FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING AN INTEGRATED BUSINESS COMMON CORE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

In response to industry demands and accreditation standards, business schools are developing various versions of integrated common body of knowledge (CBOK) courses for their majors. A central theme for all of these integration attempts is the desire to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of the various business functions and how they work together within the firm. Attempts have ranged from intentions of faculty to discuss these issues and incorporate them into their existing independent classes, to extremely aggressive efforts to develop 12 to 20 credit hour team-taught courses. Although content and presentation-related decisions are paramount to the success of these programs, other more subtle issues are of equal importance. In some cases, integration efforts targeted for the entire business college student body have been scaled back to limited offerings of honors courses. In other cases, the program has been eliminated all together. A number of important issues that have received considerably less attention in the literature include attitudes, infrastructure, and resources required to successfully implement such an extensive, and potentially disruptive curricular change. These represent the foundation on which the program will be established. If they are weak, or non-existent, the potential benefits of an integrated CBOK curriculum may never be fully realized.

Attitudinally, administrators, from department heads, to business school deans, and on up to the university president, must be fully committed to the implementation of the integrated curriculum. Their commitment, however, must extend beyond accreditation concerns. Long term success requires that the administration's motivation be based on better serving their business and governmental customers who hire their graduates, and to enable students to develop themselves into products highly desired by the market place. Faculty members must be willing to explore beyond their areas of specialty, not just the broader domain of their respective functional areas, but to the other functions of the firm and their interactions and interdependencies within the context of business operations. Finally, students must be made aware of the benefits of an integrated orientation to the business systems as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, to them personally.

In order to increase the chances for successful implementation of an integrated curriculum, a supporting infrastructure must be provided. Key issues include hiring new faculty with cross-functional backgrounds of expertise, encouraging existing faculty to develop cross-functional expertise, and creating a reward structure that encourages active participation in the integration efforts. Perhaps the most fundamental issues include incorporation of the integration effort into the mission and objectives of the business school and inclusion of the integrated course work into the college's degree program requirements.

Resource issues correspond to the standard categories of time, effort, and money. Time refers to a faculty member's time available to perform his/her teaching, research, and service duties. Effort represents the business school's teaching capacity measured in the number of class sections that the faculty is required to teach. Finally, money represents the financial resources, from both internal and external sources, available to support the integration effort. All of these resource considerations are dependent upon each other since decision regarding one will have important ramifications on the others.

The development and delivery of an integrated curriculum is not an easy task. Prerequisites for success include a supportive foundation as well as appropriate content and delivery mechanisms. We can learn from the efforts of those who have already ventured into integration efforts, some being successful while others were not. Business schools should enter into the process anticipating these issues and prepared to deal with them in an effective, proactive manner. To discover their importance by surprise after the fact diminishes a business school's chances for successful implementation.