

**THE NEXT GENERATION – WHAT WILL THAT BRING FOR
THE OLD AND THE YOUNG?**

KEITH HAYES OAM

President Elect

The Institution of Surveyors, Australia

The Next Generation - What Will That Bring for the Old and the Young?

Keith Hayes OAM

President Elect

The Institution of Surveyors, Australia

Presented to the Annual Conference of
the Association of Surveyors of Papua and New Guinea.

Madang PNG July 1998

Abstract

Much of the focus by surveyors upon the changes in the world about them is on the improvements upon existing equipment and the development of new technology such as GPS. Discussion revolves around how work can be done quicker or easier, using the latest 'gadgets'. However, surveyors should also consider the impact of change upon their professional side. As professionals, surveyors serve the community, but have surveyors adapted to the changes in the community's expectations and attitudes towards professionals?

The role of any modern professional association is to represent the interests of its members, and to support the members in fulfilling their responsibility to the community. How do the changes in the community's attitude towards surveyors and other professionals affect the way in which the association interacts with the community and its members?

Introduction

In the past 30 years, the world, technology, our environment and our society have changed at a rapid pace. Whether this change has been for the better or worse is debated long and hard by many. As is often quoted, "*..the only sure thing is change itself...*".

This change has created pressures. Pressure upon individuals, communities and countries to change. If change is inevitable, then how do surveyors manage that change to the benefit of the community, and to the science of surveying? How well has the surveying profession managed that change; is it a slave to the outside forces, has it survived and prospered, or has it just gone along with flow?

Surveyors have always enjoyed the "Surprise of Discovery". They live on the thrill of discovering the unexpected, learning from that discovery and then incorporating that learning and understanding into the known. (Bradbury 1998) But has this love of discovery been broad enough to include the society around them, or have they just focussed on the technology and its applications? Do we Lead or do we Follow?

Change, What Change?

Looking back at our recent past, in the 1950's life was predictable, not easy but at least stable. The technology used by surveyors had changed little over the past 100 years. A theodolite and level still looked the same. Surveyors dragged 'chains', booked their results with their well-chewed pencils and shouted out at the top of their voices in urban streets without making fools of them. The community respected Surveyors and saw them as an important part of the social fabric; they were Professionals.

Likewise, the associations that represented surveyors were seen as bastions of proper ethical practice and protectors of those standards and the community's interests at large. Being a member of the association was seen as a benchmark of the Surveyor's standing in the community, as a trusted professional.

The came the swinging 60's. Master surveyors who were steeped in the culture of surveying, as it had developed over the previous 50 years trained a new generation of surveyors. But there were

changes on the horizon. Electronic distance measuring equipment was no longer a dream, 'death rays' were becoming available to the surveyor on the street. The younger and some of the older surveyors could see that this new device would save time and drudgery in the field. But for some, it just didn't fit in; it just wasn't the way surveyors measured things. You had to clear lines, plumb down from the end of the chain, apply catenary corrections, wind in the chain properly etc. The landscape was starting to change.

Perhaps the most lasting change that was happening though was the change in social values and attitudes. In the industrial countries the youth rejected the values of their parents and searched for new meanings. Attitudes towards colonisation changed as did the involvement of nationals in their own affairs, albeit slowly at the start.

Technology was changing for surveyors, to their benefit. Society was also changing; no longer was simply being part of a professional vocation enough to win the trust of the community. The Surveyor, as a professional was caught in the battle between the generations. What did the surveying profession do? Mostly it hid behind the new instruments and equipment. Technology to the rescue. During this period there was massive expansion of the need for mineral and other natural resources, which required surveyors. The Surveyors were busy and therefore happy. They could avoid the hard questions by keeping their heads down, flat out.

More importantly, what did the associations that represented professional surveyors do? They did what the majority of their members wanted them to do; they maintained the status quo. The members did not complain, so there was no need to do anything. They did not change.

