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THE INFLUENCE OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AREAS ON LEADERSHIP
POSITIONS WITHIN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

by

Catherine E. Frost

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

In

Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning

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2024

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ABSTRACT

The Influence of Business Development Areas on Leadership Positions within Landscape
Architecture Professional Practice

by

Catherine E. Frost

Utah State University, 2024

Major Professor: Sean E. Michael, Ph.D.

Department: Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning

Landscape architecture is a discipline that connects natural, physical, and human sciences, and which operates as a professional design practice. While technical skills and design proficiency have historically been the focus of landscape architecture programs, the literature indicates a recognition of the indispensable role of entrepreneurial skills alongside design expertise (Marsh, 1928; Pray, 1911; Rice, 2017; Sheppard et al., 2018). However, there remains a scarcity of research specifically investigating business development skills within landscape architecture practice (Evans & Leccese, 1991; Gobster et al., 2010; Granet, 2021; Littlefield, 2015; Powers & Walker, 2009).

To bridge this gap, this study engaged in interviews with 12 landscape architecture professionals holding senior leadership titles: principal, director, or partner. Their insights underscored the criticality of business development practices for firm success, emphasizing the need for employees to comprehend and engage with these skills relevant to the profession. Concurrently, landscape architecture firms must be viewed as business entities, necessitating the education and instillation of business development tools among employees and leaders for sustained success (AIA, 2003; AIALA, n.d.; Dixon et al., 2018; Marsh, 1928;

Sharkey, 1991). The findings of this research show individuals aspiring to leadership roles within the landscape architecture industry should possess both technical acumen and business proficiency to enhance their value as such to firms (Mihail & Elefterie 2006; Rice, 2017; Sheppard et al., 2018). Hence, cultivating business development skills at multiple stages of career progression becomes imperative for career progression into leadership roles.

Additionally, the findings underscore the significance of business development skills in shaping individual trajectories and firm development, highlighting critical areas of business development within the profession and the role they play in aspiring leaders' career advancement within the industry.

(108 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Influence of Business Development Areas on Leadership Positions within Landscape
Architecture Professional Practice

Catherine E. Frost

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To bridge this gap, this study engaged in interviews with 12 landscape architecture professionals holding senior leadership titles: principal, director, or partner. Their insights underscored the criticality of business development practices for firm success, emphasizing the need for employees to comprehend and engage with these skills relevant to the profession. Concurrently, landscape architecture firms must be viewed as business entities, necessitating the education and instillation of business development tools among employees and leaders for sustained success (AIA, 2003; AIALA, n.d.; Dixon et al., 2018; Marsh, 1928; Sharkey, 1991). The findings of this research show individuals aspiring to leadership roles within the landscape architecture industry should possess both technical acumen and business proficiency to enhance their value as such to firms (Mihail & Elefterie 2006; Rice, 2017; Sheppard et al., 2018). Hence, cultivating business development skills at multiple stages of career progression becomes imperative for career progression into leadership roles.

Additionally, the findings underscore the significance of business development skills in shaping individual trajectories and firm development, highlighting critical areas of business development within the profession and the role they play in aspiring leaders' career advancement within the industry.

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To my family, for showing me the importance of education, and pushing me to always achieve more than I believed possible. To my peers, who shared endless hours of work and sleepless nights; they showed me friendship in moments I did not know I needed it. And to my professors, who shared wisdom, experience, and support throughout this entire process.

Caitie Frost

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Landscape architecture, a vital segment of the land development professional service industry, plays a crucial role in integrating cultural, environmental, and social factors for enhancing quality of life and environmental preservation (Landscape Architecture Foundation, 2023). In the competitive realm of architecture and engineering industries (A/E), landscape architects face the challenge of securing new projects to ensure stability of profit for sustaining their firms (Cramer & Simpson, 2004; Holmes, 2022). Despite this, business skills are often lacking in educational curricula used to train future professionals, hindering practitioners' ability to sustain successful practices (Noorlander, 2023; Tracey, 2021). Notably, the importance of business acumen in design industries has been consistently underscored in both historical (e.g., Marsh, 1928) and contemporary commentaries (e.g., Gensler et al., 2015). However, the necessity of research into entrepreneurial skills for ensuring ongoing work and organizational success is widely acknowledged (Gensler et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, the landscape architecture profession, like its allied disciplines, suffers from a deficiency in business-related research and education (Granet, 2021; Littlefield, 2015). This study identified multiple research objectives to help understand business development skills relevant to this field, as well as the impact attainment and practice of these skills have on the upward mobility of individuals within their career and firm.

The term 'business development' is not well defined as its role varies within industries while still carrying a distinct core value: ensuring financial stability of an

institution. Because business development practices in general have been recognized as valuable assets to practicing landscape architecture firms, the first portion of this research set out to identify:

- a) the relative importance of business development areas to landscape architecture firms, and,
- b) to provide information regarding the business development areas most beneficial for practitioners in landscape architecture firms.

Leadership, a cornerstone of business philosophy, has received little attention in landscape architecture scholarship as well, potentially disadvantaging graduates in their professional practice career mobility (Evans & Lecese, 1991; Gobster et al., 2010; Littlefield, 2015; Tracey, 2021). However, scholars and practitioners recognize that business acumen provides a competitive edge, particularly in securing new work and assuming leadership roles (AIA, 2013; Gensler, 2015; Sharkey, 1991). Thus, while design proficiency is essential and serves as a baseline of skills, business skills are said to differentiate practitioners and enhance their value within firms (Bracker et al., 1988). The research objectives for this portion of the study are as follows:

- a) to identify if business development skills are necessary for individuals in leadership positions to know when in the professional practice of landscape architecture,
- b) to identify how current landscape architects in leadership positions perceive the impact of business development skills on their career advancement within the profession, and,
- c) to identify impacts of individuals' business development skills within a professional practice firm.

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CHAPTER 2

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AREAS WITHIN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE¹

ABSTRACT

As a field rooted in natural, physical, and human sciences, landscape architecture is a business enterprise that serves clients through the practice of design. To maintain a thriving design practice as a professional service, it is crucial to seize opportunities for ongoing business growth and sustainability. However, LAAB-accredited landscape architecture programs have traditionally emphasized technical and design proficiency over business acumen (Pray, 1911; Rice, 2017). Both historical and contemporary literature (e.g., Marsh, 1928; Shepphard et al., 2018) suggests that to establish a thriving landscape architecture practice that sustains employment opportunities, firms must possess entrepreneurial skills in addition to design expertise. This study investigates the specific business development areas necessary for professional practices to succeed within the landscape architecture market. While the literature acknowledges an overall deficit in business knowledge within design industries (Granet, 2021; Littlefield, 2015; Evans & Leccese, 1991), it lacks research into most specific aspects of business practice. In particular, there has been no exploration of the role that business development skills play within landscape architecture practice (Gobster et al., 2010; Powers & Walker, 2009).

To address this gap, interviews were conducted with 12 professional practitioners

¹ Chapter 2 was coauthored by Catherine Frost and Sean Michael for submission to the Landscape Research Review

currently holding senior leadership titles such as principal, director, or partner within the U.S. landscape architecture community. Their responses consistently expressed the importance of business development practices for firms to succeed, while also indicating that employees should understand and engage in those business development skills broadly relevant to the landscape architecture profession. While technical and design expertise were said to still be crucial foundational skills in the industry, findings show that firms that neglect business development may place themselves at a comparative disadvantage. Ultimately, this study's findings have implications that can inform both undergraduate and graduate design education and ongoing professional practice training by shedding light on the importance of business development areas required to be successful and competitive in the growing landscape architecture field.

KEYWORDS

Business Development, Professional Practice, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Careers

INTRODUCTION

Landscape architecture is one of many design fields within the broader professional service industry and is generally grouped within the architecture and engineering (A/E) subset. Landscape architecture as a profession holds strong importance among multiple design industries as an integrating force among cultural, environmental, and social factors that are vital in promoting quality of life and preservation of natural resources and the environment (Landscape Architecture Foundation, 2023). As a professional service, to create and sustain a viable design practice, opportunities for the development of continuous business endeavors must be capitalized on. In the highly competitive A/E market, where landscape architects often pursue the same contracts as architects and engineers, this is especially true (Cramer & Simpson, 2004; Holmes, 2022a; Marsh, 1928; Robinson, 1917; Rumsey, 2020). Landscape architects must concurrently secure new projects as they complete existing ones. As a result, firms continuously vie for contracts and other forms of new work.

Despite this imperative for ongoing successful practice, business skills constitute a small minority of the curricula taught to future practitioners (Noorlander, 2023; Rice, 2017; Tracey, 2021). Allied disciplines have noted a similar dearth of business courses, and subsequent impacts on practitioners. For example, research conducted almost 50 years ago by Weber (1979) reported concerns about a lack of business competency within design education of interior design students, finding that “failure of design firms appears to be related to a lack of business knowledge” (p.66). Similarly, renowned architect, Art Gensler (Gensler et al., 2015), lamented virtual absence of virtually any business training in most architecture programs, and yet underscored the critical role that those skills played in launching and growing his firm, which remains the largest such practice in the world.

Despite the quality of work an individual can produce, poor business decisions can render a practitioner's design talent irrelevant (Tracey, 2021). A steady flow of contracts is necessary to sustain a firm and its employees. Therefore, assuring a reliable, ongoing stream of work in landscape architecture practices is fundamental to ensuring the profession's continued viability, and thereby for its impact on society and the environment. While the A/E literature acknowledges an overall deficit in general business knowledge within design industries (Granet, 2021; Littlefield, 2015; Man, 1991), there is ironically a widespread lack of research into any aspects of business practice. This is equally true within landscape architecture.

While there is a lack of research into business in the landscape architecture profession, the same is true regarding the need for business competencies among practitioners themselves. Nonetheless, business has been validated in similar service professions, including interior design and engineering, as a critical topic to examine (Dixon et al., 2018; Weber, 1979). This study's objective was to look at one such topic, *business development practices*, which should be relevant to creating and sustaining a professional firm, and, if true, to examine which individuals should be involved in to support both their personal careers and their organization's success.

Business in Design

Gensler et al. (2015) suggest that to create a flourishing design business, including providing adequate and ongoing work for employees, entrepreneurial skills, and not just design skills, are a critical need. This imperative, coming from the founder of one of the world's most successful architecture firms, has been noted in landscape architecture for over a century. At the onset of the 20th century, Marsh (1928) observed "the first problem of the practicing landscape architect is to get the business" (p. 144). Landscape architecture was

then just emerging as a nascent field, but despite the promise it held, there were many practitioners involved who Marsh and others claimed did not know enough about business operations. For this reason, their success was at risk (Dixon et al., 2018; Granet, 2021; Marsh, 1928). Marsh's belief was that clients would hold the designer accountable for failure if they lacked a thorough understanding of capital and credit, attributing unsuccessful business practices and lack of knowledge as the primary causes (Marsh, 1928). Only a decade later, the American Society of Landscape Architects reminded its members that landscape architects are expected to not only design, arrange, develop, and build, but also “obtain bids, negotiate with contractors, and find a more functional and economic utilization of land” (ASLA 1940, p. 169). To protect and maintain landscape architecture as a growing profession, these and other leading voices were matter-of-fact in observing that practitioners should recognize the potential that can be realized through strong business acumen. Today, the principle still holds true, with leadership in many of landscape architecture’s preeminent firms (Grove, 2022; Michael et al., 2013) claiming that too few in the profession are adequately equipped with the business knowledge to benefit their practices.

Business Development

Business development is a recognized, but not specifically defined, term within research conducted in the business world (Kind & zu Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2007). Although a broad subject, the overall goal of strong business development is “the creation of long-term value for an organization from customers, markets, and relationships” (Achtenhagen et al., 2017, para. 1). Rainey (2010) identifies business development as a combination of different strategies that “when employed together...provide a sophisticated management model for achieving success in the long term” (pg. 17). The ambiguity of a specific definition for business development is related to its different usage within varying industries and their

goals. Within landscape architecture, there is also a lack of an existing definition. Therefore this study established a definition of the term for this unique field, but which can potentially be applicable to other design fields. For this research, the definition used distills common explanations from those used widely in the business world (Granet, 2021; Indeed Editorial Team, 2021; Pollack, 2012), and reads:

Business development is a model or organization within a business, firm, or company, that promotes financial stability through insurance of profit, opportunity for growth, and longevity of a firm.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As Dixon et al. (2018) argue, lack of competence can cause lost potential for a firm through the inability to recognize future opportunities, and therefore creates a threat to market success. By understanding skills that can be practiced by all individuals within a firm, there is potential to have improved day-to-day operations as well as leadership succession planning. Preparing these individuals to run the business occurs through improved business knowledge gained from education and operations of the firm (Evans & Leccese, 1991; Rainey, 2010; Weber, 1979). When people or businesses lack the necessary business skills and knowledge, they often find themselves unprepared to respond to evolving industry trends, the introduction of new technologies, and shifts in consumer preferences. Having competence equips businesses to adapt, making well-informed choices, providing meaningful value to their customers, and maintaining a competitive edge in the market. This study seeks to understand the importance of business development in this dynamic, examining both the relevance to the firm and to the individual practitioner. The two main objectives of this research are to a) identify the relative importance of business development areas to landscape

architecture firms, and to b) identify the business development areas most beneficial for practitioners in landscape architecture firms.

