

# WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER  
ADVANCEMENT FOR MID-LEVEL  
PROFESSIONALS

A REPORT BY KAREN FUGLE



SLEEPINGGIANT  
CONSULTING

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# FOREWORD

Women face barriers at many points in their careers, many engrained in the systems and culture of our profession.

This report is dealing with an essential aspect of women's mid-level careers: What can I, as an individual, do to move on and bring my career to a new level? It is not about high-level policies but empowers the reader to use their own skills to create progress herself. Therefore, these are practical recommendations that don't rely on the slow pace of institutions but can be brought to life imminently.

At WIA, we stand for changes in policies and the public face of architecture. But we are also aiming to cover something this report recommends: support from your peers and groups. WIA are discussing and documenting the lived experience of women architects and providing networks, group events and new perspectives. Let's not forget how important a short exchange can sometimes be to propel one onwards and provide energy for the next step.

The work is all in the next step and the next - so we at WIA wish the reader good luck in shaping the future of their career and promoting the progression of women in architecture together.



Anna Schabel  
WIA Chair

As a female architect, I hope you will read this report and know first and foremost that you are not alone. The cross-section of comments will help you reflect on your career progression so far, while the advice will steer you in a positive direction which will, I hope, keep you happy and satisfied in this profession. This report explores:

- What mid-level female architects think about their career progression and growth.
- The advice they have to offer about self-development.
- What they did, are doing or will do to position themselves for promotion.
- The biggest struggles around self-development.

As a senior manager or HR professional, this report will shed some light on the career satisfaction of your mid-level female architects. Their responses to a 10-point questionnaire should spark ideas on how you can empower and motivate these females so we can retain them in their company and industry. This report summarises:

- What women want in order to develop their capabilities.
- The top skills they need to focus on for personal and professional success.
- The difference in their leadership development in comparison to male peers.
- The number one barrier that stops mid-level female architects from participating in self-development.

As you navigate this report, I invite you to question, reflect, discuss, and take action. Do the findings apply to you and your colleagues? What effect will the pandemic have on your career development? What steps will you take? If we continue the dialogue, we can enhance the outlook for mid-level female architects, and ultimately, improve the likelihood of you reaching the top of the profession.



Karen Fugle  
SleepingGiant

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If there is one thing Covid-19 has taught us, it is that we need to stay resilient, optimistic, flexible and strategically-savvy in a dramatically changing world. We cannot afford to have women stuck in the middle. Now, more than ever, the risk is that we lose our mid-level female architects if we don't take their career challenges and needs into account.

## KEY FINDINGS

The report's findings draw attention to these top overall themes:

1. **TIME** – 73% of the women revealed that a lack of time is the number one barrier stopping them from participating in self-development.
2. **STRATEGIC SUPPORT** - Women own the responsibility to initiate their self-development but would like significantly more help from line managers and senior management.
3. **OPPORTUNITIES** - Women feel that management give them fewer opportunities than their male peers.
4. **CONFIDENCE** – Women experience an erosion of confidence when a desire for promotion is unmet and when faced with overtaking male colleagues.

5. **PROVING WORTH** - Women feel the burden of having to continually prove their competence and worth.
6. **COMMUNICATION** – Women have keen views on the necessity to speak up, find their voice and to strategically keep their head above the parapet.

The findings draw attention to an overall feeling of stagnation in career growth, with only 14% of the women saying they were 'very satisfied' at the speed of their career path. Another conclusion to be drawn is that when we give women critical opportunities and support, this can directly result in higher self-esteem, confidence and a greater sense of purpose.

The women also voted on the key focus areas for personal and professional development success, which are:

- Strategic thinking
- Communication
- Confidence
- Increasing network
- Resilience
- Team leadership skills

This report shows that women in architecture willingly own responsibility for their self-development. However, lack of time, not enough support and missing critical experiences are impeding their growth. They know that visibility – getting their head above the parapet – is imperative, while the support of peers, networks, coaches and mentors helps them to find a voice and get support. But, undermining their confidence and self-esteem is a combination of the energy-sapping task of continually having to prove their worth and being overlooked for opportunity or promotion.

The primary recommended solution for mid-level female architects is to dedicate regular and consistent time to work on their self-development.



# INTRODUCTION

In my role as an Executive Coach, I work with many architects from mid- to senior level, and I act as a sounding board to their challenges and opportunities. I also attend construction industry conferences, observing numerous women-only panels that highlight the problems of retaining females in this sector. At an industry, community and company level, we are acting on these issues: gender pay gap, unconscious bias, work flexibility, gender equality and D&I initiatives, to help retain women in the industry. But I wondered if mid-level female architects could do more themselves, and so I engaged in this research project.

As a result, this report sets out to:

- Clarify what women want to get themselves to progress.
- Give mid-level female architects a voice about their self-development.
- Discover the key barriers, in their eyes, to career progression.
- Highlight the interviewees' advice to other female architects.
- Give women recommendations on how to progress their self-development.



## BACKGROUND

In studies highlighting the need to act to retain women in architecture, and address the reasons why they leave, key recommendations stood out to me as being out of the individual's control. For example, the famous RIBA-funded report "Why Do Women Leave Architecture?" concludes with 112 recommendations addressed to the employer, school or professional body. Not one suggestion is aimed at the female architect. I found similar results in further studies, and it frustrated me to see no impetus for empowering the individual.

I was therefore keen to find out - Mid-level female architects: What are their self-development needs and what can they do to improve performance and increase chances of promotion?

Asking this question may help us find out what is missing from women's career development, what needs to be different and what women at this transition point can do to increase their agency and be more actively in control of their career paths.

## METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

I interviewed 20 mid-level female architects to take a snapshot view of their opinions on self-development. All are qualified architects and their titles are many; Architect, Project Architect, Associate and Senior Architect, to Associate Director and Director. Their ages ranged from the late 20s to high 40s. There was a fairly even split between those who didn't have children and those who did. The companies they work in range from <5 to >500 people.

This is not an academic report. I have specifically not designed the report to look in-depth at the themes covered and have not included comments or commentary from male architects. I also acknowledge that I do not approach topics such as race, intersectionality, child and caring responsibilities or stress within the architectural environment. I believe these issues can compound the identified problems and are worthy of further exploration outside of this report.

### “ INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Highlighted within boxes, you will also find Inside Insights; advice from the interviewees aimed at junior and mid-level female architects.

