

Report: Risk analysis of the working climate at the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment

TU Delft

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Inhoudsopgave

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Why this analysis?

Over the past year, TU Delft has taken significant steps to strengthen its integrity infrastructure. Particular focus has been placed on establishing effective reporting systems, so that reports of integrity violations and social unsafety can be handled professionally, and on training and developing managers and staff.

The impetus for this analysis lies in a series of signals concerning the working climate at TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. That these signals emerged is a direct consequence of the reporting system having been put in place and being actively used by staff. The reports received prompted the faculty to proactively commission a analysis in order to gain insight into what is happening and what is needed to improve the working climate and provide a healthy and safe working environment. For the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, an analysis of the working climate is an important instrument for taking a more preventative approach and protecting staff from socially unsafe situations.

Governance & Integrity (G&I) was asked to conduct conversations with staff to explore what is happening within the faculty. This report describes what staff are experiencing, where the organisation and its employees are vulnerable, which risk-increasing factors are at play, and what measures are needed to improve the working climate. This is explicitly intended as a critical analysis. The focus therefore falls primarily on bottlenecks and vulnerabilities. Aspects that are functioning well receive less extensive coverage. The aim is not to provide a complete or all-encompassing picture, but to indicate what is needed to achieve a safer and healthier working climate and where improvements are possible.

1.2 Aim of this analysis

The aim of this analysis is therefore clear: to gain insight into the factors that influence social safety and the working climate within TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, with a view to targeted improvement.

The analysis focuses on visible and less visible patterns, underlying dynamics, habits, and experiences that affect the day-to-day functioning of staff. Central to this is how staff experience the working climate in practice, which patterns may have an inhibiting effect, and where opportunities lie to strengthen the working climate further. The starting point is to preserve what is working well and to improve things that require development.

The central research question was as follows:

How do staff experience the working climate within TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, which patterns and factors influence this working climate, and what concrete starting points exist for structurally improving social safety and the working climate?

1.3 Analytical framework

The formulated assignment concerns both working climate and social safety. Working climate is generally understood to mean the totality of circumstances, relationships, and perceived norms and values within an

organisation that influence how staff carry out and experience their work. It encompasses, amongst other things, the manner of collaboration, communication, leadership, modes of behaviour, and the extent to which staff feel supported, valued, and heard.

A socially safe working climate is a working environment in which staff feel free to speak up, make mistakes, and report concerns or misconduct, without fear of negative consequences. In such a climate, risks of interpersonal violations are actively identified and addressed preventatively, and interpersonal violations that do nonetheless occur can be reported safely and followed up carefully. Psychological safety — the extent to which staff feel free to speak up — forms part of the definition of a socially safe working climate.

In its vision on integrity, TU Delft distinguishes three domains: organisational integrity, academic integrity, and social integrity. This analysis focuses on the working climate, and includes those risk-increasing factors and risks that, as evidenced by the interviews, have a direct link to the experienced working climate. The majority of these risks fall within TU Delft's classification of social integrity: they are risks of interpersonal violations. Where risks relating to other forms of integrity violations — such as procurement fraud, conflicts of interest, or violations in the area of academic integrity — have not been included in this analysis, it should not be inferred that such risks do not occur within the faculty. It is also possible that these risks are unknown to staff, or that the staff members interviewed did not perceive a significant relationship between these risks and the social safety and working climate they experience. In short: whether the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment faces integrity risks beyond those identified here — in the areas of academic or organisational integrity (as defined by TU Delft) — falls outside the scope of this analysis where no direct relationship to the working climate has been established.

Throughout this analysis, reference is frequently made to risk-increasing factors. These are elements within the organisation or its culture that can reinforce or give rise to undesirable patterns. Such factors often relate to multiple points of concern simultaneously. By intervening in these factors in a targeted manner, improvement can be achieved on several fronts at once. The recommendations therefore explicitly address these interconnections. To arrive at a coherent and careful picture, this analysis distinguishes two categories of influencing factors:

Inherent factors (or: vulnerabilities) are factors associated with working within a (technical) university and that are, to some degree, recognisable across all comparable academic contexts.

Context-specific factors are factors that are characteristic of the organisation, culture, and working practices of TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment.

By mapping both perspectives, a comprehensive and nuanced picture emerges of those factors that influence the working climate and the resulting risks to social safety. Each risk has been assessed on the basis of 'likelihood' and 'impact' (low, medium, high). The recommendations focus on those factors over which the faculty itself has influence.

The analysis is qualitative in nature and takes an explicitly forward-looking approach. No investigation has been conducted into individual incidents, nor into establishing the truth about past events. The focus was on understanding recurring patterns, shared experiences, and ingrained working practices within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. The methodology was carefully agreed upon with the commissioning party: staff were able to speak with us in full confidence, and were moreover given ample opportunity to share their own experiences and perspectives. A deliberate choice was made to adopt the format of an open dialogue, without a fixed questionnaire. Whilst comparable themes arose across conversations, the substantive contributions of staff remained central throughout. Only signals that were recognised or raised

by multiple staff members have been included in this report. This ensures a reliable and coherent picture, without statements that could be traced back to individual persons.

1.4 Methodology

The analysis was carried out by a team of seven experienced analysts with diverse professional backgrounds. Together, they undertook the following:

- Targeted desk research in preparation for the analysis;
- A joint kick-off meeting with the commissioning party;
- 82 one-to-one interviews with staff from all levels of the faculty;
- Analysis of the interview records and joint deliberation within the analyst team on the key findings.

The interviews formed the heart of this analysis. In a confidential setting, conversations were held with a broad and representative cross-section of staff within the faculty. Both academic staff and employees from the support and professional services were interviewed. All departments and job levels were represented.

For the selection of interviewees, a specially developed methodology was employed, aimed at both representativeness and careful distribution. On the basis of input from heads of department and the Personnel Committee (the faculty's Work's Council sub-committee), a longlist was compiled using a questionnaire that ensured a balanced representation of different roles, backgrounds, and organisational units, combined with an element of randomness. This longlist was subsequently reviewed by the G&I analysts, with the aim of arriving at a balanced selection of 70 staff members.

In addition, staff were informed of the opportunity to volunteer for an interview. During the course of the process, 15 additional colleagues came forward or were put forward by others. A small number of former staff members were also spoken with. In total, 82 interviews were conducted with staff from all levels of the faculty.

The information gathered during the interviews was processed in strict confidence and on an anonymous basis. Findings have only been included in this report where multiple staff members shared comparable signals, ensuring that individual statements cannot be traced back to specific persons.

1.5 How to read this report

As described above, this analysis is focused on areas for improvement. This means that attention is given primarily to matters that are not functioning well or that present vulnerabilities. What is already working well receives less coverage. In the chapters that follow, we describe the vulnerabilities inherent to working at a university — vulnerabilities that therefore apply to other faculties and universities as well. From Chapter 3 onwards, we zoom in on the situation at TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. We begin by describing the faculty and its history, for readers who are not yet familiar with it. We then describe the risk-increasing factors that play a role in the experienced working climate, and the associated risks to social safety within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. In the final chapters, we set out our summary conclusions and recommendations.

1.6 Acknowledgements

We wish to thank everyone who contributed to this analysis. The openness, trust, and willingness to share experiences have been of great value. It is precisely those accounts that make clear what people are going through, where tensions exist, and where opportunities lie to work together towards a stronger, more socially safe workplace.



Chapter 2 Inherent Vulnerabilities in Working at a (Technical) University

2.1 Introduction

Before zooming in on the specific situation within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, this chapter pauses to consider what makes universities in general vulnerable with regard to working climate and social safety. These are structural vulnerabilities that can occur in virtually any faculty or university. They illustrate how the nature of the work and the context in which it is carried out influence the working climate and the wellbeing of staff.

The academic working climate and social safety within universities have been extensively and thoroughly researched worldwide. This chapter describes the following vulnerabilities, which emerge from that global body of research as either widespread or inherent to the academic world — and to STEM disciplines in particular:

- Hierarchy-linked dependency
- Strong sensitivity for reputation and career development
- The value placed on academic freedom

Whilst these factors largely fall outside the direct sphere of influence of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, they are nonetheless relevant to the faculty's working climate. A sound understanding of this context is necessary in order to properly interpret the situation within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Given the nature of the assignment and the aims of this chapter, a decision was made to describe these three inherent vulnerabilities. This is not an exhaustive overview, and the factors are discussed only briefly, which means the available research findings are unlikely to be fully done justice. Those who wish to explore prior research into the universal vulnerabilities of universities with regard to working climate and social safety are referred to the bibliography in the appendix, which also includes the publications used for this chapter.

2.2 Hierarchy-linked dependency

That the academic world is competitive requires little elaboration. The number of positions is limited: only 'the best' gain entry, and only a small proportion reach the top. Universities have traditionally been characterised as hierarchical environments, in which greater autonomy and decision-making authority are associated with more senior positions and advanced academic specialisation. Senior positions in particular, as well as roles that offer scope for independent research, are scarce and therefore highly sought after. Junior roles, by comparison, are characterised by less autonomy and a greater degree of dependency.

Junior academic staff in particular — such as PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and early-career lecturers — frequently find themselves in a vulnerable position as a result. In terms of their development, opportunities, and career progression, they experience a significant degree of dependence on others who hold formal or informal power. This dependency is especially pronounced in a context of scarce resources and limited positions, and may be regarded as a structural feature of academic careers. Dependency relationships manifest themselves in, amongst other things, the influence senior staff have over publications,

references, and contract renewals, and thereby over the further careers of junior researchers. The intertwining of hierarchy and career development contributes to the vulnerability of early-career researchers in particular.

Added to this is the fact that within academia, people often work alongside the same individuals over extended periods, continually encountering one another in different roles and hierarchical relationships. The combination of hierarchy, scarcity, and long-term working relationships means that power dynamics can persist and prove difficult to break. This can further reinforce the sense of dependency and makes it difficult to avoid or disengage from relationships.

2.3 Strong sensitivity to reputation and career development

All universities share a focus on groundbreaking research and generating as many academic publications as possible. Academic success confers status and prestige upon staff, and is most commonly measured by the number of publications in leading academic journals and the research funding an individual is able to secure. The by now well-worn phrase 'publish or perish' reflects this reality: those who do not publish, disappear.

The reputation and career development of staff are determined not only by publications, but also by factors such as visibility within a field and one's position within relevant networks. These elements reinforce one another and together contribute to the professional standing of staff. This gives rise to performance pressure for individual staff members and competition amongst colleagues. In practice, the management of staff within universities tends to be more developed with respect to performance than conduct. Whilst performance is systematically measured, assessed, and rewarded, the management of professional conduct is less explicitly and less consistently organised. As a result, performance in practice frequently carries more weight than conduct in the appraisal of staff.

In such a context, there is a risk that undesirable behaviour is less readily corrected, particularly when it occurs within dependency relationships. The strong intertwining of reputation, career development, and access to resources can lead staff to be reluctant to raise or address behaviour, for instance due to potential consequences for collaboration, references, or future career opportunities. As a result, undesirable behaviour may persist for longer or be addressed less explicitly.

2.4 The importance of, and pressure on, academic freedom

Within universities, a subtle tension frequently exists between the need for organisational management and the protection of academic freedom. On the one hand, a university requires clear direction: resources must be allocated, strategic choices must be made, and teaching and research must be aligned. On the other hand, academic freedom is a core value of the academic community. Groundbreaking scientific research does not, after all, emerge from rigid control, but from space for curiosity and independent thinking. The challenge for every university governing body is therefore to provide organisational direction without curtailing the academic freedom that gives the university its societal value. This tension is compounded by the growing emphasis on accountability and performance measurement within universities. Research and teaching are increasingly assessed on the basis of output, impact, and efficiency, leading to a greater degree of management and control. Whilst these forms of accountability contribute to transparency and quality, they can at the same time place pressure on the space available for independent research and academic autonomy.

Universities are autonomous institutions and, simultaneously, organisations dependent on external funding, political support, and legal frameworks. This makes them vulnerable to both shifting political winds at national level and changes in the global order. When, for instance, national policy in the Netherlands constrains resources or places additional demands on universities, the pressure on staff at Dutch universities increases. This manifests itself in, amongst other things, the temporary nature of research projects and contracts, greater uncertainty about the future, and an ever-increasing workload for a diminishing number of staff as funding is withdrawn. When, for instance, European or national security interests are at stake, the university may be drawn into broader political agendas, academic freedom may be curtailed, and funding streams may be redistributed. When, for instance, the United States pursues restrictive policies on diversity and inclusion, this has consequences for the academic world as a global institution.

The combination of internal management demands and external dependencies can place pressure on the academic freedom of staff. Precisely those members of staff who were drawn to the university because of these values may, as a result, become professionally disillusioned and grow reluctant — not only in their expression, but also in their research and teaching choices.



Chapter 3 Historical Growth and Recent Developments

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we described the areas in which staff at all universities in the Netherlands are inherently vulnerable with regard to social safety. The vulnerabilities to social unsafety that are inherent to working at a university make it vitally important to maintain a sound and socially safe working climate — and therefore to manage interpersonal integrity risks effectively. This applies to all universities.