METHODS

Literature Review of Existing Topics

Through a review of business-related literature in design industries (Dixon et al., 2018; Gensler et al., 2015; Granet, 2021; Littlefield, 2015; Marsh, 1928; Robinson, 1917; Sharkey, 1994), themes of specific business development practices that should be relevant in landscape architecture firms were identified and segmented into three main categories for research:

1. Creating and ensuring profit
2. Client relationships
3. Marketing

Because business development is a process that evolves through continuous innovation and adaptation to changing market conditions, and because of a lack of research on business areas within landscape architecture firms, the addition of themes and relevant topics was expected and identified when analyzing the responses of participants in this study.

Qualitative Research

A semi-structured interview method was employed to investigate the importance of business development skills of practitioners in landscape architecture (Roemaker & Hensey, 1989; Weber, 1979). The ability to gain in-depth answers to questions through a qualitative research method is critical to creating a foundation of understanding due to the lack of prior research (Beck & Manuel, 2008; Jamshed, 2014; Robison, 2002). A semi-structured interview format was used for interviews to allow for additional probing and follow-up

questions based on the responses of the interviewees (Gall et al., 2007; Robson, 2011).

Through the interview process, access to the perceptions and attitudes of the interviewees can be used to analyze their responses (Beck & Manuel 2008; Gall et al., 2007). As explained by Jamshed (2014), “by adopting qualitative methodology, a prospective researcher is going to fine-tune the pre-conceived notions as well as extrapolate the thought process, analyzing and estimating the issues from an in-depth perspective” (para. 8).

Research Samples

The study used data collected from semi-structured interviews of a homogenous sample of 12 principal-level landscape architects. The choice of principals as the interview group for this study is based on the position being the most ubiquitous of penultimate ranks within landscape architecture and related design firms, signifying a high level of career advancement (AIA, 2003; AIALA, n.d.; Holmes, 2022). Focusing on this upper-tier management position allows for the collection of insights from senior professionals who have risen to leadership positions and who possess significant experience with and responsibilities for profit sectors of the industry, including the ability to secure future contracts.

The term principal can be used interchangeably with both director and/or partner within this study. The American Institute of Architects (2003) combines the titles partner *and* principal under common position title descriptions by level:

- “Senior Principal / Partner: Typically, an owner or majority shareholder of the firm; may be the founder; titles may include president, chief executive officer, or managing principal/partner” (pg. 1).
- “Mid-Level Principal / Partner: Titles may include executive or senior vice president” (pg. 1).

- “Junior Principal / Partner: Recently made a partner or principal of the firm; title may include vice president” (pg. 1).

World Landscape Architecture (2022) defines the titles director and principal under common position title descriptions by level:

“Either someone who has started their own firm or has worked and developed their career to become a Director (either in the title or legal company part owner). This person can be managing the whole company or one team or one division depending on the company’s size or type (landscape architecture vs multi-discipline). Other Principals/Directors managing the whole company require a high level of involvement in winning work, negotiating contracts, and managing people (employees, clients, consultants, etc.) and relationships. They may spend time designing and working on projects, but many in this position spend most of their time managing the company” (para. 9).

Consequently, principal, partner, and director position titles can be understood to denote senior-level roles that encompass managerial duties with company-wide, team-wide, and financial responsibilities. For this study, these titles were interchangeable in the determination of firms and individuals to be interviewed.

First, firms from which the principals were selected were identified based on three criteria:

- For-profit firms solely practicing landscape architecture, urban planning, and/or urban design
- Employing 2-10 practicing principals at individually managed locations

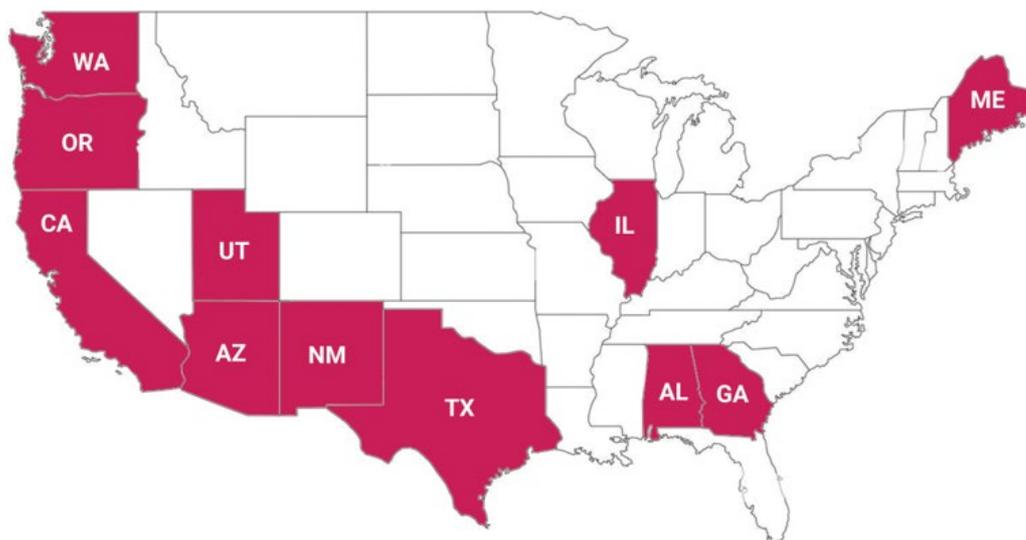
- No more than 1 individual from the same firm to be selected²
- Based within the United States

Secondly, principals eligible to be interviewed did not have to be a licensed landscape architect, but must have:

- Worked at the identified firm for at least 5 years
- Been practicing within landscape architecture firms for a minimum of 10 years
- Earned a landscape architecture degree in the United States or Canada

Figure 2.1

State of Practice of Participants



² Two interviews were conducted with individuals at a selected firm, but only one participant's responses have been recorded due to these constraints. The selected participant was chosen based on their longer experience within the firm.

Figure 2.2

Participant Titles

*founding title not shown as it does not denote significance for this study

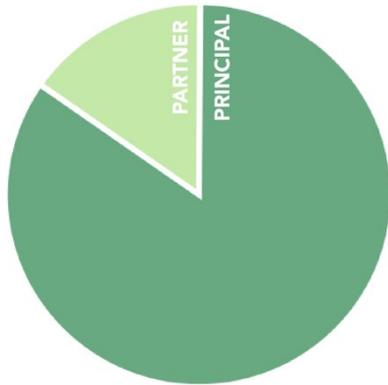


Figure 2.3

Participant Contact & Response Rates

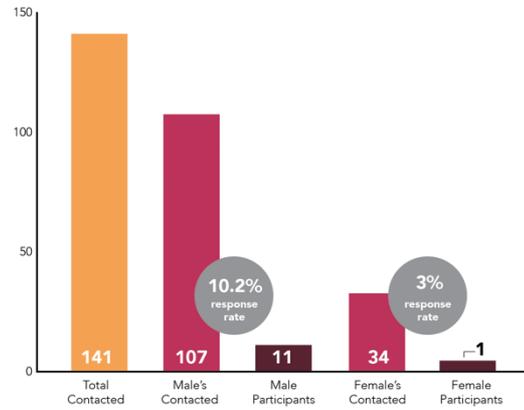
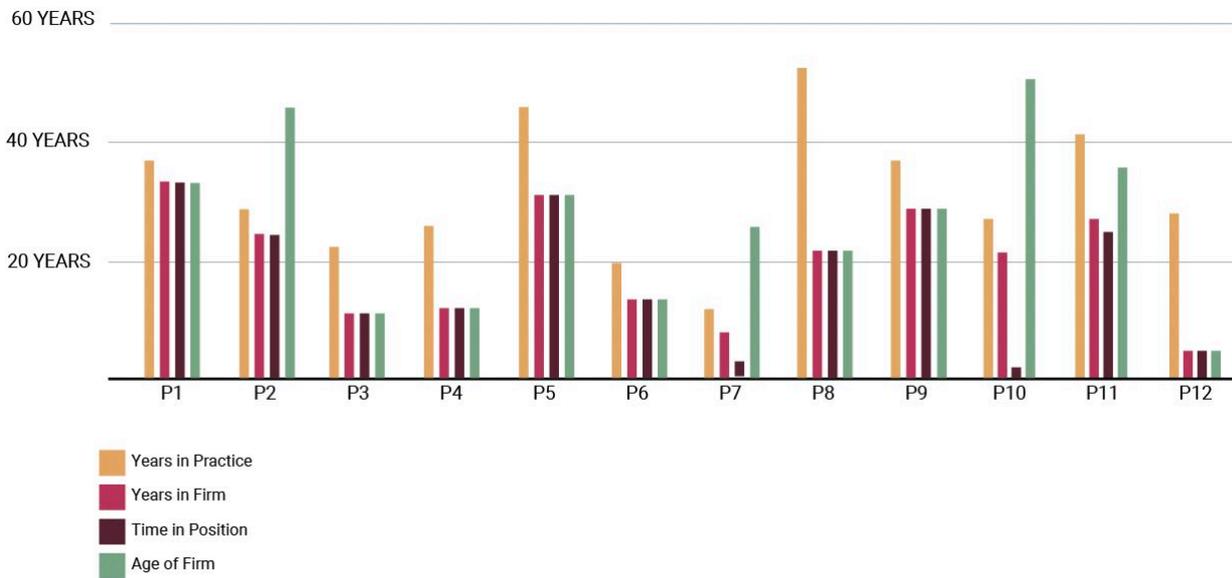


Figure 2.4

Practice Experience of Participants



The present study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set forth by the Institutional Review Board. Approval for the study was obtained from the USU Institutional Review Board (protocol number 13570). All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. A total of 57 qualifying firms were contacted, including a total of 141 eligible principals. Figure 4 shows the overall response rate of participants was 10.2%. Participants were contacted through email, either personal and/or firm with two emails: first ensuring their eligibility, and second to provide further information of interview content, to obtain signatures for consent, and to allow interview scheduling. Interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom conferencing platform and were both video and audio recorded (Zoom Video Communication, 2022). They were then transcribed from audio to text using Otter.ai (Otter.ai, 2022). Once transcribed, and verified for accuracy, video and audio of all interviews were deleted, and information was deidentified.

Critical Questions

Among multiple questions asked during the interview, the prompts that were most relevant to this portion of the study and generated the most response are as follows:

1. How important are business development areas within the landscape architecture profession?
1. What type of business development areas are most beneficial in showing an individual's value to landscape architecture firms?
2. Going forward, do you feel training and involvement of your employees in business development skills and areas is relevant/necessary?

Thematic Analysis

To analyze the responses of participants we used thematic analysis to identify themes within the data with the approach defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012), a six-phase approach to thematic analysis to develop themes. MAXQDA 2022 coding software was used to code transcribed interviews and provide visual tools to aid identification of common trends. We started by reviewing the textual data from the transcribed interviews to identify common themes previously identified, as well as newly introduced topics. After analysis and study of the data, themes were condensed and organized by clustering similar codes. After codes were clustered based on main themes, the themes for discussion were selected based on if the topics were mentioned repeatedly within all interviews.³ The methodology was a bottom-up approach, starting with relatively defined topics, then throughout the coding process we identified additional themes that emerged from the data itself. Participant responses are herein attributed using their coding identifier (i.e., P1, P2, P3, etc.).

RESULTS

When the topic of business development within landscape architecture was presented early within the interviews, all participants agreed that these areas cannot be ignored in private or even public practice. Analysis found that 100% of participants agreed that business skills within professional practice are not only important, but *critical*, acknowledging that a well-rounded background is helpful. Despite unanimous agreement that these skills are important, many participants stated that conversation about business within design industries is both rare and avoided, even going as far as to agree that this lack of conversation is

³ If new topics became prevalent in later interviews, previously coded interviews were checked for similarity.

prevailing not only in landscape architecture but in architecture and other design professions (P2, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12). In summary, as one senior practitioner put it, “the lack of business acumen that tends to exist is pretty large” (P5).

There was a strong recognition among participants that business development areas can be considered ‘soft-skills’, able to be both obtained and contributed to by all members at a firm, and at any positional level, although it is often not required. Lack of business development expectations in firms from participants' prior experience in academia and professional practice led to the inference that the topic is often not talked about or thought about. One participant reflected others’ responses saying this is because “we are not educated enough on what we need to ask” (P4).

Despite limited exposure to these practices, participants all recognized that their position as a principal, partner or director was often the main position responsible for overseeing these activities, and they are expected to be actively participating daily in these efforts. Moreover, as a principal, business development constituted much of their work. This was true across most participants, with the limited exception of a minority being highly specialized and talented at something else (P1, P2, P3, P10, P11).⁴

The three business development topics extracted from current literature—*ensuring and creating profit, marketing, and client relationships*—were unanimously accepted as critical areas of business development for creating a sustainable firm. In addition to these skills, without any prompt, four further business development areas were identified as valuable to establishing stability and success by more than two participants, and therefore have been included:

- Communication skills

⁴ None of the participants in this study fell into this category of holding a principal position without business development responsibilities.