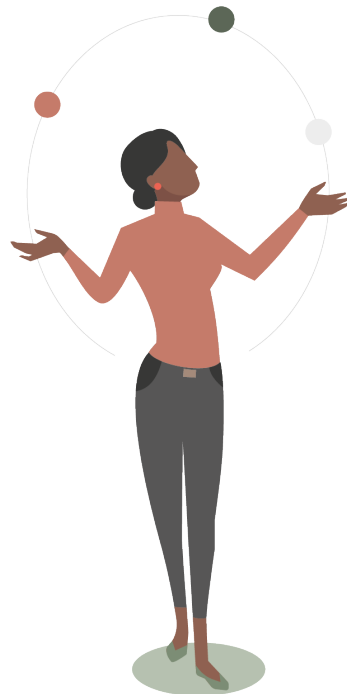
# Q1

## WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT?

### WORK VS LIFE

The women's approach to self-development splits opportunities between the office environment and those that happen externally. Out-of-office self-development isn't necessarily architecture-related, but women view it as essential to maintaining work/life balance. One interviewee put it succinctly: to breathe life into architectural work, you need to have that break away from it.

*"My company know that, for people to be good architects, they need to be happy people outside of work. We don't work ridiculously long hours; we have a lot of extra-curricular activities that are non-architecture related, and we have a good social side."*



### SUPPORT FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

The level of self-development support, attributed to the company, was felt to be erring on the low side. The office is "supportive", but less so for activities that don't relate to the task at hand, or for the women who don't work full time. An opinion is that the office is less inclined to acknowledge the whole person – their stage in life, limitations and aspirations - when it comes to career development.

*"I'm tempted to say there was no support from top-level because they didn't do this type of self-development themselves; [so] they don't see the need for employees to do it. They see support as, 'Oh, you need your hand held, like a child?'. Like young people are snowflakes."*

Women acknowledge the importance of women's networking groups for support – to find others "in the same boat". Similarly, women view mentoring and coaching as having positive impacts on their self-development.

*"I asked for a mentorship scheme, but it's never been implemented, so I've ended up finding it myself."*

*"Talking to a coach about career struggles or interpersonal and work relationships was very helpful."*

### “ INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Prioritise your time for development. If you do it with other people, you are more likely to stick to it. Take advantage of peer-to-peer mentoring.
- Look at external places - CBT, psychotherapy, coaching support for proactive ways for acknowledging your self-development.
- Have a break away from it, turn the phone off. Taking a break so that you can gain perspective is really key.

### SUMMARY

- Self-development embraces non-architectural learning as essential in maintaining balance and for feeding creativity.
- When self-development from the office errs on the low side, external support such as networking groups, mentors, coaches can fulfil this need.

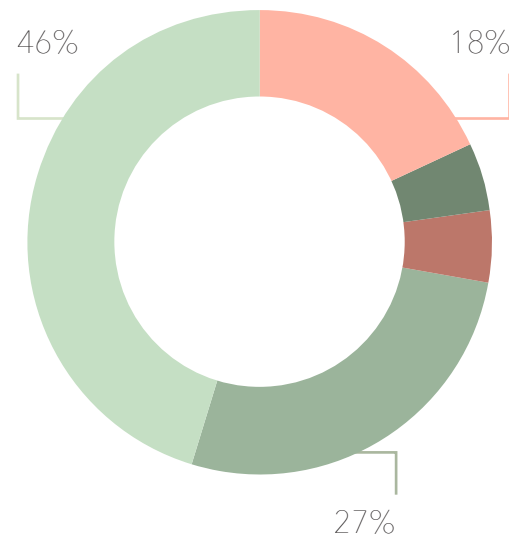
# Q2

## HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR CAREER GROWTH?

### THE STATISTICS

# 64%

OF RESPONDENTS WERE EITHER SOMEWHAT SATISFIED OR NOT SO SATISFIED.



- EXTREMELY SATISFIED
- VERY SATISFIED
- SOMEWHAT SATISFIED
- NOT SO SATISFIED
- NOT AT ALL SATISFIED

Little more than a quarter of respondents were Very Satisfied; there was evidence of disquiet, with a total of 64% of respondents being only Somewhat Satisfied or Not So Satisfied.

*"Very satisfied. The project experience I've been getting is fulfilling. I'm getting things built, I'm not being cornered into doing one stage of the project, and I'm getting exposure to different sectors and all stages of projects. All of which I think is very important for myself. And in terms of feedback, I am getting more succinct and salient points about where I can improve."*

*"Definitely not at all satisfied."*

### WHAT IS CAREER GROWTH?

There was evident frustration at a perceived lack of clarity regarding the steps to be taken, and the expectations to be fulfilled, in order to obtain senior positions. Even the most satisfied respondents felt disillusioned for this single reason; not just for themselves but extended to more junior members of staff as well.

*"I didn't pick 'Extremely Satisfied' because the company does not have a clear job description for all groups. While I'm told what I need to do, to get to the next step, I feel this criterion is not understood office-wide."*

*"The only thing missing is the actual understanding of how to get to that next step. The promises are all very well and good but when they say 'you've done everything you've needed to do', well, the question is 'why haven't I been promoted yet?'. So, it's not 100% clear."*

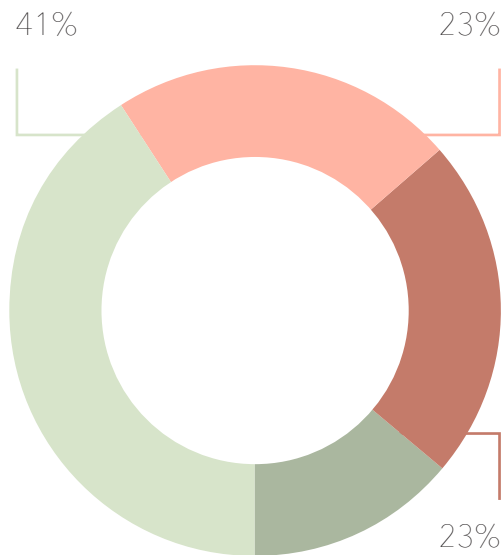
However, there was an element of contentment in those who wished to remain at their current level, with a feeling that promotion is less important than recognition. The problem here, though is that recognition can be absent or inadequate.

*"I am progressing, but it's the recognition that's lacking. And the reward. If it weren't for the lack of recognition, then I would be 'Very Satisfied'."*

For women to believe they are valued, and where promotion is not a way forward, then recognition and reward are the replacement.

