

# Surveying Profession and Ethical Questions

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## SUMMARY

This paper seeks to reawaken the Surveying Professionals on the need to maintain highest ethical standards in our day-to-day activities so as to preserve the reputation and future of the surveying profession. It also discusses the tools and principle of business ethics.

The paper discusses what qualifies one to be a professional surveyor, what constitute unethical behavior in the professional sense of it as well as the tools of ethics. It opines that if the tools of ethics and principle of business ethics are implemented by individual surveyors that it will improve the diminishing reputation of surveying profession.

It then concludes by suggesting mode of conduct that can improve the image of surveying profession. It also discusses on the importance of professional education in developing professional ethical behavior.

# **Surveying Profession and Ethical Questions**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A profession can be defined as a vocation based on a long, specialized training that enables a particular service to be rendered. To qualify as a professional, one has to undergo a minimum standard and rigorous course in a specialized body of knowledge requiring a developed intellect for assimilation, train in the application of the acquired knowledge until a defined standard of proficiency is certified, and subscribe to a standard code of ethics and regulations. In many parts of the world, the proper conduct of an individual member in the practice of a profession is often governed by a code of ethical rules. These rules are important for establishing the standard of behavior expected of the professionals. Studies have shown that professional practices in less developed systems are often guided by the personal value judgement of an individual player and the exigencies of economic realities of the day.

A profession can be self regulating, that is they control and or influence the training and evaluation process that admit new person to the field and in judging whether the work done by their members is up to standard or it can be regulated by government to ensure that they carry out their services to required standard in order to protect the public interest.

A professional surveyor has a responsibility to the client, the public, and his employees and must always strive to ensure that the general integrity and image of the profession is protected at all times. He is meant to strictly adhere to the rules and regulations guiding the profession as provided by the regulating body. He is also expected to hold in high esteem the ethical standards of the profession. Professionals who are once looked upon to lead the drive in restoring business

integrity are now victim of corrupt practices. It is time for the surveyors to do a realistic SWOT analysis of themselves in order to overcome the challenges of current global economic situations.

### **Who is a Professional?**

A profession can be defined as “an occupation that requires extensive education or specialized or specialized training”. A professional, is then, a person who has attained the minimum training and has been certified by a regulatory body, to be able to carry out his or her services to required standards so as to protect public interest.

With the increasing number of professional surveyors and considering the dwindling economic condition of the country, there seems to be a sharp difference between a professional surveyor and professionalism in the real sense of the word. Professionals who are expected to lead the drive for business integrity in are now the arrowhead of corruption and sharp practices. Surveying being the bedrock of any development, always has a direct relationship with the client and the community at large. Hence, surveyors are the image makers of other professions, being the first to be on the site and the last person to leave the site.

Professional surveyors therefore must do a realistic SWOT analysis of themselves. Developing their strength should help them overcome most of their weakness, and then they can fully exploit their opportunities, and also find the confidence to convert each threat into a challenge that

becomes advantage-giving opportunity. None of these can be done successfully without a professional, who may often find himself standing alone against daunting odds that may threaten his personal interest and welfare.

### **Professional practice and Ethics**

Ethics, also called moral philosophy, can be defined as a system of moral principles governing the appropriate conduct for a person or group. Professional ethics is very vital for establishing the standard of behavior expected of individual professional. Ethical behavior is not limited to matters covered explicitly in the ethics; rather it is based on consideration of justice, courtesy,

honesty, sincerity and dignity, associated with mutual interest between individuals and it applies to all professions including surveying. The key business ethics is concerned with the way businesses conduct their ordinary, everyday routine. The way the surveyor, be it in public or private sector, deals with his client, public, employees and the individual members of the profession.

### **Tools of Ethics**

The public image of the surveyor is declining tremendously. It is not as if the importance of surveying has decreased in stature, rather it has increased. In fact it can be said that the task the surveyor is called upon to perform have grown tremendously in quality and technicality. Sadly enough, this growth has gone along a course that is inversely proportional to the surveyors image (Atilola, 1994). To “rebrand” the image of surveying profession, the following tools of ethics should be adopted.

#### **1. Values**

In a given culture, at a given time, there is a broad agreement on major values. Most people agree on what is good and what is bad. Not all people or groups of people hold the same values, but the value of those in majority will affect the belief and behavior of the society. Individuals do not qualify into a profession entirely without ethical values, which are derived in part from their personal background and culture. There are no laid down rules indicating the correct solution or judgment to a particular problem, there is simply a correct answer and anyone, anywhere, who follows the appropriate procedure correctly, will arrive at this answer.

To recognize what the right things are, it is helpful to understand the principle that underlines ethical conduct in business. Such principles are most usefully presented in the form of an ethical decision model. Members of the surveying profession can develop a shared professional culture by which its membership can be defined.

According to Sternberg (2000), an ethical decision model that clearly set out the principle of business ethics can help business both to identify and actually resolve business ethics problems.

An ethical decision model is a functional equivalent of a map, it can help guide a business through the ethical issues that it, inevitably, must handle. When all within the business or professional body share a similar culture and common vocabulary for ethical matters, they can articulate moral standards and moral questions easily thereby eliminating conflict of interest. Members of the professional body, knowing that there are economic advantages to be achieved by acting ethically will adhere to the professional culture.

