

Editorial

This issue (34-4) has two sections. The first is a special issue on Innovation in Engineering Practice and Technology Education guest edited by professors Faiez Alani and Mo Elbestawi of McMaster University, Canada, to whom I am grateful for suggesting the topic and for the time and expertise they invested in guest-editing the special issue.

The second section has papers addressing various topics including: Teamwork, Engineering Design, Evaluation, Faculty Development, Project Management, Innovation, Critical Thinking, Social Networking, e-Learning, Learning Competency, International Students, Academia and Industry, Project-Based Learning, and Learning Physics. The authors are from: Australia, USA, Mexico, Serbia, Taiwan, India, Sri Lanka, Spain, Korea, and Colombia.

I wish to thank all the authors for their valuable contributions and I hope the readers find the papers to be interesting, useful, and thought provoking.

In Defense of Troublemakers: The Power of Dissent in Life and Business is the title of a book published a few months ago by Basic Books. Author Charlan Nemeth is a Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley. Her background includes a BA in Mathematics from Washington University in St. Louis and a PhD in Psychology from Cornell University. According to her biography, Professor Nemeth has taught executive education in the areas of persuasion, team decision making, scientific creativity, and corporate cultures and innovation.

At first glance one may think that the book would be of little interest to engineers and engineering educators, as the value of dissent is not a new idea in science and engineering. For example, Galileo was of the opinion: “in questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual”.

The book is not really defending trouble makers, rather it defends those who may be perceived as such by the less informed. As the author explained the book is not about anger, diversity of background, feuding, or contrivances. The book is rather about authenticity and conviction, speaking up, protecting different views, and debate rather than harmony. The book gives examples of situations and outcomes of research that support the message that there is importance and value in authentic debate. Genuine dissent (not just being the devil’s advocate) makes us think carefully and leads to better decisions.

It is good for engineers and engineering educators to speak up and express their well-thought-out views. It is useful to remember what Cicero said: “If we are not ashamed to think it, we should not be ashamed to say it.” However, in some cases, it becomes rather a duty. For example, if public safety could be compromised or when the outcome of a well designed and carried out research raises questions about popular views. There is however, a time and place to speak up to be effective; common sense should prevail.

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