# Q3

## HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE SPEED OF YOUR CAREER PATH?



- EXTREMELY SATISFIED
- VERY SATISFIED
- SOMEWHAT SATISFIED
- NOT SO SATISFIED
- NOT AT ALL SATISFIED

### THE STATISTICS

While 14% of women were Very Satisfied, nobody picked Extremely Satisfied. In the mid-range, 41% are Somewhat Satisfied with the speed of their career, leaving

# 46%

OF WOMEN ARE NOT SO SATISFIED OR NOT AT ALL SATISFIED.

The general feeling was of stagnation, even though there may be increased responsibility.

*"Up until a year ago I was very happy with the speed and progression, it's just this last year that I am constantly trying to make sense of why it stalled."*

*"I blame myself - I should have been more confident to ask for more responsibility quicker. I was capable enough to do it way earlier than when it happened."*



### INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Talk to many different people about how to progress. Don't rely on your efforts to get noticed without speaking about your efforts. The impulse is to say 'I'm going to do the best job I can and that will take care of things', and unfortunately, that won't take care of things.
- You have to take risks. You have to be prepared to move companies to get what you want, and you have to be prepared that your next company might not work out for you.
- We should be asking ourselves 'what are we really interested in?'. Take 30 minutes to ask yourself where you are going and how are you getting there. And if you are not getting there, how are you going to get back on track?

### SUMMARY

- Women are dissatisfied with the lack of clarity over role paths and steps to progression.
- Women find stagnation in career progression at mid-level to be frustrating.
- When a promotion is not an option, recognition is needed in its place.



# Q4

## WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR INITIATING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES?

### THE STATISTICS

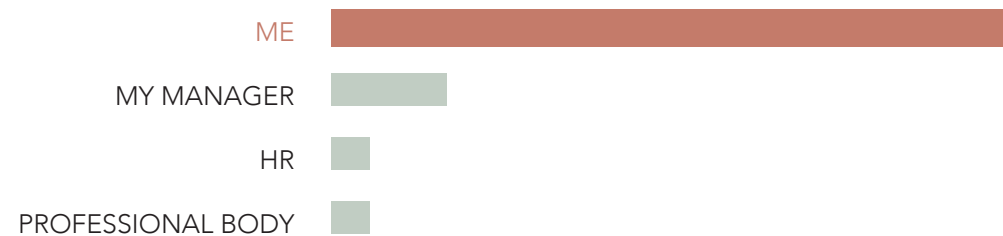
The consensus is that the women themselves are responsible for initiating their self-development, first and foremost.

It's a strong consensus as well -

# 82%

OF THE WOMEN INTERVIEWED SAID THEY FELT THEY SHOULD GET THE BALL ROLLING WITH THEIR DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.

This view is mostly non-contested; after all, these women have successfully navigated their way through seven years of architectural training.



### MANAGERS

However, it is against other findings – a Gallup study<sup>1</sup> found that 81% of employees who did not participate in training felt their organisation should initiate it. The female architects involved in my research, eager to give a second choice, chose their manager – the person likely to be the “route to [gaining] exposure to what’s going on”, one architect said. But some suggested managers don’t have time either, or, more startlingly, that they don’t care enough.

Managers can be more effective than they realise though, especially when giving consistent support. A LinkedIn Learning study<sup>2</sup> is showing that 75% of employees would take a course assigned by their manager. Another study highlights a positive correlation between women whose managers provide career opportunities and women who have confidence in their ability to lead and rise to the most senior levels with their current employer.<sup>3</sup>

*“Yourself and your manager [are responsible]. It needs to be both. But you can’t wait for it to be fed, you need to go out and look for things you are genuinely interested in, but you also need to be given that encouragement; that a balance can be struck.”*

*“Me, but there has to be someone to enable that, facilitate that. Because it’s going to take time and cost money, then [time and money] should be invested in me to do that.”*

### SUMMARY

- Women own the responsibility to initiate their self-development.
- Support from the manager can be missing or inconsistent. Women would like to see an increase in support.

# Q5

## WHAT STOPS YOU FROM PARTICIPATING IN SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES?

### THE STATISTICS

BY A LONG MARGIN, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT IS 'NOT ENOUGH TIME' AT

# 73%

FOLLOWED BY 'NOT OFFERED SELF-DEVELOPMENT OR TRAINING' AT 27% AND 'NOT KNOWING WHAT IS AVAILABLE' AT 18%.



### TIME

This report suggests that the number one barrier that stops mid-level female architects from participating in self-development is the availability of time. Time to find opportunities, create opportunities and to partake in self-development. For the women who work flexible hours, their priority sits with the completion of project work, leaving self-development to out-of-office hours. It then gets put on the back-burner due to caring responsibilities.

*"I am under-resourced, but I don't want to be seen that I can't get it done. I've communicated it in a subtle way, as in, 'It would be great if we had another pair of hands', but not, 'Sort me out tomorrow as we are absolutely screwed here'. Perhaps I should say that."*

*"A lot happens via socialising at an inconvenient time. If it happens during the day this is OK, but if it happens after work or on weekends, then it discriminates."*

When asked, women do have an idea of where they'd like to go, in terms of career progression, but they don't have the space to articulate or think about whether it's a possibility. The ownership of self-development is there, but over and over the response is "I don't have time".

We know women care about their learning and development opportunities, while research shows that 74% of employees want to learn during spare time at work. Also, 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development.<sup>4</sup> This research is, therefore, an excellent incentive to mandate women this time.



### INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Treat self-development as part of your job and keep up the momentum. Goals shared are more likely to be achieved.

# Q5

## WHAT STOPS YOU FROM PARTICIPATING IN SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES? (CONTINUED)



### AVAILABILITY

The lack of time perpetuates the lack of clarity or knowledge in what is out there.

*"Because I don't have time, I don't often know what's around."*

This view is supported by research<sup>3</sup>, which finds that for learners, one of the biggest challenges (apart from time) is that they struggle to find what resources they need to support their self-development and training. Views are that general RIBA CPD is focused at the junior level. It is no surprise then that mid-level females want management to help in this regard; to take greater responsibility in the form of encouragement, direction and provision of funds - cost is the fourth barrier to self-development.

