The following information is from *Doing by Learning* (2018), by Dr. Don Haggerty, Professor of Strategy, Innovation and Business Capstone Experiences at Champlain College.

Areas of Management Practice

If you are like most students, your life has been extremely full while pursuing your degree. Most of the time just getting the reading and assignments completed on time, and to your level of satisfaction, is a full plate. Because "courses" still represent the primary structure for most schools, it does encourage a mindset, unfortunately, of short-term thinking and doing "what's next" to complete the course requirements.

Many students describe this as being on a treadmill without ever having the time to really reflect on, or appreciate, what they are learning. Finding time to expand your learning about a particular topic of interest is just a dream needing to be deferred until after graduation. That said, students regularly report that the capstone fulfills that dream because, for the first time in years, there is no "new" course material and the objective is to look back and apply what you have learned in some way.

So, what was it that you learned? While business program structures may vary, there is more consistency than you think. In my own studies of Business and Management programs, I derived my own "model" that I call *Areas of Management Practice* for business, management, and leadership. These ten buckets are broad and encompassing enough that they can be defined to fit virtually any organizational context and, therefore, have the ability to serve as an outline or filter to reviewing any business or management program. They are:

1. **Aligning Mission, Values, and Strategy**
2. **Understanding Products, Services, Marketing, and Sales**
3. **Investigating and Implementing Process Improvements**
4. **Utilizing Information Systems**
5. **Recognizing Organizational Impacts and Managing Change**
6. **Demonstrating Leadership Capabilities**
7. **Creating Financial Business Cases**
8. **Utilizing Economic Modeling**
9. **Managing Projects**
10. **Integrating Learning and Reflection on Practice**

If you think back to the business management program and, using your transcript or a list of courses taken, you will probably find that each course fits into one or more of the above areas. You will probably also see that all of these Areas of Management Practice were specifically addressed in your program.

The World of Business Competencies

It is no accident, really, that your courses fit so neatly into this model. The world of undergraduate and graduate business education works hard to ensure a reasonable level of consistency in the learning outcomes that you have presumably gained proficiency in, or mastered. Whether your courses were very traditional (quizzes, tests, big papers) or highly experiential (simulations, work-based projects) the competencies are generally very comparable. The difference is in *how you get to those competencies*.

So, where do these business competencies come from? In the U.S., and for many other nations' business programs, the suggested competencies can be found in one of several accrediting agencies. Two widely used accrediting bodies are the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and the ACBSB (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs). Both are recognized world-wide for their work to ensure that business degrees are meeting standards of rigor, professionalism and quality.

The competencies from both of the AACSB and ACBSB are compared to the Areas of Management Practice model in the table below. Listed in the far right column are the Business Management courses that are found in your Business Management degree program. While comparisons like this are never based on a perfect match for every competency, this does help you to see the range of skills that you have acquired, which of your courses are likely to have contributed and they fit into the overall picture of Business and Management education. **Where do each of your courses fit into the right-hand column?**

Areas of Management Practice	AACSB Skills and Knowledge Areas	ACBSB Common Professional Components	Business Management Curriculum
Aligning Mission, Values, and Strategy	Ethics, Political, Legal and Regulatory, Social Responsibility, Social Context	Global Dimensions of Business, Business Policies	BLAW 140: Business Law I MGMT 150: Principles of Business MGMT 460: Strategic Management
Understanding Products, Services, Marketing, and Sales	Markets, Marketing and Distribution	Marketing	MKTG 200: Principles of Marketing MGMT 310: Revenue, Profit, and Cust. Satisfaction MGMT 380: Business Innovation
Investigating and Implementing Process Improvements	Systems and Processes, Production & Operations	Production and Operations Management, Quantitative Techniques, Statistics	MGMT 315: Fulfilling Supply Chain Demand MGMT 318: Transportation Management MGMT 360: Securing Resources MGMT 450: Integrating the Supply Chain
Utilizing Information Systems	Technological, Data Analytics, Data Management, Information Technology	Information Systems	MGMT 220: Business Information Systems & Security MGMT 370: Business Research Methods
Recognizing Organizational Impacts and Managing Change	Group and Individual Behaviors, Thinking Creatively, Interpersonal Relations and Teamwork	Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management	COMM 350: Conflict Management MGMT 210: Managing Behavior in Organizations MGMT 280: Organization Development MGMT 320: Managing talent MGMT 325: Strategic Human Resource Mgmt. MGMT 336: Compensation and Benefits
Demonstrating Leadership Capabilities	Evidence-based Decision Making, Leading, Managing in Diverse Global Context, Analytical Thinking	Business Ethics, Management, Leadership	COMM 350: Conflict Management MGMT 210: Managing Behavior in Organizations MGMT 280: Organization Development
Creating Financial Business Cases	Economics, Financial	Business Finance, Accounting, Economics	ACCT 130: Financial Accounting ACCT 140: Managerial Accounting ECON 205: Microeconomics ECON 210: Macroeconomics MGMT 240: Principles of Finance
Utilizing Economic Modeling	Economics	Economics	ECON 205: Microeconomics ECON 210: Macroeconomics
Managing Projects	Complexities of Decision Making, Application of Knowledge	Management	MGMT 260: Project Management MGMT 262: Project Mgmt Standards and Behaviors MGMT 265: Project Development and Risk MGMT 267: Agile Project Management
Integrating Learning and Reflection on Practice	Integrating Knowledge across Fields, Reflective Thinking	Integrating Experience	MGMT 425: Critical Thinking in Business MGMT 460: Strategic Management MGMT 470: Business Management Capstone