Naturally, each university, and each faculty within that university, also has specific characteristics that are relevant to the working climate. The chapters that follow will successively address the risk-increasing factors and risks that apply specifically to TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Discussion of these aspects presupposes a degree of familiarity with the faculty, its history, and a number of relevant recent developments. This chapter provides a brief outline of that context.

3.2 Historical growth: From vocational training to university faculty

Originally, the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment was a vocational training institution for architects, and only became a university-level institution at a later stage — one with a remit that also encompassed academic research and academic teaching. This transition has had implications not only for the formal position and structure of the organisation, but also for its culture and identity. Since that transformation, the faculty's four departments have spanned a range of disciplines: design, construction, and management. The various disciplines offer different professional fields and career prospects, and attract a diverse range of people with different competencies, ambitions, areas of expertise, and ideals.

Today, the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment is one of the eight specialised faculties of TU Delft, which focus on engineering and science. TU Delft is the oldest and largest technical university in the Netherlands, with more than 7,500 members of staff and 26,000 students.

The Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment currently comprises four departments: Architecture, Urbanism, Management in the Built Environment, and Architectural Engineering and Technology. The faculty has approximately 1,700 permanent members of staff and around 300 staff on temporary contracts. Those on temporary contracts include PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, Academic Career Trackers (ACTs), and a number of practice-based lecturers. The faculty currently has approximately 3,000 students. Master's courses are taught in English, whilst Bachelor's courses are largely taught in Dutch.

The Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment has held a top position in the QS World University Subject Rankings for many years, and is regarded internationally as a leading institution for education and research in the fields of architecture, urban planning, landscape design, building technology, and management of the built environment — widely acclaimed for its achievements in innovation and its strong engagement with professional practice.

3.3 Working climate and social safety on the agenda of TU Delft and the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment

In 2024, the Inspectorate of Education published a report — following signals it had received — concerning, amongst other things, social safety amongst staff at TU Delft. Since then, attention to social safety has increased considerably. An Integrity & Social Safety Reporting Point has been established, and work is under way on a new code of conduct.

Every three years, the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment conducts a staff satisfaction survey amongst all employees, known as the MedMon. The results of the survey have been broadly positive and have improved somewhat in recent years. In interviews too, the majority of staff indicate that they greatly enjoy working at TU Delft, with the opportunity to work alongside young, creative, and talented people most frequently cited as a source of job satisfaction. Following the 2024 MedMon, however, a number of areas of attention and concern were identified, most notably workload.

At around the same time, the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment's Restructuring Plan was also developed — a multi-year strategic policy plan covering the period 2026–2030. This plan is intended to deliver multi-million-euro savings and a 15 per cent reduction in teaching capacity. Student numbers are expected to continue growing, which will in turn further increase workload.

In April 2026, the Inspectorate of Education published its so-called recovery report, in which it concluded that care for staff had been sufficiently restored and expressed confidence in the direction being taken.

3.4 Focus on internationalisation and international reputation under pressure

TU Delft and the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment have for many years invested heavily in the internationalisation of both research and teaching. The Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment is home to a large international community: 40 per cent of Master's students, 75 per cent of PhD candidates, and nearly 50 per cent of all staff come from outside the Netherlands. Together, they represent approximately 40 different nationalities.

Maintaining a high position in the international rankings is cited in the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment's Multi-Year Plan 2021–2025 as one of the faculty's most important ambitions. This reputation enables the faculty to recruit large numbers of students each year, as well as to attract renowned professionals — including architects and leading academics — as members of staff. In short, the faculty's international reputation is of great importance to it. Given the faculty's prestigious standing, the pressure on staff to succeed and to continue working there is considerable. Staff indicate that there is no institution in the Netherlands or neighbouring countries that offers them comparable opportunities.

Dutch politics has, for some years, been seeking greater control over the influx of international students and a more prominent role for the Dutch language. Since 2019, successive Ministers of Education have been working on a proposed piece of legislation — the Act on Internationalisation in Balance — which is currently with the Council of State for advice. There is hope and expectation that political pressure on the internationalisation of higher education will ease somewhat under the new cabinet.

Chapter 4 Risk-Increasing Factors for Social Safety and Working Climate

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 we described the general aspects of Dutch universities that are regarded as vulnerabilities for experienced social safety and working climate. In Chapter 3 we discussed the specific characteristics of TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment that distinguish it from other university faculties. In this chapter we examine the circumstances that increase the risks to social safety and working climate within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. We refer to these circumstances as 'risk-increasing factors'.

Risk-increasing factors are factors that are not in themselves an (integrity) risk. However, they can increase the likelihood or impact of certain risks. A risk-increasing factor often influences more than one risk, meaning that addressing a single risk-increasing factor will contribute to better management of several risks simultaneously.

The analysis reveals that a number of structural risk-increasing factors are currently present within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment that are specific to this faculty. These risk-increasing factors can be categorised as follows:

- Risk-increasing factors related to ambiguities in identity and the absence of a shared mission
- Risk-increasing factors related to leadership
- Risk-increasing factors related to dominant culture and implicit norms
- Risk-increasing factors related to career opportunities
- Risk-increasing factors related to staff care
- Risk-increasing factors related to the handling of incidents and reports

Before addressing these factors — which may pose a risk to the working climate and which, unlike more inherent factors, are generally considered to be improvable within the faculty's sphere of influence — the positive aspects of the faculty's working climate that also emerged from the interviews are described below.

4.2 Positive factors contributing to the working climate within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment

In Chapter 1 it was described that a socially safe working climate is characterised by a situation in which risks of interpersonal violations are actively identified, preventative measures are taken, and few interpersonal violations occur — those that do nonetheless arise being able to be reported safely and followed up carefully. This analysis, based on conversations with staff, has examined the working climate, the risks experienced within it, and the underlying factors that contribute to these. The analysis commissioned by the faculty can in itself be regarded as a contribution to such a working climate: risks are made visible, and acting on the recommendations can contribute to prevention.

Given the nature of the commission to make recommendations for improvement, this report places emphasis on what can be improved, on risks, and on risk-increasing factors, so that — when these are addressed — the working climate of the faculty will structurally improve. Before turning to these areas of concern, this section

briefly considers the positive aspects of the working climate that staff value, as they emerged from the interviews. This provides a more balanced picture and also makes visible which elements ought to be protected and preserved in future improvements.

Engagement and pride

Without exception, virtually all members of staff interviewed indicate that they feel highly engaged with their own department or part of the faculty. Many made a deliberate choice to work within this faculty. The international standing and reputation are frequently mentioned and accompanied by a sense of pride. The majority of staff indicate that they wish to continue working at the faculty and see their near and often longer-term career future here. Even staff who are critical of aspects of the working climate frequently combine that criticism with a clear sense of engagement with the faculty.

Dedication and passion

Staff speak with dedication about their work and recognise a comparable passion in their colleagues. This engagement is linked not only to the international standing of the faculty, but also to the content of the work itself and its importance for academia, the sector, and society. Whilst staff indicate that people work hard — and sometimes too hard — this is partly explained by a strong intrinsic motivation. Staff experience their work as relevant and meaningful, and regularly indicate that they are willing to go the extra mile, even when this requires more time than is formally available.

The pleasure and value of working with young, smart, and creative students

The student population is frequently described by staff as smart and creative. Staff indicate that they enjoy working with this group of young people and value their interaction with them. Whilst some critical views are also expressed about the building, the centrally located 'Model Hall' — where students work out their ideas in, amongst other things, scale models — is seen by many staff as emblematic of the presence of and focus on these young creative designers.

The positive aspects of 'excellence'

Later in this report it is described that the focus on 'excellence' also has its darker sides. At the same time, some members of staff indicate that the ambition to be among the best, to deliver outstanding academic performance, and to provide high-quality education is also experienced as inspiring and motivating. This focus appears to contribute in part to the appeal the faculty holds for staff who are drawn to such a working environment. The pride described earlier therefore relates not only to the faculty's reputation, but also to the achievements actually delivered — in research, in education, and for society.

Attention to teaching

Whilst it is by no means taken for granted at universities that staff regard teaching as the most appealing part of their work, many members of staff at the faculty indicate in interviews that the importance of teaching within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment is widely endorsed. Whilst it is described later that other tasks sometimes take priority, staff do nonetheless feel that teaching receives genuine attention and is regarded as an important part of the work.

Social engagement

Amongst staff at the faculty — who may hold very different views on various social issues — there appears to be a broadly shared sense of social engagement. Staff from a range of disciplines indicate that they are motivated to contribute through their work to addressing societal challenges by, with, or in the built environment. Staff appear proud of this social relevance and engagement.

Signals have been listened to

Those members of staff who have expressed a view on the matter indicate that they appreciate the initiative to commission this analysis, precisely because it arose from signals about the working climate. They regard the analysis as a serious attempt to gain insight into what is actually happening and where improvement is possible. Some staff adopt a more wait-and-see attitude, pointing to the importance of follow-up and concrete improvement. The fact that staff have raised signals — much like the criticism voiced during the interviews — is perhaps indicative of their engagement, and of the importance they attach to a socially safe working environment, one in which the majority of the colleagues interviewed would very much like to continue working.

4.3 Risk-increasing factors related to ambiguities in identity and the absence of a shared mission

A shared identity and common mission can contribute positively to experienced social safety and a positive working climate. Within TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, however, three partly overlapping ambiguities are visible in the way staff view the faculty, its identity, and its mission — ambiguities that, individually and in combination, can have a negative effect on the working climate and social safety. On the basis of the interviews, the following three ambiguities are identified as risk-increasing factors and elaborated upon below. A fourth related risk-increasing factor is the experience of staff that a shared identity and mission is lacking.

- Ambiguity 1: the 'designer' versus the 'scientist'
- Ambiguity 2: the Dutch versus the international faculty
- Ambiguity 3: a hierarchical organisation presented as flat

The absence of a shared identity, mission, and strategy for the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment

4.3.1 AMBIGUITY 1: THE DESIGNER VERSUS THE SCIENTIST

Whilst one can speak of 'the' Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment as an institution occupying a single building and formally constituting one organisation, the interviews reveal that in practice staff do not always experience the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment as a single unified whole. The faculty houses several distinct identities which, in the words of those interviewed, broadly divide into 'scientists' on the one hand and 'designers' on the other — also described as the engineers and the architects.

Such terms are commonly used to denote 'blood groups' within the staff population. The suggested dichotomy does not do justice to the more nuanced reality, but has been heard in various forms repeatedly — primarily as a means for staff to position themselves and the group they feel at home in relative to others.

Architects place their discipline at the centre and speak of colleagues who are or are not architects, who are or are not designers. What the 'non-designers' actually do is rarely named, described, or differentiated. Colleagues are categorised as either belonging or not belonging to one's own field. Those who identify as 'non-designers' associate themselves with terms such as scientist or engineer, setting themselves opposite the architects and designers with the implicit or explicit suggestion that the latter are neither technical nor scientific.

This division may be linked to the faculty's origins. As described in Chapter 3, the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment was originally a vocational training institution for architects, and only became a university institution at a later stage, with the associated remit of academic research and academic education.

The architecture department is home to designers — creative, entrepreneurial minds who prefer to work with freedom and who, it is said, do not take readily to being constrained by rules and procedures. Building technology largely attracts 'engineers', some of them highly specialised. For architects, creativity, originality, and entrepreneurship are important markers of success. They are more oriented towards professional practice outside the university, which in the Netherlands takes precedence. The Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment has therefore, traditionally and more so than other university faculties, maintained close ties with the profession.

Scientists are assessed on knowledge gained through research, number of publications and citations, and the ability to secure research funding. Their peers are scientists worldwide. In the technical sciences, the focus is on research into materials and techniques, and on measurable and therefore objectively assessable quality. Quality in architecture, it is suggested, is more difficult to assess objectively, as it involves creative designs in which more subjective aspects such as originality and aesthetics play a role — aspects that are less readily measured.

In assessing one another's work, this can give rise to questions such as: what is quality, who determines it, and how? It leads to a perception that it is not the quality of one's work but one's name recognition and network — within and outside the faculty — that determine one's standing among colleagues and students and one's prospects for a successful career.

The differences in identity and staff profiles between departments also lead to differences between departments in what staff need in order to work — and work together — with pleasure and with results. The formation of distinct groups is felt in many places and frequently spoken of. Groupings exist, and the productive and constructive collaboration between departments and between individual members of staff is not always considered self-evident.

4.3.2 AMBIGUITY 2: THE DUTCH VERSUS THE INTERNATIONAL FACULTY

Related to the ambiguity described above, contradictions are also observable in the way 'internationalisation' and the international character of the faculty are experienced. There is a lack of clarity amongst staff about the commitment to internationalisation. In interviews, staff openly wonder what kind of institution the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment wishes to be: one that orients itself primarily internationally and is, as it were, incidentally located in the Netherlands — or one that, whilst having a strong international reputation and intake, is explicitly rooted in Dutch architectural history and practice and wishes to continue to serve it.

The identity of the faculty on this point is therefore experienced differently by different members of staff. Several internationally recruited staff members indicate that they feel no genuine interest from the faculty in what they bring in terms of new knowledge, experience, and insights. The existing lack of clarity about the faculty's vision of and commitment to internationalisation appears to be compounded by the fact that the faculty — under the influence of decisions in Dutch politics — has taken measures to create more space for Dutch students and Dutch-language teaching. The pressure on international staff to acquire Dutch has also increased as a result. At the same time, international students have become, as at most higher education

institutions, an important source of funding for the faculty — and in order to continue attracting them, it is important to keep investing in the faculty's international character and reputation.