*"I know if I'm managing people and want everyone to work well and want the company to grow, then I would also take some responsibility for encouraging self-development and training."*

*"I think you have to demonstrate the value to the company. So, there are courses of value to me, but not to the company."*

### “ INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Take time for yourselves and figure out what you want to do.
- I've observed colleagues who have progressed quite quickly, and one thing they shared is that they knew what they liked, what they were good at. Make it clear to your office, line manager or director what your interests are. Always highlight them when you have a chance to speak to them.
- Seek out things. Go to industry events or seminars and hear other people's opinions and get out of your bubble.

### SUMMARY

- Time is the number one barrier that stops women from participating in self-development.
- Time impacts on knowing what training or development opportunities are available.
- Women want more company support, by way of direction, encouragement and provision of funds.

# Q6

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT TO YOUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, COMPARED TO YOUR MALE PEERS?

### OPPORTUNITIES & PROVING ONESELF

Put simply, women feel they receive fewer opportunities than their male peers. Other factors exacerbating this problem were said to be time constraints, bias and an overwhelming sense that they need to prove themselves before being offered the opportunity.

*"It's not easy to answer this [question] because, from the outside, the opportunities are equal. So, if there is training, we all [theoretically] can attend. But I cannot attend because I have to finish something in order to leave early to pick up my son."*

*"The men don't even have to ask – it's just assumed that they will grow into those roles. So, I asked: 'Why is this happening?'. Since then, I've continued to ask, and I've not been held back, but I've always had to prove myself."*

The report, Women in Construction: The Race to Gender Equality<sup>5</sup>, spells it out clearly. Almost three-quarters (73%) of women said they felt they had been passed over for projects because of their gender and not their skills, compared to just 27% of men.

Similarly, the Mayor of London's Supporting Diversity Handbook<sup>6</sup> found too that women think employers provide better opportunities for men.

*"On top of this, women too often find that their status as architects is questioned by male colleagues. This is especially when it comes to technical expertise. Women may also have their authority questioned while out on project." - Supporting Diversity Handbook*

The women interviewed for this report perceived that male peers:

- Get and ask for opportunities sooner
- Grow into a role
- Have the trust of senior management
- Are assumed capable until proved wrong
- Are more likely to ask for a pay rise

*"I could not imagine a male peer having the same conversations as I was having – 'Why am I not promoted?'. I think it is the biological, cultural and social construct; we give males more opportunities at pivotal stages of their career."*

*"You can't make mistakes; you have to be very efficient. You feel more challenged compared to your colleagues because you have to prove you are perfect, to gain trust. Men already have trust and can only be proved wrong."*

Other research findings have said women's competence is more likely to be questioned when they are the only female presence in a room or one of only a few women present. They are more likely to need greater evidence of their competence, to have their judgement questioned in an area of expertise, and to be interrupted or spoken over.<sup>6</sup>

*"I was the only woman in a room of males. That automatically created a dynamic where I had to prove myself a lot harder, a lot more visibly and a lot more consistently than the male counterparts would have."*

### CONFIDENCE

The dynamics surrounding either having or lacking confidence are clear. These women are confident about their skills and about whether they deserve a promotion; they also have the confidence to ask for one. But they talk instead of being held back. The factors which erode confidence are a combination of having to prove their worth, having to perform at a higher level before being offered promotion to that level, or just not being promoted.

*"The men have grown as a result of promotion – their confidence is up. Their belief in themselves is up, due to that role and how they are perceived. It has been interesting to see this, in comparison to the knock in my confidence as a result of not being promoted and not getting that recognition."*

# Q6

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT TO YOUR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMPARED TO YOUR MALE PEERS? (CONTINUED)



*“Men are so much more... not confident... but they don't really care about just going in and asking for what they want. They have a rapport with a senior man straight away, whereas I would have to justify myself a lot more.”*

*“My confidence was there, I kept asking, but it didn't get me the roles sooner.”*

Being passed over for promotion or being overlooked for projects are two factors that limit the retention of aspiring female leaders, according to Randstad's more recent Women in Construction Report<sup>5</sup>. Going further back, the response to the report Why Do Women Leave Architecture (2003)<sup>7</sup> found one problem for female architects was centred around: *Training and promotion, with lack of training opportunities leading to lack of experience, lower levels of responsibility, poor career progression, falling confidence and an ultimate de-skilling.*

The lens of exploring women's confidence relative to men's is not new. Research<sup>8</sup> is abundant in finding that women tend to understate their performance and appear “under-confident”, while we perceive men as being “over-confident”. The women interviewed for this report correlated any loss of confidence directly to the energy and effort which was required in order to prove themselves; in an atmosphere where stagnation or stalling was either in progress or on the horizon, but where male peers were visibly progressing.

### SUMMARY

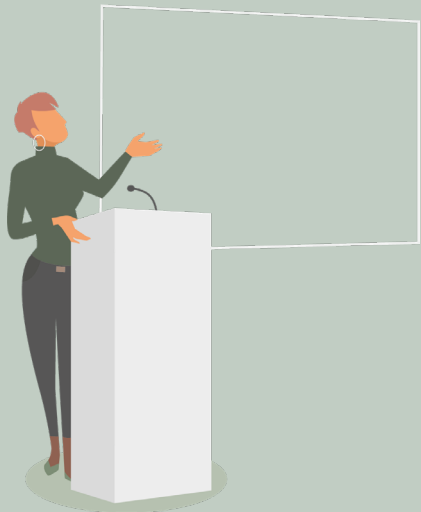
- Women feel they have fewer opportunities than their male peers.
- They feel the burden of having to prove their competence and worth.
- Career stagnation, few opportunities and visibility of male peers overtaking them, combine to undermine women's confidence.

### “ INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Believe in yourself more and don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Don't be scared in situations where you don't feel comfortable and have frank conversations. Be honest about how you are feeling and what the issue is.
- Look at how a practice is structured and set up - are women at top level? Be selective about who you work for. Find women to be your role models in there.

# Q7

## WHAT WILL YOU (OR DID YOU) DO TO POSITION YOURSELF FOR PROMOTION?



### HEAD ABOVE THE PARAPET

When it comes to promotion, mid-level female architects insist that keeping your head above the parapet - that is, understanding the politics within the company and holding a profile within the whole organisation - is crucial if you wish to get noticed. Being proactively visible in all directions is seen to benefit both the individual and the company.