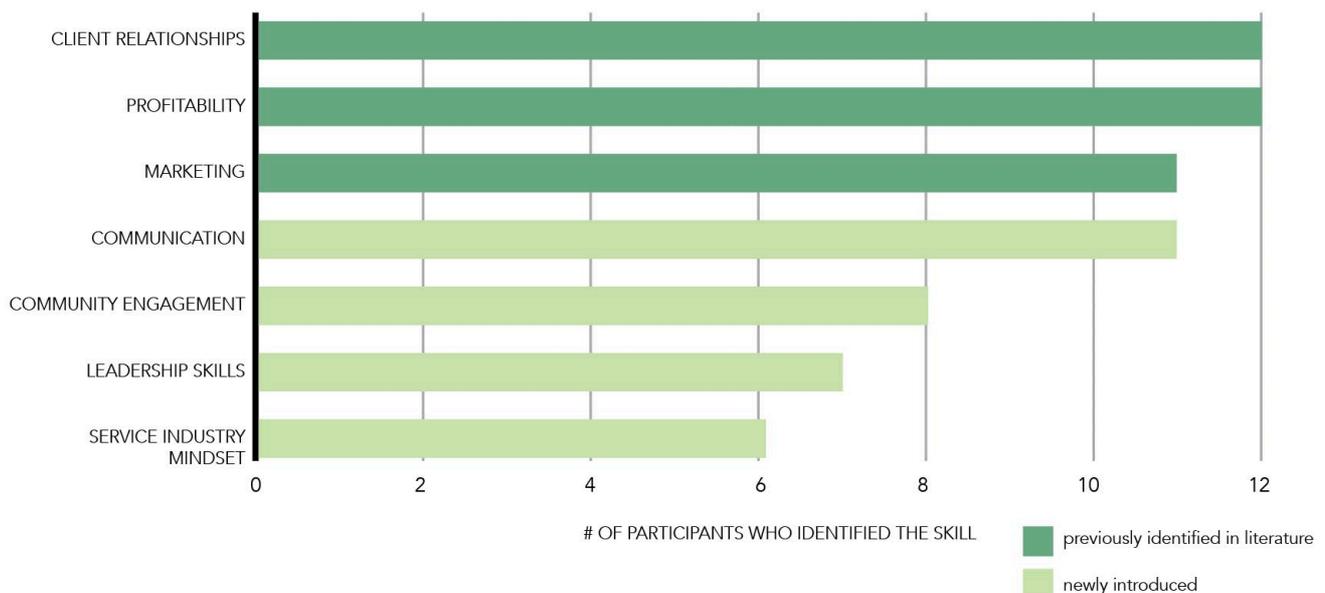
- Leadership skills
- Community engagement
- Common understanding of landscape architecture as a service industry

When discussing these topics, it became apparent that all are interconnected, and to successfully practice ‘business development’, a combination of these tools needs to be utilized. Furthermore, the understanding that business development is active, ongoing, and fluctuating, was affirmed. The factors and determinants of success in business are dynamic and should be approached in coordination with design endeavors. These topics will be discussed further on their relevance to professional practice within landscape architecture.

Business Development Areas

Figure 2.5

Business Development Areas Identified by Participants



Ensuring and Creating Profitability

All participants highlighted the critical importance of understanding how a business operates. A key point supported both in literature and with the participants is that if there is no work coming through the door, none of the rest of the design or production matters. Simply put, an unstable financial foundation puts both the firm and its employees at risk of being unsuccessful.

Time management of individuals within firms can, participants said, directly impact a firm's profitability. Teaching and expecting wise time management was recognized by many of the participants as directly impacting a firm's profitability. Participant 10 acknowledged that "sometimes the amount of time that it takes to get to a complex and high-end design, doesn't align with the fees that we have". Participant 3 reiterated the statement, warning that "you can be good at something, but if it takes you double the budget to do it, you're costing someone more".

Study participants also recognized that balancing the amount of work taken on to stay profitable and maintain a constant revenue stream, without being *too* busy, is sometimes difficult due to unpredictable factors (P1, P2, P3, P7, P9). Therefore, understanding work projections, and when to pursue new contracts, needs to be well understood. Coordination with marketing strategies and client relationships can help establish more accessible, steady revenue streams, allowing access both to new and existing markets, and thereby reducing substantial variations in workloads. This symbiotic relationship can therefore impact employee stress and work/life balance.

Three predominant strategies for managing and sustaining profit among participants' firms are:

- 1) Establishing a relationship with a “revenue powerhouse” client that brings in most of the firm’s money. Despite it not being desirable to have too many projects in this strategy, doing so sustains more interesting, design-intensive work that tends to have less reliable, lucrative or long-term revenue with separate clients. This does not mean most projects are for this “revenue powerhouse” client, but they do bring in the most revenue.
- 2) Only taking high-end, high-revenue projects that fit a firm's brand to maintain identity. This strategy can come at the cost of having a less stable flow of revenue if certain projects ‘dip’ in billable hours, and/or if few such projects are available and run concurrently. While highly desirable, such projects are harder to obtain due to stiff competition for this surrounding minority segment of the market.
- 3) Establishing a ‘main’ client that provides most of the firm's revenue. Although this strategy seems ideal, participants agreed that having a diverse portfolio can be preferable in case the main client is lost. Unlike strategy 1, this approach suggests that the majority of the firms’ work *and* revenue is through this client.

As leaders in their firms, all participants carry a high responsibility for bringing in work, and they recognize their firms’ and employees' livelihood are dependent on remaining profitable. This activity can involve a wide range of activities, including approving budgets, knowledge of where money is coming from, understanding the legislative process, monitoring public release of projects, managing key business factors (e.g., debt, billing ratios, workflow balance), pursuit of new work, reading and understanding economic projections, and overseeing operations (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12).

Literature supports these claims that to be successful, revenue as well as profits need to be reliably produced by all firms. If those key performance indicators (KPI) are ongoing

skill gaps in a practice, the business faces the likelihood of failure; this holds for landscape architecture firms, as well as any business (Kopec, 2010; Bracker et al., 1988). To keep a design firm in business, there must be demand for its services, coupled with an awareness of the tools it offers. Churchill and Lewis (1983, p.7) stated the need, succinctly writing, “the important tasks are to make sure the basic business stays profitable so that it will not outrun its source of cash”. Put more plainly, there needs to be profit for there to be production, and production for a firm to be profitable. Roenker and Hensey (1989), researchers studying engineering and its business practices, support the argument, pointing out that keeping a company profitable will not only keep the staff existing employed, but also helps attract new talent, and thus to keep the firm competitive.

Client Relationships

For the individual practitioner, the practice of building client relationships is a form of business development that can continually help by providing services to clients, thereby providing an opportunity to build value for the organization:

"[The client] trusts you, believes in you... [the client] says, 'We don't need to look anywhere else, we're just going to stick with those people.' And [our firm] has had great success with repeat clients over the years" (P11). [Because] “through that work, you are continuously crafting relationships, strengthening relationships, and by doing that you are developing business” (P3).

All participants stated that the most valuable relationships their firms had were cultivated, personal, and sustained. These statements are supported by Preddy (2017) who reiterates that concepts of building trust and value among clients are universally applicable and highly relied on within and outside of the design profession. Recognizing the difference between a business relationship and a client relationship makes a difference, and like other

relationships, takes a significant amount of time and effort to maintain. Business relationships are professional connections with professional boundaries, with interactions guided by roles, responsibilities, and formalities. Ultimately, the main goal of business relationships is related to work and achieving work. These partnerships can be developed into personal relationships to build a greater level of trust and increase human and personal connections for longer lasting relationships.

In addition to establishing a personal relationship, providing a high-quality product is considered the best method for obtaining an ongoing client relationship. Participants agreed with the notion that repeat business is substantially less expensive than efforts to find new clients. This repeated business can create reliable revenue streams, reduce periods of low work, and decrease stress. But of equal importance was their observation that less money is spent on acquiring new business, and therefore both time and money can be devoted towards a better product for one's existing clients. Additionally, it is noted that satisfied clients aid in a firm's marketing by spreading positive information, making recommendations, and generally growing a firm's business indirectly.

In summary, firms can leverage their network and relationships to both bring in new business opportunities and to allow their practice to focus on higher quality production. Establishing and maintaining high-quality relationships with clients can also lead to firms generating more contracts, reinforcing the credo that trust is a key component in the business world (Pirson, 2016). These findings are supported by Sharkey's (1994) past guidance to landscape architects, which claimed that satisfied clients are more likely to return for future projects and refer others to the design firm. "Once you get that relationship, that repeat business is so inexpensive, that you could give that client 105% or 110% of what they paid for, and it's still cheaper than going to find a new client" (P5). This notion that client retention is typically more cost-effective than searching for new clients, as it requires less

investment in time and resources involving marketing expenses, and less unpredictable results is echoed by other both in and out of this study (P3, P4, P5; Dyer & Liebrecht-Himes, 2006; Noorlander, 2023). This is especially true when these relationships are fostered within other, more lucrative, market sectors such as with developers or architects.

Communication

Ten of the twelve participants expressed the impact communication has on business development. For existing clients, participants agreed that how communication was handled on a project has led to both gain and loss of a project, with the outcome a result of how professionally they represented their firm and their work. In representing the firm, an ability to clearly convey the firm's value and purpose, as well as to be adept in public relations, can help prospective clients recognize the results a firm can offer. "Trying to tune into people is being really sensitive to their issues [and] is pretty critical" (P11), because "making sure that the client feels like we're performing, and that the communication is good, and they really enjoy working with us is a huge business development effort" (P6). Additional business knowledge can also increase the overall credibility of the practitioner's work as they can effectively communicate both the business and design side of projects, as "additional vocabulary can go a long way" (P11; Rumsey, 2020).

Effective communication with existing and potential clients allows knowledgeable rapport that helps each party to work efficiently and set correct expectations. "You have to communicate in a way that people are getting what they expect" (P9). By having open and honest communication with clients during both the proposal and project management phases, study participants claimed that clients are more likely to work with them again since they see their design fees are producing results (P5). In this same vein, an ability to communicate expectations, deadlines, and opportunities among employees and clients will aid

collaboration processes and office efficiency for better production, and therefore stronger internal and external relationships.

“How we communicate strengthens those relationships and maintains them because no one missed a deadline, or [an] opportunity to present themselves, or demonstrate our abilities and that we’re experts” (P3).

Writing skills are also a form of communication valuable to designers, according to the principals interviewed, especially when preparing an RFP or contract. For instance, participants recalled multiple instances where their firm was selected for projects based on specific phrasing and writing techniques that were unique and concise. Finally, transparency with ‘plain language’ was said to help break down barriers between everyone involved: designers, clients, and business relationships.

Community Engagement

Participants encouraged community engagement in five distinct ways that aid in generating business and building a positive reputation:

- a) Involvement in a firm’s local community to “become a fixture in the local community” (P1, P12, P4, P7):
 - i) Volunteer and pro-bono work and community service activities
- b) Involvement in landscape architecture and planning organizations:
 - i) ASLA (American Association of Landscape Architects), both regionally and nationally
 - ii) APA (American Planning Association)
- c) Involvement in other professional organizations outside of landscape architecture and planning to “get involved in different communities” (P7):
 - i) AIA (American Institute of Architects)

- ii) ULI (Urban Land Institute)
- d) Involvement in informal groups of landscape architects:
 - i) Other local firms' leadership
 - ii) Local alumni organizations
- e) Involvement with academic and university programs

Involvement and engagement in these activities can help practitioners to network with like-minded individuals for inspiration, innovation, and collaboration within the A/E marketplace.

A different yet still symbiotic engagement was reported by participants concerning academic communities. Influence with academia can help students prepare for the professional world, while serving to address firms ongoing talent acquisition. These interactions indirectly improve future business development because, within contemporary architecture and design education, graduates are not found to be prepared to run a business (Evans & Leccese, 1991; Littlefield, 2015; and Tracey, 2021).

Ultimately, participants agreed that involvement that is only landscape architecture oriented can *hinder* opportunities to gain business from separate sectors, as “landscape architects do not provide other landscape architects business or projects” (P7). In conjunction with building relationships within other sectors, it can also help diversify a firm's project portfolio.

Leadership

To effectively execute the business, develop skills outlined, it is essential to possess additional leadership capabilities. Individuals responsible for business development tasks must have time for them, and therefore must engage in effectively delegating additional responsibilities and tasks.

In the professional realm, possessing strong organizational skills is paramount for success. This encompasses the ability to efficiently schedule hours and tasks, as well as comprehending financial projections. Participant 7 highlighted the ability to be organized, to be able to schedule out and look at projections, and to “understand a market as a whole as critical skills to have, and great skill sets to bring to an office”.

Understanding the market as a whole and grasping basic economic principles is another foundational aspect of business leadership in a design firm, even for those not directly involved in operational control. Recognizing the intricacies of business management and having a fundamental understanding of economics was emphasized, said one principal. "I think that the foundation of understanding business management is, to a degree, understanding how economics works fundamentally" (P2).

Effectively managing people in a respectful manner is also a key component of successful leadership. Identifying individuals' preferences and work styles is crucial, as emphasized by Participant 3: "You've got to really identify where people's preferences are and how they work and how they operate". Moreover, expectations for leadership include the ability to manage teams in a positive and respectful manner, as articulated by another perspective: "As a project manager, you're managing people. I expect you to manage them in a respectful way and communicate positively" (P5).

Critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities are indispensable traits in the professional landscape. These skills enable individuals to navigate challenges, make informed decisions, and contribute to overall organizational success. Being respected as a leader is not only a desire but a prerequisite for effective leadership. As one participant succinctly stated, "if you want to become a leader, others have to see you as a leader" (P2). This underlines the importance of building credibility and trust within a team or organization.

Lastly, understanding the skills and preferences of employees is crucial for the proper organization of teams and projects. By aligning individuals with tasks that suit their strengths and preferences, leaders can optimize team performance and project outcomes. This basic organizational strategy was also recently echoed in Forbes Business Magazine article addressing non-design workplaces (Suner, 2023). Properly managing teams will allow a better workflow and more efficient office, leading to higher productivity, and a higher quality product, and eventually leading to higher client satisfaction and a higher likelihood of repeat clients.

Service Industry Mindset

Fifty percent of participants agreed that landscape architecture is, at its core, a service industry whose aim is to serve both the client and the land. Understanding the client's side of a project is essential, and firms should be keeping clients satisfied. “We're a service industry and as much as we like to think that we build things, most of what we're doing is relating to our clients and engaging and transforming their thoughts” (P1). Participant 5 described the necessary mindset this way:

“Understand your client’s needs, listen to them and tailor your process or work and how you deliver that service to really line up and advance their business goals and needs. We’re really in a service industry. We’re serving those clients, and you really need to understand that.”

Participant 11 agreed saying, “you recognize that you're working for, and with, the client. You want to be able to be open, honest and [to] give the best product to them and not just say ‘no’. You can't do that and walk away, but [instead must] find that middle ground

and understand that there's a service being provided and you want to make both parties happy”.

Participant 10 added, “we're a professional services organization. We are in the business of selling our time, essentially” and entering contracts and agreeing to pay for a service “demonstrates a level of financial commitment from the client, who in turn expects a corresponding level of service” (Faust, 2000, p. 42). “I don't care if you're a furnace repair company or landscape architect or doctor you know, it's seeing the world from the client side is essential”, warned Participant 9.

In design business sectors, knowledge about more than just the product (e.g., site grading plans, specifications, etc.) is beneficial to both the client and the designer, creating a financially plausible project that meets budget and assures profit, builds value, and elevates trust between both parties. In the process it helps a firm better understand and adapt its marketing and businesses processes to its customer’s preferences (Dyer & Liebreinz-Himes, 2006; Preddy, 2017).

Somewhat tellingly, a few participating principals said that employees who have experience in service industries *outside of landscape architecture* tend to excel in business development, as they already understand the value of providing a product the customer expects when entering a contract with them. These participants’ observations indirectly speak to the lack of a professional service mindset among some practitioners who have not worked outside the field.

Marketing

There was a divide among study participants regarding whether marketing should be included under the business development ‘umbrella’ said one, “I think marketing and

business development is a piece of the puzzle but not for everybody” (P12). Participant 6 supported this ideal saying “I definitely think of marketing as being a very different thing than business development, although they are related”. Whereas Participant 9 argues “marketing is a tool within business development”.

Quality work is crucial to the success of any professional service practice, but it is of little use if not properly marketed to both new and returning clients (Littlefield, 2005). Effective marketing will identify and target new customers and markets, creating demand for services. Roenker and Hensey (1989), Indeed (2021), and Sharkey (1994) argue that effective marketing also helps organizations to generate leads and convert them into paying customers, thereby increasing revenue and driving growth. Marketing involves customer attraction on the front end, but it subsequently feeds into the bigger picture of business development regarding retention. Unfortunately, Littlefield (2005) points out that “marketing is hardly in the vocabulary of architects” (p.21), and the same may be true for landscape architects.

The main differences between marketing and business development are short-term versus long-term goals (Indeed, 2021). Business development should focus on the sustained health and longevity of a business, including building a successful brand. Marketing, in contrast, is a day-to-day endeavor that focuses on ongoing projects; efforts by marketing teams “will always be limited by the company’s current products and process” (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021, para. 23). The use of marketing tools and practices can be applied at all scales, from individual to firm-wide, and will encourage the growth of the company, an important aspect of business development, and produce a higher number of incoming clients (Roenker & Hensey, 1989; Strydom, 2015). Because A/E marketing tools are aimed at securing new contracts, either from new or existing clients, the level of involvement with marketing can vary, and depends on how much business a firm is attempting to generate and maintain in the foreseeable future.

Multiple participating firms engaged with marketing professionals and consultants, while other firms held that marketing efforts fall under the principal's job expectations. It is therefore important to recognize that marketing responsibilities can differ drastically across firms, especially depending on size. Despite disagreement on the categorization of marketing, all agreed marketing and business development are related, with the prior a critical activity for generating business.

In addition to marketing responsibilities varying, marketing strategies also varied depending on the branding and image each firm wants to portray. Branding and imaging can help firms portray a specific "voice" to help build their brand versus disperse their brand, a separate effort. This can relate to their budget, target audience, use of social media, selection of projects they choose to participate in, or other outreach efforts. Although marketing strategies in the sense of attracting business differed, there was an agreement that each employee markets their firm with each interaction they have with the public and their clients, and they are expected to maintain a positive image with each of these interactions.

Skill Acquisition

All participants agreed that there was little to no business education within the landscape architecture education they received. Participant 9 summed up others remarks saying, "I'd say in school, not much at all" (P9). Littlefield (2015) echoed that sentiment speaking of how architects are trained, and warned that "like most business skills in the profession, which are given scant attention in architecture school, [practitioners] make it up as they go along" (p. 23). As a result, a lack of substantive training in business practices within design school leaves practitioners to learn and develop these skills in the workforce individually, with possible help from their firm. "Basically, the connecting ring through those [in charge] was that nobody knew what they were doing", quipped Participant 7.

Participating practitioners unanimously acknowledged they had little or no formal training in business development areas until they were expected to be responsible for them, or else they obtained these skills from business school by their own accord. As no formal training is usually provided within firms, principals and others in leadership positions are taught mainly from mentors or through observed traditions in their current or past firms. Fifty percent of participants agree that “a lot of it is just you learn from doing and you learn from others that maybe are your mentors” (P10).

This pattern contains several potential problems, including repetition of ineffective strategies, and inconsistent or missing business development skills. “The lack of business acumen that tends to exist is pretty large” (P5). Additionally, participants felt that they lacked access to tools, if available tools even exist, to understand what business practices are necessary to lead a successful landscape architecture firm.

Although not all participants regretted a lack of any formal business training, all but one participant acknowledged a business background would have (or had) helped them when moving into and navigating their leadership position. Some further admitted they did not realize the value of business development within a successful firm until late in their career.

DISCUSSION

Business development specific to landscape architecture professional practice is an important but unexamined topic. This study’s data reveal that there are business development tools that are relevant in contemporary professional practice, but which are not examined in current or past landscape architecture literature. This blind spot in the discipline’s scholarship

is not dissimilar to research patterns in architecture and mirrors the tertiary role that business plays in accredited landscape architecture curricula.

Taken together, this study's results point to an overall disconnect between business development skills in landscape architecture as addressed in academia compared to their relevance to successful professional practice. According to study participants, unlike technical and design skills, individual practitioners often do not have the opportunity to obtain business development skills within the early years of their careers, which can lead to principals being unprepared to successfully manage and sustain a firm. This dilemma appears to be more problematic in the absence of a strategic success plan.

One participant in this study acknowledged they did not have formal training in business development, nor were they interested in pursuing it at any points in their career. Despite their aversion to business, and subsequent attempts to minimize participation in business development efforts, they acknowledged the importance of understanding business operations and basic economics. According to the experience, regardless of a designer's interest in business, involvement in these activities once in a leadership role is necessary to some degree within mid-sized firms.

Based on participants' remarks, academics, however, have an opportunity to change this phenomenon for the better. Increasing landscape architecture-oriented business courses in higher education could shift the paradigm of what a "practice ready" graduate looks like. Allowing those who will progress into future senior positions an opportunity to gain an appreciation for the importance of business development, both in operating a firm and in career advancement, has potential to empower individuals as well as the profession. This can, it appears, occur without diminishing technical skill courses if business-related topics are conceived as integral to, rather than independent from, traditional curricular topics in LAAB-accredited programs.

Beyond academia, this study's findings have implications for the continued professionalization of the design industry. By drawing attention to the potential that business development tools have, alongside design skills, for preparing entry-level and early career practitioners for more significant and influential future roles, the results can inform curricula. More broadly, this study can contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the value of a comprehensive approach to professional development, including highlighting the need for continuous learning for practitioners to remain relevant in an ever-changing and highly competitive business landscape.

At the industry scale, wide-spread inefficiency in, or ambivalence to, skill development in business practices among firms could hamper landscape architecture firms due to realizing reduced numbers of contracts and diminished revenue. One specific area that could be impacted is the likelihood of leadership within multidisciplinary projects and/or firms. Should landscape architects be widely seen as lacking business acumen, individual practices may be perceived as less valuable and authoritative in the central decision-making for projects and/or firms. On the contrary, an ability to speak the business 'language' by the next generation of landscape architects can open more significant opportunities on projects, earn a role in critical client conversations, and expand leadership roles in the A/E industry. Put somewhat differently, if other A/E disciplines face a similar dilemma concerning inadequate business development training, then the subject offers a potential competitive advantage for any practitioners who accelerate and expand their skills development in the subject. Additionally, providing tomorrow's practitioners with pertinent vocabulary and knowledge to utilize both technical and business areas of knowledge also holds potential to create a common connection between separate departments within an individual firm, while concurrently enhancing satisfaction among the firm's clients.

CONCLUSION

This research identified specific business development areas that principals in landscape architecture professional practice consider to be relevant and necessary for a firm's success and longevity. As landscape architecture firms are business organizations, these tools should be practiced and taught to employees and leaders to ensure a firm's long-term success in both design excellence and profitability. While design and technical skills remain at the core of the landscape architecture industry, this study shows the symbiotic importance of business development skills in assuring a sustainable practice. The results encourage a new, comprehensive learning approach to developing those skills, while encouraging business development skills as a replacement or priority over traditional design skills. According to the study's participants, understanding both technical and business practices empowers individual practitioners to effectively market their expertise and aesthetic sensibilities and thereby contributing to the creation of more valuable and well-managed landscapes (Robinson, 1917). To succeed at this enterprise, practitioners must be motivated to create and attract business, generating consistent growth, and thus supporting and motivating employees to do likewise (Gensler et al., 2015). Lastly, this study points out the widespread need for research into subjects related to business practices by landscape architects. In particular, greater understanding of business development tools and their influence on career advancement is necessary to help guide individuals who aspire to leadership positions. Expanding research into these critical topics can help future leaders of practice to have access to necessary skills and education that sooner, and subsequently equip them to assure that landscape architectural practice occurs in a sustainable and profitable manner, and without forfeiting design quality.

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CHAPTER 3

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SKILLS AND CAREER PROGRESSION IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: A PATH TO LEADERSHIP ROLES⁵

ABSTRACT

Landscape architects' careers unfold in the context of a highly competitive professional services industry. This crowded marketplace sees not only firms vying for the same contracts, but entire disciplines jostling to claim ownership of different sectors of practice. It also involves professionals competing for the best job openings, both on the open market and within the hierarchy of their current firms. As a result, skill competency that provides a competitive advantage to practitioners may help both their careers and the firms in which they work.

Career progression in landscape architecture and allied professions generally follows a path from entry-level design staff to positions of senior leadership. As leadership and responsibility increases, compensation and job security rise (AIA, 2024; IIDA, 2021). However, little is known about how practitioners advance in their careers within landscape architecture, as the discipline's scholars to date have not examined the topic. Even less well-understood are the factors within the discipline affecting career advancement, who is selected for promotion, and what determines which practitioners ascend to principal, principal-in-charge, or partner, and why.

⁵ Chapter 3 was coauthored by Catherine Frost and Sean Michael for submission to the Landscape Journal

This study provides a look into the importance of one skill area—business development—in the path to leadership for senior landscape architects. In the process, it provides a unique glimpse into the responsibilities of individuals responsible for keeping their firms open and profitable. The results offer insights into the duties of principals and similar leadership positions, and suggest that business skills, including business development, have an outsized importance in professional practice, and warrant further study by scholars given the influence they have on the financial success and project attainment of landscape architecture firms.

KEYWORDS

Business Development, Professional Practice, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Careers,
Compensation, Promotion

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been highlighted as a staple of business philosophy by authors ranging from Adam Smith (1776) to Dale Carnegie (1936) to Peter Drucker (1966) and John Maxwell (1998), with each successive generation pointing out aspects of the topic to eager readers. Despite a century of modern business literature on leadership, scholars in landscape architecture have given the topic little notice. This holds true as well for the subject of leadership development in the profession.

Regardless of whether there is an avoidance of business topics within the field of landscape architecture, as Evans (1991), Gobster (2010), Littlefield (2015) and Tracey (2021) infer, the claims that within contemporary architecture and design education graduates are not prepared to run a business may be related to a lack of curiosity by scholars regarding this subject area. Given that those same scholars are also instructors in landscape architecture programs, the effect may therefore be twofold. Whatever the extent of this apparent ambivalence, the outcome may be a marketplace that favors graduates who demonstrate an understanding of business in professional practice. Specifically, practitioners with adequate business acumen are at a potential advantage over peers, as they possess a unique, perennially important skill set. This point of view is reinforced by views from the general business world.