This feeds into how staff view, for example, the political trend of recent years in which the Dutch language and Dutch students are receiving a more prominent role. Contradictions in the way the faculty positions itself internationally, and in the degree to which internationalisation is prioritised, lead to a lack of clarity and at times to disappointment — particularly amongst international staff who came to Delft with different expectations.

4.3.3 AMBIGUITY 3: A HIERARCHICAL ORGANISATION PRESENTED AS FLAT

TU Delft previously restructured its organisational model away from the 'pyramid model' — with traditional research groups organised around a professor — towards a flatter structure with departments, groups, and sections. This change was implemented in phases within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment; for some parts of the faculty the transition is more recent, whilst for others it took place longer ago. This new structure was intended to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and teaching quality, with sections focusing on specific subject areas within larger departments.

Previously, professors held a more firmly defined leadership role, with the research group functioning in a supportive capacity to their work. The new structure was designed to relieve senior academics of management responsibilities, allowing them to focus more on research and on guiding and supporting academics in their careers. Under the new arrangement, collaboration would flow through horizontal lines rather than being directed from above. For staff who prefer to work autonomously and with freedom, the flatter structure would offer more room to do so. However, interviews also note that the strengthened focus on horizontal collaboration still clashes with the competitive university culture.

Part of the existing ambiguity stems from the fact that the transition from the old to the new organisational structure is still ongoing. Despite the new, flatter structure, decisions in some departments are still often taken at the top and 'communicated', in the experience of staff. Professors indicate that they experience a high degree of inefficiency in the new structure: whilst relieved of management responsibilities, they now find themselves having to arrange the most basic matters themselves, and are moreover more dependent than before on others and on the organisation's bureaucracy when it comes to decisions about time and resources for their work.

Staff speak of a strongly directive communication style. It is noted, for instance, that education tasks are largely allocated. Interviews also frequently raise the point that, whilst professors no longer formally lead a section, their academic achievements and standing mean they continue to play a determining role within a section. Those described as 'big names' from professional practice outside the university — who are, for instance, affiliated with the faculty as visiting professors — are experienced as particularly influential. By virtue of their position inside but especially outside the university, staff can feel strongly dependent on these professors — more so than the formal model on paper would suggest. Such dependency relationships are even more pronounced between early-career academics on temporary contracts and their supervisors, such as PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and Academic Career Trackers (see also 4.6).

Part of this ambiguity lies in the fact that the organisational culture described to new staff as horizontal and open is, over time, experienced by those same staff as implicitly hierarchical and lacking in transparency. International staff in particular, who may be accustomed to strongly hierarchical organisations with clearly defined and explicitly acknowledged power relations, appear to struggle with the implicit nature of this hierarchy when trying to find their way within the organisation.

Hierarchical relationships that remain implicit can give rise to feelings of uncertainty and risks to a level playing field. Real or perceived dependency has a significant effect on experienced social and psychological safety. Staff in positions of dependency are more frequently reluctant to be critical, to speak out against prevailing norms, views, or influential individuals, and to set clear boundaries, to disagree, or to say 'no'. Dependency relationships are therefore vulnerable to interpersonal violations, or the perception thereof. As far as these effects are concerned, it is not so much a question of whether the organisation has significant formal dependencies. What matters above all is whether staff experience it as such, and whether they feel that decisions about matters important to them — such as appraisals, task allocation, career progression, and development opportunities — depend on the preference or approval of one or a small number of individuals.

4.3.4 THE ABSENCE OF A SHARED IDENTITY, MISSION, AND STRATEGY FOR THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Taken together, staff experience one or more contradictions in the identity of the faculty. Several members of staff also indicate that they feel the absence of a clear mission and strategy — one that spans the faculty as a whole, connects its various departments, and provides a framework for clear substantive choices regarding education, research, personnel policy, and organisational development.

Some staff feel a need for clarity on questions such as: how does the faculty address the major societal challenges of our time, and how do the different departments contribute to and collaborate on this? What do we continue to do, and what do we leave to others? What values are important to us in doing so?

The impression amongst staff is that choices are currently made primarily under pressure from available resources — that the pursuit of as many students and as much research funding as possible carries too much weight in many decisions, at the expense of the substantive quality of education or genuinely innovative research. The sense is that the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment is drifting away from what the mission of a university faculty such as this one ought to be.

At the same time, the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, like all university institutions, faces an inherent tension between the need for organisational direction on the one hand and the protection of academic freedom on the other.

Research shows that a shared identity and common direction contribute positively to the working climate and to experienced social and psychological safety, whilst perceived contradictions or a lack of clarity about direction can have a negative effect and serve to increase risk.

The ambiguities described above can, in combination, lead to reduced attachment to and trust in the organisation, diminished social cohesion, and greater relational tensions between staff. Together, these tensions can contribute to higher levels of stress, a lower appreciation of the working climate, and increased risks of interpersonal violations.

4.4 Risk-increasing factors related to leadership

In the preceding sections we described the ambiguities in identity encountered within the faculty, the absence of a shared identity, vision, and strategy, and their risk-increasing effect. Beyond the experience of this absence, other aspects of leadership and management also play a crucial role in shaping the working climate and the experienced social and psychological safety within an organisation.

On the basis of the interviews, the following risk-increasing factors related to leadership have been identified within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment that can have a negative effect on the experienced working climate:

- Management responsibilities as a precondition for an academic career
- Leadership style varies and is person-dependent; a consistent vision is absent
- Vulnerabilities of certain leadership roles in the new organisational structure

4.4.1 MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AS A CONDITION FOR AN ACADEMIC CAREER

In many organisations, leadership positions are actively pursued and regarded as a natural next step in a career. Staff who wish to be considered for such a position must demonstrate that they possess the necessary leadership competencies. Once in a leadership role, they are assessed on their performance, supported where needed, and typically follow a development pathway through which they grow in capability towards a next, more senior or more challenging position.

Within the academic world, however, holding a leadership role is often not so much an aspiration as a fixed component of the desired academic career path. An academic with ambitions to become a professor is expected, along the way, to take on management responsibilities as well.

The interviews reveal a widely shared view that within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, management responsibilities are more than occasionally fulfilled by staff who lack either the ambition or the appropriate competencies for those tasks. Leading others, or undertaking management tasks such as heading a section or coordinating projects and meetings, is not infrequently experienced as a form of obligatory duty — a stepping stone on the way to something more in line with the ambitions, competencies, and aspirations of the person fulfilling the role. The importance of carrying out these responsibilities well, and the competencies required to do so, appears at times to be underestimated. There seems to be an assumption that everyone — or at least everyone with ambitions for further career progression — ought to be capable of performing these tasks.

The interviews also indicate that insufficient attention is not always paid to the effects of having to carry out tasks that are neither aspired to, insufficiently mastered, nor easily combined with other responsibilities. This applies to the effects on the leaders themselves, as well as on their professional environment — namely the staff they lead and those who fall under their management remit.

How well leaders carry out their often less-than-coveted responsibilities, and what their staff and colleagues experience as a result, varies from person to person and falls moreover outside the scope of this analysis. Independently of that, it is in many cases also difficult to assess: interviews indicate that the performance of management responsibilities — such as leading a department, section, or research group — is not always formally evaluated.

The impression is that there is no formal mechanism by which members of staff who carry out their management responsibilities poorly or in a manner that others find unpleasant are made aware of this (and supported to improve), for instance through a performance management process, mandatory training, coaching, or advice.

Particularly in situations where leading others is new, a secondary task, or a 'stepping stone' towards a more desired position, it stands to reason that leaders should be assessed, supported in developing the right competencies, and provided with training, coaching, and HR guidance.

On the one hand, the impression is that such support is not always sufficiently available; on the other, it is also the case that leaders do not always make sufficient use of what is available. Both the existing workload and leaders' tendency to prioritise their own research play a role in this.

This situation — in which leadership responsibilities must be fulfilled regardless of the person's ambition or suitability, whilst at the same time sufficient support is neither always provided nor taken up — also appears to have an effect on those who hold these responsibilities. They speak in terms of 'high workload' and sometimes of 'little satisfaction or enjoyment' in these tasks.

Staff describe the negative effects this situation has on them as well. In interviews, they regularly indicate that they feel insufficiently seen or acknowledged by their manager. Their manager is said to have little availability for management tasks, frequently absorbed by other work. The Results & Development conversations are regularly cited as an example — commonly dealt with as a formality and receiving little to no follow-up. Interviews also include several examples illustrating that leaders struggle with their role in resolving conflicts and handling incidents relating to integrity and social safety.

This situation can have negative consequences for the working climate. When leaders are less able to fulfil their role whilst also having limited availability, this can lead to a lack of clarity, reduced approachability, and reluctance in day-to-day contact. Conflicts may persist for longer, and staff become more dependent on one another for their professional development and interpersonal relationships — both professional and personal. This increases the risk of tensions, interpersonal violations, and the perception thereof, for leaders and staff alike. At the same time, opportunities go unrealised: due to a lack of priority, time, or competence, leaders will not always be able to fulfil the positive role they could play in strengthening the working climate and social safety.

4.4.2 LEADERSHIP STYLE VARIES AND IS PERSON-DEPENDENT; A CONSISTENT VISION IS ABSENT

It is generally accepted that working climate and social safety are partly grounded in shared perceptions of policy and behaviour within an organisation, and that consistent and uniform application of these by leaders is of fundamental importance. This requires a shared vision of which form and style of leadership best fits, and consistent implementation of that vision by those in leadership positions. Such a shared vision is absent within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment — something that may be connected to the earlier observation that the importance of leadership is not always sufficiently recognised.

The interviews paint the picture that employer-employee relationship within the faculty are experienced as diffuse. This appears to be largely connected to the value placed in the academic world on freedom and autonomy. There seems to be a lack of clarity — amongst professors in their role as leader or supervisor, and amongst those who report to them — about what kind of leadership style is appropriate in this context. Some professors do not see themselves as typical managers, whilst the staff who report to them do expect this of them and may feel less inclined to hold them accountable in their leadership role.

Nor do staff as a group uniformly prefer any single leadership style. For some, a professor in their supervisory role is valued for the high degree of freedom and trust they give staff. For others, a professor is valued for their continuous critical questioning and requests for justification of decisions, which staff experience as more stimulating. Both styles are appreciated where they are a good fit. However, they are not without consequence when they do not match the kind of direction a member of staff needs. In the first case, there is a risk that coherent guidance and a broader overarching vision recede into the background; staff may feel lost, overlooked, or without direction. In the second, staff may come to feel increasingly pressured or as though they are never quite good enough.

Altogether, there is no established or agreed leadership style that fits the mission and identity of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Furthermore, due to gaps in or the absence of job descriptions, it is not always clear what is expected of leaders — for instance with regard to staff care, conflict management, and other aspects of social safety. This also obscures who is performing well, who needs support, and who is not suited to such a role.

It was noted earlier that appraisal processes (Results & Development cycle), assessments, and — where necessary — coaching and support are not always sufficiently deployed or drawn upon. Leaders are therefore largely left to their own devices when it comes to their leadership style, relying on their own personality, competencies, and personal experience. What falls within the scope of the leadership role, how that role is carried out, and what staff can expect from their line manager therefore varies considerably from one leader to the next.

Part of the diffuseness around leadership style also stems from the new organisational structure not yet being fully embedded or accepted. In interviews, the leadership style — though varying in both preference and practice across staff and departments — is generally described as top-down. Staff indicate that they find it difficult to raise issues or achieve results from below. Decisions are taken at the top and, according to some, subsequently communicated down to them.

Staff also regularly experience a strongly directive communication style. They indicate, for instance, that they are not asked to take on certain educational tasks, but instructed to do so. It is important to view this directive, top-down style in combination with the — still prevalent — picture of implicit hierarchy and dependency described earlier.

Finally, a number of staff have drawn attention to what they perceive as the open relationship between the faculty and the professional field. Colleagues recruited from architectural practice often bring with them a distinctive leadership style of their own. It is said that their approach to leading may be better suited to 'running' an architectural practice than to a university organisation.

Attention is also drawn to a phenomenon connected to the repeatedly mentioned informal hierarchy and perceived dependencies: prominent figures, established and successful professionals from the field, carry a certain power with them — formal or informal, and sometimes in spite of themselves. A particular dynamic forms around them: they are listened to, and students sometimes gather around them as a following.

Inconsistency and strong person-to-person variation in how the leadership role is fulfilled and the style employed can have negative consequences for the working climate and social safety. The variation in leadership style, combined with the absence of clear expectations, means that staff do not always know what to expect from their line manager or what they can fall back on.

In a context where people already experience dependency on others, this variation can lead staff to adapt their behaviour to the personality of their line manager and be less inclined to speak up or set boundaries. This increases the likelihood of misunderstandings, tensions, and interpersonal violations, or the perception thereof.