*"There is a bit of self-promotion that needs to happen."*

*"I'd like to think that everyone in the company knows who I am, knows what I am doing. I get involved in other things besides my projects. I jump on opportunities when they are given, being proactive, having frank conversations with other people."*

### SPEAKING UP

Women talk about speaking up and yet berate themselves for not speaking up enough. There is an understanding that women generally keep their heads down and work hard, thinking they will be duly rewarded. However, this is not what the interviewees said they were doing. Instead, they take on more responsibility, demonstrate that they can do the job and arm themselves with justifications for deserving a promotion. If they speak up and ask for a promotion, then they may be rewarded. But if they get pushback, it disincentivises them to take on extra responsibility in the future.

*"I identified quite quickly that I wasn't at the right level - so I put together something to showcase that I was outperforming and deserved a promotion."*

Carrie A. L. Arnold, the writer of "The Silenced Female Leader: A White Paper"<sup>9</sup>, says when women feel silenced they perceive a lack of agency, and when they self-silence there is a high correlation of them opting out of leadership. Women need to find their purposeful voice and speak up, despite any fears or potential consequences. The silenced female architect's route to recovery is via their community networks, peers, groups, mentors, coaches, friends and family; where they can safely dialogue in the company of other women with similar leadership problems. Many women in this report find that mentoring boosts confidence and self-esteem. She finds her voice through leading, becoming a role model and in giving voice to others.

*"My male MD acknowledges that he tends only to notice the louder voices and the ones that speak out. He overlooks the ones who did the work and had something to say but were too quiet to speak out."*

### NOT SPEAKING UP SOON ENOUGH

Women are also quick to point out that, in hindsight, they have not spoken out soon enough. This awareness occurs after noticing that their male peers speak up sooner. Self-advocacy is often an area that is outside women's comfort zones. Still, there is evidence they are becoming

more proactive and are keen to learn the art of influence and negotiation. Creating a healthy and consistent dialogue between themselves and management, to talk about key goals and aspirations, is imperative.

*"I was given what I asked for. But I don't know if, at that point, I was asking too late. It might be that a man would have asked for that way before I did. I asked for it when I was in a position to have it rather than challenging myself and asking a bit earlier. You have to have the confidence to say: 'Now I can do it'. But I look around and see that the males go for it before they have confidence, before knowing if they can do it."*

### SUMMARY

- Self-advocacy, keeping abreast with the company news and politics, and being visible throughout the organisation helps women position themselves for promotion.
- Women find their voice when engaging in dialogue with peer groups, networks, mentors, coaches, and when mentoring and leading others.
- The need to speak up sooner is noticed in hindsight, through invited dialogue.



# WHAT FACTORS ENABLE YOU TO PERFORM AT YOUR BEST?



## SUPPORT BALANCED WITH AUTONOMY

Support from senior leaders and the company is viewed, alongside autonomy, as a prerequisite to growth. Sponsorship enables the women to stretch out of their comfort zone with the backing of trust. Then they want independence to get on with the work without being micro-managed. This co-existence of support and autonomy results in higher self-esteem and a general feeling that the company 'believes in them'. Women tell us that, as a result, they would feel valued, appreciated, respected, motivated and keen to find further opportunities to develop.

*"I need autonomy – I want to go to someone at a strategic level, but then who lets me try something on my own and not be micro-managed."*

*"When I am supported, the level of trust enables me to take on more projects."*

*"Feeling appreciated makes a big difference, and that is why I am choosing to leave; it hasn't been forthcoming."*

Other suggested ways to deliver support were:

- Flexibility in hours and location - to accommodate home-working and caring responsibilities.
- Time - to attend events/training during office hours, even if working in a part-time position.
- Pay – equitable pay, commensurate to responsibility, and anchored on clearly defined expectations.
- Feedback and recognition – expectations should be well defined and communicated regularly by the employer. There needs to be appreciable recognition of achievements, especially where a reward is absent.

## A GREAT TEAM + BEING HUMAN

The women also attributed their best performance to having and being part of a good team. A well-resourced team allows them to delegate and avoid micro-management. However, this ties to an undercurrent of discontent about the way staff members are treated – and a feeling there should be a more holistic and humanistic interest in employees.

*"There is a lack of job description or expectations at each tier and a different view on what junior, intermediate, senior or associate means. If you assign someone a role just because of his or her title, it's counter-productive."*

*"I think if employers approached their employees less one-dimensionally - they were almost blind to the fact that I had kids."*

*"Sometimes it's as if you are not looking at employees as people; you are looking at them as machines. 'We'll get this done', but that [approach] affects someone."*

## “ INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Role models are really, really important. Try to find good role models - male and female - and try to get them to mentor you. Or at least have someone at work you can speak to, to help you with things that you worry about.
- Businesses are businesses; they are not a charity; they are not doing you a favour. If they give you a job offer, they must believe you have the same ability as a male counterpart. So, stop selling yourself short. If you were not up for the job, I'm sure they would have no problem letting you go.

## SUMMARY

- Support from senior management, combined with autonomy, is a prerequisite to growth.
- A good team means people are chosen based on holistic and humanistic resourcing and allows for better delegation and less micro-management.