In a 1988 McKinsey staff paper, Lanning and Michaels argued that businesses such as design firms are “value delivery systems”. Three decades later, their colleagues (Sheppard, et al., 2018) reported on the importance of design as both a value-enhancing business strategy and a performance metric for businesses, and, subsequently, described the importance of maximizing the potential of design leadership for realizing a firm’s performance potential (Dalrymple et al., 2021; Kopec, 2010). If design itself has risen to being a business strategy that adds value, the importance of designers themselves being able to add value has become

all the truer (Bracker et al., 1988). To stand apart as a designer, one should provide value to a firm or a project, whether that be as a technician or a business leader. However, in talent-rich design communities, design proficiency alone is rarely unique. Business acumen, in contrast, can set an individual practitioner apart as a more valuable member of a firm by having an additional essential skill set.

Business skill sets within professional practice firms are numerous, and well-documented in architecture (AIA, 2013), interior design (Piotrowski, 2020) and landscape architecture (Gensler et al., 2015; Rogers, 2010). Consistent across these professions is the importance of securing new work through marketing and promotion, or what is commonly termed *business development*. Because there is an expectation of business development within leadership positions, an ability to use and understand these skills would seem to be relevant to consideration for and success within leadership positions (AIALA, n.d.; ALA, 2003; Sharkey, 1991).

Leadership & Management

Leadership, a multifaceted concept, does not fit within a singular definition, and various scholars have approached it from diverse perspectives. Summerfield (2014) defines leadership by condensing it to the fundamental objective of "making things better" (p. 252). In his view, leadership is most effective when administered democratically and collegially, emphasizing the leader's pivotal role in enhancing the current state of affairs. Further underscoring the complexity of leadership, another perspective by Winston and Patterson (2006) argues that leaders are individuals or groups responsible for selecting, equipping, training, and influencing followers with diverse gifts, abilities, and skills. This definition emphasizes the leader's task of aligning followers with the organization's mission and objectives, thereby inspiring them to willingly invest toward achieving collective goals. Both

definitions, along with others, agree on the fundamental principle that a leader aims to achieve specific objectives and improve the overall performance of the team or organization under their guidance.

Recognizing the diversity within leadership, experts (e.g., Maxwell, 1998; NSLC, 2024) acknowledge the existence of various leadership styles, each offering unique approaches to achieving organizational objectives. The diverse array of leadership styles ensures adaptability to different contexts and organizational cultures, allowing leaders to navigate challenges effectively, as is true in the landscape architecture profession. In essence, leadership styles serve as tools through which leaders can impart stability, ensuring the sustained progress and success of the organizations they lead.

While specific styles may differ, the overarching goal of leadership remains constant: providing stability to the organization (Burke & Freidman, 2011; Laub, 2018; Rino & Rafika, 2017; Senior, Martin, Thomas, Topakas, West, M. Yeats, 2012). Within landscape architecture, a lack of business knowledge among leaders can limit opportunities for firms to succeed. To sustain their practices, firms must capitalize on opportunities to develop new business partnerships. Due to the increasingly competitive market in which landscape architects practice, coupled with weak growth projections, the need for business development skills may be greater now than ever (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). In the context of business development leadership, Rainey (2010) argues that, “[leaders] must use business integration to allow the corporation to strategically select and develop principles, processes, practices, and techniques that obtain superior results” (pg. 17). Therefore, individuals in leadership positions should possess such skills to fulfill their position, and to optimize the performance of their organization.

Business Development

Within the business world, business development is a widely recognized term and activity, yet it remains poorly defined even within the associated research literature (Kind, & zu Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2007). Nonetheless, Rainey's (2010) work frames business development as a set of distinct strategies, which "when employed together...provide a sophisticated management model for achieving success in the long term" (pg. 17).

Understandably, the absence of a clear definition of business development may be due to differing specific meanings across related professions. In landscape architecture itself, there exists no widely recognized definition of the term. As a result, for this study, an array of definitions were melded into one. Derived primarily from business literature (Achtenhagen et al., 2017; Granet, 2021; Indeed Editorial Team, 2021; Pollack, 2012), the definition reads: Business development is a model or organization within a business, firm, or company, that promotes financial stability through insurance of profit, opportunity for growth, and longevity of a firm.

Career Advancement

Career advancement yields higher compensational influence within architectural and engineering (A/E) firms (AIA, 2024; BLS, 2023). The Society for Human Resource Management (2017) identifies "career paths and career ladders [as] two traditional methods by which an employee can develop and progress within an organization" (para. 1). Higher titles are an indicator of more responsibilities, and more experience within a workplace. In order to reach a higher position within any type of business organization, there are typically overt criteria by which individuals are considered for promotion. A unique value proposition, such as the importance of business skills within design industries, could be a potential reason practitioners are considered for advancement or leadership positions within their careers.

Early in the landscape architecture's emergence as a profession, Marsh (1928) warned that designers are the ones who suffer most from the conditions of not fully utilizing their potential, and, therefore, if a practitioner takes the steps to remedy the situation, they will benefit themselves, along with the firm. While there is no documented formula for spotting great business prospects among landscape architects, the better one knows their product and market, and the more employees are involved in business operations, the better they are likely to be in evaluating opportunities that arise (ASLA, 1940; Rogers 2010). Dixon et al. (2018) and Robinson (1917) argue that if a practitioner understands the basics of the business model and strategies in which they are working, they will be able to spend less time explaining the value of design and more time producing a unique and original design. Additional business knowledge can also increase the overall credibility of the practitioner's work as they can effectively communicate both the business and design side of the project (Rumsey, 2020). Dixon et al. (2018) also argues that practitioners who manage this chaos with calm and wisdom are going to dominate the marketplace much faster because they are more familiar with similar situations.

The beneficial effects of the business development process in A/E firms appears to be symbiotic and compounding. When an individual practitioner can bring more value to the client, and thus their firm, through business development practices, they may subsequently be viewed differently by their employers due to having secured additional contracts. Recognition of efforts to secure future work may yield results including more opportunities for leadership and career advancement within their career (Carmeli et al. 2007; Valdez, 2024).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The three main objectives of this research are a) to identify if business development skills are necessary for individuals in leadership positions to know when in the professional practice of landscape architecture, b) to identify how current landscape architects in leadership positions perceive the impact of business development skills on their career advancement within profession, and c) to identify impacts of individuals' business development skills within a professional practice firm.

This study seeks to better understand the relationship between business development skills and career advancement towards roles such as 'principal' or 'partner' within landscape architecture professional practice. By exploring the perceptions of current landscape architects in leadership positions, the research aims to shed light on the importance of these skills in shaping not only individual career trajectories, but also their impact on the overall success of a firm. By assessing the relevance of business development practices among current professionals and their reflections on related experiences, this research aims to provide valuable insights for both students and practitioners of landscape architecture, especially those contemplating a path to leadership. Understanding whether, and at what level, proficiency in business development skills is required for success in leadership positions is also relevant to professional practice firms, and their strategy for leadership succession.

METHODS

Literature Review

There is a lack of research on, and therefore research methods for assessing, the effects business training and practice have on individual practitioners' career within design fields, especially within landscape architecture. In a more general review of literature outside

the design industry, however there were many factors affecting promotions and advancement dependent mainly on the industry or organizational structure. Maurer and Weeks (2010) conducted case studies of over a dozen interior design firms to assess their business models. In addition, Mihail and Elefterie (2006) studied the importance of business knowledge in relation to employability and career advancement. Through interviews of MBA graduates, they identified the advantages of having more training regarding “managerial competencies, employability and career development” (para. 2). Bos-de Vos et al. (2016) began diving deeper into the A/E business structure, specifically oriented around the value capture of architectural firms, and therefore the significance of professional value being utilized to be more profitable as a firm. Their methodology focused on semi-structured interviews with professionals as they wanted to take into “account the dynamics that are involved, and allow new concepts to emerge”, specifically in an area with business and design correlation, as there is lack of statistical data on these topics (Bos-de Vos, 2016, p. 24). Through this methodology, they were able to access the positive perceptions and attitudes of the interviewees to better access their experience and identified the importance of business education in relation to career advancement.

Qualitative Research

For this study, individual interviews were employed to investigate the importance of business development skills of practitioners in landscape architecture (Roemaker & Hensey, 1989; Weber, 1979). The ability to gain in-depth answers to questions through a qualitative research method is critical to creating a foundation of understanding due to the lack of prior research (Beck & Manuel, 2008; Jamshed, 2014; Robson, 2002). A semi-structured interview format was used for practitioner interviews to allow for additional probing and follow-up questions based on the responses of the interviewees (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Robson,

2002). Through the interview process, access to the perceptions and attitudes of the interviewees can be used to analyze their responses (Beck & Manuel 2008; Gall et al., 2007). As explained by Jamshed (2014), “by adopting qualitative methodology, a prospective researcher is going to fine-tune the pre-conceived notions as well as extrapolate the thought process, analyzing and estimating the issues from an in-depth perspective” (para. 8).

Research Samples

The research relied on data gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with a homogeneous sample of 12 landscape architects holding principal-level positions. This choice was deliberate, as principals represent a prevalent tier of leadership within landscape architecture and other A/E firms, indicating significant career advancement (AIALA, n.d.; AIA, 2003; Holmes, 2022). By focusing on this senior management role, the study aimed to capture insights from experienced professionals responsible for profit-oriented sectors of the industry, including contract acquisition and future project planning.

The term "principal" is interchangeable with "director" or "partner," as defined by professional organizations such as the American Institute of Architects (2003), the American Planning Association (2024), and World Landscape Architecture (2022). These titles denote individuals with extensive managerial responsibilities, overseeing company-wide operations, client relationships, and financial matters. Its usage is commonplace as well in engineering and interior design firms.

World Landscape Architecture (2022) defines the titles director *and* principal under common position title descriptions by level:

“Either someone who has started their own firm or has worked and developed their career to become a Director (either in the title or legal company part owner). This person can be managing the whole company or one team or one division depending

on the company's size or type (landscape architecture vs multi-discipline). Other Principals/Directors managing the whole company require a high level of involvement in winning work, negotiating contracts, and managing people (employees, clients, consultants, etc.) and relationships. They may spend time designing and working on projects, but many in this position spend most of their time managing the company" (para. 9).

As a result, across the A/E industry, titles such as principal, partner, and director signify senior-level positions that entail managerial responsibilities spanning across the entire company, specific teams, and financial matters. For this study, these titles were regarded as interchangeable when selecting both firms and individuals for interviews, and when describing individual participants responses.

In selecting firms for inclusion in the study, a vetting process was undertaken, guided by three specific criteria:

- The firm must specialize only in landscape architecture, urban planning, or urban design, operating as a for-profit enterprise.
- Employing 2 to 10 active principals within the independently managed location.
- Only one principal per firm was eligible for selection, with all chosen firms being within the United States or Canada.⁶

Furthermore, prospective interviewees were not required to possess a landscape architecture license but were chosen to satisfy the following prerequisites:

- Accumulate a minimum tenure of 5 years within the employing firm.

⁶ Two interviews were conducted with a selected firm, but only one participant's responses have been recorded due to these constraints. The selected participant was chosen based on their longer experience within the firm.

- Garner at least 10 years of professional experience within the landscape architecture industry.
- Hold a landscape architecture degree from a university within the United States.