4.4.3 VULNERABILITIES OF CERTAIN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE CURRENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organisational structure — which is not yet fully settled — the relationships experienced as implicitly hierarchical, and decision-making processes described as lacking in transparency and difficult to scrutinise, give rise amongst staff who depend on those decisions to a perception of concentrated power in the hands of certain leaders.

In particular with regard to the dean, there is a perception that power within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment is concentrated in his position. The dean appoints the heads of department, who in turn appoint the section heads. It is the dean who — after consulting the heads of department — takes decisions on research, education, and operational matters. Many members of staff share the impression that it is therefore important to be in contact with the dean, or at the very least to be 'visible' to him if one wishes to obtain certain opportunities. Having good connections with the dean means 'your future is assured', it was said. This also generates expectations: when difficult decisions arise and conflicts escalate, people look to the dean for a solution. The dean must implement policies established by the Executive Board and at times to take decisions he may not personally support, without being able to explain this within the faculty. The vulnerability stems from the perceptions and expectations of staff on the one hand, and this position of the dean between the faculty and university leadership on the other. Heads of department are also seen as powerful figures, by virtue of their position, membership of the management team, and proximity to the dean.

The role of section head is regarded as one of the most demanding and vulnerable positions in the faculty. It is a role without formal authority, created by the new structure of departments and sections in place of the former research groups. In addition to conducting their own research, the section head is responsible for coordinating research and education within the section, assessing applications for maintenance funding, and carrying out a range of administrative management tasks such as approving leave requests and conducting Results & Development conversations. At the same time, due to the still-considerable authority of professors, section heads are insufficiently able to direct the work of the professors within their section — particularly those who are more senior. Section heads consequently run the risk of being unable to fulfil their role adequately. This situation can also give rise to tensions in the relationship between the section head and the professors working within their section.

4.5 Risk-increasing factors related to dominant culture and implicit norms

'Organisational culture' refers to the totality of shared values, norms, and implicit assumptions that guide or determine behaviour and interpersonal interactions within an organisation. This culture is of great significance for the working climate and experienced social safety, as it helps determine what is regarded as appropriate behaviour, how staff interact with one another, and the extent to which they feel free to speak up.

The following risk-increasing factors related to dominant culture and implicit norms have been identified:

- Dominant organisational culture and the tendency towards conformism
- Implicit norms that can give rise to unintended exclusion
- Habits in day-to-day interactions between staff

Each of these risk-increasing factors related to organisational culture is elaborated upon separately below.

4.5.1 DOMINANT ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND THE TENDENCY TOWARDS CONFORMISM

Whilst the way in which people interact with one another can differ between parts of an organisation, most organisations have a 'dominant' organisational culture — that is, the totality of values, norms, and modes of behaviour that in practice prevails within an organisation and sets the direction for what is regarded as

'normal' and desirable behaviour. This dominant culture is often shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by the most visible and influential groups within the organisation, and manifests itself in informal and formal working practices, procedures, and expectations about how to act and conduct oneself.

Staff describe the dominant culture of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment primarily in terms of what behaviours are important and positively valued, and what is needed to be successful within the faculty. What emerges is a picture of a 'masculine' culture, in which values such as achievement, results orientation, status, and ambition take centre stage. The emphasis in the faculty culture is on excelling, achieving results that are visible to others, and individual success. Mutual competition plays an important role in this, and working hard is the norm. Some members of staff relatedly refer to a culture that is characteristic of architects.

The primary carriers of this culture are identified as the mostly somewhat older, Dutch, predominantly male professors who have made a name for themselves in the professional field, have been or continue to be successful in their own domain, and have in doing so contributed to the faculty's prestigious standing. In other words, the origins of the current culture are most likely to be found in a time when the majority of the faculty's staff consisted of Dutch men who were, for the most part, at the top of their field. Career pathways, decision-making procedures, and meeting conventions were shaped around the then-dominant group. Elements of the culture and habits that developed at that time have been reinforced and preserved over the years, even as the organisation has grown and the staff demographic no longer resembles what it once was.

Staff who wish to work pleasantly and — above all — successfully feel it is important to adapt to this culture, even when they do not belong to the traditionally dominant group. In doing so, they contribute to sustaining and perpetuating it. This tendency towards conformism may be partly driven by the competitive character of the university, the desire to succeed at precisely this prestigious faculty, but also by the previously described perceived dependencies on, for example, professors and the professional field.

It is thus possible that staff have, over the years, collectively contributed to a culture in which they personally also experience negative elements. Some members of staff indicate, for instance, that they suffer adverse consequences from the enormous competitive and work pressures. Staff also indicate that when they experience disadvantages from these or other aspects of the prevailing norm — such as working fewer hours, maintaining a stricter separation between private and work time, displaying more 'feminine' qualities, or pursuing different kinds of ambitions — they do not always feel sufficiently free to put forward alternative perspectives or to behave in ways that deviate from the norm. They feel a certain pressure to go along with what is simply 'part of being at Bouwkunde'. This pressure has negative consequences for the social and psychological safety experienced by staff, but can also lead to excessive workload and absenteeism.

The effect of the dominant culture becomes concrete when one considers the implicit norms that appear to form part of it, as described in the following section. It also becomes apparent that the extent to which these implicit norms can be met is not equal for everyone. The dominant culture and its implicit norms can give rise to an unintended, yet nonetheless real, mechanism of exclusion.

4.5.2 IMPLICIT NORMS

Implicit norms are important carriers of organisational culture. They are largely unspoken, form part of the socialisation and sometimes the selection process, and determine what is regarded as 'normal' and 'appropriate' behaviour. Staff conform to these norms — consciously or unconsciously. In an environment such as the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, these norms carry additional weight. The combination of mutual competition, high performance standards, interdependencies, and a strong desire to

succeed within the faculty means that staff conform closely to these — often implicit — norms. This is reinforced by the long-term and selective nature of academic careers, in which staff must continually position themselves in relation to others — within and outside the faculty — over extended periods, and feel themselves to be constantly judged.

The interviews have brought to light, amongst others, the following implicit norms as characteristic of the faculty:

- Implicit norm: Work more hours, keep going, and work overtime
- Implicit norm: Do not say 'no' to additional tasks
- Implicit norm: Be visible within and outside the faculty
- Implicit norm: Ensure you can participate in Dutch as quickly as possible
- Implicit norm: Work more hours, keep going, and work overtime

The interviews reveal an implicit norm of working more hours than formally required. Workaholism is understood as a sign of quality and 'genuine love' for the profession. This manifests itself in, for example, the normalisation of lunch meetings, answering emails late in the evening, working after office hours, at weekends, and during holidays or leave. For some of those interviewed, this extra work stems from the great passion they feel for their work: a design that is never finished and can always be improved, or a research project that continues to fascinate. Such passion is often spoken of with enthusiasm, and the extra time it requires is sometimes rationalised away. Other frequently cited reasons have a less positive undertone: fear of failing students, not wanting to be visibly seen to work less than colleagues, the need to take over tasks from absent colleagues, the high degree of competition, and the hope of a permanent appointment.

Implicit norm: Do not say 'no' to additional tasks

In some cases, extra tasks are taken on out of a sense of collegiality or responsibility — tasks that, when a colleague is absent, would otherwise go undone. Another picture that emerges from the interviews is that staff are expected to take on a range of additional roles and responsibilities, such as participating in meetings and carrying out coordinating tasks. Despite already full schedules, people are rarely inclined to say 'no' to these. This is connected to the perception that taking on extra tasks can contribute to visibility within the faculty, whilst declining them may have negative consequences for one's career prospects. Here too there is a more positive variant: some members of staff proactively take on extra tasks of their own accord, driven by a strong sense of engagement with the work. At the same time, this habit carries risks. Sufficient critical consideration is not always given to whether such tasks fit within a staff member's duties, or to an equitable distribution of additional tasks across the team.

Implicit norm: Be visible within and outside the faculty

Related to the previously described open relationship with the professional field — which applies particularly to architects at the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment — it is customary to actively maintain relationships with external parties. This takes place, for instance, by attending presentations, lectures, and networking events outside working hours. For academic staff, this also plays a role in securing fellowships and grants. There is a prevailing sense that it is important, or even necessary, to be known by the right people and to be able to approach them for references, for example. This gives rise to an informal expectation of network maintenance outside the organisation and beyond regular working hours: the perception is that one must be visible to the right people and organisations at the right moments. This visibility relates not only to physical presence, but also to presence in online networks such as LinkedIn. It is also regularly noted that external visibility carries weight within the faculty as well. References are made to 'attention-seeking

behaviour' among visible staff members, and even to adverse career effects when someone is deemed 'not visible enough' — the faculty, after all, has a vested interest in the visibility of its staff.

Implicit norm: Ensure you can participate in Dutch as quickly as possible

Whilst TU Delft presents the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment as an international faculty, English is a common working language, and the Master's programme is taught entirely in English, the interviews reveal an implicit expectation regarding international staff: that they should, in time, acquire Dutch. Interviews with Dutch-speaking staff reveal a wide range of views on this matter, ranging from encouragement to explicit expectation, and from understanding to irritation. A frequently heard observation is that meetings regularly switch to Dutch as the working language — sometimes for brief coordination purposes, sometimes for longer stretches of discussion. A commonly cited justification is that people have 'already been speaking English all day'. Seminars within the faculty are sometimes also organised in Dutch. In informal settings too — in corridors, over coffee, and at lunch — Dutch frequently functions as the dominant language.

The norms described above are in all likelihood only a part of the implicit norms that underpin the dominant culture of the faculty, demand conformity, and thereby serve to reinforce that culture. However, the ability of and extent to which staff can meet these norms is not equally distributed. It is precisely those staff who feel the greatest pressure to conform — for instance because they are on temporary contracts, such as PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, or Academic Career Trackers — who encounter the greatest difficulties. In practice, the impossible can be asked of them. They risk falling behind, must do more to achieve the same goals, or have no opportunity to achieve those goals at all.

In this way, implicit norms can unintentionally give rise to inequality and exclusion. Within the faculty, this applies for instance to staff who do not have the financial or relational capacity to carry out extra work outside regular working hours — such as those with care responsibilities, second jobs (such as some self-funded PhD candidates), or other external commitments.

This dynamic affects women on average more heavily than men and can make it more difficult for them to build a career or to combine an academic career with family life. This aligns with the perception raised regularly in interviews that women encounter more obstacles to career progression.

Another example concerns international staff and the Dutch language. Certainly when it is uncertain whether they will remain affiliated with the university for an extended period, the investment required to learn Dutch is considerable — especially when this must take place in one's own time, and particularly given its limited utility beyond the country's borders. By using Dutch not only in informal but also in professional contexts, participation in meetings can in practice be made more difficult for international staff. This is experienced as a form of exclusion, with consequences that are not only social and psychological, but also career-related.

Within an organisation, shared norms — implicit or explicit — can offer important benefits: clarity, direction, and cohesion. The implicit system of norms described above within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment appears to create an unequal playing field for ambitious staff and can lead to unconscious institutional exclusion and the perception thereof. Both this exclusion and the perception of it can lead to heightened conformism, an inability to be fully oneself, or — for those unwilling or unable to adapt — to lesser success, dissatisfaction, or departure from the organisation.

Within the faculty, a process appears to be emerging in which — for professional opportunities — an implicit selection takes place in which some staff gradually benefit more than others. The greatest beneficiary appears to be the Dutch male member of staff without external (care) responsibilities. At the same time, the

interviews reveal that even within this group, not everyone feels comfortable with the demands these implicit norms impose — neither on themselves nor on others.

Beyond actual and perceived exclusion, implicit norms in their combined effect can also increase the risk of tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings, and reduced accountability. This can place the working climate and the experienced social and psychological safety under further pressure.

4.5.3 HABITS IN DAY-TO-DAY INTERACTIONS

The dominant culture of the faculty also finds expression in the habits and customs that govern day-to-day interaction and conduct between staff. It is in these everyday interactions that what is regarded as appropriate behaviour and the expected modes of conduct become visible. It is precisely these often taken-for-granted habits that give concrete shape to the culture, and thereby have a direct influence on the working climate and experienced social and psychological safety. This section examines the following habits in day-to-day interaction that emerged from the interviews, and their effect on the working climate and social safety:

- Group formation and solo working undermine cohesion and collaboration
- There is no established habit of speaking out or confronting others, and conflicts remain unresolved for extended periods
- The way staff treat and interact with one another is rarely experienced as inclusive
- Disappointment and anger are discernible in communication

Group formation and solo working undermine cohesion and collaboration

The interviews make clear that collaboration and cohesion are not self-evident dominant values. Staff indicate that collaboration is hampered by the factors mentioned earlier — such as the individual focus on one's own career, structural aspects, and differing professional identities — but also by group formation on the one hand and a tendency to work in isolation on the other. Contributing to this is the value placed on autonomy and academic freedom. People generally prefer to work independently, and the organisation does little to discourage this. Those who can work from home tend to prefer to do so. According to staff, insufficient direction is given towards shared presence, collegial collaboration, and mutual support. When it comes to group formation, references are sometimes made to silo formation — pointing to fragmentation in education and research — and sometimes to 'tribes', formed on the basis of loyalty to one or a few influential individuals and with the exclusion of others.