# Q9

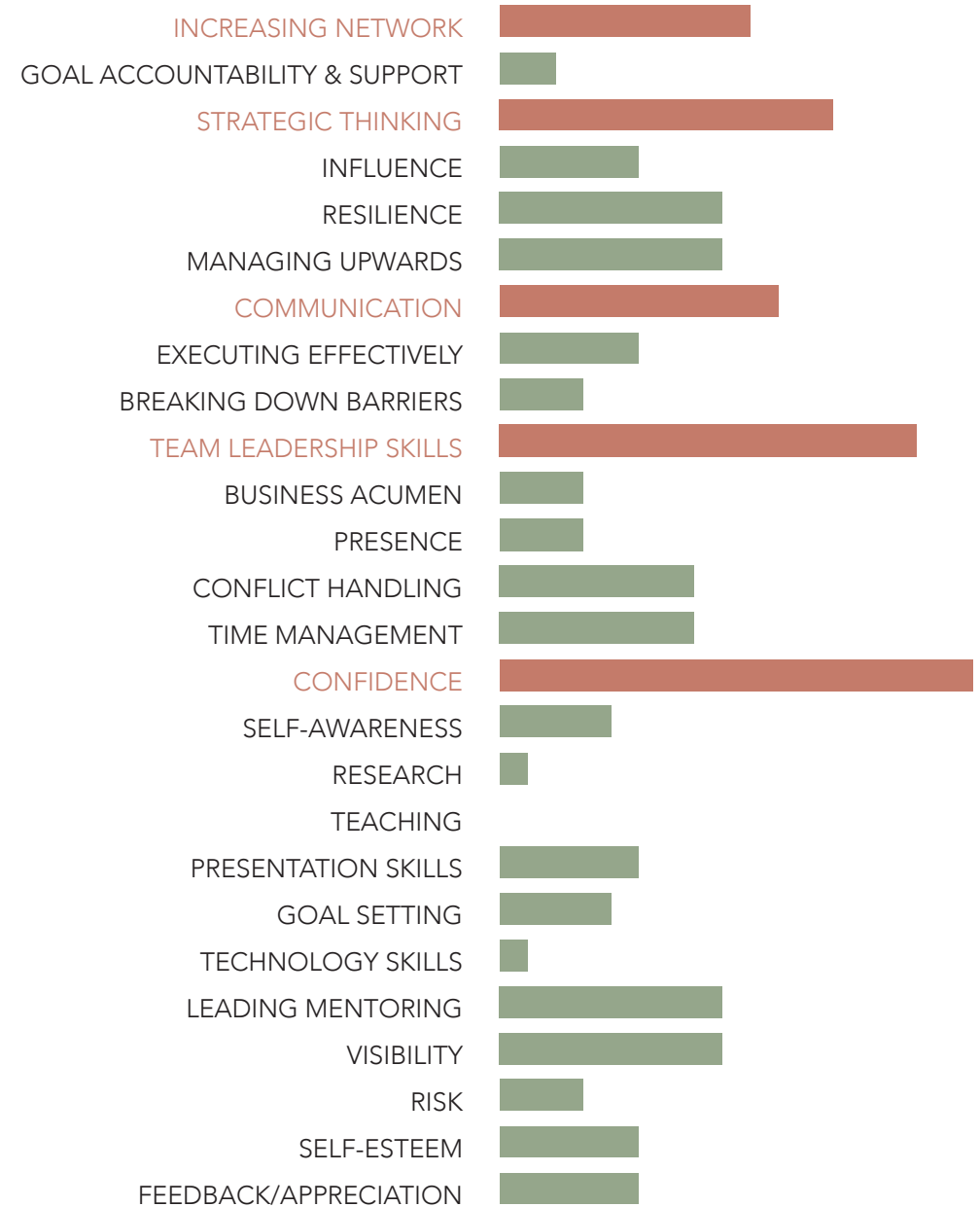
## WHAT SHOULD MID-LEVEL FEMALE ARCHITECTS FOCUS ON, FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS?

asked the interviewees to choose seven areas that mid-level female architects should focus on for personal and professional development success. Confidence has been one of many themes to emerge throughout this report, yet its impact is shown even more clearly here, where 77% of interviewees listed it as a key focus area. In the discussion, many wavered between choosing self-esteem and confidence, and instead felt that confidence encompassed self-esteem.

- The top five focus areas for mid-level female architects were:
1. 77% Confidence
  2. 68% Team leadership skills
  3. 55% Strategic Thinking
  4. 45% Communication
  5. 41% Increasing Network

*"I feel like women demonstrate confidence in a different way. We have different leadership skills than men, whereas one is understood to be leading, whereas the other isn't. We need a way of multiple traits being recognised as confidence in leadership and not having one particular image of that."*

*"There is a habit of raising your voice above the other person to assert dominance. It doesn't mean you are more confident, but you are taken as more confident."*





# Q9

## WHAT SHOULD MID-LEVEL FEMALE ARCHITECTS FOCUS ON, FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS? (CONTINUED)

When challenged to choose their top three areas, from the seven already picked, then the results were only slightly different. All the top five remain, but a newcomer, Resilience, joins in. However, the resulting image is much more robust in showing the key areas. We have, in fact, six key focus points in the top three positions.

In equal first place come Strategic Thinking and Communication. The unexpected link makes sense when you hear women talk about speaking up and getting their heads above the parapet; they know that hard work alone won't get them where they want to be.

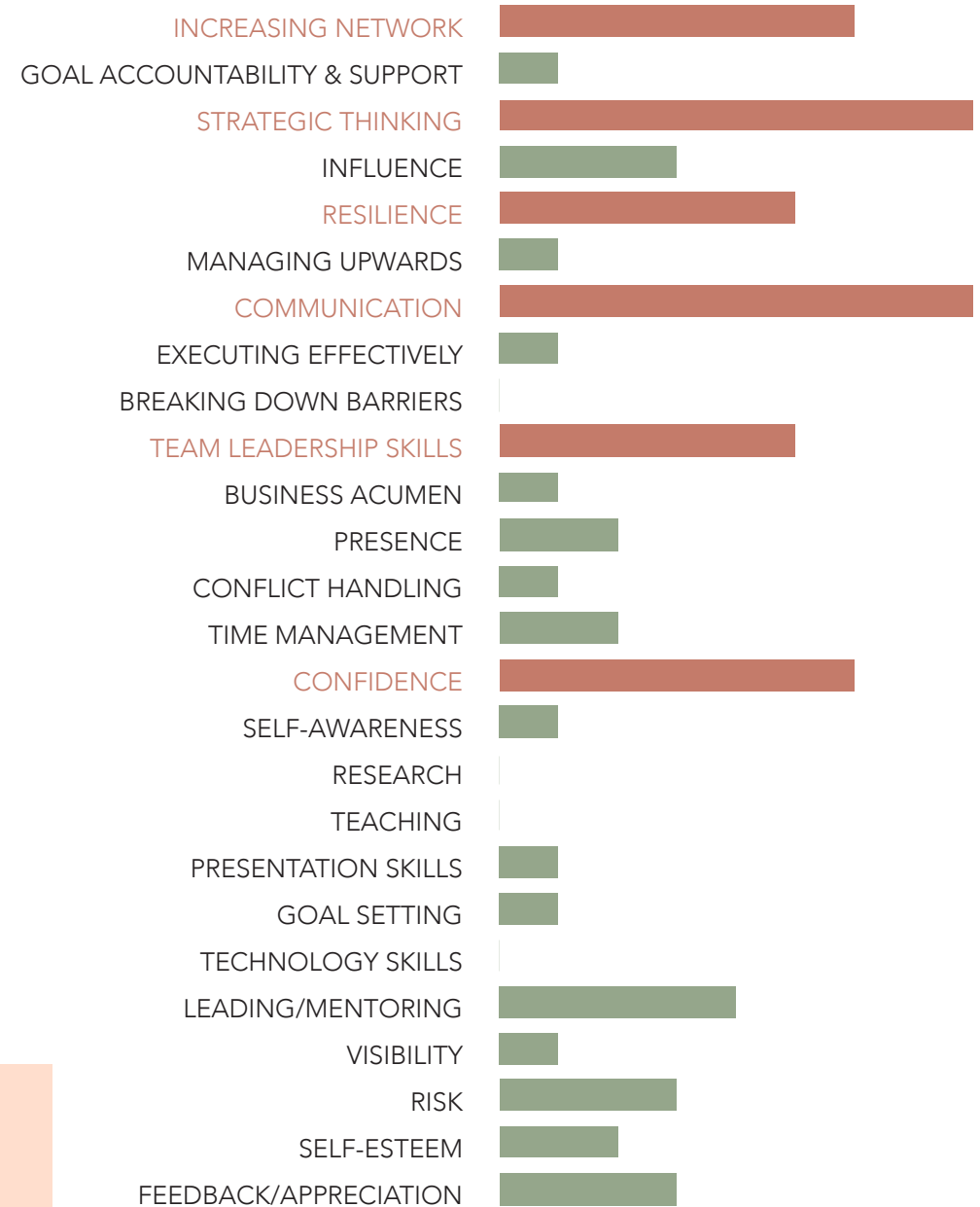
In equal second place were Confidence and Increasing Network. An essential ingredient in increasing confidence is support and women are finding this through expanding their network of colleagues, contacts and acquaintances.