Using the Areas of Management Practice in the Capstone

With an understanding of where your program courses fit into the picture and align with the Areas of Management Practice, and a bit of perspective on what you have learned and are still learning, the next step is to see how these can be used in your capstone project. When engaged in a work-based project, of any kind, it is highly unlikely that you will be referring directly back to specific courses and textbooks. What you will do, however, is use the competencies and general frameworks of your courses which may lead you to using specific techniques, models, tools or concepts from those courses in each Area of Management Practice.

Further, it is more than likely that you will begin with one of the areas and then move into most or all eventually as you explore the true scope of your project. This process begins simply enough by asking yourself **the big questions** about each Area of Management Practice. When you do this, there is virtually no area of business (or your project) that is not covered in this framework.

Think of it this way. The competencies that you learned in your courses exist because they respond to some basic questions about organizations and management that need to be understood. As an example, look below at the area of Products, Services, Marketing and Sales. Everything in this general area has to do with customer need (and generally, revenue) or, to simplify it, the Marketing side of the organization. One of the most important questions you need to understand for any opportunity is whether “customer data is used to support change or new products or services.” Whether you ascribe to traditional large sample size market research or more anthropologic customer observation, the question remains the same because there is an enduring need to use customer data to inform decisions. So, too, are the remaining questions under that same Area of Practice and in others.

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Below are some suggested questions to launch your thinking about virtually any change in the workplace. They are specific enough to focus on a central part of the project or functional area but are broad enough to generate some high level thinking about the nature of your opportunity for change.

1. Aligning Mission, Values, and Strategy

- What is valued to the organization what values seem to be driving the organization in this project?
- How much of a gap is there between the espoused organizational core values and the actual values demonstrated by choices to be made?
- Will your change take on the tough ethical challenges or is there avoidance?
- Is decision making driven by a long term perspective or is it consumed by short term thinking?

- Are choices made consistent with organizational, personal and global values?

2. Understanding Products, Services, Marketing, and Sales

- How is customer data used to support change or new products and services?
- Does an understanding of specific market segments provide guidance?
- To what extent are sales processes and feedback linked to our core business?
- How are new products and services truly innovative?

3. Investigating and Implementing Process Improvements

- How is success measured and communicated?
- How do metrics drive decisions, resource allocations and strategic choices?
- Are there feedback loops that generate improvements and are identified improvements implemented and measured?
- Is quality well understood?
- How are process improvement projects measured for performance?

4. Utilizing Information Systems

- How is information used strategically and for data driven decisions?
- Is innovation based on a culture of widely shared information?
- What systems exist to capture, analyze and share information?
- Is there an upward and cross-organizational flow of information?

5. Recognizing Organizational Impacts and Managing Change

- Are people and organizational units open to learning and change based on input from all parts of their respective systems?
- Is there a spirit of mentorship, coaching and facilitation?
- How are people communicating and are they really listening to each other?
- Are organizational members trusted and empowered?
- Do organizational members trust senior management to identify and facilitate changes?

6. Demonstrating Leadership Capabilities

- Is leadership capable of change consistent with new thinking?
- Is leadership development and mentorship part of the culture?
- Do organizational members trust senior management to identify and facilitate changes?

7. Creating Financial Business Cases

- What are the financial criteria used for measuring success?
- How are financial and economic resources allocated?
- Are resources sufficient to support the chosen strategy and growth?
- Are resources sufficient to meet short-term objectives?
- Does financial planning exist and, if so, does it have long term goals and how will the organization meet those goals?

8. Utilizing Economic Modeling

- Does the economic model capture changes in revenues, costs or cost savings in all other areas of the organization?
- Are all benefits and positive changes quantified to the extent feasible?
- Are all costs and uses of resources accounted for to the extent feasible?
- Does the "model" express clearly the assumptions, benefits, costs and limitations of the analysis?
- Is the model transparent and honest in its assumptions and presentation of input and output?

9. Managing Projects

- Do plans generally account for the complexities of the project or projects involved?
- Is planning consistent with other initiatives at the organization?
- Are best practices in Project Management applied to the extent possible?

10. Integrating Learning and Reflection on Practice

- To what extent are all Areas of Management Practice represented and given time to learn?
- Is there adequate reflection and time for effective learning?
- Are all aspects of the project and the organization included?
- How have you changed as a result of this project?
- What new perspectives on ethical behavior come out of the project?