There is no established habit of speaking out or confronting others, and conflicts remain unresolved for extended periods

In interviews, the culture is described as informal and familiar, yet simultaneously as one in which people are not accustomed to voicing criticism or confronting one another. Some international members of staff see this as something typically Dutch: people regard themselves as open and direct, yet find it difficult to talk about feelings and to address one another on their behaviour. Because irritations and opinions about colleagues are not openly expressed, people more often speak about others behind their backs. In the same vein, conflicts are avoided as much as possible. References are made to 'skirting around the issue' and 'papering over the cracks'. Line managers are not always aware of conflicts, or do not know what their role is and how they should address or resolve them. Conflicts can therefore persist over time. Staff have cited examples of conflicts and soured relationships that have been ongoing for years. In the immediate vicinity of such conflicts, this has notable consequences. When leaders are involved, staff become aware of the conflict, leading to inefficiencies, tension, and a tendency to 'work around the conflict'. In such situations, colleagues

or staff feel compelled to take sides, or try to avoid doing so by limiting contact with one of the parties. This can continue over an extended period.

The way staff treat and interact with one another is experienced as rarely inclusive

The fact that the faculty is rooted in a Dutch tradition is generally respected and appreciated by international staff. An interest in this tradition is often part of their motivation for coming here — though with the expectation that this interest is mutual, given the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment's profile as an internationally recognised institution. However, a large proportion of international staff indicate that the faculty is less international than they had expected. There is a perception that little value is placed on the culture they represent, that there is limited curiosity about who they are, and that there is insufficient interest in what they can bring to the faculty. It is also noted that differences are too often explicitly pointed out. Sometimes this is accompanied by a suspicion that it is done with a positive intention — to demonstrate cultural sensitivity, to show that one is aware of other cultures and customs. In practice, however, such remarks can have precisely the opposite effect, serving to exclude rather than include. Several examples of this were cited in the interviews. Staff indicate a need for greater attention to what connects them, and more interest in what international colleagues contribute and have to offer.

Disappointment and anger are discernible in communication

More so than in other organisations, interviews refer to anger that people experience or encounter in contact with others. Line managers in particular indicate having to deal with this, but it is also observed in interactions between colleagues.

It appears to stem from workload, from disappointment about expectations that have not been met, and from a lack of understanding about decisions that are or are not taken. There are said to be expressions of anger — from professors who have been at the faculty for a long time and feel insufficiently heard, as well as from lecturers who feel frustrated in their ambitions. Frustration and a sense of not being recognised appear to manifest themselves in the way people give critique on the work of others: it is direct, sometimes experienced as confrontational, and offers little acknowledgement of what has gone well.

Feelings of disappointment and anger also persist in connection with decision-making around the debate on Israel and Gaza. There was external pressure and internal polarisation, which led to aggressive confrontations, intimidation, and disparagement. Both staff who feel personally connected to the Palestinian cause and Jewish members of staff have expressed that they felt insufficiently protected by the university during that period. The dean was ultimately required to take decisions in that situation that a proportion of staff did not understand.

Anger amongst staff also appears at times to surface in interactions with students. Staff also sometimes experience aggression from students, for instance in evaluations about education.

These forms of unsafe communication — in which tension and negative emotions are more visibly present in everyday contact — have a negative effect on the working atmosphere and the experienced sense of social safety for both staff and students.

The habits in day-to-day interaction described above can, in combination, have a risk-increasing effect on the working climate and social and psychological safety. Limited collaboration and group formation can weaken mutual cohesion, whilst the absence of a culture of accountability can mean that tensions and conflicts persist and accumulate. Combined with perceived dependencies, unsafe communication, and an interpersonal environment experienced as insufficiently inclusive, staff may become more reluctant to voice concerns, give feedback, or set boundaries. This increases the risk of misunderstandings, a hardening of relationships, and interpersonal violations or the perception thereof, and can place an open and safe working climate under

further pressure. These effects do not affect all staff equally and can weigh more heavily on groups that are less well aligned with the dominant culture or find themselves in a more dependent position.

4.6 Risk-increasing factors related to career opportunities

The risk-increasing factors described in this chapter can reinforce one another and partly overlap. This will be particularly evident in this section, which addresses aspects of career policy that can have a negative impact on the working climate. When reading this section, it is therefore important to bear in mind the strong informal hierarchy, the perceived dependencies, and the performance-oriented culture described earlier.

The way in which career opportunities are structured, how decisions about career development — such as promotions and appraisals — are reached, and in particular staff's perception of these processes, have a significant influence on how the working climate and social safety are experienced. The key aspects of the faculty's career policy and their potential consequences for the working climate are elaborated upon below.

- Perceived lack of transparency regarding requirements, procedures, and decisions
- Perception that career policy further advantages the dominant group
- Limited progression and turnover
- Junior researchers experience considerable uncertainty about their prospects

4.6.1 PERCEIVED LACK OF TRANSPARENCY REGARDING REQUIREMENTS, PROCEDURES, AND DECISIONS

The organisational culture of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment has previously been described as performance-oriented and competitive. Staff who have succeeded in securing a position at this prestigious institution are generally ambitious — including in relation to their careers. They are prepared to work hard, to carry out tasks they find less interesting, and to actively manage their visibility and pursue compelling results. At the same time, the career path many aspire to — in particular the most sought-after senior positions, such as that of professor — is not open to everyone. This path requires completing various intermediate steps and overcoming obstacles, with the ultimate goal far from guaranteed. Staff are aware of this and generally show a willingness to accept it.

At the same time, staff frequently express critical views about career policy. They indicate that the requirements for promotion are not always sufficiently clear and concrete. There is also widespread criticism of the transparency of the process and the way in which decisions are reached. Decisions are experienced as insufficiently explained and not always easy to follow. This perceived lack of clarity and transparency demonstrably affects trust in the organisation and in the decisions taken.

When asked about the applicable requirements, staff most frequently refer to three domains in which they are expected to perform: research, educational, and societal impact. At the same time, staff — including those currently going through such a process — indicate that the specific content of these requirements is not always sufficiently clear. Some members of staff suggest that alongside formal criteria, informal factors also play a role, such as relationships with those who hold decision-making authority, willingness to take on additional tasks, visibility, and the sharing of achievements. The role of the line manager — for instance, supervisor or professor — is regarded as crucial in this regard. They are expected to be both willing and able to exert influence on the decision-making process. It is suggested in this context that staff who have a supervisor with a strong position, with whom they have a good relationship and who is willing to provide support, have better prospects for promotion than others with comparable performance.

Beyond questions about the criteria applied, there is also widespread lack of clarity and criticism regarding the appointment process itself. Questions are raised about the composition of appointment advisory committees and the way in which they are constituted. Decisions and any exceptions to the usual process are not always explicitly substantiated. As a result, the appointment process is experienced by some staff as a system that lacks transparency.

The characteristics of the career policy described above have clear implications for the working climate. The combination of unclear criteria, limited transparency, and the perception of informal influence can lead to feelings of uncertainty, inequality, and dependency amongst staff. This can translate into cautious behaviour, with staff less inclined to speak critically, set boundaries, or raise concerns, for fear of potential negative consequences for their careers. Such circumstances can also contribute to interpersonal tensions, undesirable forms of competition, and mistrust amongst colleagues, all of which increase the likelihood of interpersonal frictions and violations. It is notable that the weaknesses in career policy described during the interviews provoke strong emotional responses amongst staff — more so than most other topics discussed. This appears to be indicative of the importance attached to this subject and the extent to which it touches on fundamental expectations of fairness and recognition. Nothing appears to place trust in the institution and confidence in the fairness of decision-making under greater pressure than the experienced lack of clarity and transparency.

4.6.2 PERCEPTION THAT CAREER POLICY ADVANTAGES THE DOMINANT GROUP

Decisions that are not understood — arising from the lack of clarity and transparency described above — can give rise to the perception that decisions are not objective, are driven by personal motives, and/or involve improper preferential treatment or disadvantage. Staff who suspect that such preferential treatment plays a role indicate that the current practice would tend to benefit those who align with the prevailing norm, who resemble colleagues in influential positions, and/or who belong to what was earlier described as the carriers of the dominant culture. Set against this perceived advantage for the dominant group is the perception — and in some cases the experience — that other groups are disadvantaged in their career prospects. These perceptions also manifest themselves in the experiences of specific groups within the organisation. It is noted, for instance, that women still encounter greater difficulties in gaining promotion, and that women who do succeed have, according to some, adapted their behaviour to conform to the masculine norm dominant within the faculty. It is also suggested by staff that international employees do not receive the same opportunities as their Dutch colleagues, with those from outside the European Union or outside the 'West' said to face additional barriers. Several interviews indicate that women from Asia in particular are disproportionately disadvantaged in their career prospects within TU Delft.

Whether there is in fact institutional disadvantage for certain groups or favouritism cannot be established on the basis of this research. The effects of these perceptions are, however, no less relevant. As with the factors described earlier, the consequences can be understood in terms of cautious behaviour and self-censorship, mutual mistrust, and tensions in interpersonal relationships. The assumption that decision-making is not fully objective or transparent can reinforce feelings of inequality and a diminished sense of fairness, and can lead staff to be less inclined to speak critically or to share signals, for fear of possible career consequences. For specific groups — in particular those who feel disadvantaged — this can contribute to a sense of distance from the organisation and a reduced feeling of inclusion and recognition. This can affect the working climate and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the faculty.

4.6.3 LIMITED PROGRESSION AND TURNOVER

The interviews reveal that there is limited movement within the faculty: progression and turnover are relatively low, whilst the inflow of new perspectives is also under pressure. TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment has a strong international reputation and is regarded as a prestigious place to work. At the same time, it is precisely this standing that makes alternatives scarce. There are few institutions with a comparable profile, and for many staff — within the Netherlands and neighbouring countries — realistic options for moving to another university are limited. This contributes to staff often remaining affiliated with the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment for extended periods. For some, the organisation thereby takes on the characteristics of a 'gilded cage': attractive and stable, but with limited scope for mobility and renewal.

Within this context, tensions can arise. When staff remain in the same role for extended periods without prospect of further development, whilst those from outside the institution — from professional practice, for example — are given opportunities to join, this can be experienced as inequality. This applies not only to academic staff, but also to a proportion of non-academic staff, for whom the job classification structure is experienced as restrictive — particularly for those with educational and coordinating responsibilities. Having reached a ceiling in their career progression, they often remain on the same salary scale for an extended period, which can contribute to feelings of being undervalued and of missed opportunities.

The combination of limited progression, perceived inequality in opportunities, and long-standing working relationships increases risk for the working climate. This can lead to reticence and less open exchange, whilst interpersonal tensions can intensify. As a result, the space to speak up may reduce, which has a negative effect on the experienced social and psychological safety within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment.

4.6.4 JUNIOR RESEARCHERS EXPERIENCE CONSIDERABLE UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THEIR PROSPECTS

The interviews reveal that junior academics within the faculty — such as PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and Academic Career Trackers — in particular find themselves in positions of uncertainty. They are often employed on temporary contracts and have limited clarity about their prospects for continuing to work at TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment in the longer term. The Academic Career Track is designed as a career pathway that, after five to eight years, is intended to lead to a permanent appointment and further progression within academia. In practice, however, this pathway is characterised by high performance pressure and uncertainty about the future.

Within this context, junior academics experience considerable workload. Long working weeks are for many the rule rather than the exception, partly because they are still required to prove themselves at this stage of their career. For some (visiting) PhD candidates, financial pressure adds a further burden, as their income is not always sufficient and they are obliged to take on additional work. At the same time, they are heavily dependent on their (co-)supervisors for the progress of their research. These supervisors — often professors or associate or assistant professors — sometimes have a large number of doctoral candidates under their supervision, which can affect the availability and intensity of guidance provided.

For a proportion of international staff on temporary contracts, the stakes are particularly high. For them, the termination of their appointment may also mean losing their residence permit and being required to return to their country of origin.

The combination of temporary appointments, high performance pressure, and strong dependency relationships increases risk for the working climate. This can lead to reluctance to voice concerns or criticism

— for instance towards supervisors on whom one depends for assessment and career prospects. This can limit openness in day-to-day interaction and intensify tensions, placing the experienced social and psychological safety within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment under further pressure.

4.7 Risk-increasing factors related to staff care

The interviews bring to light several aspects of staff care that can have a risk-increasing effect and a negative influence on the experienced working climate and social safety. This section elaborates on the following themes:

- The experienced and increased workload
- The perception that the HR department is not functioning optimally
- The quality of Results & Development conversations is not assessed positively
- The reception and induction of new staff is insufficient to support a good start

4.7.1 THE EXPERIENCED AND INCREASED WORKLOAD

Experiences of workload vary amongst staff, but there is broad agreement that workload — particularly for academic staff — is high. This is partly related to the nature of work within a university, in which staff are continuously assessed on publications, citations, and secured research funding, all within a competitive environment with high performance standards. At the same time, they combine these responsibilities with substantial educational duties and the supervision of multiple PhD candidates.

Within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, it is noted that the teaching workload has increased further since the budget cuts associated with the so-called 'restructuring'. The growing number of students — an important source of income — is being accommodated with fewer staff. Practice-based lecturers are less frequently used, and staff experience the time available for preparation and contact hours as insufficient. As a result, many staff spend more time on education than they are formally resourced for, in order to maintain the quality of provision for students. This contributes to overload and, in some cases, absence due to mental health difficulties, which in turn further increases the workload for colleagues.

