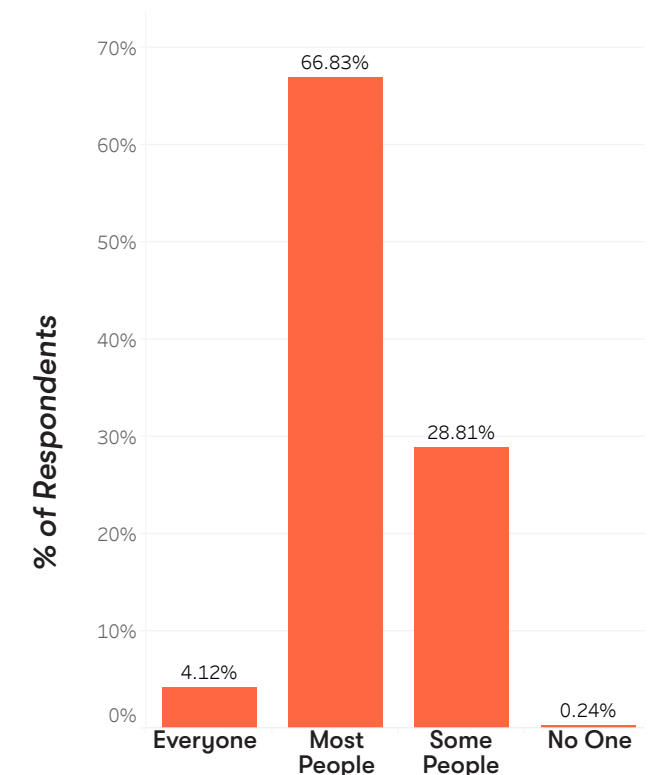
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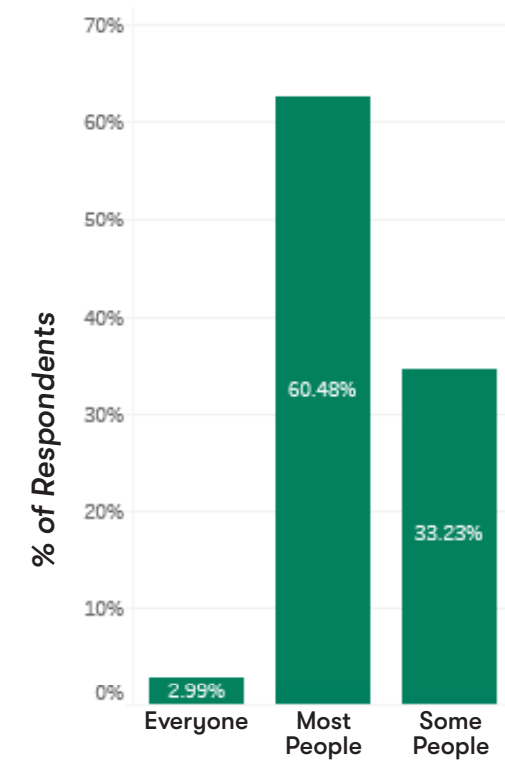
## Who Shares Your Cultural Perceptions?



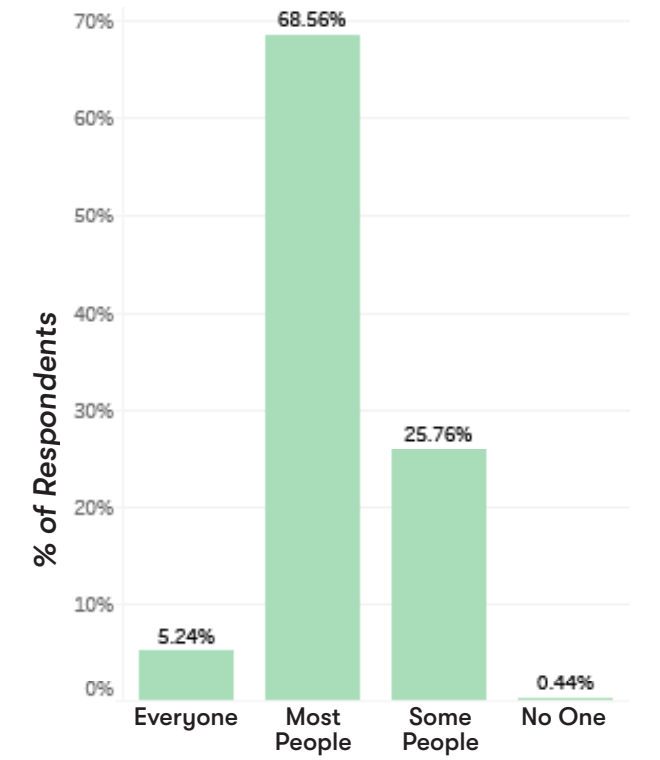
Respondents of Color



white respondents



Women, GNC, NB, 2-Spirit respondents



Men respondents

## Who at your workplace would agree with your perception of the culture?