The 70's then arrived with a rush. Man walked on the Moon in 1969. Spin offs from the space age started to filter into our daily lives. Advances in electronics meant that things only dreamt of in the past were becoming reality. Combined theodolites and edm's, satellite positioning by the Transit System, hand held calculators (oh joy, oh joy!) and computers.

Surveyors, at first distrustful of these new 'gadgets' soon realised that life could be made a lot easier with these new tools. Electronic Distance Measuring equipment became more common place. Work was still plentiful, the Universities were still churning out graduates, and fees were at a level where surveyors could enjoy a comfortable existence.

Society was still in turmoil. The rapid changes in attitudes of the 60's were tempered somewhat in the 70's as the youth became older, had children themselves and discovered mortgages. They still had their beliefs but now practicalities had to be taken into account. In the 60's they might have espoused views on medical doctors and turned to alternatives; but now it was quicker and easier to go to your local doctor to get the childrens' runny noses seen to. (Mackay 1996)

What of the attitudes towards the professions, particularly surveyors? The beliefs of the youth of the 60's were still the same. Their distrust of those institutions of the past, such as putting the Professions up on pedestals still existed. The position of the professional surveyor was slipping.

What was the reaction from surveyors? Mixed. Some could see the changes around them, and changed the way they interacted with their community, clients and students. Many however drew a little further back from the light, into the comforting shadows of their equipment. Technology meant stability.

Again, the professional associations representing surveyors reflected the views of their members. "Steady as she goes." Those members who could sniff the winds of change pushed for associations to change to meet the challenges of the future. In Australia, the Surveying Profession was seen as being maintained, and the standards of surveying controlled by the public sector - which has never been known to be a dynamic force and receptive to change. There was movement to include a stronger focus on private practice matters within the Institution, which was not well received. A number of separate associations sprung up in the Australian States and Territories to cater for private practice surveyors.

The surveying associations suddenly realised that they had to sell themselves to the community, to ensure their position within society was recognised. Did this work? Like many of the other professions, Surveyors fell into the trap of putting out their message in the voice of the old, using terms and explanations that were not relevant to the public at large. This was not a failing of the surveyors, it was just in the past everyone thought surveyors were great, so why should they have had to develop public relations skills?

The 80's saw the start of specialisation of business related groups within the community, and the professions. Project Managers became a separate area of expertise. Likewise, Management

specialists. In the past those areas had been part of what professionals such as architects, engineers and surveyors did.

Surveyors now faced a new challenge. The community now saw less and less of them and more of the specialist managers. Surveyors were slipping into a role of sub consultants to Managers. The Surveyor was beginning to be seen as a technical specialist rather than the total professional.

Technology? It just kept on going. Total Stations, GPS, data recording, desktop computers, complex processing software and more. The surveyor with a love of technology was in hog heaven.

Society's attitude distrust towards professionals also continued to grow. No longer could a professional stand back and say, "Trust Me". Whereas in the past the public would accept that statement at its face value, they would now ask "Why?"

The response of the surveying associations to this change was to re-examine the reasons for their existence and roles. Many of the associations around the world restructured to include membership from a broader range of people. The "G" word, Geomatics came into vogue, to describe the broader role of technical specialist/land manager/land information skills that surveyors now needed to possess to survive. Technology had reduced the importance of the "measurement" role, to how fast the surveyor (or his or her assistant) could push a button.

For many years the associations, reflecting the wishes of their members simply tried to ignore the changes. As long as Surveyors felt they were important, what else mattered? But, now an air of urgency crept into the meetings of the associations. Graduates from the Universities no longer saw the associations as being relevant and providing modern services. The average age of the members of the associations started getting older. How could they capture the days of old? Attempts were made to publicise the importance of surveyors and surveying, but like many campaigns in the past they were hampered by the attempts to create a message that surveyors could feel comfortable with, rather than come up with a message that the public could relate to.

Where to from Now?

In the 90's the advances in technology have encouraged an explosion in the availability of information, which is now accessible to a variety of audiences. As customers and sponsors alike have become better informed, they have become more demanding about the services offered by professionals (Kennie 1998).