Figure 3.1

State of Practice of Participants

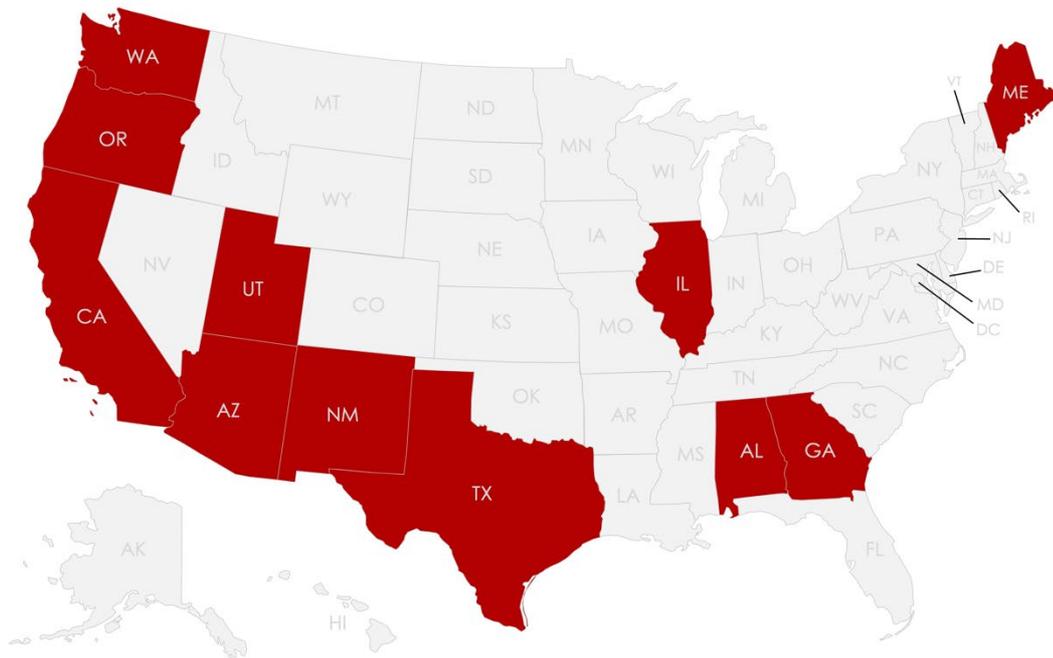


Figure 3.2

Professional Experience of Participants

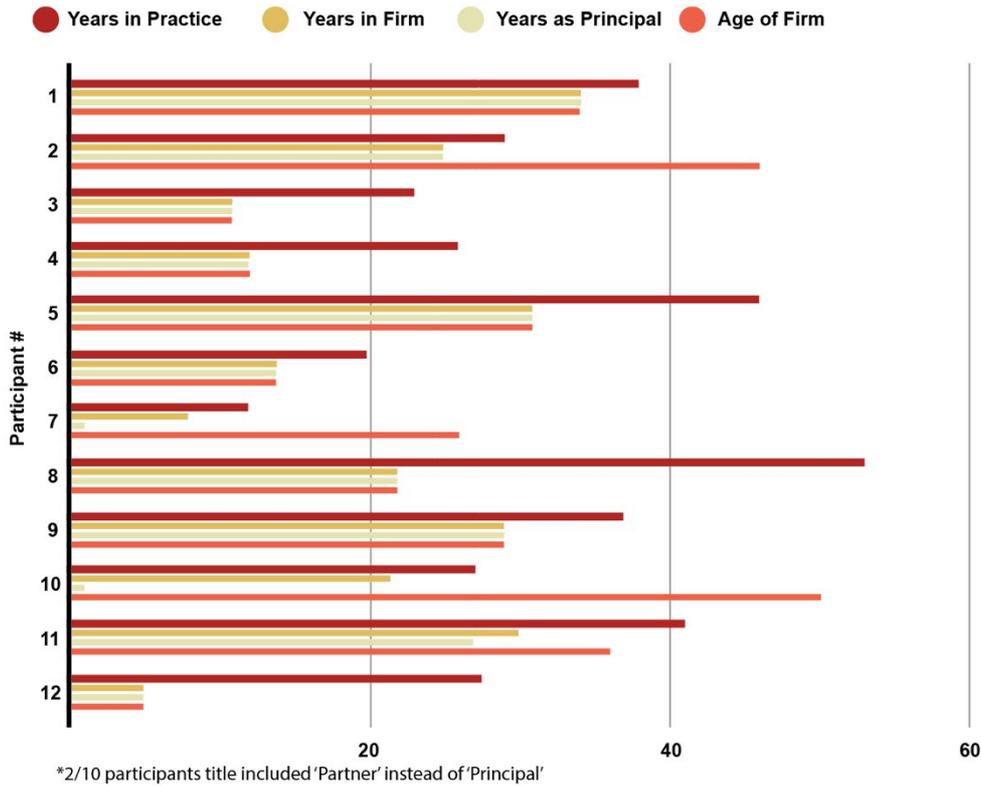


Figure 3.3

Statistics of Participant Experience



Figure 3.4

Participant Contact

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board. Approval for the study was granted by the Utah State University (USU) Institutional Review Board under protocol number 13570. Prior to participating, all individuals provided informed consent. A total of 57 potential firms were contacted, comprising 141 qualifying principals (Figure 3.3). The overall response rate among participants stood at 10.2%. The demographic breakdown participants included 11 male and 1 female participants. Contact with participants was established via email, either through personal or firm accounts, with two successive messages: the first to confirm eligibility and the second to furnish details regarding the interview content, secure consent signatures, and schedule interviews.

All interviews were conducted remotely using the Zoom conferencing platform and were recorded in both video and audio formats (Zoom Video Communication, 2022). Interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 90 minutes, with the average length of 50 minutes. Subsequently, interviews were transcribed from audio to text utilizing Otter.ai (Otter.ai, 2022). Following transcription, all interview recordings were expunged, and participant information was anonymized.

Interview Questions

Nine questions were posed to each interviewee. Of those prompts, specific questions elicited responses and were pertinent to this aspect of the study. These questions were:

1. Has your experience with business development contributed to your progression into a principal position? If so, how?
2. Do you feel like you were prepared to be involved with business development?
3. Going forward, do you feel training and involvement of your employees in business development skills is relevant/necessary?

Several responses to these questions touched upon subjects that were not directly asked but were mentioned by multiple participants. These topics were subsequently incorporated into the findings. The recurrence of these unaddressed topics, remarked upon by several participants, underscores the importance of themes that emerged organically among participants without any prompting.

Thematic Analysis

In analyzing participant responses, we employed thematic analysis following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012), which entails a six-phase process for theme development. MAXQDA 2022 coding software facilitated the coding of transcribed interviews and offered visual aids for identifying common patterns. Our analysis commenced by reviewing textual data from transcribed interviews to discern both previously identified and newly introduced themes. Subsequently, themes were condensed and organized by grouping similar codes. Following the clustering of codes into overarching themes,

discussion themes were selected based on their recurrence across all interviews.⁷ This methodological approach was characterized by a bottom-up strategy, beginning with predefined topics and evolving to incorporate emergent themes discovered during the coding process. Responses by participants are attributed using their coding identifier (i.e., P1, P2, P3, etc.).

RESULTS

In examining the necessity of business development skills for professionals in leadership positions within landscape architecture professional practice, the 12 participants provided numerous insightful perspectives. The sentiment that being well-rounded is crucial for those aspiring to be principals was expressed by most participants. “Leadership is one of those things that comes in many forms, many skills and perhaps, you know, there's many different examples of it” (P2). This notion extends to the understanding that successful leadership requires a diverse skill set, including business development. Furthermore, participants acknowledged the interconnectedness of business development skills and success in landscape architecture, with one participant stating, “I think they're extremely necessary” and others emphasizing, “Yes, the answer is yes” (P5, P4). These affirmations reflect the unanimous consensus among participants regarding the importance of business development skills in leadership roles within the field.

Another participant highlighted the practical implications of possessing business development skills, noting that such “skills make a tangible difference in a professional's success” (P6). This sentiment is further supported by the acknowledgment that these skills are not only beneficial but, in fact, *critical* for individuals in leadership positions within

⁷ If new topics became prevalent in later interviews, previously coded interviews were checked for similarity.

landscape architecture (P12). The recognition that success in the field, whether as a sole practitioner or within a larger firm's team, is contingent on understanding and implementing business development strategies reinforces the overarching theme of the indispensability of these skills (P10). Moreover, participants emphasized that business development skills are not innate but, as one individual put it, "can be acquired and are essential for the sustained success of landscape architects" (P9). The belief that these skills are a necessity was echoed by multiple participants, reinforcing the idea that professionals in leadership positions "cannot expect success to happen organically, but must actively engage in business development efforts" (P3). Collectively, the participants' remarks strongly convey an affirmative response to the research question: are business development skills necessary for individuals in leadership positions to know when in the professional practice of landscape architecture? Their consistent answers emphasized a belief in the critical role of business development skills for professionals in leadership positions within landscape architecture professional practice.

While the majority of participants strongly advocated for the necessity of business development skills in leadership positions within landscape architecture professional practice, there were some dissenting perspectives and exceptions in regard to its relationships with career progression into leadership. One participant expressed the belief that the absence of these skills may not necessarily hinder individuals from advancement if one is deemed as the 'right fit' by compensating with design or other relevant professional skills practiced within management (P9). Another participant introduced a nuanced perspective, stating that while relevant, business development skills may not be an absolute necessity (P7). Additionally, a third participant highlighted the importance of character and values in initial firm recruitment, suggesting that possessing business development skills is not the *sole* criterion for promotion or entry into the profession (P1). But in these cases, it was also recognized that

individuals not possessing these business development skills had compensated by being extremely talented in design and/or other facets of the landscape architecture profession. These exceptions underscore the complexity of the relationship between business development skills and success within the landscape architecture field, emphasizing that there may be instances where individuals can thrive without a strong command of business development skills, or that other qualities also play a significant role in professional advancement. Specialization and importance of these skills priority and advantage can also vary between firms depending on size and scope.

Principal Involvement & Responsibilities within Business Development

All participants acknowledged that business development is an expected part of their job. The result, they reported, was a shift in how they spent their time, which one individual characterized as “doing less technical work and a lot more driving” (P5). All participants agreed business development skills “are in the job description of ‘principals’ for most firms” (P1), affirming what existing literature had previously inferred. Specifically, principals are involved with, and responsible for, bringing most of the work in, which includes writing proposals and other marketing efforts, building client relationships, managing accounts, etc. (P1, P4, P8, P9, P11). Participant 12 stated that “95% of the work that was brought in was brought in by [managing partners]”, and other participants agreed that most, if not all, of the work brought in was the principals’ responsibility. One participant recalled having younger employees be surprised because as principals they “spend most of [their] time on the phone or in meetings or email, and [they’re] not just drawing all day” (P4).

Within design firms, production is the driving force, but to sustain those projects, principals and leaders are the ones responsible. As a result, “somebody has to be the ‘Rainmaker’. Somebody asked to go out there and get the projects, bring the money, and feed

the kids” and “lead the firm on the business side of it” (P11, P2). That is, to stay in business, “somebody's has to understand the numbers and the business behind everything” (P10), and that responsibility falls on persons in positions of leadership.

Because of the responsibility these leaders have, it was said that these individuals “have to have some level of business aptitude” and “be thinking strategically” (P10, P6). But although most people don't have previous training in business development, working within business operations “gave [the participants] the ability to tend to understand other people's business models and plans and understand how they can then serve them to advance [their firm]” (P5). These findings collectively emphasize the multifaceted role of principals and leaders, underscoring the importance of business acumen in their successful execution of responsibilities within landscape architecture firms

Place for Everyone

Eighty percent of participants were consistent in underscoring the recognition that obtaining the title of principal, or acquisition of a similar leadership role, is not the only way to be ‘successful’ within a firm, and that not everyone “gravitates towards, or has interest in a leadership position” (P12, P6). Consensus among participants was that “everybody has an opportunity to be successful in the firm in a way that works for them” (P2, P1).

Because of the expansive responsibilities of leadership positions within small and mid-sized landscape architecture firms, among them, business development, these roles can be “overwhelming to a lot of people” (P12). To accommodate employees, leaders take on the responsibility of “helping [colleagues] navigate” the possibilities, or even “open up titles” to help create an environment for success, without giving them principal-level responsibilities (P6).

Risks of Lack of Business Development

The participants' perspectives on the intersection of business development skills and design proficiency reveal an interesting relationship between the two. One participant expressed the belief that possessing business development skills enhances one's design capabilities, asserting, "I think it's going to make you a better designer because you're just understanding the full aspects of the operation" (P3). This viewpoint aligns with the earlier consensus on the multifaceted nature of leadership roles within landscape architecture. However, contrasting this positive perspective, another participant highlighted the potential negative consequences of not possessing business development skills, stating, "you can totally mess it up, and then your firm is at a loss" (P11). This acknowledgment of the potential pitfalls suggests that while business development skills can enhance design proficiency, mishandling or lacking these skills may lead to adverse outcomes. These diverse perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between business development skills and design expertise within landscape architecture professional practice leadership positions.

Participant 5 explains a major connection between business development skills and leadership positions stating:

"Even as we hire people, for them to advance there is a limit to how far you can go in the firm if you're not bringing work in the door. It is [a] simple business aspect: the firm would not exist, were it not for business coming in the door" (P5).

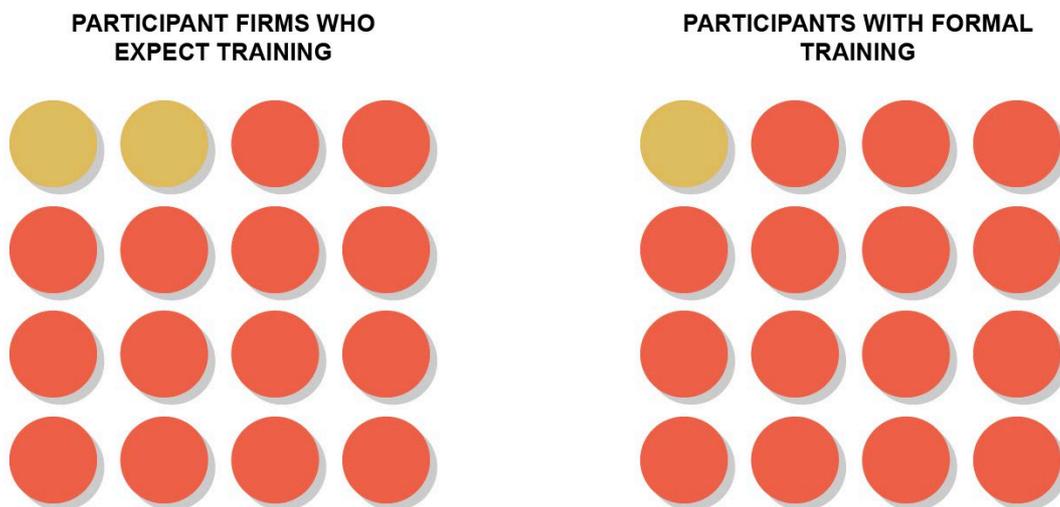
This observation sheds light on the intricacies of career advancement within landscape architecture firms and the integral role of business development in those firms' success. The participant emphasizes a clear connection between career progression and the

ability to contribute to bringing in new projects. This statement underscores the notion that, in the landscape architecture profession, the ultimate advancement of practitioners within the firm is closely tied to their capacity to generate business, and thereby to contribute to the overall success of the firm. It highlights not only the practical significance of business development skills for personal career growth, but also for the sustainability and existence of the firm itself. This perspective adds depth to the understanding of the symbiotic relationship between individual career advancement, the firm's success, and the crucial role of business development skills within landscape architecture professional practice.