At the same time, PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers in particular experience growing pressure to take on educational responsibilities alongside their research commitments. This can create tension between education and research, and in some cases leads them to feel compelled to fill gaps. Furthermore, they are not always sufficiently equipped for these tasks, which carries risks for both the quality of education and the progress of their own research.

In addition to these core responsibilities, staff are expected to fulfil supplementary roles — such as participating in consultative structures and carrying out coordinating tasks. Given the emphasis on visibility and performance within the faculty, staff are often reluctant to decline such tasks. At the same time, driven by a sense of engagement and ambition, staff regularly take on additional work of their own accord. This is not always actively managed or kept within reasonable limits, and the distribution of these tasks is not in all cases experienced as equitable.

The heaviest burden falls on academic staff with educational responsibilities, but the effects are felt throughout the organisation. Pressure on supervision increases as available time for it decreases. At the same time, part of the burden shifts to PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and ultimately to students as well.

The combination of high performance pressure, an increased educational load, and supplementary responsibilities increases risk for the working climate. This can lead to overload and to mental and physical health difficulties amongst staff, with negative consequences for their wellbeing. At the same time, the competitive nature of the working environment can mean that staff are less inclined to raise these issues in a timely manner or to set boundaries.

4.7.2 THE PERCEPTION THAT THE HR DEPARTMENT IS NOT FUNCTIONING OPTIMALLY

Amongst many staff and a proportion of management, there is dissatisfaction with the way in which HR responsibilities are organised and carried out. The perception is that HR positions itself strongly on the side of the university as employer and operates primarily as an administrator of employment contracts, in which policy and procedures are strictly applied. Staff raise concerns about the accessibility and quality of the service provided. Communication is regularly experienced as formal and directive, and the human dimension is felt to be lacking. A number of staff indicate that they feel insufficiently heard or seen. Some interviewees also note that HR policy is applied in a limited strategic way in support of the faculty's research and education objectives. The impression exists, for instance, that there is insufficient integrated oversight of the composition, quality, and deployment of the workforce. Responsibility for the Results & Development cycle lies in practice largely with line managers, who do not always feel sufficiently equipped or supported in this role. HR appears to play a limited part in this and is not actively involved in the conduct or follow-up of Results & Development conversations.

An assessment of the actual functioning of the HR department falls outside the scope of this research. However, the perceptions described above can nonetheless affect the working climate. When staff feel that they are insufficiently heard or supported, this can lead to reluctance to raise questions, concerns, or problems. This can limit openness in day-to-day interaction and contribute to feelings of unsafety — thereby having a negative effect on the working climate and the experienced social and psychological safety within the faculty.

4.7.3 QUALITY OF RESULTS & DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATIONS NOT ALWAYS ASSESSED POSITIVELY

Results & Development conversations are generally regarded as an important instrument for supporting staff development, discussing performance, and clarifying mutual expectations. They can contribute to targeted guidance, the timely identification of difficulties, and better alignment between individual development and organisational goals.

The interviews reveal that staff within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment hold annual Results & Development conversations with their line manager. In some cases these proceed satisfactorily and are experienced as valuable. The good intentions behind the Results & Development cycle and the Recognition and Rewards programme are not in doubt. At the same time, the quality and effectiveness of these reviews proves to be heavily dependent on how the line manager approaches them and the extent to which they take them seriously and follow up accordingly. A considerable proportion of staff feel the Results & Development process is approached primarily as a formality or an administrative obligation, in which case it loses meaning for them. This can lead to staff files not always being complete or up to date, which in certain situations can have adverse consequences for the faculty as an employer — for instance when, in cases of performance issues, insufficient documentation exists to enable timely intervention or to properly substantiate any employment law measures that may be required.

It is also noted that Results & Development processes still tend to place the emphasis on performance associated with an academic career, such as research and publications. Talent and effort in the areas of education or coordinating responsibilities are said to receive less recognition and acknowledgement, meaning that not all contributions within the faculty are equally valued.

The way in which Results & Development conversations are conducted, as described above, can affect the working climate and experienced social safety. When reviews are experienced as formal or of little significance, this can mean that staff are less inclined to openly discuss difficulties, uncertainties, or development needs. This can limit openness and trust in the relationship with the line manager. Furthermore, a one-sided emphasis on certain forms of performance can contribute to feelings of being undervalued and treated unfairly amongst staff whose efforts receive less visible recognition.

4.7.4 RECEPTION AND INDUCTION OF NEW STAFF IS INSUFFICIENT TO SUPPORT A GOOD START

The interviews reveal that the onboarding of new staff within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment is largely delivered through online modules, such as presentations and written information. Recent graduates in particular indicate that this leaves them feeling insufficiently prepared for day-to-day practice. Reception and induction in practice most commonly fall to associate or assistant professors or professors, who due to their workload do not always have sufficient time for this. This can mean that new staff find themselves having to manage largely on their own at an early stage, feeling as though they have been thrown in at the deep end.

It is also noted that international staff — such as PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers — face specific challenges when working and settling in the Netherlands. According to interviewees, these challenges are not always sufficiently recognised. They indicate that they are expected relatively quickly to be fully operational and contributing, whilst at the same time dealing with practical and personal matters such as finding suitable and affordable housing. Support from central services — such as 'Coming to Delft' — is not experienced as adequate by everyone. In some cases this leads to disappointment, particularly when the support offered does not match the expectations that were raised about joining the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment.

The approach to onboarding described above can affect the working climate and experienced social safety. When new staff feel insufficiently supported, this can lead to uncertainty, reduced attachment to the organisation, and reluctance to ask for help. For international staff, this effect can be compounded by additional practical and social barriers. This can make integration into teams more difficult and contribute to feelings of isolation, which can have a negative effect on the working climate and the experienced social and psychological safety within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment.

4.8 Risk-increasing factors related to the handling of incidents and reports

In a socially safe working climate, few interpersonal violations occur, and those that do arise can be reported safely and followed up carefully. With regard to the handling of incidents and reports, the following aspects emerge from the interviews as potentially risk-increasing for the working climate:

Insufficient attention to desired interpersonal behaviour

- Problems for line managers in relation to social safety
- Insufficient awareness and accessibility of confidential advisers
- The handling of reports

4.8.1 INSUFFICIENT ATTENTION TO DESIRED INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR

As described earlier, speaking out about, or holding colleagues accountable for, behaviour experienced as undesirable or crossing boundaries is not a natural or established practice within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. The organisation has paid greater attention to this in recent years, which is generally experienced as a positive development. At the same time, the interviews reveal that actually addressing behaviour in practice still occurs relatively infrequently. It is noted, for instance, that the code of conduct receives only limited attention during onboarding. Staff who have participated in bystander training find it valuable, but also indicate that attention to addressing behaviour in everyday practice quickly fades into the background. It is also observed that the staff members for whom such training might be most relevant do not always participate.

4.8.2 LINE MANAGERS STRUGGLE WITH THEIR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN MATTERS RELATING TO SOCIAL SAFETY

Line managers too appear to be uncertain about their role in promoting a pleasant working climate and social safety, and in managing conflicts. For some, this is not something they regard primarily as their responsibility, or it is an area to which they devote limited time due to competing priorities — particularly in relation to their academic work. Others do attempt to raise the subject, but experience their own reluctance or uncertainty in doing so.

The reporting channel via line managers does not always appear to function effectively in practice. Line managers are not in all cases sufficiently aware of their role in identifying and referring suspected integrity violations. Staff who are considering signaling a situation of undesirable conduct indicate that they sometimes feel discouraged from doing so. They experience that signals are not always taken seriously, or they feel expected to resolve or accept situations themselves. There is also a perception that certain members of staff are protected from formal follow-up by virtue of their position or importance to the faculty.

In some cases, line managers attempt to handle reports themselves — for instance by mediating, transferring someone, or issuing a warning — even where a more serious integrity issue may be involved. This appears to be connected to a lack of clarity about their own role and responsibilities, but also to limited familiarity with TU Delft's Integrity Office and doubts about how reports that are submitted there are followed up. The expectation that formal reports may lead to unrest or escalation also plays a role. Where the reporting channel via line managers functions inadequately, signals and situations of undesirable conduct can persist

for longer without adequate follow-up, allowing tensions and uncertainties in working relationships to continue and in some cases to escalate further.

4.8.3 CONFIDENTIAL ADVISERS ARE INSUFFICIENTLY KNOWN AND ACCESSIBLE

TU Delft has six internal confidential advisers operating university-wide in the areas of social safety and organisational integrity, and three confidential advisers for academic integrity. There are also two external confidential advisers for social safety and organisational integrity. Whereas confidential advisers were previously attached to individual faculties, a central structure has since been adopted, with the aim of safeguarding the quality and professionalism of this function.

The interviews reveal that this centralisation is also experienced as having drawbacks within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Previously, approaching a confidential adviser within one's own faculty was experienced as a low-threshold step. The step towards one of the centrally available confidential advisers is more frequently experienced as significant. The physical and organisational distance appears in some cases to contribute to reluctance. Interviewees also point to a degree of mistrust — for instance regarding potential conflicts of interest — stemming from a perception that the confidential advisers are too closely aligned with the university's interests. There are also questions about the extent to which a confidential adviser from outside one's own faculty can have sufficient insight into the context and dynamics within it.

At the same time, the interviews reveal that informal alternatives are emerging within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Some staff members — consciously or unconsciously — take on a role as a point of contact for colleagues or students. Whilst this can contribute to low-threshold reception of signals, it also carries the risk that information about social unsafety becomes fragmented and does not always become available in a central, consistent, and professional manner. This can limit oversight of signals and patterns within the faculty, allowing undesirable situations to persist or develop further. Staff who experience no clear follow-up or improvement may become disappointed as a result and be less inclined to raise concerns again in the future.

4.8.4 THE HANDLING OF REPORTS

Whilst staff who are better acquainted with the working practices of the integrity and social safety reporting point — which has been in operation since 1 April 2025 — speak of careful and independent processes in the handling of reports, this picture has not yet become widely established within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. The interviews reveal that many staff are still not well acquainted with the integrity and social safety reporting point and the way in which it operates. The distance to the integrity and social safety reporting point is often experienced as considerable, despite efforts to increase its visibility through posters, leaflets, and information on the intranet.

It also emerges that staff do not always draw clear distinctions between the different roles and functions — such as those of the integrity and social safety reporting point, the committee for handling complaints about undesirable conduct, the ombudsperson, and the confidential advisers. This gives rise to a lack of clarity about where to turn with which question or report, and how reports or complaints are subsequently taken up and handled. There is a particular need for greater transparency and communication regarding the manner of follow-up and the outcomes of reports — especially where these concern issues arising in one's immediate working environment. The interviews also note that there is an expectation for line managers to take a more active role in explaining processes and informing staff about how reports within the organisation are or have

been handled. This can contribute to confidence that reports are taken seriously and that the organisation genuinely protects its staff from unacceptable behaviour.

Making desired and undesired behaviour explicit and discussable, and reaching clear agreements about conduct that will not be tolerated, makes it easier for staff to hold one another accountable — or to be held accountable themselves — when such conduct occurs. Awareness of and trust in confidential advisers and reporting channels increases staff willingness to raise concerns with line managers, confidential advisers, or staff of the integrity and social safety reporting point when direct conversation with the colleague in question has not been successful. A high willingness to report, combined with the careful handling of reports and complaints, contributes to social safety.



Chapter 5 Risks to Working Climate and Social Safety

In the preceding chapters we established that work at universities — and therefore also at the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment — is inherently vulnerable with regard to working climate and social safety, whilst a socially safe working climate is essential for a university to function well and to deliver good education and research. We then examined the organisation-specific characteristics of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment that play a role in this. In Chapter 4 we described the aspects of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment that we regard as risk-increasing, and that heighten the risks to social safety and the working climate. In this chapter we describe the social safety risks that arise from these factors. We have divided these risks into categories, which are addressed in the following sections:

- Risks to working climate and social safety in the relationship between staff and line managers
- Risks to working climate and social safety in relationships between staff
- Risks to working climate and social safety in interactions with students

5.1 Risks to working climate and social safety in the relationship between staff and line managers

5.1.1 FAVOURITISM OR PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OR FALSE ACCUSATIONS THEREOF

The risk to social safety and the working climate most frequently cited by staff, and also regarded as most likely to occur, concerns favouritism or preferential treatment in the relationship between staff and line managers — particularly in career development and promotion processes. This is most prevalent amongst staff engaged in research and education. The interviews reveal that many staff hold the perception that it is important to know the right people within the faculty and to be visible, with the role of the dean being mentioned in particular. Staff also experience a strong dependency on the willingness of their line manager to advocate on their behalf.

In addition to the risk of actual favouritism or preferential treatment, the interviews also reveal a related risk: that of the perception or accusation of such conduct. Both situations are said by staff to occur in practice. The perception that assessment does not take place solely on the basis of merit appears to stem in part from a lack of clarity about the criteria that must be met in order to gain promotion. It is also noted that decision-making around promotions is experienced as insufficiently transparent.