In equal third place are Resilience and Team Leadership Skills. In the discussion, the women view Resilience as the foundation that holds them strong. Team leadership skills reflect where the women are at now – leading teams or wanting to lead teams and wanting to be good leaders.

### SUMMARY

The key focus areas for personal and professional development success are:

- 36% Strategic Thinking // Communication
- 34% Confidence // Increasing Network
- 22% Resilience // Team Leadership Skills



# Q10

## IF ANYTHING WERE POSSIBLE, HOW COULD YOUR CAPABILITIES BE BEST DEVELOPED?

### OPPORTUNITIES + SUPPORT

The architects, when asked, have an idea of what they would like to happen and the leading emerging theme was “give me an opportunity”; something that offers a challenge, from running a project, to site experience or facing clients. The women recognise this must be facilitated and supported by the company, not only in giving opportunities but by providing support via regular mentoring. The result of opportunities and support is perceived to be higher self-esteem, confidence and a greater sense of purpose.

*“More opportunities to develop. By that, I mean having the experience of running a meeting with a client and a panel of other people – that really develops my experience. I need more opportunities to be out there, and that keeps you excited and wanting to learn more.”*

*“Being thrown in the deep end, with guidance from the company, I would have the knowledge and ability to run a project confidently. I don’t feel there is that opportunity...yet.”*

*“Self-esteem grows quickly. This makes me keener to put myself out there, as I feel the company supports me, believes in me.”*

### PROVE YOURSELF

The downside is their own self -doubt, coupled with the feeling they need to constantly prove themselves capable before the opportunity is awarded.

*“It’s like every single time you do something you have to prove it. It’s never just accepted that I’ve done all of this. It would be really nice to lift that pressure because it’s an added thing you have to deal with on top of everything else.”*

*“It’s the proving yourself that absorbs the energy.”*

### ENCOURAGEMENT

Research<sup>10</sup> shows that when managers advocate for new opportunities for employees, the employees are three times more likely to think they have equal opportunity for advancement. This sign of encouragement, backed up with having an open-door policy for reciprocal feedback, would help to reduce self-doubt.

Additional requests for support included setting aside funding for self-development, active company encouragement to undertake continuous training and self-development, plus the autonomy to work flexibly.

*“Not having to physically be here [in the office] as much as I am. You can equally do your work whether you are here at work or the café down the road or whether you are at home and have the right toolsets to work with.”*

*“I don’t understand why everyone has to work 9-5/6/7/8 pm; [if you have] trust to work with autonomy... you wouldn’t have to prove everything or defend yourself.”*

### “ INSIDE INSIGHTS

- Be confident and be willing to take risks. We tend to overthink and be too cautious, and when we get an opportunity, we need to take it.
- Get out of your comfort zone and do things outside of your office. You can’t rely on the office environment to develop yourself.
- Ask to be involved, don’t just wait for it to be given.
- If you think you’re not able to do your best work then look for other opportunities outside the firm or, if big enough, inside. You don’t have to be unhappy; there is always another option.
- Whatever you are secretly thinking inside - do it!

### SUMMARY

- Opportunities have to be facilitated and supported by the company.
- The result of opportunities and support is perceived to be higher self-esteem, confidence and a greater sense of purpose.

# SUMMARY

This report shows that women in architecture possess drive and passion; they are serious about climbing to the next level. They willingly own the responsibility of their self-development. However, several factors are impeding their growth and causing frustration to these women who wish to progress beyond mid-level roles. In short, mid-level female architects would benefit from an increased level of help from their organisation if they are to be retained and make it to the top of the profession. The results of this would fuel self-confidence, self-esteem and a greater sense of purpose.

## FRUSTRATIONS

The stagnation of career growth at mid-level is both a source of frustration and confusion for these women. Attributed to their dissatisfaction are:

- A lack of time to participate in training and development opportunities
- The added burden of continually having to prove their competence and worth
- Fewer opportunities than their male peers and elusive critical experiences
- A lack of recognition coupled with inconsistent feedback

## BARRIER

Lack of time is the number one barrier that stops mid-level female architects

from exploring and participating in training or development opportunities. This barrier creates a stand-off; while empowering employees to take ownership of self-development is excellent, the lack of time prevents this initiative from working.

## VISIBILITY

Mid-level female architects are mindful of the priority to keep their head above the parapet, think strategically and remain visible to the company. Yet, the burden lies on the company to facilitate more opportunities for the women to develop and to be aware of where biases are unfairly leaving them without the role experiences they feel they require. There is a danger that no self-development time could result in a lack of curiosity and low strategic-thinking ability. However, their visibility-awareness will help them position themselves for promotion; but only if they speak up, self-advocate and communicate their needs.

## SUPPORT

Where support from the office and senior management is on the low side, women have instead found their voice when engaging in dialogue with external groups, networks, peers, mentors and coaches. However, increased support by way of frequent mentoring from senior management is welcome. This needs to be combined with autonomy – women want to be trusted to get on with things, once they have secured the support of the mentor/manager.

