

A Guide to Architectural Practices



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A guide to architectural practices

Architecture practices are not one-size-fits-all. While searching for your next job, it is prudent to have knowledge of what architectural practices you may come across, and which type you may best fit into.

Although creative companies share many characteristics, there are also identifiable types. Ask yourself which one you belong to, because that will influence much of how you approach your staff and the whole issue of HR and people management. Creative companies encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from architecture and interior design, product and graphic design, to fine art, publishing, fashion, music, TV and film.

Common company types

One man bands



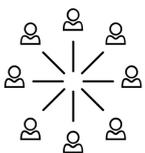
Not quite slaving over a drawing board or computer in a garret with a guttering candle, but the modern day equivalent. Driven by the desire to create and living from hand to mouth. This member of the species is common and often has to supplement more creative projects with house extensions or similar work to feed self and dependants.

Micro studios



Started as a solo player and through luck, perseverance, talent or a combination of these, gained more lucrative or prestigious projects which have propelled the solo artiste to form a band of perhaps five or six people. Still probably working from the largest bedroom or a purpose-built extension of the owner's house. Looking to make the leap to their own premises. An exciting place to be, where hope is high and the possibilities endless.

Small to medium boutique design agencies



Often started by a few friends from university or a family based partnership. They have a strong brand and want to keep it that way. The founders will be supported by a young and enthusiastic team of 2 juniors, largely straight from university. Very much driven by the mindset and ethos of the founders, but still desperately clinging on to the concept of creativity, client response and flexibility.



Black cape architects



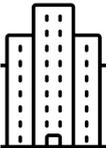
Founded by a famous individual, and orientated around their personality, ego and lifestyle. This is what most architecture students assume they will be before the harsh reality of life in the architecture profession hits them. The attraction of working for one of these practices is to have the name on your CV. It is likely that you will learn a lot about the creative process simply by hanging on the coat tails of this famous individual, but it is equally likely your own chances of developing your own design profile will be more limited.

Cooperative



This may sound like the practices described above, but it is different in that it has settled into itself. There was no ego strong enough to wish to become a black cape architect. A very egalitarian company where the founders do not take exorbitant salaries or take all the kudos for the work produced by the practice. They still enjoy what they do and pass on this love of design throughout the company. Graduates and less experienced staff members love it and learn a lot.

Business disguised as 'design'



Big, big, big, often international, they see no limit to their horizons. Probably the most commercially astute, they have robust systems and procedures in place for almost every aspect of their work. Typically very competitive in their salaries and with good benefits and compensation packages. They may compromise on design and tend to be client focused rather than innovative. A great training ground, you're unlikely to fulfil your creative dreams here, but can make use of the generous opportunities for training and development.

Family



Tend to be long established with a broader demographic than most creative companies. Their reputation as a caring company is not ill founded. However, the route to the top is likely to be through length of service. They are founded on a somewhat paternalistic hierarchy, almost like an apprenticeship scheme; these companies provide perhaps a more secure working environment than most.

These examples illustrate the wide variety of creative environments that exist. They also illustrate the vastly different approaches to people management that can occur. No one type of working environment will fulfil the needs of all creative individuals. Ultimately, people generally gravitate towards the environment that suits them best and best enables them to express their creativity.



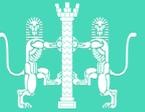
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