Both actual favouritism and the perception or accusation of it can have a considerable impact on trust in decision-making and on interpersonal relationships, and thereby on the working climate and social and psychological safety within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Such perceptions and accusations are often difficult to refute, meaning that they affect not only the social safety of those who feel disadvantaged, but also of those who find themselves on the receiving end of such perceptions or accusations.

5.1.2 INSTITUTIONAL EXCLUSION

The interviews reveal a perception amongst staff that it is more difficult for those who do not belong to the dominant group — Dutch-speaking, male, white, architect — to progress or gain promotion. This perception

appears to stem in part from the same factors as the risk of favouritism, such as limited transparency in decision-making and dependency on informal networks, but is also fuelled by experiences reported in particular by international staff and women. Staff assess the likelihood of this risk as moderate to high.

It is described, for instance, that newcomers are expected to adapt to existing working practices and norms, whilst there appears to be less room for the perspectives and experience they themselves bring. Practical barriers are also mentioned, such as limited access to relevant networks and the use of Dutch — particularly in coordinating meetings — which can present an obstacle for international staff.

Female staff additionally indicate that, alongside an experienced mismatch with a dominant masculine culture, they see fewer opportunities than their male colleagues. The influence of care responsibilities is also raised here — responsibilities that are still more frequently carried by women — which can lead to a greater burden on the work-life balance and thereby to limitations in opportunities for further development or career progression.

At the same time, some interviews note that members of the dominant group also feel disadvantaged in certain respects — for instance on grounds of age. It is noted that pressure may be felt to retire earlier in the context of budgetary constraints.

Several interviews also raise the possibility of exclusion in connection with knowledge security. It is mentioned, for instance, that applications from candidates from certain countries — such as China or Iran — may have less chance of success or may not be considered at all.

The impact of this risk is assessed as significant. In addition to consequences for the working climate and social and psychological safety within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, it can lead to diminished trust within the organisation, damage to the faculty's reputation, and negative effects on the functioning and performance of the organisation as a whole.

5.1.3 INTIMIDATING LEADERSHIP OR FALSE ACCUSATIONS THEREOF

Given the hierarchical relationships within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment and staff's dependence on their line manager or supervisor for the next step in their academic career, there is a perception that line managers wield considerable influence over staff career paths. This experienced position of power can in itself be experienced as intimidating. Staff also speak of performance pressure that in some cases is equally experienced as intimidating.

Some members of staff indicate that it is precisely because of this dependency relationship that they would find it difficult to address their line manager in situations involving intimidating or other transgressive behaviour. This appears to apply particularly to PhD candidates, and in particular those from cultural backgrounds in which hierarchical relationships play a more prominent role. It is also noted that staff do not always feel free to take a position in meetings that differs from that of their line manager, and that in some cases pressure is felt to align oneself with the line manager in discussions or conflicts.

Staff further indicate that feelings of intimidation can also arise in situations where they experience being deliberately ignored or receiving insufficient recognition for academic achievements they feel they are entitled to.

The likelihood of both intimidating leadership occurring and of false accusations thereof is assessed by staff as moderate. The impact for those involved can be significant and, where such situations persist, can also have consequences for the working climate and the reputation of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment.

5.1.4 SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR, UNDESIREABLE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, STALKING, AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS THEREOF

The risk of sexually transgressive behaviour is seen by staff primarily in relationships between line managers and staff members — in particular between male supervisors or line managers and female PhD candidates or postdoctoral researchers. This risk is located above all in situations involving intensive one-to-one working arrangements, such as individual supervision or joint international travel.

Sexual or romantic relationships between line managers and staff members are regarded as undesirable given the existing power differential, yet clear agreements on this do not always appear to be in place. When such a relationship is ended by one of the parties, this can lead to a disrupted professional relationship. In more extreme cases, this can develop into stalking or the perception thereof, or into forms of pressure or blackmail.

The likelihood of the risk of romantic relationships taking on unwanted forms is assessed by staff as moderate. The risk of sexually transgressive behaviour is similarly regarded as moderate, whilst stalking is considered less likely. The impact for those involved is assessed as significant to highly significant. For the working climate, the short-term consequences are more limited, but where such situations persist, a moderate to significant impact may be expected there as well.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact on individuals	Impact on work climate/organisation
Favoritism or preferential treatment and the false accusation thereof			
Favoritism or preferential treatment in career development or promotion processes			
False accusations of favoritism or preferential treatment			
Institutional exclusion			
Institutional exclusion of staff outside of the dominant group			
Intimidating leadership and the false accusation thereof			
Intimidating leadership in hierarchical dependency relationships			
False accusation of intimidating leadership			
Sexually transgressive behaviour, undesired relationships, stalking and the false accusation thereof			
Undesireable intimate relationships within hierarchical relations			
Sexually transgressive behaviour in dependency relationships			
Stalking or continued unwanted behaviour after a relationship			
False accusation of sexually transgressive behaviour			

5.2 Risks to working climate and social safety between staff

5.2.1 DISCRIMINATION, STEREOTYPING, AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS THEREOF

Many members of staff indicate in interviews that subtle or implicit forms of discrimination based on culture, religion, or gender occur between colleagues. These are said to stem largely from prejudice and to manifest themselves in stereotyping remarks about the cultural or religious backgrounds of colleagues, often without the person making them being aware of their discriminatory or exclusionary nature.

It is also noted that the risk of discrimination and stereotyping is partly connected to the great diversity of cultures within the faculty, whilst the faculty's senior leadership consists predominantly of white, Dutch men. According to some interviewees, a proportion of staff have a limited capacity to communicate effectively with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. The Dutch direct communication style — for instance in the form of remarks, sometimes intended as humour, about a colleague's assumed cultural customs or religion — is experienced by many international staff as inappropriate or even discriminatory. This is linked both to the underlying stereotyping and to the sense that such remarks serve to emphasise differences relative to the dominant Dutch culture.

The likelihood of this risk is assessed by staff as high. The impact for both those involved and the organisation is regarded as moderate to significant, partly due to potential effects on the working climate and the reputation of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment.

5.2.2 GOSSIP

Gossip is regularly mentioned in interviews as a feature of the way staff interact within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. It is often described as arising from decision-making that is unclear or difficult to understand, or from limited transparency in communication surrounding incidents. According to staff, it can also serve as a way of expressing dissatisfaction or frustration, or releasing tension. In this context, it is also noted that conversations may involve calling into question the qualities of colleagues — particularly when those colleagues are given opportunities that others are not. Existing group formation and the absence of a culture in which staff hold one another accountable appear to reinforce this behaviour. As a result, some staff indicate that they are reluctant to share personal matters. International staff in particular note that information shared in confidence has a tendency to spread through informal channels and subsequently come back to them. The likelihood of this risk is assessed as very high. The impact for those involved can be significant, whilst the impact for the organisation is initially regarded as moderate.

5.2.3 EXCLUSION

Many conversations raise the exclusionary effect of the use of Dutch during meetings and seminars. International staff experience this as unfair and inconsistent with the international character of the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment. Even where they have a basic knowledge of Dutch, they indicate that this limits their participation in discussions and the exchange of knowledge.

Some staff also hold the perception that the use of Dutch in certain situations is deliberately deployed by Dutch colleagues to maintain or strengthen their own position. Exclusion is further experienced in connection with existing group formation and the 'islands' that exist within the faculty, combined with mutual competition. The absence of faculty-wide gatherings is also cited as a factor that contributes to a sense of exclusion. In addition, some staff indicate feeling shut out when they are not part of informal networks or 'inner circles' — for instance those surrounding the dean — where in some cases there is also a suspicion of

favouritism or preferential treatment. The likelihood of this risk is assessed as high. The impact for both those involved and the organisation is regarded as significant.

5.2.4 VERBAL AGGRESSION

As noted earlier, interviews make notably frequent reference to anger that staff experience in themselves or observe in others. This appears to stem from a combination of frustration and workload. The presence of these tensions — whether openly expressed or simmering beneath the surface — increases the risk of outbursts of anger and other forms of verbal aggression. The risk of verbal aggression is further heightened by polarisation and interpersonal tensions connected to geopolitical developments, such as the conflict in Gaza and tensions surrounding Iran. Interviews refer to earlier heated discussions in which those involved describe aggressive treatment by the other party. Whilst tensions have since eased somewhat, it is noted that this is not the result of any structural approach to managing these differences. The risk of tensions escalating and coming to a head therefore remains.

The likelihood of this risk is assessed as relatively low. The impact for those involved can range from moderate to significant.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact on individuals	Impact on work climate/organisation
Discrimination, stereotyping and the false accusation thereof			
Discrimination and stereotyping between staff			
False accusations of discrimination or exclusion			
Gossip			
Gossip and spreading of (confidential) information			
Exclusion			
Exclusion through language use, networks and group formation			
Verbal aggression			
Verbal aggression and escalating tensions between staff			

5.3 Risks to working climate and social safety in interactions with students

For this analysis, which focuses on the working climate and social safety as experienced by staff, no students were interviewed. Nonetheless, on the basis of interviews with staff, something can be said about risks in the interaction between staff and students. These include both risks in which staff display transgressive behaviour towards students or are accused of doing so (whether justifiably or not), and situations in which staff themselves experience transgressive behaviour from students.

5.3.1 SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR, AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS THEREOF

Staff indicate in interviews that they are aware of risks in their relationships with students — both with regard to actually displaying sexually transgressive behaviour and the risk of being accused of it. In some cases it is noted that students might use such accusations to exert pressure, for instance in relation to assessments. The risk appears greater in situations involving one-to-one contact between a staff member and a student. It is noted, for example, that in the model hall — where people work in close physical proximity and guidance sometimes involves physical contact — staff run the risk of this being experienced as transgressive.

The likelihood of this risk is difficult to assess on the basis of the interviews. Staff explicitly do not rule it out, in part given signals and experiences that are more widely known in the university sector. At the same time, the probability of it occurring is assessed as lower than for other risks, such as favouritism. The impact for those involved — both alleged victims and those who are accused — can be significant. This risk can also have consequences for the working climate and the reputation of the faculty, and thereby for the organisation as a whole, with the impact regarded as moderate to significant.

5.3.2 DISCRIMINATION, STEREOTYPING, AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS THEREOF

As in relationships between staff members, there is also a risk in relationships with students of implicit forms of discrimination arising from prejudice and stereotyping. An example given is students being addressed on the political or military actions of their country of origin. Staff also indicate that some colleagues make remarks or jokes about students — sometimes in the presence of students themselves — that can be experienced as inappropriate or transgressive.

For the assessment of the likelihood and impact of this risk, reference is made to what has been described in the context of relationships between staff members, with the caveat that this analysis is based primarily on interviews with staff and therefore relates above all to the working climate as they experience it.

5.3.3 (VERBAL) AGGRESSION AND INTIMIDATION

There is a risk that the frustration and anger present amongst staff may manifest itself in verbal aggression or intimidating behaviour towards students. At the same time, some members of staff indicate that they themselves can be subjected to aggressive or intimidating behaviour by students or those close to them — for instance in relation to assessments. Several staff members also note that the tone of feedback in student evaluations is sometimes experienced as sharp or confrontational. These evaluations are generally completed by a relatively small proportion of students, and staff have the impression that this is relatively often students who are dissatisfied with their results or assessment.

The likelihood of this risk is assessed on the basis of the interviews as real, though it is a matter of incidents rather than a structural pattern. The impact for the staff members involved can range from moderate to significant. For the organisation, the consequences are more limited as long as such situations remain isolated, though they can have a negative effect on the experienced working climate and may, over time, also have implications for the faculty's reputation as an employer.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact on individuals	Impact on work climate/organisation
Sexually transgressive behaviour and the false accusation thereof			
Sexually transgressive behaviour between staff and student	●	●	●
False accusation by or towards student	●	●	●
Discrimination, stereotyping and the false accusation thereof			
Discrimination and stereotyping towards students	●	●	●
False accusation in education context	●	●	●
(Verbal) aggression and intimidation			
Verbal aggression of staff towards students	●	●	●
Aggression or intimidation by students towards staff	●	●	●



Chapter 6 Conclusions

This analysis was conducted in response to signals about the working climate within TU Delft's Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, and aims to provide insight into the working climate and the factors that influence social safety. On the basis of a broad and representative set of interviews, recurring patterns, underlying dynamics, and staff experiences were examined. A distinction was drawn between vulnerabilities that are inherently associated with working within a university (and apply to universities in general) and factors specific to this faculty. The analysis focuses primarily on risks and risk-increasing factors, with the aim of providing concrete starting points for strengthening the working climate and social safety, whilst preserving what is already functioning well.

CONCLUSION 1

Universities — and faculties within them — are inherently, that is by their very nature, vulnerable to risks in the areas of working climate and social safety. This vulnerability stems from the nature of academic work and the context in which it takes place. Three structural characteristics play a central role: hierarchical dependency, strong reputation and career sensitivity and tensions around academic freedom.

- The hierarchical relationships within universities, combined with scarcity of positions and resources, mean that junior staff in particular are significantly dependent on senior colleagues for their career development.
- At the same time, the strong focus on academic performance and reputation gives rise to performance pressure and competition, whilst conduct is less explicitly factored into assessment and management. This can contribute to undesirable behaviour being corrected less readily.
- In addition, academic freedom — as a core value of the university — is under pressure from internal direction and external dependencies. This can limit the space to speak out critically and to act independently.