## SKILLS

While being incredibly practical about the outward-looking skills they need to work on, the women also recognise that confidence and resilience are required to help them manage their way through their career challenges. The emphasis of traditional CPD learning has tended to be in favour of developing technical skills, and we need to shift more consciously towards long-term continuous professional development. Architects critically reflect upon their performance during qualification years; unfortunately, this study-led development tends to stop at mid-level.

## TIME

We know already that a clearly defined strategy for developing staff is critical, and there is room for improvement at offering leadership programmes and encouraging involvement. It is the ongoing and consistent time for reflection, exploration, planning and actioning, along with manager/mentor support for the career path of mid-level female architects, that we must adjust.



# SUMMARY (RECOMMENDATIONS)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MID-LEVEL FEMALE ARCHITECTS:

- Work on your self-development consistently. This could be found in the form of dedicated mentoring, coaching or facilitated group support that provides the space, time and autonomy, which encourages ownership of work and skill development. Ensure you have the systems and support to reach your goals; align your actions to these goals.
- Commit to your improvement by developing feedback systems that enable you to continually assess and reassess your relevance while also advancing your skills and capabilities. Within your network, identify your supporters, sponsors and cheerleaders. Be specific about how you like to receive feedback, how often and commit to identifying changes in behaviour and actions as a result of feedback. Cultivate the growth mindset.
- Where there is not an in-house Professional Development Plan template, women should consider creating a self-development framework. Set out key areas such as vision, values, strengths, performance metrics, initiatives and relationships; plus the SIX primary focus areas for personal and professional development success, as selected by my interviewees:
  - Strategic thinking
  - Communication
  - Confidence
  - Increasing network
  - Resilience
  - Team leadership skills
- Cultivate your assertiveness with practice, role play and conversation rehearsal to help you to speak up with confidence about your strengths and goals, as well as have and lead difficult conversations and initiate reviews.
- To help yourself, firstly listen to yourself. Take note of the advice that you would give to yourself. Step into your future self and look at the pros and cons of that future. With self-awareness and self-belief, you can make changes in your behaviours that align with your thinking.
- Surround yourself with a diverse range of support networks, groups, coaches and mentors. Not only have these networks but also utilise them by asking for help. They remind you that your challenges are not unique and can increase your resilience and give perspective.

I hope you find this report insightful and that you use it to generate conversations with your colleagues and managers about the topics raised. With still not enough senior female role models at the top level of architecture firms, the future of gender equity remains at stake without further action at all levels. However, I am confident that together we can expand on the work the industry is doing and strengthen the path forward. With the right support, sponsorship and dialogue, we can help mid-level female architects rise to the next level, sooner than is happening now.

*Karen Fugle*

# SLEEPINGGIANT CONSULTING

KAREN FUGLE

Karen Fugle is an Executive Coach and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator who has more than 20 years of experience in the Architectural industry. Karen founded SleepingGiant Consulting in 2014 after a successful career as a leading UK CAD/BIM consultant, and she has been supporting the careers of architects, designers and construction professionals ever since.

Karen elevates her client's ability with results-oriented coaching achieved through clear, actionable planning. She has a strong work ethic, manifested in high standards, clarity of approach and simplicity of delivery.

Karen is an accredited Professional Certified Coach (PCC) with the International Coach Federation, a member of the National Council of

Psychotherapists and is a certified facilitator of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and materials. Karen is a committee member of the Women in Architecture network and also a trusted writer of post-session notes for worldwide attendees of the World Business and Executive Coach Summit (WBECS).

Karen offers bespoke solutions to enhance the personal and professional performance of your employees:

- 1:1 Executive Coaching
- Group Coaching
- Workshops, including LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®



*"I love working with people and am passionate about personal development that can have a positive and quantifiable impact on the running of businesses at every conceivable level."*

## THANKS

I wish to thank the interviewees, for not only giving up their time and energy but for entrusting me to bring their voice forward.

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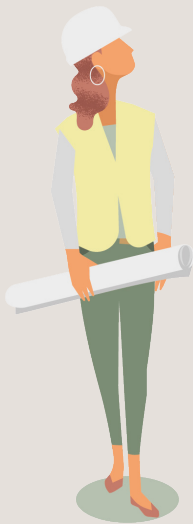
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2-4 PARTICIPANTS

## WHAT IT COVERS

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- Goals, vision and mission
- Communication and influence
- Strategic networking
- Time management
- Building resilience and confidence
- Managing personal and professional domains
- Specific issues as they emerge

## BENEFITS

- Clarify your personal and organisational goals
- Gain insight, advice and support from your peers
- Address specific issues that are impacting on your performance
- Have support and accountability to help drive performance and remove barriers
- Enhance your ability to respond to challenges and opportunities and become more resilient
- Improve communication across the group, office and with external stakeholders

*"My experience of group coaching with Karen was a very positive one. I especially gained a lot out of listening and learning from the challenges of the others in the group. Also, sharing my issues within a group, I got plenty of ideas and encouragement from those that had faced a similar challenge."*

*"It was useful to get other people's perspectives and ideas and see how other individuals work. There was also an added accountability for the actions we agreed at the sessions! I would highly recommend SleepingGiant and group coaching."*

CALL KAREN

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Sessions are bespoke to the individual, and discussions may be around:

- Goals, vision and mission
- Communication and influence
- Strategic networking
- Time management
- Building resilience and confidence
- Managing personal and professional domains
- Specific issues as they emerge

## BENEFITS

- Clarify your personal and organisational goals
- Address specific issues that are impacting your performance levels
- Have support and accountability to help drive performance and remove barriers
- Increase confidence, self-belief and enhance your ability to respond to challenges and opportunities
- Improve your communication up, down & across the organisation, and with external stakeholders.

*"I have regained my sense of self and professional identity and have a toolkit with which to approach previously difficult areas. The coaching was well-tailored to my specific requirements, and Karen responded well in each session to my progress and direction of travel. It felt like an evolving and nuanced process rather*

*than a prescribed course. I would highly recommend this coaching process."*

*"Working with Karen has given me what feels like a 'scaffold', from which I have learnt how to both think critically about my business and develop personally. There is a kindness and openness to this process that at first, eases pressure on one's self, removes shallow preconceptions, and creates the space to follow a line of questioning that can take you forward. It feels like an invaluable part of my practice."*

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