Training and Expectations of Employees

Figure 3.5

Participant Training and Expectations



The participants' perspectives also explain the training and expectations of employees concerning business development skills within landscape architecture firms. One prevalent theme is the encouragement for individuals, regardless of their level, to gain a holistic

understanding of the firm's operations, budgets, and revenue aspects. A participant stressed the importance of individuals on the cusp of earning project management responsibilities to comprehend these aspects, fostering an organic growth into business knowledge that might sometimes be thrust upon them (P3). Another participant emphasized the “creation of an environment where individuals, from designers to associate principals, adopt a sense of ownership in the firm, transcending traditional hierarchical distinctions” (P6). This transparent and open culture, described as having no walls in the office, fosters an environment where individuals actively participate in business development by staying informed and engaged.

Training initiatives within some firms include a year-long program on software and business processes, highlighting the commitment by some firms to equipping employees with essential skills for effective business development (P5). But not all firms require or financially support these training or access to conferences. Participants noted the importance of teaching their employees the business side of the firm, especially as they move up in the hierarchy, emphasizing the role of both experience and training in developing these skills (P5). The varied approaches to business development training were evident, ranging from a structured year-long program to an acknowledgment that it wasn't explicitly expected when participants were younger (P3, P5, P7). The expectation for employees to contribute and actively seek projects and clients to support future work aligns with the overall emphasis on encouraging a sense of ownership within the firm (P1, P4). Given the absence of formal training programs within firms, individuals in principal and or similar leadership roles appear to typically acquire their knowledge primarily through mentorship or by observing established practices in their current or previous professional environments.

Despite the consensus on the importance of business development skills, participants highlighted variations in the approach to training and the level of emphasis placed on these

skills within their firms. Some participants acknowledged that business development was not explicitly part of their job descriptions in previous firms, indicating a lack of formal emphasis on these skills (P8). Others recognized the evolving nature of involvement in business development, “evolving over time as employees grew in stature within the firm” (P8). The importance of continuing education in business management was stressed by one participant, indicating a recognition of the need for ongoing skill development (P10). Overall, the participants' insights underscore the complexity and diversity of training approaches and expectations related to business development within landscape architecture firms. For the majority, an overarching emphasis was placed on fostering a sense of ownership and encouraging active participation at all levels with no expectation or mandated training among employees outside of leadership positions.

Business Development Influence on Career Advancement

Business development skills within the design industry purport to add value to an individual, according to participants, which can influence career advancement into leadership positions (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P10, P12). The significance of business development in career progression is evident as articulated by Participant 12, who emphasized the need to attract clients and actively contribute to project acquisition. The transition from associate to senior associate to higher positions such as principal or partner, involves not only design excellence but also the responsibility of bringing in clients, a role that requires a nuanced understanding of the business landscape. This aligns with the notion that rising to the level of a principal necessitates at least a “minimum understanding and aptitude for business development” (P10).

Leadership aspirations are not always the immediate choice for many professionals, as highlighted by the observation that not everyone gravitates towards such roles (P6, P12).

The overwhelming nature of leadership responsibilities can present a daunting challenge for those primarily focused on project-centric tasks. However, recognizing and seizing opportunities for leadership and business opportunities can lead to career advancement.

The case of one participant (P10), a new partner, exemplifies how a deep understanding of business development can propel an individual to a pivotal leadership role within a firm. In this participant's case, the lack of interest from other partners, coupled with this participant's aptitude for business, saw him promoted to take charge, showcasing the pivotal role that proactive engagement in business development can play in shaping one's career trajectory.

As individuals grow into project management roles, there is a growing realization of the importance of understanding the firm's revenue generation, business operations, and budgetary considerations (P3). This holistic view extends beyond design skills, encompassing aspects such as payroll, insurance, or simply the implications of timed tasks. This knowledge progression aligns with the perspective that an organic and gradual growth into business development is essential, but that sometimes individuals may find themselves thrust into it (P3, P9, P7, P5, P10). But perhaps more tellingly, the interviewees expressed a keen interest in those individuals who actively contribute to moving the business forward in a positive direction (P6).

In the context of promotions, it was emphasized that "character and values are fundamental considerations, not just the ability to bring in work" (P1). However, in the same conversation, it was also recognized that the tangible impact of individuals who bring in significant work acknowledges the necessity of "rewarding and recognizing those efforts" (P4). This topic of compensation is crucial and serves as an acknowledgment that bringing work into the firm is essential to the business (P5). It establishes a clear link between business development success and career advancement, emphasizing that there exists a *quid*

pro quo benefit to the practitioner, and correspondingly a limit to how far one can progress in the absence of contributing to the firm's business growth.

In summary, the path to leadership positions in landscape architecture is a nuanced evolution that involves a blend of technical design expertise, leadership development, and an understanding of business dynamics. Business development emerges as a catalyst in career advancement, with professionals needing to actively engage in acquiring clients and projects, contributing to the firm's profitability, and demonstrating a commitment to excellence in both design and business realms.

Transition of Leadership in Firms

Forty-two percent of participants acknowledged the rising concern of leadership transitioning in their firms, in relation to responsibilities within business development, asking the question “how do you transition the business?” (P9). The commitment to teaching and preparing the next generation is a recurring theme in these narratives, and the importance of imparting knowledge and skills to enable a seamless transition when they eventually step back from their leadership role was also expressed (P10, P11, P12). This commitment to mentorship and knowledge transfer is not only a personal goal of these participants, but also a fundamental aspect of ensuring the continued success and sustainability of their firms.

The challenge of transitioning leadership becomes more pronounced when there is a lack of individuals well-versed in the business side of the firm. As expressed by one professional (P12), the firm faced a situation where younger leadership lacked the necessary tools for business development, marketing, and public relations. Their dilemma underscores the importance of strategic planning to cultivate talent within a firm. Identifying individuals with aptitude and providing them with the opportunity to develop into future leaders becomes crucial for the continuity and growth of the firm (P10).

In the context of succession planning, the need to prepare the next generation of leaders is emphasized. For instance, strategic planning exercises are seen as a platform to define the firm's vision for growth and the “development of internal talent to eventually take over leadership roles” (P10). The challenge is not just in identifying the right person but in equipping them with the skills and knowledge to navigate the intricacies of business development, marking a departure from the traditional focus solely on design proficiency. Participant 4 recognized the need to stimulate this shift and is “trying to get that next echelon of leaders to go out and really get engaged” so the workload becomes more balanced between existing and future leaders.

The aspect of transitioning leadership extends beyond mere identification of successors to a hands-on approach in grooming them. One participant shared the experience of offering ownership positions to employees, highlighting the importance of not only identifying potential leaders but also actively placing them in leadership roles. The transition process involved stepping back and allowing the emerging leader to take the lead on projects, gradually building trust and familiarity among the team (P11).

However, there was a recognition that this proactive approach to developing the next generation is not universally embraced within landscape architecture, or across other design firms. The sentiment, and hence the concern, expressed was that many leaders may not actively prioritize bringing up the next generation of marketers and business development professionals (P12). This observation highlights a potential gap in the industry's approach to succession planning and the need for a more concerted effort to foster a new generation of leaders equipped with both design and business acumen. Put another way, the profession may be at risk of maintaining rather than advancing its business development acumen if successive generations of leaders are needing to be self-taught.

Based upon participants' comments, identifying individuals with business development aptitude to actively preparing and teaching them, the process is crucial for the sustained success, growth, and development of a firm. Their narratives suggest the need for a paradigm shift in the industry's approach to succession planning, emphasizing the importance of developing not only design leaders but also leaders proficient in business and marketing.

DISCUSSION

In considering the exceptions and varied opinions expressed by participants, it becomes evident that success within the field is not solely contingent on possessing business development skills. A participant emphasized this point, noting that despite the critical nature of business knowledge, there are individuals who lack the understanding of running a business yet find success (P12). This observation introduces a level of complexity to the previously established consensus, suggesting that while business development skills are valuable, success within the landscape architecture profession can manifest in different ways. In contrast, another participant highlighted the indispensable role of bringing in business for professional advancement within their firm, emphasizing how this simple business function sustains the existence of the firm (P5).

These diverse perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the varying nature of "success" within landscape architecture, considering both the enhancement of design proficiency through business development skills and the potential success of individuals who may not possess these skills. Despite the seeming conflict between these observations, the point may be that success is defined by the individual or their firm, and to some practitioners it may not require profitability. Multiple participants acknowledge the benefits and drawbacks to having financial transparency within their firms. There was not a

discernible norm of how much or how little of this information to share with employees not holding leadership positions or business responsibilities. More open conversation regarding finances, however, can potentially help with breaking down barriers among employees lacking financial training and exposure, as well as introducing and ‘demystifying’ the conversation to those with an typical avoidance of business language and skills. Additionally, earlier exposure to these principles can help bridge the gap for those looking to obtain positions within the industry associated with the business side of professional practice. The notion that leadership responsibilities are overwhelming can be attributed to the lack of training, and lack of open dialogue in regard to business, therefore encouraging the stigma of business being ‘too hard’ or ‘not within a designer’s skillset’, leaving individuals unprepared to fill these roles, despite their capability.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies the influence of business development skills on individuals seeking leadership positions, and the relevance of business development acumen to those in leadership positions within landscape architecture professional practice. Given that landscape architecture firms function as business entities, results showed that it is imperative to instill and educate employees and leaders in utilizing these tools, thereby guaranteeing the enduring success of the firm.

In the context of landscape architecture firms, business development stands as a crucial factor for ensuring the continued viability of the business. It is imperative not to relegate it to the periphery but to acknowledge its prominence, and that it requires consistent practice and attention from both current individuals responsible for its execution and those

individuals aspiring to advance into such pivotal positions. By identifying the business development skill sets required for success in leadership roles, professionals can focus their efforts on developing the areas of proficiency that will have the most significant impact on their careers.

This study's findings provide professionals with information to understand how to position themselves as valuable assets in their firms, and to increase their chances of securing leadership positions. Additionally, the study's results contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the value of a comprehensive approach to professional development and highlight the need for continuous learning to remain relevant in an ever-changing business landscape. Finally, this study points to a need for more research into this and other business practices within landscape architecture. Participants' observations point to an abundance of topics relevant to the success of practitioners, firms and the profession as a whole, and the value of future research probing these unexplored aspects of landscape architecture.

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CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to identify the influence and importance of business development practices, specifically within landscape architecture professional practice. To do so, a single study was conducted that produced two bodies of research: one focusing on specific areas of business development relevant to landscape architecture professional practice, and the other focusing on the influence of business development skills on progression to leadership positions in professional practice. This study's results, coupled with existing literature points to the pressing need for implementation of more business development research and better informed practices within landscape architecture professional and academic practices.

Business Development in Landscape Architecture

While design and technical skills are often prioritized in the industry, this study's results demonstrated the importance of incorporating business development skills alongside them. Results found that practitioners must understand both technical and business aspects to effectively market their expertise and contribute to valuable landscapes. Motivation to attract business and support consistent growth is vital, as is the need for research on how business development tools influence career advancement. This study's finding can help equip future leaders with a list of necessary skills to ensure sustainable and profitable landscape architectural practice (Robinson, 1917; Gensler et al., 2015).

Although existing literature identified relevant business development skills within this field (Dixon et al., 2018; Gensler et al., 2015; Granet, 2021; Littlefield, 2015; Marsh, 1928; Robinson, 1917; Sharkey, 1994), including marketing, client relationships, and creating profit, this study also identified four additional categories worthy of recognition and further research:

- communication,
- community engagement,
- leadership skills,
- and service industry mindsets.

While design and technical skills are often prioritized in the industry, this study's results demonstrated the importance of incorporating business development skills alongside them. Results found that practitioners must understand both technical and business aspects to effectively market their expertise and contribute to valuable landscapes. Motivation to attract business and support consistent growth is vital, as is the need for research on how business development tools influence career advancement. This study's finding can help equip future leaders with a list of necessary skills to ensure sustainable and profitable landscape architectural practice (Robinson, 1917; Gensler et al., 2015).

Influence of Business Development Skill on Leadership Positions

This study explored the impact of business development skills on individuals aspiring to leadership roles, and the relevance of those skills to current leaders in landscape architecture firms. Results underscore the necessity of integrating these skills into the firm's culture to ensure long-term success. Recognizing landscape architecture firms as business entities emphasizes the importance of equipping employees and leaders with these skills.

Business development, therefore, should not be sidelined but acknowledged as central to a firm's mission, requiring continuous practice and attention from both current and aspiring leaders. Identifying the essential skill sets for leadership success allows professionals to focus on areas that will advance their careers effectively (Sheppard et al., 2018). The study's findings offer insights for professionals to enhance their value within firms and increase their prospects of attaining leadership positions (AIA, 2024; IIDA, 2021). Moreover, results can contribute to ongoing discussions on comprehensive professional development, advocating for continuous learning for practitioners to stay relevant in the evolving business landscape. Additionally, the study calls for further research into business practices within landscape architecture to explore areas which could benefit practitioners, firms, and the profession.

