

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE Q+A / PHILIP VIVIAN



Earlier this year nine representatives from Australia's top architecture firms signed the first Charter for the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) (NSW Chapter) Champions of Change.

The signatories acknowledged the need for the promotion of equitable workplaces within the architecture profession and committed to actively advance gender equality across their practices and the profession as a whole. Bates Smart Director Philip Vivian is leading our practice's participation in the program.

Here he shares why he stepped up to the challenge and his experience of the program so far.

Why did you become part of Champions of Change?

Throughout my career I have witnessed first-hand gender inequality in our profession and practices in our own office that make it difficult for women to advance their careers, particularly when returning to the workforce after having children.

On a personal note, I understand how policies and attitudes like these affect individuals and their families through the difficulties my wife experienced when returning to work after having children. And with three daughters, I want to change things so they don't face these obstacles.

What are the main aims of the program for Bates Smart specifically? What do you hope to achieve in the short term/the long term?

I believe effective, lasting change starts from the top down. My first aim is to actively support and encourage flexible work arrangements. It is also essential to change our organisational culture to support this, by role modelling the changes we want to see at a senior level. It is also important that this

PICTURED
/ Philip Vivian

is not only for women. These changes need to be gender neutral – workplace flexibility is of benefit to all our people.

What are the values that underpin the culture of Bates Smart that support Champions of Change?

We have a very collaborative culture at Bates Smart and a culture that truly values the skills of all our people, when staff take time out of their career to have children, we actively try to find ways to keep our talented staff throughout all the changes that happen in life.

What are the benefits for Bates Smart in having more women in leadership roles?

The profession is missing role models at the senior levels and we need to demonstrate for our emerging leaders how women can rise to these positions.

More generally, we already have an equal proportion of men and women at Bates Smart but it is important to have this representation at all levels of the business. Women bring different, highly valuable perspectives to our work, and the research shows companies with more women in executive management outperform companies that have no women in senior roles. They also score higher on organisational criteria, and that's just the beginning of the benefits.

Thinking about the women in your team – what are the conditions and culture you believe have helped them to perform, develop, progress and thrive?

In the last ten years, Bates Smart has been very encouraging of women coming back to the workplace after having children and it's been a boon to the office. However, under the current arrangements, it is very hard to come back and be a team leader — so

we looked at what we could do to assist women to move back into architecture in a more flexible way. Our challenge is to show that people can work successfully in a part-time role as a team leader. We're going to have to be on the front foot within Bates Smart, and also be strong advocates for women with our clients — we need to show them that there are many ways to manage a successful project.

You have already undertaken some discussion groups to identify the issues and challenges women face in the company. What are the next steps for the Bates Smart Champions of Change program?

We're currently in the 'listening and learning' phase of the project and we've been conducting workshops to find out what the challenges are for women at Bates Smart. I was surprised when I spoke to our senior women that they did not perceive any barriers to their advancement at Bates Smart — but this does not mean we don't need to become more flexible and supportive. I was also surprised by some of the out-dated attitudes that are embedded in our work practices and culture.

We recently had a very productive session with our future women leaders. Although they appreciate the formal move to more flexible working conditions, what they really feel they need are good mentors and role models. We're now putting into practice a mentorship program to provide that.

We're also tackling one of the major issues that we think will make the most difference — flexible work hours — by looking at our conditions of leadership and how we can embed flexible work practices.

I've found the meetings with my nine colleagues from the other architecture firms very productive. For the first time, we are



all talking very openly about these issues in our firms, and it is a very collaborative environment. I am really looking forward to uncovering how we can all achieve meaningful advances in all our businesses and the profession.

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/ Left: Bates Smart Director, Philip Vivian
Right: Bates Smart Studio Director, Natalie Lane-Rose with Director, Guy Lake