

# Thoughts on Professional Practice and Education

Article 4: Business and Management in Education

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This is the fourth article I have prepared in the series offering thoughts on professional practice and education. The focus of this article, I hope, will assuage some individuals that I offended by my last article and will give hope to friends that will see I am now writing with the sense that I appear to have lost with my last article.

I know I am not alone when I say I wish I knew as a young surveyor what I now know about running a business. I can stand in front of a dozen or more surveyors that run their own surveying business, some for decades, and discuss rules and regulations that by law apply to them. What I reveal shocks many of them as they realize the deficiencies in their knowledge and business practice. They were unaware or confused about rules and regulations they should be adhering to or should have adhered to when running their business.

I might quickly add, I will not claim to know the entire plethora of knowledge on government regulations as applied to businesses. Who would know all the governing rules except for the most dedicated bureaucrat or regulator? Sadly, the federal, state, and local governments continue to do their best to create more difficulties in starting and running a business – especially if you contract with the government.

The first time a surveyor hears the phrase ‘cash flow’ should not be during their first year of owning a business as they sit in their office, the time near midnight, the pay for employees due the next day. Having never heard of the term ‘cash flow,’ the new business owner cannot understand how they must pay sooner using what they won’t have until later.

The new graduate that is checking into the human resource manager at the onset of their surveying career should not wonder what is meant by a 401k, employer match, vesting periods, and pre-tax contributions.

This missive is not meant to discuss politics or even the various subjects that may fall under the concepts of ‘business’ and ‘management’ education. Rather, the focus is to advocate that relevant business and management topics be presented to students studying in a four-year surveying program.

Faculty would be disappointed when collecting alumni data to discover graduates described their job title as ‘survey technician’ ten years after graduation. After ten years, the graduate is expected to be licensed and in management. Yet, many survey programs have failed to give students any relevant knowledge that would aid the graduate to take on management positions where survey graduates are expected to spend most of their professional careers.

I would opine the lack of adequate business and management courses in surveying programs stem from two conditions. The first condition arises because of the lack of business and management experience that faculty have. Many faculty do not have the experience, training, or knowledge to teach relevant business and management courses. Even survey programs at larger universities can’t always draw on the business school faculty to help educate

the surveying student in relevant business courses. While the business school faculty may be able to educate the surveying student regarding contracts, business entities, employee law, etc. topics such as mechanics liens, survey fee makeup, right of entry laws, road safety laws, Dig-safe, OSHA, federal contracting, and other such survey specific areas will not be covered in a course taught by the business school.

The second condition thwarting the introduction of business and management courses into a surveying program is the difficulty in fitting more courses into a surveying degree program. Universities limit the maximum number of credits for a bachelor of science degree. ABET accreditation requires certain courses and credit hours. NCEES has established topics covered in the FS exam that must be covered in the academic program. Finally, the university requires all students at the university take certain courses for the regional accreditation the university maintains.

If the reader will indulge me, I will get upon a soapbox regarding the last limitation mentioned - that is University accreditation requirements. I have found it frustrating that regional accreditation often requires courses such as diversity, artistic expression, humanities, and other general education courses popular among liberal arts faculty but worthless in a business or a professional environment. (Not all general education is dismissed by practitioners. Course such as communication and writing courses are the exception. These courses and their content are appreciated by employers.)

For 30 years I have examined hundreds of employment-surveys prepared by alumni and survey employers sent by the University for program self-improvement. In those 30 years and after review of hundreds of documents, I have yet to see a single employer or alumni say how useful artistic expression and similar courses have been toward their career. The mention of these courses is a common occurrence but only under a category where alumni cite courses of no use in their life and wasted tuition money.

Having given my opinion, I now offer advice by suggesting professional societies that advocate for surveying programs also look at the courses in the survey program to ensure there are business and management courses that provide the graduate with the knowledge to become leaders in both the profession, community, and a surveying business.

† Other books and articles by Knud can be found at <https://umaine.edu/svt/faculty/hermansen-articles/>