DISCUSSION

These papers identify multiple gaps in research regarding business development topics and opens a research conversation window for improvements within both academia, and also for professional practice's in relationship to business development practices within landscape architecture.

Overlooking of Training

Findings in this study show that despite recognized importance of business development skills within landscape architecture, many firms and principals still do not require or offer opportunities for training in these areas. As a result, there is opportunity for implementation of standardized classes specialized for this discipline to teach business skills through continued education courses, conference topics, and more, whether prepared and taught on a national, or firm level. Firms that choose to implement these courses or training agenda could potentially gain a long-term competitive advantage, as they would be among the few to prepare their future leaders in an organized manner. This may also give such firms an advantage by bringing in more clients and projects more efficiently through utilizing other younger members of their firm. These reactions to the research need further investigation. It may be possible to achieve this without imposing demands on younger employees enforced by management. This approach could foster participation in business development without pressuring or involving individuals who are not interested in pursuing future leadership roles. Many participants admitted to failing when it came to these practices, and lamented wanting to do something about it, yet there was an overall lack of initiative. The priority of these skills is continually overshadowed and relegated to a lower importance level despite it being core to the profession's sustainability. These narratives should shift from just acknowledging the issues to actively implementing and updating solutions.

Leadership Styles

As mentioned in Chapter 3, there are a variety of leadership and project management styles taught in business school and other instructional management courses. Despite the prevalence of these generic project management resources, the access to these resources as a student within landscape architecture programs is limited. Introduction to these styles and systems through studio settings and internship opportunities is uncommon, yet consistent, modest doses, could help prepare emerging professional to hone and practice these skills to work better in teams, and to prepare for potential future leadership roles. This research has shown a negative link between past education on these topics for those in current leadership positions, as those now holding these positions reported not having access to these resources. As a result, they are often perpetuating what they are exposed to. The majority of participants instead gained their knowledge of business development practices through mentors and/or previous leaders. This continuous cycle of a lack of training and education should be altered, to avoid continuing this informed practice, along with reliance on individuals whose experience comes from outside of landscape architecture. Finally, training and education in business development should not undermine design and technical skills, but should be offered and/or expected concurrently for those looking to rise within ranks of leadership positions within firms.

Additional Leadership Skills

In addition to specific business development practices participants identified, below is a portfolio of additional skill relevant to individuals within leadership positions to bolster broader business development at a more manageable scale. These additional skills were identified through the same coding process and organized based on frequency of mention; but

were not mentioned frequently enough by multiple participants to be included in results section. These additional skills could be further explored in depth to understand more of their priority and relevance to leaders within the professional realm.

Figure 4.1

Leadership Skills Portfolio



Gender Equality within Leadership Roles in Landscape Architecture

This study revealed further information regarding the gender gap in leadership roles within landscape architecture professional practice. The study investigated 141 potential firms for participation, and within those firms, 76% of the principals were male, with only 24% being female. This contrasts with ASLA's findings that X% of all practitioners are

women. When comparing participants, the gender gap became even more split, with only 1 female participating in this study. The reason for this could have a myriad of explanations, but points to the questions regarding gender and access to business development training.

Although this profession is generally accessible to women within the United States, it has been shown in multiple industries that women “are still a minority in leadership positions worldwide” and “fall behind in representation in senior level positions” (Calsy & D’Asostino, 2021, p.1). This narrative is further supported by Lawson et al. (2022), who suggests that, “this underrepresentation is at least partly driven by gender stereotypes that associate men, but not women, with achievement-oriented, agentic traits (e.g., assertive and decisive)” (Abstract). If women are to be fairly considered for leadership roles, further research should be employed to consider reasons for this disparity within landscape architecture specifically, and to explore potential remedies.

When speaking with the lone female participant of this study, she expressed feelings of being at a disadvantage because of her gender, expressing the “obstacles a lot of women face because there is not a man to stand behind [them] for credibility” and the reality of always being “at meetings in a roomful of men”. Not only was the gender disparity expressed in the participant statistics, but also in their personal experiences. This participant strongly believed “there is a difference in the way a man runs a company, and a woman runs a company”. Again, this can be attributed to multiple different factors, but as a reflection on her success, demonstrates the value of having both gender perspectives, and not valuing a male’s leadership style over a female’s.

The topic of gender inequality within business centric organization has been and continues to be a topic for discussion and can benefit the landscape architecture professional practice by revealing steps forward to abolish gender stereotypes within leadership roles.

IMPLICATIONS

This research provides further evidence that business development is a viable and every day, if not critical, skill within the landscape architecture professional practice world. Attention should be directed towards untapped research areas in this and other business-related topics within landscape architecture. The study found both a lack of existing research and active researchers in this domain, highlighting the need to validate these topics to encourage future exploration. Moreover, to foster the competitiveness of landscape architecture as a discipline within the A/E industry, this study's results suggest the need to devote more attention and resources to research in this and related business topics. By amplifying research efforts and fostering collaboration among researchers and practitioners, there is potential to propel the landscape architecture profession forward despite the poor future forecast coming economic landscape (BLS, 2023).

In discussing the implications of this study's findings and the avenues for future research into business development within landscape architecture, several methodological suggestions emerge. First, to enhance the robustness of future studies, researchers should consider larger research pools and additional research methods in addition to interviews. Expanding the sample size beyond the limited number of participants could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances and variations within business development practices across different firms and regions. The significance of these skills may vary depending on the size of the firm, as this research focuses on mid-sized firms. As indicated usually by the number of employees, larger firms may assign different levels of importance to these skills compared to smaller ones. More research will be required to determine any variance of these results among different sized firms.

Additionally, collection of more key information on professionally practicing firms would be useful. Such topics include: organization of firm information based on principal and employee numbers, business training requirements and expectations, actively updated information on titles and responsibilities of leadership roles. These data could offer valuable insights into the organizational structures and professional development pathways prevalent within the landscape architecture industry. In addition to this information benefiting future research related to this topic, it could also provide information to practicing professionals to gain a network of similar firms and create an open community of business discussion to standardize or suggest business practices relevant to similarly sized firms.

Moving beyond methodological considerations, this study also sheds light on prevalent topics in need of deeper exploration. For instance, there is a need for clearer, more consistent definitions and more comprehensive strategies related to business development from this study's identified categories with perhaps the most pressing being: marketing. Understanding what marketing entails in this context and how it can be optimized to promote firm growth and sustainability is essential for practitioners and academics alike. By delving into the intricacies of these identified categories, researchers may find nuanced insights that can inform more targeted and effective business development practices at all firm scales.

Lastly, this study's findings underscore the opportunity for networking and career advancement inherent in research focused on business development within landscape architecture. By highlighting the benefits that research in these categories can offer students or professionals seeking to expand their networks and enhance their learning opportunities, the profession can inspire greater engagement and investment in these practice-critical topics. Through initiatives that promote knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collaboration, it is possible to cultivate a community of practitioners and researchers committed to advancing business development practices within landscape architecture.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. *Initial Contact of Participants*

TO: (potential participant)

FROM: a02302750@usu.edu (Catherine Frost)

Hello (potential participant),

My name is Catherin Frost, and I am reaching out in regard to a research project I am conducting at Utah State University with the Master of Landscape Architecture program, to see if you would be interested in participating. After review of your firm/position, I would be interested in asking you a few questions about your professional experience in Landscape Architecture. Let me know, at your earliest convenience, if you are interested and I can give you some more information.

Please fill out this quick survey to verify your qualification and let me know at your earliest convenience! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V9KG88N>

Thank you,

Catherine Frost

a02302750@usu.edu

Appendix B. Formal Agreement of Participants

TO: (potential participant)

FROM: a02302750@usu.edu (Catherine Frost)

Dear (potential participant),

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without affecting your relationships with myself (the researcher), or Utah State University.

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of business development practices on career advancement within the landscape architecture profession. Information about specific definitions and topics of this study will be specified below. Data collection will involve audiovisual and transcribed material of interviews with individuals involved. Individuals in the data collection process will only be myself.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name, or firm's name, will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only I will know your identity as a participant.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about the influence of business development on career advancement in landscape architecture. If submitted for publication, a byline will indicate the participation of all individuals.

Regarding an upcoming interview, definition of business development in this study will be as follows:

“Business development is a model or organization within a business, firm, or company, that promotes financial stability, growth opportunity, and longevity within a firm.”

Some questions will be geared toward topics identified as important within business development:

- Bringing in profit
- Client relationships
- Marketing

If there are additional subjects you would like to address, please let me know within the beginning of the interview.

The interview process will last no longer than 90 minutes, and if more information is needed, I will reach out afterward for a follow-up interview with your permission. You will be provided with a meeting link prior to the day of the interview.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep. Let me know, at your earliest convenience, your willingness to participate and we can coordinate a day and time.

Thank you, and I appreciate your consideration,

Catherine Frost

Utah State University

Contact information of PI: sean.michalel@usu.edu

Protocol #: 13570

Appendix C. Informed Consent Agreement



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Informed Consent

Influence of Business Development in Landscape Architecture

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sean Michael a professor in The Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning Department at Utah State University. The purpose of this research is to analyze how prioritizing business development skills throughout a practitioner's professional life can be reflected through their career advancement. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether to participate. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you have before you agree to participate.

Procedures

Your participation will involve an interview within the next 3 months consisting of an interview 90 minutes or less, with a potential follow up interview if wanted and or/necessary. We anticipate that 15 people will participate in this research study remotely.

Before you read this form, you responded to some questions regarding your experience, time and position within the Landscape Architecture field. Researchers will maintain that data once you agree to enter the full study.

Risks

This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities.

Benefits

Although you may not directly benefit from this study, it has been designed to learn more about the relevance and influence of business development skills.

Confidentiality

The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this study remains confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story/situation/response.

We will collect your information through video recordings, audio recordings, interviews, Qualtrics, email, and your place of employment's public website. Online activities always carry a risk of a data breach, but we will use systems and processes that minimize breach opportunities. This information will be securely stored in a restricted-access folder on Box.com, an encrypted, cloud-based storage system. Once your interview has been transcribed and de-identified, the video recording, audio recording, and identifiable transcript will be destroyed within 3 months. This form will be kept for three years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so. If the researchers learn that you are abusing/neglecting/going to engage in self harm/intend to harm another, state law requires that the researchers report this behavior to the authorities.

Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now and change your mind later, you may withdraw at any time by contacting Catherine Frost through email at a02302750@usu.edu. If you choose to withdraw after we have already collected information about you, no further information will be collected.



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If shared information has already been deidentified and deleted, there is potential for it to still be included anonymously. If the information is still identifiable, it will be deleted immediately after receiving your withdrawal. If you decide not to participate, the services you receive from Utah State University will not be affected in any way. The researchers may choose to terminate your participation in this research study if communication is not upheld throughout the interview process or a time for interview cannot be determined.

Findings

Identifiers may be removed from your information. These de-identified data may be used or distributed for future research without additional consent from you. If you do not wish for us to use your information in this way, please state so below.

IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at [435-797-0509](tel:435-797-0509) or seanmichael@usu.edu. If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to speak with someone *other* than the research team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or irb@usu.edu.

Sean E. Michael
Principal Investigator
(435) 797-[0509](tel:435-797-0509); seanmichael@usu.edu

Catherine Frost
Student Investigator
(571) 919-[1737](tel:571-919-1737); a02302750@usu.edu

Informed Consent

By signing below, you agree to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what you will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have, and are clear on how to stop your participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Name, Printed

Date

I do **not** agree to allow my de-identified information/biospecimens to be used or shared for future research. *You may delete this if, above, you decided that you would not de-identify and store data for potential future research use.*

Appendix D. Survey Monkey Qualification Survey

Qualification for Study

1. Have you have worked at your current firm for at least 5 years?

Yes

No

2. Have you have been practicing within the landscape architecture field for at least 10 years?

Yes

No

3. Have you earned a landscape architecture degree within the US or Canada

Yes

No

4. Do you currently hold the title of 'Principal', 'Partner' or 'Director' in your firm?

Yes

No

5. Full Name

6. Place of Employment

Done

Appendix E. Semi Structured Interview Guide

Clarification to participants will be given to share experiences at all stages in their career, not solely within the firm they are currently employed with, or limited to experiences within their current positions.

1. In your opinion, how important are business development skills within the landscape architecture profession?
 - i. What type of business development skills are most beneficial in showing an individual's value to landscape architecture firms?
2. In your experience, have business development skills and practices been prioritized at firms you have worked at?
3. At what stage in your career did you become involved in each of these activities?
 1. Was there a specific time in your career you felt you needed to be more involved/had more opportunity to be involved?
4. Has your experience with business development contributed to your progression into a principal position? How?
5. How have you been involved with maintaining relationships with your firm's clients?
 - a. What has been your experience with client relationship management?
6. Has there been / is there now an expectation of involvement in marketing your business?

7. Do you feel like you were prepared to be involved with business development? Why/why not?
 1. How did you learn business development skills?
8. Going forward, do you feel training and involvement of your employees in business development skills is relevant/necessary?
 1. What are your expectations for employees regarding business development?
9. In your opinion, for a principal to rise in the industry today, are business development skills relevant/necessary?