## **2. Right**

Right may be referred to as that which is morally good or in accordance with accepted principle of justice, fairness and honesty. Ethical issues arise obviously in connection with core ethical values; when there are questions of, for example honesty or justice. A surveyor owes this obligation to his employees, client and the public at large. The way the surveyor deals with his employees especially the pupil surveyors go a long way in projecting the image of the profession. Lack of government policy on the minimum salary to be paid to a graduate in private sector in some countries, in this case, the pupil surveyor had had negative effects on the development and sustainability of private survey firm. As a result, the pupil surveyor who is not motivated financially despite the threat to his life in the course of carrying out his duty may not be totally committed to the business objective of the organization. It is well known that stability of employment constitute one of the bases of the extraordinary loyalty that Japanese employees traditionally exhibit towards their companies.

## **3. Loyalty**

Loyalty means steadfast in allegiance to the overall objective of the profession (the reputation of the surveying profession). Cases where surveyors resort to ghost petition writing in the award of government jobs, simply because they felt that it is their preserve to be awarded certain government jobs to the extent of tarnishing the image or competence of fellow surveyors is a gross disservice to the profession. Surveyors should learn to engage in healthy competition, play the game according to the rules and accept the result sportsmanly (Atilola, 1994). This way, we can have a better and sustainable surveying profession.

#### **4. Principled Behaviour**

This is the demonstration of a consistent behavior in similar situations that makes one's behavior predictable, and ensuring the same decision being made in similar situations. Despite the activities of the few surveyors who commercialize their signature, there are many surveyors who still believe that the reputation of the profession should always come first at all cost.

#### **5. Fairness**

The avoidance of discriminating tendencies in dealing with people of diverse background, endeavoring to treat all human beings as equals and then give each person equal opportunities. The younger surveyors should be encouraged to grow in the profession rather being treated as a tool to be "used and dumped" tomorrow.

#### **Principles of Business ethics**

According to **Elegido (1996)**, the following constitute a reasonably complete list of independent and ultimate principle of business ethics.

- 1. Principle of Solidarity:** we must be concerned with promoting the well being of all human beings, not only our own. In so far as we fail to do so, we undermine our own fulfillment.
- 2. Principle of Rationality:** One should always strive to act intelligently.
- 3. Principle of Fairness or Impartiality:** One should apply the same standard in judging one's own actions, those of people who are dear to one and those of strangers.
- 4. Principle of Efficiency:** In trying to promote human fulfillment, good intentions are not enough. One must endeavor to use effective means.
- 5. Principle of Refraining from Willful Harm to Human Beings:** One should never choose directly to harm a human being.

**6. Principle of Role Responsibility:** One does not have responsibility for all aspects of the well being of all human beings. One's special circumstance, capacities, roles and commitment give one a priority responsibility for certain aspect of the well being of certain people.

### **REBRANDING THE IMAGE OF SURVEYING PROFESSION**

According to Wokemba(1991), the image of the Surveying profession will be improved if the following modes of conduct are observed:

- (i) Surveyors should own and maintain respectable offices.
- (ii) In any given state in which a surveyor wishes to practice, he should retain a paid and qualified registered junior.
- (iii) A surveyor should have only one registered head office in Nigeria.
- (iv) Lawyers, engineers, doctors have clients. People who need their services go to consult them in their chambers and offices. The surveyor should remain in his office and be consulted there most of the time.
- (v) When a surveyor is consulted in a field he is not competent or registered to operate, such a surveyor should refer such a client to another surveyor who is registered to operate in that field.
- (vi) Since certificates on the plans surveyor sign bear the full names of the surveyor it is suggested that surveying firms should use the names of the surveyor and not pseudo names, for ease of identification any time.
- (vii) Surveyors should cultivate the habit of originality in their work. He should not allow himself to be pushed around by a lawyer as to what and what not to show on his survey plan while carrying out a land in dispute. He should always be an unbiased, independent and professional witness in the court.
- (viii) Surveyors should be seen as members of a noble and respectable profession. Therefore every surveyor should be loyal and obedient to his profession's scale of fees and code of ethics. A surveyor should have total respect for these documents and not mere lip service.
- (ix) It is unethical not to sustain one's professional organization by not paying regularly annual dues and other necessary levies used in running the profession. It is also unethical not to take

active part in the activities of the profession and yet use the profession's scale of fees for professional practice.

(x) It is also unethical for a surveyor to demand incentives from a fellow surveyor before he can perform his or her official or statutory duties.

(xi) No surveyor should directly or indirectly exert undue pressure or influence on any person, whether by the offer of any payment, gift or favour or otherwise, for the purpose of securing instruction for work or accept instruction from any person on whom he has reason that undue pressure or influence may have been exerted by a third party in expectation of receiving a reward for the introduction.

(xii) It is unethical for a surveyor having once quoted a fee for professional services revise that quotation to take account of the fee quoted by another member of the surveying profession for the same service

### **CONCLUSION:**

The reputation of a profession depends to a large extent on the integrity of its professional and regulatory bodies. The way we practice, relate to our client, keep our offices, put up appearance in court tells a lot about us and have effect on the image of the profession. The professional associations and the regulatory bodies should work together in ensuring that public image of the profession is promoted. The surveyors, themselves has a lot of roles to play in this regard. The teaching of ethical principles and standard are of paramount importance to the education of professional surveyors and should not be neglected. Such education should not stop at the graduate level but should be an integral part of a Mandatory Continuing Professional Education (MCPD) Program.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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