

Business Practices: Supporting the Practising Professional

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ABSTRACT

Technological and social changes require changes in business and in management. It is generally agreed that the rate of external change is increasing. The changes impact on surveying businesses as much as they do on other businesses.

A key change for survey businesses in recent years is that members of the public have an increasingly high expectation of professional service providers. As the Institute of Management's Code of Conduct (quoted in Davies, 1997) puts it: 'A professional is someone who justifiably claims to provide an expert service of value to society, and who accepts the duties... including... honouring the special trust reposed by clients, employers, colleagues, and the general public'. Survey companies' stakeholders are increasingly demanding, putting a greater emphasis on the professional's ability and duty to consider the needs of wider society as well as of the client, and to be able to deal with this balance successfully. Allred (1999), however, suggests that professionals struggle to rationalise the (often conflicting) standards of their own, their company, their profession, and the public.

As if this wasn't sufficient, further changes in the business environment in recent years include (for a fuller exposition, see Greenway, 2001):

- The growth of the power (and respectability) of pressure groups, adding complexity to the balance that has to be struck by professionals;
- The intertwining of different professions, in large part due to technological developments, meaning that a professional is expected to have a base knowledge of a number of professions;
- The immediacy and reach of communication tools, allowing and requiring rapid decisions;
- An increasing globalisation, requiring managers to understand regional differences in culture, people and law;
- An increasing intolerance by many governments of self-regulation by professionals; and
- Profound technological changes, meaning that practising professionals can no longer understand all that is happening inside the 'black boxes' that they and their assistants use in their work.

Each of these changes puts additional pressure on a professional surveyor in the dual roles of expert and businessman. Neither of these roles can be ignored, and the abilities of an individual in each of them will continually be challenged. A professional surveyor will, in most cases, have a personal interest in the content of his work, and a passion to do it to the

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best of his or her ability. Business challenges, however, are also a necessary part of an increasing number of professionals' lives. Professionals will often have received limited training or experience in the business aspects of their work, and may have limited interest in them – they will often be viewed as a means to an end. The need for all-round skills in management and business is brought into stark relief for surveyors running small companies, where they will often be unsupported by experts and where advice from professional consultants may be beyond budgetary reach.

FIG, as a Federation made up of more than 250,000 practising professional surveyors, has over the years recognised and responded to these challenges and pressures. Recent work has included the publication of guidance on ethical principles and codes of conduct (FIG, 1998-1) and quality (FIG, 1998-2). In related work, a paper on 'Management Matters' (Hoogsteden et al, 1998) was presented at the last FIG Congress, as the output from an FIG Working Group into the subject. During the last four years, a Working Group of FIG Commission 1 (Professional Standards and Practice) has taken the earlier work, along with that published from other sources, and attempted to synthesise it into a 'guide' for practising professionals on the issues that they are likely to face in business, and therefore need to be prepared to face. The Guide will be published during 2002 (FIG, 2002); this paper highlights key themes and topics within the Guide, whilst also being designed to provide in itself a brief 'business management kit' for the professional.

What if professionals are unwilling to adapt to the changing business environment? The possible consequences are spelled out very clearly by Professor Molenaar, the Rector of ITC in the Netherlands, in the October 2001 edition of GIM International: 'Today's surveyor has become a technologist... without a clear understanding of real world problems... As a result, the surveyor will lose his role in society... Surveyors need to... pivot from a preoccupation with technology to face the problems which today confront society in general and geo-information users in particular.'

This paper is structured in a similar manner to the FIG Guide 'Business Matters for Professionals' (FIG, 2002). It therefore benefits from the very significant input to the Guide of its chapter authors – Michael Keller, Tom Kennie, Leonie Newnham and John Parker – along with a number of individuals who have provided valuable comments on improving the structure and content of the Guide during its drafting.

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