CONCLUSION 2

Within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, a combination of interrelated risk-increasing factors places the working climate under structural pressure, notwithstanding the positive characteristics that staff also identify — such as pride in the faculty and its societal relevance, dedication to their own department, and the pleasure of working with young, creative students.

- Ambiguities in identity, mission, and organisation — such as the tension between designer and scientist, Dutch and international, and formally flat but implicitly hierarchical relationships — give rise to a lack of clarity and a reduced sense of belonging. The absence of a broadly shared direction compounds this further. Combined with a lack of consistent and coherent leadership, a context emerges in which expectations are not always clear and accountability can be limited.
- The dominant, performance-oriented, and (experienced) masculine culture, together with implicit norms around effort, visibility, and language, reinforces conformism and can contribute to exclusion. Combined with habits in day-to-day interaction — such as the absence of an established norm of mutual accountability, group formation, and tensions in communication — this can give rise to a working climate in which people become reluctant to speak up or to hold one another accountable.
- Significant risk-increasing factors are also visible in the area of career opportunities. A lack of clarity about criteria and procedures, perceptions of preferential treatment for the dominant group, limited progression and turnover, and the considerable uncertainty facing junior staff undermine trust in fair decision-making and reinforce feelings of dependency and interpersonal tension.

- Finally, factors relating to staff care and the handling of incidents compound this dynamic. High workload, experienced shortcomings in HR support, variable quality of the Results & Development cycle, inadequate onboarding, and a process for handling reports that is experienced as insufficiently accessible and transparent mean that signals are not always shared or followed up in a timely manner.
- Taken together, these factors give rise to a working climate in which tensions can persist, interpersonal relationships come under pressure, and it is not self-evident for staff to raise concerns, problems, or undesirable behaviour.

CONCLUSION 3

Within the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment, various risks arise in the interaction between staff members, between staff and line managers, and between staff and students — in connection with the risk-increasing factors described above.

- The most prominent risk concerns favouritism or preferential treatment, and the perception or accusation thereof. This risk is experienced by staff as the most likely to occur and, precisely because of the combination of actual and perceived situations, has a strong impact on interpersonal relationships and the working climate.
- Intimidation — or the perception of it — also emerges as a significant risk. In a context of hierarchical dependency, this can lead staff to adopt a cautious stance, feel less free to speak up, and be less inclined to address conflicts or tensions. Mechanisms of institutional exclusion also constitute an important risk. These lie not only in behaviour, but also in culture, procedures, and practical habits — such as language use, networking, and group formation — and thereby directly affect collaboration and a sense of mutual belonging.
- Given the scope of this analysis, the risks in interaction with students are described in limited terms and from the perspective of staff. In this context, the risk of sexually transgressive behaviour and accusations thereof is explicitly identified, given the potential consequences for those involved and for the working climate. Brief reference is also made to experiences that staff shared of verbal aggression or other forms of unsafe communication from students — for instance in evaluations of education.

Chapter 7 Recommendations

Recommendations for Strengthening the Working Climate and Social Safety

1. DIRECTION, FEEDBACK AND EMBEDDING

Feed back findings carefully and organise the conversation within the faculty

Ensure findings from this analysis are fed back carefully and openly. Create space for dialogue about recognition, interpretation and experiences. Draw on specialists within the university, such as the Integrity Office. Organise both formal and informal conversations within departments and teams. Give managers an active role in discussing the findings. Create safe environments in which staff can share experiences. In doing so, distinguish clearly between reflecting on patterns and discussing individual situations.

Use the dean's leadership as a driver of change

Make use of the momentum created by the new deanship. Position the dean visibly as the driver of the changes and recommendations under way. Encourage the dean to engage actively with departments and staff on findings and next steps. Make the dean visible in communications about choices, progress and dilemmas. Explicitly link the dean's leadership to leading by example on integrity, social safety and collaboration. Use the dean's office to bring coherence to different initiatives and priorities.

Have the dean's office supported in further development by a diverse and representative group of staff who help carry the conversation within the faculty, gather signals, contribute to practical implementation and assist in monitoring progress. Ensure this group is visible, accessible and reports back regularly.

Embed the recommendations in the faculty's ongoing transition, with attention to what is already working well

Ensure the recommendations are not treated as a standalone initiative, but become an explicit part of the transition already under way in response to reports from the Education Inspectorate and the Labour Inspectorate. Link the recommendations explicitly to existing programmes and change processes. Integrate them into ongoing policy on HR, D&I, leadership and organisational development. Ensure that communication about improvements is explicitly assigned to line managers, supported where necessary by HR, social safety and D&I specialists.

Safeguard the existing strengths of the working climate identified in this analysis. Communicate actively about these positive aspects, including alongside the other findings. Monitor whether changes inadvertently put existing qualities under pressure.

2. JUSTNESS, TRANSPARENCY AND DECISION-MAKING

Prevent favouritism and strengthen transparency and equal treatment

Consistently continue the improvements already under way in decision-making and procedures — for example around promotion and appraisal — and ensure these are visible and recognisable to staff. Strengthen trust not only through actual improvement, but through active, clear and repeated communication to staff about these processes. Have managers explain and contextualise these processes within their teams. Make any deviations from standard procedures explicit and justify them. In the coming period, evaluate completed trajectories on criteria such as trust, reasoning and transparency. Actively monitor perceptions of unequal opportunity and favouritism within the organisation.

Reduce dependency relationships and strengthen transparency in decision-making

Limit the influence of individuals on critical career and work decisions by restricting informal lines of influence and strengthening formal processes. Ensure transparent and traceable processes that contribute to a level playing field. Continue developing and embedding multiple-assessment approaches for significant decisions, such as promotion and contract extension. Document decision-making processes and criteria explicitly and communicate them. Ensure decisions are explained and understandable for those involved. Actively monitor where dependency is experienced as constraining. Pay particular attention to the position of PhD candidates, postdocs and Academic Career Trackers.

Strengthen communication and participation in decision-making

Increase understanding of and support for decisions through transparency and involvement. Reduce the sense of top-down decision-making. Explain significant decisions and the reasoning behind them explicitly. Involve staff in good time in policy and organisational changes. Establish structured dialogue opportunities within departments and across the faculty.

3. CULTURE, IDENTITY AND RECOGNITION***Strengthen a shared identity in which different roles are valued equally***

Develop a clear and broadly supported sense of what the faculty is and aspires to be — one in which different contributions (research, education, design and organisation) are visibly and equally recognised. Clarify the commitment to internationalisation, the vision on it and its importance for research and education, and translate this into HR and D&I policy.

Work actively on how the faculty is presented externally and internally, ensuring that communications do not focus solely or primarily on architecture, but make other disciplines and contributions equally visible. Give this concrete expression in, among other things:

- the programme for open days;
- how the faculty presents itself externally and within the university;
- the faculty's visual identity and positioning, including the naming and presentation of its building.

Communicate explicitly about success beyond architectural practice, and give equal prominence to the achievements of researchers, lecturers and other contributors.

Encourage collaboration between different parts of the faculty, particularly where this requires working across boundaries — for example between architects and technical specialists. Name, encourage and recognise such cross-disciplinary initiatives explicitly.

Examine the relationship with the professional field critically. Recognise it as important but, in certain respects, also vulnerable — for instance where dependencies arise or where external norms influence internal recognition. Explore and develop new forms of collaboration that better reflect the faculty's desired breadth and position.

Rebalance the recognition of performance and behaviour

Ensure that not only performance, but also behaviour and contribution to the working climate are explicitly recognised and taken into account. Break a one-sided emphasis on output and competition. Include collaboration, professional conduct and contribution to the working environment in appraisal criteria. Recognise education, teamwork and coordination roles explicitly. Hold managers accountable for addressing

unwanted behaviour. Open up conversations about which behaviours reflect the desired culture. Embed these points in HR processes and evaluations.

Make implicit norms and exclusion mechanisms explicitly discussable

Break through invisible norms that may reinforce inequality or exclusion. Create awareness of and space for different ways of working and contributing. Discuss implicit norms actively within teams and departments. Train managers in recognising exclusion mechanisms, with support from HR, D&I and, where appropriate, the Integrity Office.

Monitor differences in progression and opportunity between groups of staff. Strengthen awareness and practical capability around social safety and inclusion.

Increase staff and managers' awareness of their own assumptions, interactions and behaviour, and strengthen their capacity to act in situations touching on social safety and inclusion. Organise training in cultural sensitivity and recognising implicit bias. Provide bystander training focused on timely and appropriate intervention. Offer managers in-depth training in recognising and addressing signs of unsafe situations. Stimulate reflection on behaviour and interactions within teams and departments.

4. LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Professionalise leadership and make it an explicit responsibility

Make management a conscious role for which selection, support and appraisal take place. Ensure greater consistency in leadership and strengthen the role of managers in the working climate. Select managers explicitly on leadership competencies and motivation. Develop and implement a faculty-wide vision of leadership. Make participation in leadership training and coaching mandatory. Appraise managers systematically on their performance as managers.

Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations for each management position. Ensure managers actively contribute to awareness-raising and development within their teams on social safety and inclusion.

Provide opportunities for peer consultation and conversation, enabling staff and managers to discuss difficult considerations and dilemmas together. Consider embedding structured methods for moral deliberation — of the kind already in use at TU Delft — on a regular or well-timed basis. Use the insights that emerge from these deliberations ('moresprudence') to identify patterns and address them more directly.

5. CAREERS, HR AND STAFF CARE

Make career pathways clear and apply them consistently

Ensure that improvements to career structures and appraisal processes are genuinely experienced by staff. Close the gap between formal policy and day-to-day reality, and ensure that expectations within these pathways are realistic and achievable. Continue and consolidate improvements to career and appraisal frameworks. Communicate actively and concretely about career pathways, criteria and opportunities. Have managers explain and contextualise these within their teams, supported where necessary by HR, social safety and D&I specialists. Monitor whether staff experience career policy as clear, consistent and fair.

Provide structured and targeted language support in both Dutch and English as part of professional development, so that language proficiency does not become an implicit barrier.

Make career pathways not only transparent, but realistic and achievable

Ensure career pathways are not only clear and fair, but genuinely attainable within the time, resources and role distribution available. Avoid situations in which staff are structurally expected to achieve outcomes that are difficult to combine in practice. Test whether expectations are realistic in relation to available time and resources. Make explicit choices about priorities and avoid accumulating demands. Differentiate career profiles and development pathways where necessary. Monitor signs of overload and structural unachievability.

Strengthen staff care and make HR processes more meaningful

Ensure consistent, visible and effective staff care. Build on improvements already made to existing tools such as the Results & Development cycle, strengthening their substance. Evaluate and follow up on these, paying particular attention to how they work in practice in order to avoid improvements that exist on paper only. Make Results & Development conversations mandatory, substantive and development-focused. Ensure agreements are followed up and recorded. Strengthen practical HR capacity where possible and ensure that the support managers need is more readily available — including, where necessary, by departing from the university-wide model in which HR operates at a greater distance. Provide guidance on workload, conflicts and career questions. Monitor signals about working climate and staff welfare systematically. Facilitate peer support networks for PhD candidates, postdocs and Academic Career Trackers. Make clear where these staff members can turn for advice, support and care.

Evaluate and improve support for international staff, in particular in the areas of reception, housing assistance, faculty onboarding, career guidance and mental health care.

6. REPORTING, SUPPORT AND THE DAY-TO-DAY WORK ENVIRONMENT***Strengthen reporting structures and build trust in follow-up***

Ensure that reporting systems are not only available, but also well known, understandable and trusted by staff. Communicate clearly about reporting routes, roles and procedures. Make visible what happens after a report is made. Train managers in recognising and acting on signals. Ensure adequate availability of and easy access to support and confidential advisers. Make confidential advisers visible within departments and teams. Evaluate the use of and trust in reporting structures periodically.

Review agreements around remote working and physical presence

Strike a balance between flexibility and connection through clear and broadly supported agreements on physical presence. Set clear frameworks for home working and attendance at the workplace. Stimulate teams to meet in person at fixed times. Give managers a role in making and upholding team agreements.

Facilitate informal meetings, gatherings and exchanges, including across teams and departments.

7. INTEGRITY, MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP

Gain insight into other aspects of integrity, monitor progress and report back to the Executive Board

Develop insight into how the issues identified affect integrity risks — both organisational and academic — within the faculty. Do this in a practical way, limiting the burden on the staff and managers involved in the current analysis. Engage with internal specialists from the Integrity Office and pay explicit attention to themes such as conflicts of interest, unfair competition, favouritism and the appearance thereof.

Ensure visible progress and periodic feedback to staff on the improvements under way. Commit to this from the outset and return to it regularly. Repeat the analysis in two years' time.

Communicate actively with the Executive Board about this analysis and demonstrate willingness to allow other faculties — within and beyond TU Delft — to learn from this process. Raise at university level those changes that are needed but fall outside the faculty's sphere of influence



Annex: Documents and literature

Documents reviewed

Onderzoek naar Naleving van Wet- en Regelgeving TU Delft, Rapport Inspectie van het Onderwijs (2024)

Bouwkunde MedMon 2024

Meerjarenplan faculteit Bouwkunde 2021-2025

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