The technology that surveyors love so much has now turned upon them. Frankenstein's monster has turned upon its maker.

The growing number of courses being offered, which impinge upon the areas that were traditionally "Surveyors Only", such as geographic information systems and project management are a threat to surveyors, both as technical experts in their field but also as professionals.

The shift in community attitudes towards professionals now means that they have to win the trust of the community through working and acting in a *transparent* manner. The public has to be able to see what you are about, to trust you. This change in the community's attitude is difficult for many of the older surveyors to accept. As noted before, with the aging population of the surveying associations come a resistance to change, as it moves surveyors out of their comfort zone. Surveyors who trained and grew up in the 50's find it is an entirely different ball game.

Surveyors and their association now have to come to grip with what the future will bring not what comfort the past may have offered.

Which Way do we Go?

To set a course forward surveyors have to establish where they are now.

The future of surveying as a profession lies in being able to relate to the public's demands, and in turn *communicate* with the public in a way that is clear and relevant.

In the past the term *professionalism* covered the following features:

- *technical and theoretical* expertise and the authority and status flowing from such expert, and highly valued knowledge, understanding and skill
- the establishment and *the exercise of trust* as a basis for professional relationships (with clients and between professionals)
- adherence to particular *standards and professional ethics* often, but not always, represented by the granting of a licence to practice
- independence, *autonomy and discretion*
- specific attitudes towards work, clients and peers involving dedication, reliability, flexibility and *creativity in relation to the 'unknown'*.

(Kennie 1998)

If the above points are used as a tick the boxes exercise, it could be argued that nothing has changed. The points above are the same for the 50's as they are for the 90's.

What has changed is the public's attitude. If surveyors, as professionals, uphold the principle of service to the community then they have to be relevant to the community. With the growing demands for accountability, what was considered the implicit aspects of professionalism now have to become more transparent. (Kennie 1998)

The way forward is clear; surveyors don't need to change their approach to technology, only their approach to people.

How Do We Do It?

Communication is the key to establishing trust in surveying as a profession. The main problem is that the public doesn't know what surveyors do, or their role in maintaining an orderly society. The public neither considers surveyors to be good or bad, they just don't think about them at all. (Tilley 1997)

There are numerous means for communicating the role and worth of surveyors; direct marketing, mainstream media, representation at political levels etc. The methods chosen are usually determined by restrictions on resources such as time and money.

The methods, which will best suit, will be determined by the audience that the message has to reach. It has to be well targeted and relevant. A poor message, no matter how important the material contained in the message is worse than no message at all. It is not possible to come up with a set approach as to how the communication should be carried out, but the following factors should be included:

- demonstrate that surveying is not a “once off” learning experience, but requires continual updating and development - continuing professional development
- there is transparency in the way surveyors are assessed as to their competence and the accountability for their work
- that the standards for professional surveyors are not static, but are constantly being examined and upgraded
- surveyors work in an independent manner, they consider the impact of what they do on the wider community

Conclusion

Despite what may seem a “doom & gloom” outlook for the profession, it is still in a position to move forward to a positive future.

Surveyors will have to work hard to re-establish themselves in the public’s eye, taking into account the need to work in a *transparent* and *accountable* manner. The days of saying “I’m a Surveyor, trust me...”, are long gone. It now has to be a case of “You can see what I do, and how I do it, so you can trust me...”.

References

Bradbury R. (1998), Mapping Mt Surprise: Surveyors, Sustainable Development and Complex Systems, *The Australian Surveyor Vol 43 No 1 March 1998* The Institution of Surveyors, Australia

Kennie Dr K. (1998), The Changing Nature of Professionalism: The Importance of Organisational Learning and Practical Management, *The Australian Surveyor Vol 43 No 2 June 1998* The Institution of Surveyors, Australia

Mackay H (1997), Commentaries on the Changing Nature of Society *The Australian Newspaper (various)*

Tilley L (1997) Draft Marketing Plan for the Institution